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**(In)definiteness and (Non-)maximality:  
Italian as Compared to other Romance Languages**

**Paolo Morosi**

Ph.D. Thesis

Supervisor:

Prof. Dr. M.Teresa Espinal

Programa de doctorat en Ciència Cognitiva i Llenguatge

Departament de Filologia Catalana

Centre de Lingüística Teòrica

Facultat de Filosofia i Lletres

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Centre de  
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*A la meva mare*



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## ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates how (in)definiteness and (non-)maximality are expressed in Italian, adopting a comparative perspective on other Romance languages. The thesis focuses especially on form-meaning mismatches in which a morphologically definite article gives rise to an indefinite or non-maximal interpretation. Specifically, this study examines four main (in)definite and (non-)maximal constructions in Italian: (i) the so-called *partitive article* (*di*+ART), (ii) indefinite interpretations of plural (and mass) definite descriptions (IDs), (iii) indefinite and number-neutral interpretations of definite descriptions involving morphologically singular count nouns (NIDs), and (iv) definite constructions allowing peculiar non-maximal readings, which I term *representative interpretations* (RIs). The thesis addresses three main research questions: (i) how is indefiniteness formally expressed in Italian (as compared to other Romance languages)? (ii) Why does Italian exhibit such a proliferation of indefinite expressions? And (iii) what is the exact status of the definite article in Italian?

I begin with the investigation of *di*+ART nominals in comparison with Romance bare nominals and French *des*-phrases. Assuming a unified structure for these forms, I argue that *di*+ART indefinites differ from bare nouns in their ability to introduce discourse referents bound to semantic choice functions, accounting for their specific readings and exceptional wide scope behavior. The comparison with French *des*-phrases also indicates that *di*+ART nominals are specialized for strong indefiniteness, a consequence of their co-existence with BNs. Proceeding with IDs, I empirically motivate that they function as genuine indefinite expressions –structurally aligned with the other Romance indefinites– with their existential interpretation arising in incrementally homogeneous contexts. As for NIDs, I show that they appear in the object position of characterizing HAVE-predicates and denote *definite kinds*, deriving an existential reading via Derived Kind Predication. Finally, I argue that RIs arise from a (c)overt REP-operator adjoined to a plural definite DP, which yields a representative – maximal or non-maximal– singular group, explaining why they behave differently from canonical plural definites with respect to quantificational distributivity and grammatical reciprocity.

Regarding the proliferation of indefinite forms in Italian, I argue that it results from the interaction of three factors: (i) the status of the Italian determiner system, (ii) the influence of Italo-Romance varieties, and (iii) the relevance of universal principles such as the Blocking Principle. Evidence from regional dialects suggests that IDs emerge to

compensate for the absence of BNs in certain Italo-Romance varieties, while the evolution of the Italian determiner system has led to the emergence of NIDs as a strategy for expressing number-neutrality.

Finally, I address the status of the definite article in Italian. While IDs and NIDs resemble expletive uses of the definite article, I argue that they are not semantically inert. Rather than merely introducing an identity function, IDs instantiate an *iota* operator, which is later neutralized by an indefinite operator DE, while NIDs derive their existential meaning from the definite kind interpretation of the DP. As for RIs, their non-maximal interpretation results from the presence of an operator REP, which applies to *iota* and triggers a group denotation. This analysis thus firmly aligns the Italian definite article with standard semantic accounts of definiteness in other languages.



## RESUM

Aquesta tesi investiga com s'expressen la (in)definitud i la (no-)maximalitat en italià i adopta una perspectiva comparativa amb altres llengües romàniques. L'estudi se centra especialment en certes discrepàncies entre forma i significat en què un article morfològicament definit dona lloc a una interpretació indefinida o no-màxima. Concretament, analitza quatre construccions indefinides i no-màximes de l'italià: (i) l'anomenat article partitiu (*di*+ART), (ii) les interpretacions indefinides de l'article definit amb noms plurals (i massa) (IDs), (iii) les interpretacions indefinides i de nombre neutre de l'article definit amb noms comptables morfològicament singulars (NIDs), i (iv) les construccions definides que permeten unes lectures no-màximes peculiars, que anomeno *interpretacions representatives* (RIs). La tesi planteja tres preguntes de recerca principals: (i) com s'expressa formalment la indefinitud en italià (en comparació amb altres llengües romàniques)? (ii) Per què l'italià mostra aquesta proliferació de formes indefinides? I (iii) quin és l'estatus de l'article definit en italià?

El primer punt d'estudi se centra en les expressions indefinides encapçalades per *di*+ART en comparació amb els noms escarits de les llengües romàniques i els indefinits introduïts per *des* en francès. Assumint la mateixa estructura sintàctica, defenso que *di*+ART es diferencia dels noms escarits pel que fa a la capacitat d'introduir referents discursius lligats a funcions de selecció semàntica (*choice functions*); una proposta que explica les lectures específiques i l'excepcionalitat de l'abast ampli. La comparació amb els indefinits del francès també indica que *di*+ART s'especialitza per expressar indefinitud forta, a conseqüència de la coexistència amb els noms escarits. Tot seguit, argumento empíricament que els IDs corresponen a expressions indefinides genuïnes –estructuralment equivalents als indefinits de les altres llengües romàniques– i que la seva interpretació existencial sorgeix en contextos que mostren homogeneïtat incremental. Quant als NIDs, demostro que apareixen exclusivament en posició d'objecte de predicats que codifiquen una relació de possessió caracteritzadora del subjecte, que denoten classes definides (*definite kinds*) i que obtenen la lectura existencial mitjançant l'operació coneguda com *Derived Kind Predication* (que dona compte de les lectures existencials derivades de classes). En darrer lloc, proposo que les RIs deriven de la presència d'un operador REP (explícit o implícit) que, adjuntat a un sintagma definit plural, permet d'obtenir una lectura màxima o no-màxima de grup singular. Això explica per què les RIs es comporten

de manera diferent dels plurals definits canònics en relació amb la distributivitat quantificacional i la reciprocitat gramatical.

Referent a la proliferació de formes indefinides, proposo que aquesta variació és el resultat de la interacció de tres factors: (i) l'estatus del sistema de determinants de l'italià, (ii) la influència de les varietats italo-romàniques i (iii) la rellevància de principis universals com l'anomenat *Blocking Principle* (que bloqueja operadors abstractes quan les llengües disposen d'ítems lèxics per a la mateixa funció). Les dades empíriques d'alguns dialectes regionals suggereixen que els IDs sorgeixen com a compensació per l'absència de noms escauats, mentre que l'evolució del sistema de determinants de l'italià dona lloc a l'aparició dels NIDs com a estratègia per expressar la neutralitat de nombre.

Finalment, tracto l'estatus de l'article definit en italià. Tot i que els IDs i els NIDs s'acosten aparentment a uns usos expletius de l'article definit, defenso que no són semànticament inerts: els IDs instancien un operador *iota* que es cancel·la a través d'un operador indefinit DE, mentre que els NIDs deriven la lectura existencial a partir de la denotació definida de classe. Les RIs, en canvi, reben una lectura de grup no-màxim a causa de la presència d'un operador REP que s'aplica directament a *iota*. Aquestes anàlisis adhereixen a l'article definit de l'italià a les teories estàndard de la definitud a les altres llengües.



## ABBREVIATIONS AND NOTATION

<b>*</b>	ungrammatical sequence
<b>#</b>	infelicitous sequence
<b>??</b>	odd, degraded, or marginal sequence; its precise grammaticality status is uncertain
<b>%</b>	sequence with variation in acceptability among speakers of the same language
<b>1</b>	first person
<b>2</b>	second person
<b>3</b>	third person
<b>ACC</b>	accusative
<b>AspP</b>	Aspectual Phrase
<b>AUX</b>	auxiliary
<b>BN</b>	plural / mass Bare Noun
<b>CL</b>	clitic
<b>COND</b>	conditional
<b>CP</b>	Complementizer Phrase
<b>DAT</b>	dative
<b>DE</b>	indefiniteness marker in Romance
<b>de+ART</b>	a more descriptive and neutral term for the traditionally labelled <i>partitive article</i> in French
<b>di+ART</b>	a more descriptive and neutral term for the traditionally labelled <i>partitive article</i> in Italian
<b>DKP</b>	Derived Kind Predication
<b>DP</b>	Determiner Phrase
<b>EN</b>	Catalan and French clitic <i>en</i>
<b>EPP</b>	Extended Projection Principle
<b>FEM</b>	feminine gender
<b>FUT</b>	future
<b>GEN</b>	genitive
<b>GER</b>	gerund
<b>ID</b>	Indefinite Definite
<b>INF</b>	infinitive

<b>IPFV</b>	imperfective
<b>LF</b>	Logical Form
<b>MASC</b>	masculine gender
<b>NE</b>	Italian clitic <i>ne</i>
<b>NEG</b>	negation
<b>NID</b>	Numberless Indefinite Definite
<b>NOM</b>	nominative
<b>NP</b>	Noun Phrase
<b>NumP</b>	Number Phrase
<b>PERF</b>	perfective
<b>PF</b>	Phonetic Form
<b>PL</b>	plural number
<b>PRES</b>	present
<b>PTCP</b>	participle
<b>QP</b>	Quantifier Phrase
<b>RI</b>	Representative Interpretation
<b>SE</b>	Catalan and Spanish clitic <i>se</i>
<b>SG</b>	singular number
<b>SI</b>	Italian clitic <i>si</i>
<b>SUBJ</b>	Subjunctive mood
<b>TP</b>	Tense Phrase
<b>UNOS</b>	Spanish and Catalan <i>un(o)s</i>
<b>VP</b>	Verb Phrase
<b>vP</b>	little <i>v</i> Phrase



# 1 Definiteness, indefiniteness, and beyond

## 1.1 Setting the scene

One of the fundamental semantic distinctions in the nominal domain is that between definiteness and indefiniteness. As a semantic-pragmatic category closely tied to human cognition and communication, this distinction is argued to be universally present in natural languages (Frege 1892; Hawkins 1974, 1978; Heim 1982, 2011; Löbner 1985; Cummins 1998; Lyons 1999; Abbot 2006; Farkas 2018). In languages that lexicalize the functional category of determiners, the definiteness vs. indefiniteness dichotomy is typically reflected, with singular count nouns, in the alternation between the definite and the indefinite article. The simple English examples below make this contrast evident.

- (1) a. Ernest wrote *a book*.  
b. Ernest wrote *the book*.

The sentence containing the singular indefinite article *a* in (1a) describes the situation where the subject, Ernest, wrote one book. This book exists within the context of utterance but is not necessarily uniquely identified in that domain. In contrast, (1b), containing a definite article, refers to a situation in which Ernest wrote the uniquely salient book in the context. From the perspective of formal semantics, the nominal expression in the object position of (1a) has the property of being interpreted existentially (Milsark 1974; Brasoveanu & Farkas 2016), which distinguishes it from universally quantified nominals like *every book* or *each book*. Conversely, the definite description in (1b) differs from its indefinite counterpart in that its referent is generally assumed to be uniquely identifiable, either because it is familiar, contextually salient, or inherently unique (Frege 1892; Russell 1905; Christophersen 1939).

The minimal pair in (1) is consistent with the traditional linguistic view that definite and indefinite articles, in English and other languages with overt determiners, constitute two primitive building blocks associated with the fixed and distinct meanings just described. As the discussion progresses, however, instances emerge where the strict

correspondence between article morphology and semantic import becomes less straightforward.<sup>1</sup> Consider, for instance, the following examples involving plural count nouns.

- (2) a. Ernest wrote *books*.  
 b. Ernest wrote {*some / many / more than two / three*} *books*.

All the plural nominal expressions in (2) assert the existence of (a plurality of) books. Notably, however, none of these examples feature the overt realization of a proper indefinite article. In (2a), an indefinite interpretation is conveyed irrespective of the presence of an explicit marker of indefiniteness, while in (2b), the existential interpretation is introduced by elements other than the indefinite article, namely the existential quantifiers *some* and *many*, the comparative quantifier *more than two*, and the cardinal *three*.

A second set of exceptions to the strict one-to-one correspondence between (in)definite articles and (in)definite interpretation can be observed in Italian –the object of study of this thesis.

- (3) a. Carlo ha raccolto *pomodori*. *Italian*  
       Carlo AUX pick.PTCP tomatoes  
 b. Carlo ha raccolto *dei pomodori*.  
       Carlo AUX pick.PTCP di+ART tomatoes  
 c. Carlo ha raccolto *i pomodori*.  
       Carlo AUX pick.PTCP ART tomatoes  
       ‘Carlo picked tomatoes’

The (informal) Italian sentences above feature the plural count noun *pomodori* ‘tomatoes’ in object position. Under an indefinite, existential interpretation, this nominal expression can occur in its superficially bare form, as in (3a); introduced by the so-called *partitive article* –a form diachronically derived from the conflation of the preposition *di* ‘of’ plus the definite article– as in (3b); or preceded by a morphological definite article without the overt presence of *di*, as in (3c). These examples show that the availability of an indefinite,

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<sup>1</sup> The most obvious problematic aspect of the view that the expression of (in)definiteness is tied to the alternation between (in)definite articles comes from the observation that approximately half of the world’s languages lack articles yet still convey such meanings (Lyons 1999; Longobardi 2001, Dryer 2013a, 2013b; among others). These determinerless languages rely on alternative strategies, such as constituent order or information structure. For relevant discussion, see, among many others, Dayal (2004) and Geist (2010).



existential reading in Italian is orthogonal from the overt instantiation of a dedicated (plural) indefinite article.

Moreover, and perhaps more intriguingly, the sentences in (3) also illustrate that the Italian morphologically definite article can be associated with an indefinite interpretation, either in combination with the overt item *di*, or when it is overtly realized independently. This possibility is further confirmed by the sentence in (4), where a morphologically singular definite description appears to allow an indefinite interpretation as well.

- (4) Aldo indossa                *la*    *cravatta*.  
       Aldo wear.PRES.3SG    ART   tie  
       ‘Aldo wears {the/a} tie.’

The very existence of examples such as (3) and (4) in Italian raises three broad research questions (RQs). The first, which serves as the foundation for the present investigation, can be formulated as follows:

**RQ1:** *How is indefiniteness formally expressed in Italian (as compared to other Romance languages)?*

This initial question relates to the observation, frequently noted in the literature, that the expression of indefiniteness in Italian is especially distinctive within Romance languages, deserving thus special attention. In this respect, Stark (2007, 2008) emphasizes that the Italian nominal system for expressing indefiniteness with plural and mass nouns is difficult to classify typologically. This complexity stems particularly from the intermediate position that the expression of indefiniteness in Modern Italian occupies within the Romance continuum (Longobardi 2001; Stark 2007, 2008, 2016).

Like Spanish and Catalan (Suñer 1982; Laca 1999; Leonetti 1999; Brucart 2002), as well as Rumanian and Portuguese (Dobrovie-Sorin 2013; Munn & Schmitt 2001, 2005), Italian licenses argumental plural and mass bare nouns (henceforth BNs), as shown in (3a) (Renzi 1997, 2001; Delfitto & Schroten 1991; Chierchia 1998a, 1998b; Longobardi 2001, 2005; Delfitto 2005; Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016, 2018, 2020; Gianollo 2018). Furthermore, Italian does not have a plural indefinite article *stricto sensu*. Instead, it displays so-called partitive articles, as illustrated in (3b) (Renzi 1997; Chierchia 1998a, 1998b; Longobardi 2001, 2005; Storto 2003; Zamparelli 2008a; Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016,

2018, 2020; Pinzin & Poletto 2021, 2022), similar to French (Delfitto & Schroten 1991; Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 1996, 2003; Ishane 2008; Dobrovie-Sorin & Beyssade 2012; Carlier & Lamiroy 2022). Since the latter form has largely lost its original partitive meaning (Carlier 2007; Carlier & Lamiroy 2014; Luraghi & Albonico 2021), this thesis adopts the descriptive label *di+ART* to refer to these constructions, as proposed by Cardinaletti and Giusti (2016).

In addition to these parallels with other Romance languages, Italian exhibits additional productive forms to express indefiniteness. These include the idiosyncratic uses of the definite article both with plural (and mass) nouns, as illustrated in (3c), and its use with morphologically singular nominals, as in (4). The former phenomenon, involving plural and mass nouns, was first observed, to the best of my knowledge, by Rolhfs (1968: 119) in relation to mass nouns. It was later revisited by Renzi (1997, 2001) and subsequently explored in depth by Zamparelli (2002), Donazzan and Gritti (2013), Donazzan (2014), Cardinaletti and Giusti (2018, 2020), Leonetti (2019), Giusti (2021a), and Pinzin and Poletto (2021, 2022) with respect to plural count nouns. The second phenomenon, involving morphologically singular nouns, in contrast, has received little attention in the literature.

The central aim of this dissertation is, therefore, to provide a formal account of each of these four constructions (i.e., BNs, *di+ART*, plural/mass, and singular indefinite definites). Addressing this goal and developing a formal analysis of Italian indefinite expressions will also pave the way to tackle the second research question, which can be stated as follows.

**RQ2:** *Why does Italian exhibit such a proliferation of indefinite expressions?*

The very coexistence of these four forms in similar contexts and with seemingly parallel interpretations raises issues of optionality and free variation. Such apparent optionality among different Italian indefinite expressions poses a challenge for theories of language design that adhere to principles of economy, simplicity, and optimality, which are central tenets of the Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1993, 1995, 2000, ff.). When multiple expressions exhibit similar meanings and distributions, the question arises as to why such redundancy exists in a system that is supposed to minimize superfluous complexity: from a minimalist perspective, grammar should ideally allow only one optimal form for a given interpretation.

Consequently, a second major goal of this thesis is to investigate potential differences in distribution, structure, and interpretation among these indefinite expressions. Upon closer examination, and as the investigation proceeds, the apparent free variation among the different forms will turn out not to be categorical. Differences both in distribution and interpretation will emerge, indicating that the supposed optionality is, in fact, illusory –a conclusion independently reached by Cardinaletti and Giusti (2018), and Pinzin and Polletto (2021, 2022).

These first two questions address empirical and analytical aspects related to the expression of indefiniteness in Italian and other Romance languages. However, the few pieces of data discussed thus far also point to a broader, more theoretical issue, which can be articulated as the following research question.

**RQ3** *What is the exact status of the definite article in Italian (as compared to Romance)?*

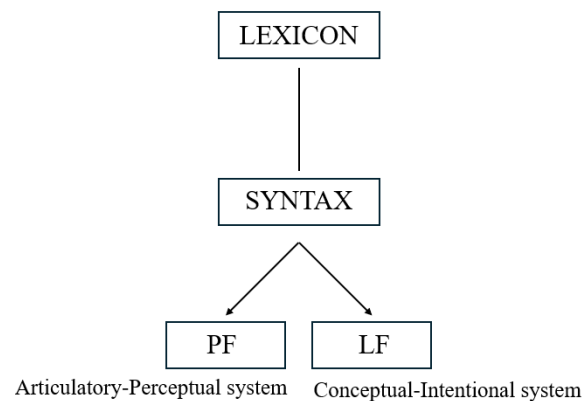
The examples in (3) and (4) illustrate that the definite article in Italian can convey an indefinite interpretation. This possibility not only raises questions about the formal derivation of these constructions but also opens two possible explanatory approaches for the status of the definite article in Italian. On the one hand, it could be argued that the definite article in the constructions under investigation is semantically inert. Such an approach has been advanced in a series of contributions by Giusti (1992, 2002, 2015, ff.) and Cardinaletti and Giusti (2015, 2016, 2018, 2020). These authors contend that definite articles, not only in Italian but potentially in all languages that possess these lexical items, correspond to mere morphological markers of case, gender, and number features, devoid of any intrinsic semantic content. In contrast, a more traditional perspective posits that the Italian definite article, on a par with its cross-linguistic equivalents, lexicalizes the semantic primitive of definiteness. Under this view, however, the indefinite interpretation would need to emerge via a process that reinterprets the determiner's standard semantics at some stage of the syntactic or semantic derivation. Both approaches –whether assuming that the definite article is semantically void, or that it contributes its standard semantics– run into the same explanatory shortcoming. Neither can *a priori* explain why only Italian, unlike other Romance languages, allow an indefinite interpretation of the definite determiner.

This third general research question thus forms the basis for the final main goal of this thesis, which is twofold. First, the thesis aims to provide evidence supporting the traditional view that definite articles in Italian (and by extension, other Romance languages) unambiguously encode definiteness. Second, it seeks to account for the availability of indefinite interpretations with definite articles in Italian, alongside their absence in other Romance languages.

Before delving further into a more detailed overview of the data of interest, and before outlining the structure of the thesis, I will first discuss some fundamental theoretical assumptions.

## 1.2 The basics: theoretical background and related concepts

Having established the broad empirical scope of the present investigation and its central questions, it is now essential to identify the theoretical framework that will guide the analysis, and to clarify some of its related concepts. The present thesis adopts a generativist approach to language (Chomsky 1981, 1986, 1995, ff.), framed within the principles and considerations of language design articulated in the Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1993, 1995, 2000, ff.). According to this view, the architecture of grammar is typically represented as an inverted Y, schematically reproduced below.



**Figure 1:** the inverted-Y model of grammar (Chomsky 1995)

Under this model of grammar, syntax constitutes the central computational component of language. It recursively generates structures that serve as adequate input to the two externalization systems: the Articulatory-Perceptual and the Conceptual-Intentional systems. These connections are mediated by two interfaces: the Phonetic Form (PF) and the Logical Form (LF), respectively. The PF interface is responsible for translating syntactic

structures into their phonological outputs, while the LF interface maps syntactic structures to their semantic representations. Given that this thesis explores the role of the functional category of (definite and indefinite) determiners in Italian and Romance, the focus lies primarily on the LF interface.<sup>2</sup>

This abstract grammatical model raises the question of how definiteness and indefiniteness are encoded to provide appropriate input for the LF interface. Therefore, addressing this question requires first a discussion of the syntactic representation of nominal expressions. Most research on the nominal domain in the generativist framework is grounded in the so-called *DP hypothesis* (Szabolcsi 1983, 1987; Abney 1987; Stowell 1989, 1991; Longobardi 1994).<sup>3</sup> The present thesis adopts this theoretical approach.

According to the DP hypothesis, noun phrases (NPs) are assumed to be headed by a functional item of the lexicon –the determiner– which projects its own structure, namely the Determiner Phrase (DP) (Abney 1987). This hypothesis stems from the efforts within X-bar theory to generalize syntactic structures across categories by positing a unified template. Under this approach, DPs and Complementizer Phrases (CPs), which correspond to full clauses, share a parallel structural configuration. In both cases, the relevant lexical category, whether the noun or the verb, is embedded within a nested set of functional projections, the DP and the CP.

Among the lexical items that can occupy the head of the DP projection, however, a distinction is often made between determiners proper (like those in (1)), and quantifiers (like those in (2b)), on the basis of their respective distributional properties (Shlonsky 1991; Stowell 1991; Giusti 1991; Cardinaletti & Giusti 1992; Beghelli 1995; Gianollo et al. 2021). Consequently, the term *determiner* becomes ambiguous and can be interpreted in two ways: a broader sense, which includes quantifiers, and a narrower sense, that

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<sup>2</sup> See Irutzu (2009) for a detail discussion on the adequacy of the inverted-Y model for the investigation of interface phenomena.

<sup>3</sup> The universality of the DP hypothesis has recently been questioned, particularly in light of the existence of determinerless languages. Bošković (2005, 2008, 2012) provides arguments suggesting the absence of DP projections in determinerless languages, based on distinct syntactic properties observed between these languages and those with determiners.

Additionally, Chierchia (1998b), proposes a semantic parameter whereby languages vary in the denotation of their NPs. In some languages, like Romance, NPs are inherently predicates and require a D projection to become arguments. In other languages, like Chinese, NPs function as names of kinds. Therefore, they are inherently argumental and can occur freely without determiners. Finally, a hybrid class of languages, including Germanic and Slavic, is also identified. This group behaves partly like Romance and partly like Chinese.

For further discussion on the NP vs. DP debate, see also Longobardi (1994, 2001) for the assumption of null determiners, Cyrino and Espinal (2015) for the NP/DP status of BNs in Brazilian Portuguese, and Salzmann (2020) for a recent overview of the ongoing debate.

excludes them. This thesis focuses primarily on (indefinite) determiners in the narrow sense.<sup>4</sup>

In accordance with this bipartite distinction, moreover, different syntactic projections are typically stipulated for these items. Articles, for instance, are generally assumed to function as heads of DP projections, while quantifiers are considered to be heads (or specifiers) of a hierarchically higher Quantifier Phrase (QP). These different positions within the nominal spine explain their potential cooccurrence and their largely fixed linear order, which is illustrated in the contrast below:<sup>5</sup>

- (5) a. Ernest wrote *all<sub>Q</sub> the<sub>D</sub> books*.  
 b. \*Ernest wrote *the<sub>D</sub> all<sub>Q</sub> books*.

On the basis of contrasts like that in (5), it is convenient to assume that the structure of nominal arguments in languages with overt quantifiers and determiners roughly corresponds to the configuration minimally represented in (6) (Cardinaletti & Giusti 1992; Zamparelli 2000; Chierchia 1998a; Longobardi 2001, 2005).

- (6) [QP Q [DP D [NP N]]]

The unified configuration in (6), however, applies to both definite and indefinite nominal expressions. Consequently, the interpretative difference between definite and indefinite expressions must arise from other dimensions of grammar. To explore these dimensions in more depth, it is essential to establish precise definitions of the concepts that underly this distinction.

### 1.2.1 Definiteness

To address first the definiteness vs. indefiniteness dichotomy, the initial step is to provide formal definitions for these two concepts. Although this dissertation focuses primarily on indefinite expressions in Italian and Romance, let us start with a definition of definiteness.

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<sup>4</sup> Therefore, when not explicitly stated otherwise, throughout this thesis the term *determiner* is to be understood in a narrow sense –that is, excluding quantifiers.

<sup>5</sup> Possible counterexamples to this generalization included phrases such as *the four books* and *the many faces*. I set this issue aside in this thesis and assume a hierarchical structure in which the QP is positioned above the DP.

This choice may seem unexpected. Nonetheless, indefiniteness is notoriously regarded as particularly challenging to define, partly because the distinction between definiteness and indefiniteness is asymmetrical (Farkas 2018; Pozas-Loyo 2022). For reasons that will become clearer as we proceed, indefiniteness is best understood in contraposition to definiteness. Hence, the definition of indefiniteness in this thesis will be parasitic on the definition of definiteness.

Definiteness is generally addressed, discussed, and defined in relation to three main theoretical parameters: presuppositionality, uniqueness (or maximality), and familiarity. The first parameter relates to the long-standing philosophical debate, originated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, between the quantificational versus presuppositional interpretation of definite descriptions. As proposed by Russell (1905), under the quantificational approach, the definite description in (7) expresses a quantificational statement.

(7) *The dog is barking.*

According to this view, (7) is true if, within the context of utterance, there exists exactly one dog and this dog is barking. The sentence is false in any other scenario – whether no dog exists, or the unique dog in context is not barking.

In contrast, the presuppositional account (Frege 1892; Strawson 1950), posits that a speaker that asserts (7) presupposes the existence of a unique dog. Under this account, (7) is true if exactly one dog exists in the context and it is barking, and it is false if exactly one dog exists, but it is not barking. Crucially, the presuppositional account holds that the sentence is undefined otherwise; that is, it has no truth value if there are no dogs in the context.

Empirical support for the presuppositional status of definites comes from standard diagnostics for presuppositions. Presuppositions are known to project from embedded contexts (Beaver & Guerts 2011, *i.a.*), especially negative environments. Hence, in the negated counterpart of (7), illustrated in (8), the existence presupposition of a unique dog in the context of utterance persists despite the presence of negation.

(8) *The dog is not barking.*

In light of the behavior of definite descriptions in negative environments, this thesis adopts the presuppositional framework and assumes that definite descriptions presuppose

the existence of their unique referents. This perspective can be formally represented by assigning the (singular) definite article the following denotation.

$$(9) \quad \llbracket the \rrbracket = \lambda P: \exists x \forall y [P(y) \leftrightarrow x = y]. \iota x. P(x)$$

(Notation from Heim 2011: 998, (4))

This formula also integrates the second parameter associated with definiteness, namely uniqueness and/or maximality. “ $\iota$ ” stands for “the unique  $x$  that”. Therefore, the denotation in (9) reflects the view that the definite article lexicalizes the semantics of a iota operator (Sharvy 1980; Partee 1987; Chierchia 1998b), which introduces a function that takes a property as its argument and returns the contextually unique entity that satisfies such property.<sup>6</sup> In view of the Compositionality Principle (Frege 1906; Partee 2004), (7), repeated below as (10a), can thus be formally represented as in (10b).

(10)a. *The dog* is barking.

$$b. \llbracket the \rrbracket = \lambda P. \iota x [P(x)]$$

$$\llbracket the \ dog \rrbracket = \iota x [\text{dog}(x)]$$

$$\llbracket The \ dog \ is \ barking \rrbracket = \iota x [\text{dog}(x) \ \& \ \text{barking}(x)]$$

Under the assumed semantics, singular definite descriptions refer to the unique entity in the context that satisfies the relevant property.

Let us now take a look at the following example containing a plural definite description.

(11) *The dogs* are barking.

Plural (and mass) nouns have cumulative extensions (Quine 1960; Krifka 1989), which are assumed to be closed under sum formation and modeled as join semi-lattices structured by a part-of relation (Link 1983; Landman 1989a, 1989b; Lasnik 2011).

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<sup>6</sup> Since definite descriptions refer to *contextually* unique entities, the claim has been made that all definite articles introduce domain restrictions (Etcheberry & Giannakidou 2010; Gillon 2015; among others). These restrictors contribute variables that restrict the set of individuals that satisfy the NP description to those that are contextually salient within the discourse (Westerstahl 1985; von Stechow 1994, among others). For simplicity, this thesis will not explicitly include such restrictors in the semantic derivations, although it assumes they are universally present with definite articles.



Assuming, a context where three salient dogs are present – say, Luna, Finn, and Atlas, the extension of the plural noun *dogs* includes the individual atoms (i.e., l, f, a) and all pluralities formed by their sums (i.e., l+f, l+a, f+a, l+f+a). Under the denotation in (9), however, multiple (sub-)pluralities could satisfy the plural definite description in (11), leading to undefined truth conditions.

To resolve this issue, Sharvy (1980) proposes a unified semantics for singular and plural / mass definite descriptions based on maximality. Under this approach, definite descriptions are not characterized as presupposing the existence of a unique individual, but rather of a unique maximal element of a given extension. This unified treatment based on maximality can be formalized as follows.

$$(12)a. \llbracket the \rrbracket = \lambda P: \exists x \forall y [MAXP(y) \leftrightarrow x = y]. \iota x. MAX(P)(x)^7$$

$$b. MAX(P) = \lambda x. P(x) \ \& \ \neg \exists y [P(y) \ \& \ x < y]$$

(Notation from Heim 2011: 998, (6))

With singular count nouns, every element in the extension qualifies as a maximal element. In contrast, plural count nouns are closed under sum formation. Consequently, plural count nouns always have a unique maximal element, provided their extension is non-empty. In the specific context of (11), the proper-part relation “<” defined in the above formula ensures that  $MAX(dogs)$  can only contain the unique maximal element l+f+a. This maximal element represents the sum of all contextually salient individuals, capturing the desired interpretation of the plural definite description, which needs to satisfy the principle of maximality.

Finally, it is important to highlight that definite descriptions are often analyzed as encoding a further pragmatic condition of familiarity. According to this familiarity condition (Christophersen 1939; Kamp 1981; Heim 1982), a definite description is felicitous only if the existence of its referent is known or accessible to the hearer within the discourse context.<sup>8</sup> This pragmatic requirement explains why definite descriptions typically refer to familiar referents that are known and mutually identifiable by both speaker and

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<sup>7</sup> To simplify formulas while preserving their explanatory power, the “MAX” component introduced in the denotation will be omitted in the remainder of the thesis. The contribution of the definite article will consistently be represented through the iota operator, which will however be assumed to inherently function as a maximalizing operator.

<sup>8</sup> In dynamic semantics (Kamp 1981; Heim 1982), this requirement is formalized by stipulating that the discourse variable introduced by the definite description must be familiar relative to its input context.

hearer. Furthermore, the familiarity condition also accounts for the anaphoric uses generally available to definite descriptions, as illustrated in (13).

(13) A dog<sub>i</sub> is in the garden. *The dog<sub>i</sub>* is barking.

Therefore, definite descriptions are generally infelicitous in an out-of-the-blue context precisely because the familiarity condition requires that both the speaker and the hearer be able to identify the specific referent being referred to. This is typically achieved either when the referent has been previously introduced in discourse, as in (13), or when its existence is already mutually known by both participants within the discourse context.

More specifically, however, recent experimental research within the Dual-Process Activation Model has shown that introducing a new discourse referent involves two processes: the introduction of a new concept and the assignment of a referent to that concept (Brocher et al. 2016; Brocher & von Heusinger 2018). This concept can be entirely discourse-new or be activated when inferable from previous context. For instance, *ambulance* activates the concept of the noun *doctor*. In all such cases, the function of the definite article is to signal that the referent is uniquely identifiable.

In summary, in this section it has been argued that definite descriptions can be characterized by three main parameters: presuppositionality, maximality, and familiarity. Together, these parameters shape the desired semantics contribution of definites, which presuppose the existence of a maximal referent that is uniquely identifiable by speaker and hearer. With these foundational elements of definiteness established, we now turn to the notion of indefiniteness.

### 1.2.2 Indefiniteness

As previously mentioned, the characterization of indefiniteness developed in this section will build upon the definition of definiteness outlined above. A straightforward approach is to define indefinites as nominal expressions that convey an existential interpretation, but differ in their behavior with respect to presuppositionality, maximality, and familiarity conditions.

Within this approach two possibilities arise. On the one hand, the definite vs. indefinite contrast can be framed as a symmetrical relation: definites are subject to uniqueness and familiarity constraints, while indefinites obey non-uniqueness and novelty

constraints. Alternatively, the relationship may be viewed as asymmetrical: only definite descriptions are required to adhere to maximality and uniqueness conditions, whereas indefinite expressions are semantically unmarked. This thesis partially adopts the asymmetrical view, as it better captures the broader distribution of indefinites compared to definites, as well as their wider range of associated interpretative possibilities (see also Brasoveanu & Farkas 2016 on this point).

In light of this unmarkedness and given that this thesis primarily discusses indefinite interpretations with plural count nouns, it is also important to address (non-)maximality. While plural definites, as shown in the previous section, adhere to maximality constraints by referring to the maximal sum of contextually salient individuals satisfying the property denoted by the descriptive content of the noun, no such requirement exists with plural indefinites. In other words, plural indefinites do not refer to a maximal individual but simply assert the existence of a plurality of individuals within the extension of the noun. Therefore, from a pretheoretical standpoint, this thesis assumes that plural indefinite expressions are non-maximal.

Considering these interpretative possibilities, a further distinction traditionally made in the literature is between two types of indefinite expressions, namely *strong* and *weak* indefinites (Milsark 1974, 1977). According to the traditional view, weak indefinites differ from strong indefinites in their ability to occur as internal arguments of existential constructions (Milsark 1974, 1977; McNally 1997, 2020, among many others), as attested in the contrast below.

- (14) a. There are {*dogs* / *sm dogs* / *two dogs* / *no dogs* / ...}.
- b. \*/<sup>??</sup>There are {*most dogs* / *both dogs* / *two of the dogs* / ...}.

(14a) shows that weak indefinites are allowed in existential constructions, whereas (14b) illustrates the ungrammaticality or infelicity of strong indefinites, including partitive constructions, in the same context.

This distinction has been foundational in the study of various phenomena related to indefiniteness. Currently, weak indefinites are observationally identified with those indefinite nominals that mandatorily take the narrowest possible scope in the presence of other scope-bearing elements (Ladusaw 1994; Dobrovie-Sorin 1997; McNally 2004, 2020). Under several approaches, these indefinite constructions are taken to denote properties, of type  $\langle e, t \rangle$ . Strong indefinites, by contrast, are characterized by their tendency to

take wide scope in the presence of logical operators. As a result, they are sometimes treated as generalized quantifiers (e.g., de Hoop 1992), of type  $\langle\langle e, t \rangle t\rangle$ , even though there is often a scarce consensus in the literature regarding their precise semantic type.

Given that scope behavior is closely related to the notion of specificity – a fundamental property of indefinites – the strong vs. weak distinction is sometimes framed also in these terms. Weak indefinites correspond to nominals that can never convey a specific interpretation, whereas strong indefinites generally display a strong tendency to convey specificity (von Heusinger 2002, 2011). This parameter will prove crucial for the analytical discussion in the following chapters. Therefore, to substantiate this discussion, it is necessary to provide first a more detailed account of specificity.

Following von Heusinger (2011), specificity can be defined as a semantic-pragmatic notion encompassing different interpretations and uses of indefinite expressions. Pretheoretically, specificity can be argued to correspond to the *referential intention* of the speaker that uses an indefinite nominal. A speaker uses a specific indefinite when intends to refer to a particular referent they have in mind.

To my knowledge, the distinction between specific vs. non-specific interpretations was first observed by Quine (1956, 1960), who noted that indefinites in opaque environments are ambiguous, allowing both *de re* (i.e., specific) and *de dicto* (i.e., non-specific) readings:

(15) Bill wants to talk with *a famous writer*.

In (15), the intensional verb *to want* creates an opaque context in object position, where the indefinite *a famous writer* occurs. This sentence allows two interpretations: (i) a specific reading, where there is a particular famous writer Bill wants to talk to; and (ii) a non-specific interpretation, where Bill simply wishes to talk to any famous writer. In the first case, the nominal is interpreted outside the opaque environment, taking scope above the intensional predicate. In the non-specific reading, the indefinite is interpreted *in situ* under the scope of the intensional predicate.

While this description captures the essence of specificity, a wider variety of data involving specificity has been discussed in the literature.<sup>9</sup> This heterogeneity makes a

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<sup>9</sup> Von Heusinger (2011: 1028) identifies several types of specificity, which include (i) referential specificity; (ii) scopal specificity; (iii) epistemic specificity; specificity related to (iv) different notions of familiarity, such as d-linking (Pesetsky 1987); (v) topicality; (vi) noteworthiness; and (vii) discourse prominence.

unified characterization particularly challenging.<sup>10</sup> The most promising attempt in this direction comes from von Heusinger (2002, 2011, 2019), who proposes a core semantic notion of specificity in terms of *referential anchoring*. According to this view, a specific reading is brought about by the anchoring of a referent to another element salient in the discourse domain (e.g., the subject, quantified expressions, or the speaker). This thesis adheres to this account of specificity.

The discussion of indefiniteness thus far has not addressed the (non-)presuppositional status of indefinites. Strong indefinites, due to their tendency to be associated with wide scope, specific (i.e., referential) interpretations, have been claimed to presuppose the existence of their referents. Diesing (1992), for instance, argues that (strong) indefinites are ambiguous between a presuppositional and a non-presuppositional interpretation depending on their position in the syntactic structure. Under their specific readings –possible only when the indefinite occurs outside the VP at LF– strong indefinites are presuppositional. By contrast, weak indefinites, such as English BNs, are restricted to the VP domain, and, as a result, lack this ambiguity. They do not presuppose but assert existence. Crucially, this assertion can be negated.

In sum, this subsection has defined indefinites as nominal expressions conveying an existential interpretation that contrast with definites in terms of (various degrees of) presuppositionality, maximality, and familiarity. Additionally, a distinction between strong and weak indefinites has also been outlined, mainly based on scope behavior and (non-)specificity. Finally, this subsection has also addressed the (non-)presuppositional status of indefinites, highlighting that strong indefinites may presuppose existence under specific readings, whereas weak indefinites assert, but do not presuppose, existence. The next section introduces a notion closely related to (in)definiteness and reference in general: genericity.

### 1.2.3 Genericity

Genericity is a linguistic phenomenon through which speakers of a language express generalizations and regularities about individuals and the world. As a universal linguistic feature of natural language, genericity has been extensively studied in the literature,

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<sup>10</sup> See, among many other attempts, Karttunen (1968, 1976); Abbott (1976); Fodor and Sag (1982); Abusch (1994); and Farkas (1994, 2002).

particularly in relation to languages with lexical determiners. For a detailed overview of genericity, see Krifka & Gerstner (1987), Krifka et al. (1995), and Mari et al. (2013).

This section discusses genericity as an interpretative possibility associated with both morphologically definite and indefinite expressions, as illustrated below.

(16)a. *The lion* is a predatory cat.

(Krifka et al. 1995: 5, (5a))

b. *A lion* has a bushy tail.

(Krifka et al. 1995: 9, (20a))

Both examples in (16) express a generalization about lions, though they differ in interpretation. In (16a), *the lion* does not refer to a particular individual, but to the species as a whole, namely the kind Lion. (16b), on the other hand, can be paraphrased as *A lion usually has a bushy tail*, which does not refer directly to a kind, but rather expresses a generalization over events.

These two interpretations reflect a well-established distinction between two types of generic statements (Carlson 1977; Krifka & Gerstner 1987; Krifka et al. 1995; Pellettier 2010; Mari et al. 2013). Specifically, (16a) exemplifies an instance of nominal-level genericity, while (16b) corresponds to a case of sentence-level genericity. These two types of generic expressions are referred to by Krifka et al. (1995) as *reference to a kind* and *characterizing sentences*, respectively. In the former case, the source of genericity is assumed to be the DP alone, which inherently denotes a kind.<sup>11</sup> In the latter case, genericity originates at the sentential level, and it is usually associated with the presence of a covert generic operator, namely **Gn**.<sup>12</sup> This operator, akin to a modal universal quantifier, binds variables over individuals and situations, thereby encoding a generalization about individuals in a given relevant situation. The representation and paraphrase of (16b) are provided below.

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<sup>11</sup> Kinds are typically understood as abstract mental constructs and have been postulated across different scientific subfields related to human cognition. Hence, they can be viewed as sortal concepts forming a mental catalogue (Mueller-Reichau 2011). As a product of human thought, moreover, they can be modelled in various ways (see Chierchia 1998b). Following Borik and Espinal (2015: 183), this thesis adopts the view that proper kind denotation results from generalizing over the instances of a given kind, with the outcome of this generalization being abstracted away from those instances. Consequently, kinds, conceived as intensional objects, semantically behave like entities devoid of any internal structure (Carlson 1977; Link 1983).

<sup>12</sup> Within sentence-level genericity, a further distinction is traditionally made between characterizing sentences, which express generalizations about properties, and habitual sentences, which express generalizations about events.

(17)a. **Gn**<sub>x,s</sub> [lion(*x*) in *s*][have\_a\_bushy\_tail(*x*) in *s*]

b. “For each appropriate situation *s*, if *x* is a lion in *s* then *x* has a bushy tail in *s*”

Research on genericity has underscored that languages with and without articles vary in the strategies they adopt to convey generic statements (e.g., Chierchia 1998b; Dayal 2004). Even within determiner languages, significant variation exists. For singular count nouns, Romance languages align with English in using singular definite and indefinite expressions to convey nominal- and sentence-level genericity, respectively. However, different patterns between English and Romance arise with plural nouns, as illustrated in the following examples.<sup>13</sup>

(18)a. *Lions* will become extinct soon.

*English*

(Krifka et al. 1995: 10, (23b))

b. \*(*I*) *leoni* si estingueranno presto.

*Italian*

the lions SI become\_extinct.FUT.3PL soon

‘Lions will become extinct soon.’

The contrast in (18) reflects a well-documented typological distinction between Germanic and Romance languages. While English (and Germanic languages more broadly) can express genericity by using plural (or mass) BNs, Romance languages rely on definite descriptions instead.

To begin with the English case, the most influential account of kind reference is the theory developed in Carlson (1977). Under this framework, the BN in (18a) refers directly to a kind, much like the singular definite in (16a). In contrast, the same nominal expression in (19) refers to objects, namely instantiations of the kind.

(19) *Lions* are ruining my garden.

<sup>13</sup> Similar contrasts are observed with mass terms, as shown below.

(i) a. *Gold* is a precious metal

(Krifka et al. 1995: 5, (5c))

b. \*(*L*)oro è un metallo prezioso.  
the-gold be.PRES.3SGa metal precious  
‘Gold is a precious metal.’

To account for the fact that an English BN can receive both a generic and an existential interpretation, Carlson (1977) introduces a key distinction between predicate types, namely s(tage)-level, i(ndividual)-level, and k(ind)-level predicates. S-level predicates, such as *ruining my garden* in (19), describe temporary states or conditions of their arguments, as they apply to specific stages of an individual, which may vary across time or context. These predicates often describe transient situations or actions and do not characterize the entities denoted by their nominal arguments in a permanent way. When English BNs combine with s-level predicates, they receive an existential interpretation (Carlson 1977; cf. Chierchia 1998b; Dayal 2004, 2013, among others). Accordingly, (19) denotes a situation in which some (non-specific) lions are currently ruining the speaker's garden.

In contrast, i-level predicates denote inherent, stable, or characteristic properties of their arguments. Therefore, they apply to individuals as a whole describing attributes that are not transitory. Take, for instance, the following example containing the i-level predicate *have a bushy tail*.

(20) *Lions* have a bushy tail.

As this predicate denotes a stable property of individuals, the BN argument is interpreted generically, referring to the sum of all individuals satisfying the property denoted by the descriptive content of the noun.

Finally, k-level predicates are assumed to apply directly to the kind level, rather than to individual instantiations. Consequently, these predicates denote properties that hold meaning only when applied to a whole kind or species. A classic example is *become extinct* in (18a). Here, the BN *lions* –the subject of the k-level predicate *become extinct*– refers to the kind as a whole, not to individual lions.

Carlson's (1977) taxonomy of predicates offers a useful framework to distinguish between the existential and generic reading of English BNs. The next chapter will extend this discussion to Romance indefinites, exploring how they interact with predicate types.

Turning to kind reference and genericity in Romance, this phenomenon has been extensively investigated in the literature (e.g., Chierchia 1998a, 1998b; Longobardi 2001, 2005; Zamparelli 2002; Beyssade 2005; Borik & Espinal 2015). It is well known that, unlike English, Romance BNs can only convey an existential reading, but not a kind



interpretation (Laca 1990, 1999; Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 1996, 2003; Zamparelli 2002; Beyssade 2005, de Swart 2006; Borik & Espinal 2015).<sup>14</sup> To convey a generic interpretation, Romance languages employ definite plurals, as illustrated below.

- (21) Gianni odia                      *\*gatti / i gatti*.<sup>15</sup>                      *Italian*  
       Gianni hate.PRES.3SG    cats        the cats  
       ‘Gianni hates cats.’

The precise denotation of generically interpreted plural definites in Romance is a matter of ongoing debate. Zamparelli (2002) contends that generic plural definites in Romance are semantically equivalent to generic BNs in English and can therefore denote kinds directly. A similar perspective is offered by Dayal (2004), who argues that Romance definite plurals are systematically ambiguous. They can convey a default definite reading, derived by the iota operator (as discussed in Section 1.2.1), or a kind-denoting interpretation, derived through the down operator.

An alternative account emerges from Borik and Espinal (2015). According to their analysis, definite plurals in Romance are unambiguously derived by the iota operator. Their potential generic interpretation emerges through the intensionalization of the maximized semantics associated with plural definites. Specifically, building on Chierchia (1998b), Borik and Espinal (2015) argue that the generic reading of Romance plural definites is obtained by applying an intensional operator  $\hat{\cdot}$  to the semantics of the iota operator. The output of this operation is  $\hat{\iota}$ . This intensionalization arises due to a coercion of meaning triggered by i-/k-level predicates, which select for kinds and cause a type mismatch with the default interpretation of the DP. To resolve this mismatch, the interpretation of the plural definite must be intensionalized by abstracting over worlds or situations. As a result, the generic plural definite is interpreted as referring to the maximal sum of individuals satisfying the property denoted by the descriptive content of the noun, relative to a given world or situation. This thesis adopts Borik’s and Espinal’s (2015) view of generic plural definites in Romance.

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<sup>14</sup> This view is not without contention, as there appear to be certain cases –particularly involving modified BNs in Italian– that seem to be compatible with a generic interpretation (*cf.* Chierchia 1998b; Longobardi 1994, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> The verb *odiare* ‘to hate’ selects for generic objects. This verb has been chosen intentionally, mainly because unmodified BNs in Romance are independently excluded from preverbal positions, a phenomenon that will be discussed in the following chapter.

In sum, this section briefly discussed genericity, focusing mainly on the typological distinction between English and Romance languages in expressing generic meanings. It highlighted how English BNs can refer to kinds, while Romance languages use definite plurals for generic statements. Finally, Borik and Espinal’s (2015) perspective of generic plural definites in Romance was presented and adopted. Next section examines a final notion closely related to (in)definiteness and reference.

#### 1.2.4 Partitivity

Before outlining the structure of the present thesis, it is worth addressing another phenomenon closely related to indefiniteness, namely partitivity. This notion was briefly introduced earlier when discussing the various indefinite forms of Italian and has been the subject of extensive recent research (e.g., Falco & Zamparelli 2019, Ihsane 2021a; Sleeman & Giusti 2021; Espinal & Cyrino 2022b; Sleeman & Luraghi 2023, to name just a few recent contributions). Generally, this linguistic concept covers a broad range of phenomena within the nominal domain. In its standard sense, however, a partitive construction can be defined as an indefinite nominal constituent that denotes a subset of a larger referent.

Let us explore this definition in more detail by considering the following Italian example involving a canonical partitive construction.

- (22) {*Alcuni / due / molti / la maggior parte*} *degli studenti* hanno  
           some       two many the greater part   of-the students AUX  
           passato   l’esame.  
           pass.PTCP the-exam  
           ‘{Some / two / many / most} of the students passed the exam.’

From this example, several descriptive generalizations about partitivity can already be formulated. First, it is important to note that a partitive construction consists of two components: the first, headed by a quantificational element, denotes a subset of a larger set; the second denotes the larger set itself. Two key constraints have been proposed in the literature to capture the nature of these two components. On the one hand, Barker (1998: 680) states that standard partitivity involves a proper part-whole relation, whereby the quantificational element must denote a proper subset of the entity denoted by the second

component. On the other hand, Jackendoff (1977) introduces the *Partitive Constraint*, which stipulates that the complement of a partitive construction must be definite. This constraint has been further refined: the complement of a partitive can in fact also be a specific indefinite (de Hoop 1992; Abbott 1995; Barker 1998, among others), and not a strong quantifier in the sense of Milsark (1974) (Falco & Zamparelli 2019). Within this standard definition of partitivity, various related constructions have been discussed. For instance, Falco and Zamparelli (2019) identify twelve distinct facets of partitivity, each corresponding to different structural configurations and conveying different nuances of meaning.<sup>16</sup>

While providing a comprehensive formal characterization of partitives is beyond the scope of the present dissertation, some important differences emerge when comparing proper partitives to Italian *di*+ART constructions. As mentioned, these expressions are traditionally labeled *partitive articles*. The term *partitive article* relates to the partitive origin of the indefinite determiner and its superficial equivalence with the (apparent) preposition + article complex found in standard partitives.<sup>17</sup> However, the use of this term has led to some confusion, as pointed out by several authors (see, for instance, Milner 1978; Storto 2003; Ihsane 2008; Martí-Girbau 2010; Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016). Let us see these issues in more detail by considering the following example involving a *di*+ART nominal.

- (23) *Degli studenti* hanno passato l'esame.  
 di+ART students AUX pass.PTCP the-exam  
 '(Some) students passed the exam.'

The most significant difference between *di*+ART indefinites and proper partitive constructions is structural. Unlike canonical partitives, and despite the partitive origin of *di*, *di*+ART nominals generally lack a covert or overt quantificational component, which is believed to have been lost during their diachronic development (Carlier 2007; Carlier &

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<sup>16</sup> These facets include: canonical partitives, proportional partitives, indefinite partitives, the *amongst* semi-partitive construction, superlative partitives, double-noun partitives, bare partitives, covert partitives, extraposed partitives, inverted partitives, maximal pronominal partitives, the *out of* partitive construction, and pseudopartitives.

<sup>17</sup> The apparent preposition + article complex is commonly referred to as *preposizione articolata* 'articulated preposition' in the Italian linguistic tradition (see also Chierchia 1998a). However, the status of this apparent prepositional element has been the subject of recent debate. Espinal and Cyrino (2022b), for instance, contend that the *de* element in Romance partitives corresponds to the overt Spell-Out of a relator head in Den Dikken's (2006) sense. This relator takes a definite DP (i.e., the superset) as its complement and a QP (i.e., the subset) as its specifier.

Lamiroy 2014, 2022; Luraghi & Albonico 2021). This structural difference is mirrored in their interpretation. With canonical partitives, the proper part-whole relationship between the subset denoted by the quantifier and the superset denoted by the (definite) DP is explicitly entailed by their syntactic configuration. In contrast, with *di*+ART indefinite, this partitive implicature is not syntactically encoded but can only be pragmatically inferred under the adequate contextual premises (Espinal & Cyrino 2022b). Further syntactic and semantics differences, which will inform the formal derivation of *di*+ART indefinites proposed in this thesis, will be discussed in following chapters. For now, it suffices to note that partitives and *di*+ART nominals constitute two syntactically and semantically distinct constructions.

In summary, this section has outlined the theoretical framework underpinning the present thesis, which is grounded in formal semantics, and informed by the Minimalist Program and related assumptions about the structure of grammar. Additionally, it has introduced and defined four core concepts central to this study, namely definiteness, indefiniteness, genericity, and partitivity. With these theoretical tools in place, the next step is to present an overview of the data of interest and outline the structure of the thesis.

### 1.3 The structure of the thesis

This thesis offers a comprehensive characterization and formal derivation of the expression of indefiniteness in Italian, with a particular focus on those nominals that feature a superficially definite article, in comparison with other Romance languages. The analysis is guided by the three main research questions outlined in Section 1.1, which address (i) the formal derivation of each indefinite expressions in Italian; (ii) the proliferation of these forms in Italian (but not in other Romance languages) and the potential existence of free optionality among them, and (iii) the status of the Italian definite article. Each chapter revolves around one of the indefinite forms featuring a morphologically definite article introduced above, complemented by an additional chapter examining a peculiar, cross-linguistically available, definite construction. Accordingly, the thesis is structured as follows.

Before the analytical discussion, Chapter 2 provides a foundational description of the expression of indefiniteness in Italian compared to other Romance languages like Spanish, Catalan, and French. The chapter explores canonical and non-canonical strategies employed by these languages to express indefiniteness, focusing on different grammatical

factors such as (i) the syntactic position of indefinite nominals; (ii) predicate type; (iii) syntactic and semantic number; and (iv) scope relations with other scope-bearing elements. This cross-linguistic picture sets the stage for the analytical investigation in the following chapters.

Chapter 3 examines the Italian *di*+ART nominal construction illustrated in the following examples.

(24)a. Carlo ha comprato *dei pomodori*.

Carlo AUX buy.PTCP *di*+ART tomatoes

‘Carlo bought (some) tomatoes.’

b. Carlo ha comprato *dell’olio*.

Carlo AUX buy.PTCP *di*+ART=oil

‘Carlo bought (some) oil.’

Concretely, it addresses two specific research questions: (i) what is the formal derivation of *di*+ART? and (ii) what accounts for the distributional and interpretative differences between *di*+ART and two closely related indefinite forms, namely Romance BNs and French *des/du*-phrases? To answer the first question, the chapter reviews previous approaches and proposes, in consonance with previous literature (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016; Espinal & Cyrino 2022a, 2022b), a unified morphosyntactic analysis for the three forms, namely *di*+ART, BNs, and *des/du*-phrases. Addressing the second question, the chapter argues that, despite sharing the same underlying configuration, *di*+ART indefinites are referentially stronger than BNs, due to their ability to introduce stable discourse referents. This possibility is accounted for by postulating that *di*+ART expressions contribute discourse referents bound to a semantic choice function at the level of logical representation. This analysis accounts for specificity, strong indefiniteness, and interaction effects with other logical operators, meanings for which *di*+ART specializes. The chapter further posits that the interpretative differences between *di*+ART and *des/du*-phrases stem from the coexistence of alternative forms in Italian, which is absent in French. However, this coexistence is not a case of syntactic competition but arises from the mapping from syntax to exponence. This analysis also suggests that the telic interpretation and the ‘small quantity’ reading associated with *di*+ART indefinites are not syntactically encoded but must be pragmatically driven.

Chapter 4 examines indefinite interpretations associated with morphologically definite articles combined with plural and mass nouns, which allow both definite and indefinite readings. These uses are illustrated below.

- (25)a. Giacomo ha mangiato *le<sub>def/indef</sub> patate*.  
 Giacomo AUX eat.PTCP the potatoes  
 ‘Giacomo ate (the) potatoes.’
- b. Giacomo ha mangiato *il<sub>def/indef</sub> pane*.  
 Giacomo AUX eat.PTCP the bread  
 ‘Giacomo ate (the) bread.’

The chapter addresses two main research questions: (i) what grammatical conditions enable plural and mass indefinite definites in Italian? And (ii) why do only Italo-Romance varieties, and not other Romance languages, exhibit indefinite definites (in addition to BNs, *di*+ART nominals, and even a bare *di*)? Regarding the first question, the chapter reviews previous approaches to this construction and shows that the indefinite reading of plural and mass definites in Italian can neither be assimilated to short weak definites (Carlson & Sussman 2005; Carlson et al. 2006), to kind denotation, nor can it be derived by Chierchia’s (1998b) operation of Derived Kind Predication. Instead, I propose that indefinite definites are best captured using the unified syntactic structure outlined in Chapter 3 for BNs, *di*+ART nominals, and French *des/du*-phrases. Under this structure, I argue that plural and mass definite internal arguments allow an indefinite interpretation as long as the event in which they participate denotes incremental homogeneity (Landman & Rothstein 2010, 2012a, 2012b). This hypothesis is supported by the productivity of indefinite definites in habitual (and iterative) contexts –environments that are incrementally homogeneous by definition– and their compatibility with *per* ‘for’ and *ogni* ‘every’ N temporal modifiers, which force an atelic interpretation. Concerning the second question, and through a small corpus study, I hypothesize that indefinite definites emerge in Italo-Romance varieties lacking BNs as an alternative indefinite form. This innovation was later adopted into Italian, revealing the bidirectional influence between dialectal substrata and the national language, and the role of competing grammars in speakers of informal Italian.

Chapter 5 serves as a natural continuation of Chapter 4, as it continues the investigation of non-canonical interpretative possibilities associated with the Italian definite

article, although in combination with an apparently singular count noun that conveys a number-neutral interpretation (Farkas & de Swart 2003). This possibility is exemplified in italics in the following sentence.

- (26)a. In questo hotel c'è *la piscina*.  
 In this hotel there-be.PRES.3SG the pool  
 'There {is / are} (a) pool(s) in this hotel.'
- b. Fabio indossa *la cravatta*.  
 Fabio wear.PRES3SG the tie  
 'Fabio wears (a) tie(s).'

This construction raises three specific research questions: (i) what syntactic and semantic factors license this indefinite and number-neutral reading? (ii) How is the indefinite interpretation of the definite article and the number-neutral reading of the morphologically singular count noun compositionally derived? And (iii) why does Italian, unlike other Romance languages, adopt this strategy? To address question (i), I follow previous analysis of number-neutral BNs in Spanish and Catalan (Espinal & McNally 2009, 2011, Espinal 2010), and argue that Italian number-neutral indefinite definites are licensed exclusively in the object position of HAVE-predicates that express a HAVE-relation (Borthen 2003), provided that the resulting VP denotes a characterizing property of the external argument. Regarding question (ii), I attribute number-neutrality to the absence of Number and related projections in the syntactic structure. Semantically, I propose that the resulting structure corresponds to the denotation of *definite kinds* in Romance (Borik & Espinal 2015), which trigger Chierchia's (1998b) Derived Kind Predication when combined with HAVE-predicates. Finally, concerning question (iii), I argue that the presence of this construction in Italian, but not in other Romance languages, stems from the peculiar status of the Italian determiner system and independent general grammatical principles that govern the application of covert type shifts, such as The Blocking Principle (Chierchia 1998b; Dayal 2004).

The discussions in Chapters 4 and 5 underscore the need to investigate a closely related, yet under-researched definite construction that is cross-linguistically attested. This construction, referred to as the *representative interpretation*, is the focus of Chapter 6. Representative interpretations are exemplified in the following sentences.

(27)a. *Gli antichi romani* hanno costruito questo ponte.  
 the ancient Romans AUX build.PTCP this bridge  
 ‘#(The) ancient Romans built this bridge.’

[Translated from von Koss Torkildsen 2002: 2, (1.1)]

b. *Gli americani* hanno creato la bomba atomica.  
 the Americans AUX create.PTCP the bomb atomic  
 ‘#(The) Americans developed the atomic bomb.’

The motivation for analyzing this construction in this thesis lies in its parallels with Italian indefinite definites. Like Italian indefinite definites, representative definites are *non-maximal*, at least in a pretheoretical sense. For instance, in (27a), *Gli antichi romani* does not refer the contextually maximal sum of ancient Romans. Instead, it is felicitous in a situation where only a small group of Romans participated in the event denoted by the predicate. Upon closer inspection, I show that representative definites are structurally and interpretatively distinct from Italian indefinite definites. This distinction becomes evident when considering the presuppositional status of the former, which presuppose existence, in contrast to the latter, which merely assert existence without presupposing it. The chapter also addresses three specific questions: (i) What grammatical factors license the representative reading? (ii) How are representative definites formally derived? And (iii) are there any compelling reasons to treat representative reasons separately from canonical and non-maximal definites (Brisson 1998)? Regarding (i), I show that representative definites can occur with virtually all plural definite descriptions in combination with s- and i-level predicates, provided the main predication can be attributed to a group of individuals. In addressing (ii), I propose that representative interpretations result from the application of a *representativity operator* (REP), syntactically adjoined to a (definite) DP. At the level of semantic representation, REP takes a maximal sum of individuals as its input (i.e., the denotation of plural definites) and maps it onto a representative group, relativized with respect to the speaker’s epistemic stance. As for (iii), the formal proposal I develop explains why, unlike canonical and non-maximal definites, representative interpretations behave like group NPs with respect to quantificational distributivity (De Vries 2015, 2017) and grammatical reciprocity (Palmieri et al. 2019). This difference reveals that representative and non-maximal definites correspond to two distinct phenomena associated with plural definite descriptions (*contra* Brisson 1998; Lasersohn 1999; Križ 2016; Bar-Lev 2021). While non-maximal definites refer to *plural* (non-maximal)



sums of individuals in the extension of the noun, representatives denote (representative) groups (i.e., *singular* atomic entities).

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by synthesizing the insights gained from the preceding analytical chapters and providing answers to the three general research questions introduced at the outset:

**RQ1:** What is the formal derivation of Italian indefinite forms?

**RQ2:** Why does Italian exhibit multiple indefinite forms?

**RQ3:** What is the status of the definite article in Italian?

The first question is answered in detail across Chapters 3–6. Regarding RQ2, the thesis demonstrates that the existence of multiple indefinite forms does not imply true optionality. Concretely, Chapter 3 shows that *di*+ART and BNs, despite being structurally identical, exhibit interpretative and distributional differences. Furthermore, when two forms convey similar semantic contributions and are found in identical syntactic contexts, as with BNs and the indefinite definites analyzed in Chapter 4, this overlap can be attributed to the bidirectional influence between Italo-Romance dialects and the national language. In contrast, the number-neutral indefinite definites analyzed in Chapter 5 and the representative definites examined in Chapter 6 do not directly compete with the other three indefinite forms (i.e., BNs, *di*+ART, and plural and mass indefinite definites) for the expression of indefiniteness with plural and mass nouns: the number-neutral indefinite definites are restricted to morphologically singular count nouns, whereas representative definites are genuine definite descriptions, which receive a non-maximal, group reading due to the presence of the operator REP. Finally, regarding RQ3, the thesis provides robust evidence across Chapters 3–6 for the unambiguous status of the Italian definite article, which consistently encodes the *iota* function in the four constructions investigated.

## 2 Indefiniteness in Italian and Romance

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an initial descriptive overview of how indefiniteness is expressed in Italian, drawing especially on observations from traditional grammars of the language. This preliminary description is compared with the strategies used to express indefiniteness in other Romance languages, specifically Catalan, Spanish, and French. The primary aim of this chapter is thus to identify empirical gaps in traditional grammars and foundational studies on indefiniteness in Italian and Romance. These gaps, along with the presence of non-canonical indefinite forms overlooked in traditional grammars, underscore the need for a more thorough theoretical analysis and provide further empirical motivation for the chapters that follow. Before engaging in this descriptive overview and cross-linguistic comparison, however, it is important to justify the selection of languages and indefinite forms under investigation.

The chapter is organized as follows. Section 2.2 delimits the empirical scope of this dissertation, providing a justification for the exclusion of certain Romance languages and indefinite forms from the discussion. Section 2.3 offers an initial overview of the expression of indefiniteness in Romance. It begins with a discussion of the distributional and syntactic properties of canonical Romance indefinites in Section 2.3.1, first addressing Romance BNs in Section 2.3.1.1, before turning to Italian *di*+ART nominals and their comparison with French *des/du*-phrases and Spanish and Catalan *un(o)s* in Section 2.3.1.2. Section 2.3.2 explores the interpretative properties of these constructions, focusing on the types of predicates they combine with (Section 2.3.2.1) and the scope interactions they give rise to in combination with logical operators (Section 2.3.2.2). Section 2.4 then turns to non-canonical interpretations associated with definite descriptions in Italian, considering plural and mass nouns in Section 2.4.1, morphologically singular nouns, in Section 2.4.2, and representative interpretations in Section 2.4.3. The chapter ends with Section 2.5, which briefly addresses the sociolinguistic panorama of Italian, with a particular emphasis on the micro-variation observed in the expression of indefiniteness across Italo-Romance varieties.

## 2.2 Delimiting the empirical scope

In defining the empirical scope of this investigation, it is necessary to justify not only the selection of languages and indefinite forms under analysis, as partially introduced in the previous chapter, but also the exclusion of certain others. This section outlines the criteria that inform these choices, focusing in particular on why specific Romance varieties and indefinite forms have been excluded from the present study.

### 2.2.1 *On the exclusion of Portuguese and Romanian*

Several factors motivated the decision to limit the comparison of Italian to Catalan, Spanish, and French, while excluding Portuguese and Romanian, as well as other minoritized Romance varieties. First, while a broader pan-Romance perspective would undoubtedly yield valuable insights, the scope of this thesis required practical limitations, driving a more focused selection of languages. Second, the author's fluency in Italian, Catalan, Spanish, and, to a lesser extent, French ensures a more reliable empirical analysis of these languages. Moreover, much of the existing literature on indefiniteness and DP structure in Italian frequently compares it with Spanish. However, as will become evident by the end of this chapter, Italian exhibits stronger parallels and similarities with French and Catalan than with Spanish, making their inclusion particularly relevant. Finally, as discussed in Chapter 1, the expression of indefiniteness in Italian, particularly with plural and mass nouns, occupies a central typological position within the Romance continuum. Concretely, Italian lies between two linguistic extremes: Catalan and Spanish, which allow argumental BNs, and French, which prohibits them, instead requiring *des/du*-phrases for all argumental indefinite nominal expressions.

The exclusion of Portuguese and Romanian from the investigation also requires justification. It is important to notice that Brazilian Portuguese stands out among Romance languages for its near-unrestricted use of BNs. These BNs, in both singular and plural forms, can occur in virtually all syntactic positions and allow both existential and generic interpretations (Munn & Schmitt 2001, 2005; Schmitt & Munn 2003; Dobrovie-Sorin & Pires de Oliveira 2008; Pires de Oliveira & Rothstein 2011; Cyrino & Espinal 2015, among others). The following examples illustrate these possibilities. In (1), BNs occur in both subject and object position, with either singular or plural morphology, and receive a generic interpretation. In (2), BNs in postverbal position receive an existential interpretation, again allowing both singular and plural forms. Lastly, (3) shows that singular

existential BNs in preverbal positions exhibit a more restricted distribution, being licensed only in specific environments, such as when included in some sort of list (3c) or combined with other elements like negation (3d).

- (1) a. *Crianças* lêem *revistinhas*. *Brazilian Portuguese*  
 children read.PRES.3PL comic books  
 ‘Children read comic books.’

- b. *Criança* lê *revistinha*.  
 child read.PRES.3SG comic book  
 ‘Children read comic books.’

(Schmitt & Munn 2003: 186, (1))

- (2) a. Ele comprou *computadores / computador*.  
 he buy.PST.3SG computers computer  
 ‘He bought computers.’

- b. Chegaram *crianças / criança*  
 arrive.PST.3PL children child  
 ‘Children arrived.’

(Schmitt & Munn 2003: 187, (5))

- (3) a. *Mulheres* discutiram as eleições.  
 women discuss.PST.3PL the elections  
 ‘Women discussed the elections.’

- b. ?*Mulher* discutiu as eleições.  
 woman discuss.PST.3SG the elections

- c. *Mulher* discutiu as eleições, *homem* discutiu futebol...  
 woman discuss.PST.3SG the elections man discuss.PAST.3SG soccer  
 ‘Women discussed the elections, men discussed soccer...’

(Schmitt & Munn 2003: 187, (6))

- d. *Mulher* não esteve discutindo política.  
 woman not aux.PST discuss.GER politics  
 ‘Women were not discussing politics.’

(Schmitt & Munn 2003: 188, (7a))

The virtually unrestricted distribution and interpretational flexibility of BNs in Brazilian Portuguese attested above contrast sharply with the patterns observed in the other

Romance languages examined in this thesis. As will be discussed in detail below, plural and mass BNs in Italian, Catalan, and Spanish allow only existential readings –excluding generic interpretations– and are largely restricted to postverbal positions, becoming ungrammatical as preverbal subjects (Suñer 1982; Longobardi 1994, 2001, 2005; Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 2003, among others).

Given these differences, and since this thesis primarily investigates the expression of indefiniteness in Italian, including Brazilian Portuguese would introduce an unnecessary complexity to the discussion. These considerations, along with the author’s limited proficiency in Portuguese, provide a rationale for its exclusion from the present study.

As regards Romanian, this language partially aligns with Italian, Catalan, and Spanish, as it also licenses argumental BNs. This is exemplified in (4).

- (4) Ion scria scriori. Romanian  
 Ion write.IPFV letters  
 ‘Ion was writing letters.’

(Dobrovie-Sorin 2013: 60, (30))

Like the other languages under scrutiny, argumental BNs in Romanian are restricted to internal argument positions and only allow an existential reading, being incompatible with a generic interpretation (Dobrovie-Sorin et al. 2006; Dobrovie-Sorin 2009, 2013).

Additionally, as with Spanish and Catalan, Romanian features a plural indefinite article derived from the unitary numeral. The nominative and accusative forms of this article are *unii* for masculine and neuter, and *unele* for feminine. In contrast, the genitive and dative case correspond to the unified form *unor*, which is used across all genders. Interestingly, Ledgeway (2013: 409) observes that the genitive / dative forms are more commonly used, while the nominative / accusative forms are marked, as attested by the fact that this determiner is usually stressed. Maiden (2016: 108) further argues that the plural indefinite articles that incorporate a suffixed definite article –namely *unii* and *unele* ‘the ones’– function as specificity markers, akin to *certain* in English.

By contrast, it is generally assumed that the unmarked plural indefinite forms in Romanian are built with the quantifiers *niște* and *câțiva*, as illustrated in (5).

- (5) Marcu a văzut niște / câteva filme. Romanian  
 Marcu AUX see.PTCP some several movies  
 ‘Marcu saw some / several movies’

(Farkas 2013: 192, (29b))

The main distinction between these two forms is that only *câteva* can carry a (c)overt partitive interpretation (Farkas 2013: 192), as shown in (6).

- (6) Manole a văzut un grup mare de oameni pe stradă. *Câteva* /  
 Manole AUX see.PTCP a group large of people on street several  
 \**niște dintre ei* purtau steaguri.  
 some of them carry.IPFV.3PL flags  
 ‘Manole saw a large group of people on the street. Several of them were carrying flags.’

(Farkas 2013: 192, (30a))

Thus far, Romanian parallels Italian (as well as Catalan and Spanish) in having at least two indefinite forms –bare and determined– for plural and mass nominal expressions.

However, this thesis primarily focuses on indefinite interpretations associated with either the so-called *partitive* or the definite article in Italian. In contrast, such indefinite readings for definite descriptions are unattested in Romanian. Moreover, Romanian differs crucially from other Romance languages with respect to the morphosyntactic status of the definite article. While most Romance languages use a proclitic definite article, Romanian employs an enclitic definite article suffixed to the noun, as illustrated in (7).

- (7) Ernest a scris cărți-*le*. Romanian  
 Ernest AUX write.PTCP books-the  
 ‘Ernest wrote the books’

These facts have led to the exclusion of Romanian from the analytical discussion in this thesis.

Finally, this thesis also excludes other minoritized Romance varieties (e.g., Occitan, Franco-Provençal, or Romansh) from the analysis. In most cases, the lack of

comprehensive and reliable descriptive studies on these varieties makes it difficult to establish a solid empirical foundation for comparison, thus justifying their exclusion.

### 2.1.2 *On the exclusion of the singular indefinite article*

Having more precisely defined the empirical scope of the languages under investigation, we now turn to the indefinite forms of interest for this thesis. It is important to note that all Romance languages display overt definite and indefinite articles. In fact, the emergence of articles represents one of the most significant diachronic shifts from Latin to the Romance languages (Ledgeway 2012). However, considerable variation exists within the system of indefiniteness across Romance, especially with respect to plural and mass nouns. In contrast, the distribution of singular indefinites remains relatively uniform, with Romance languages using a singular indefinite article derived from the Latin unitary cardinal *ūnus* in combination with a singular count noun (Givon 1991; Ledgeway 2012; Pozas-Loyo 2016, 2022). This homogeneity with singular indefinites justifies their exclusion from the pool of indefinite forms under analysis.

That said, a brief discussion of the singular indefinite article in Romance languages is still warranted. Let us take a look at the following examples in Italian, Catalan, Spanish, and French, respectively.

- |        |                         |               |                |
|--------|-------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| (8) a. | Ernest ha scritto       | *(un) libro.  | <i>Italian</i> |
|        | Ernest AUX write.PTCP a | book          |                |
| b.     | Ernest ha escrit        | *(un) llibre. | <i>Catalan</i> |
|        | Ernest AUX write.PTCP a | book          |                |
| c.     | Ernest ha escrito       | *(un) libro.  | <i>Spanish</i> |
|        | Ernest AUX write.PTCP a | book          |                |
| d.     | Ernest a écrit          | *(un) livre.  | <i>French</i>  |
|        | Ernest AUX write.PTCP a | book          |                |
|        | 'Ernest wrote a book.'  |               |                |

As shown in (8), all the Romance languages under scrutiny express indefiniteness with singular count nouns using the singular indefinite article. Notably, none of these languages allows the presence of a singular BN in the object position of a s-level verb like *to write*.

Given the superficial similarity between the singular indefinite article and the unitary cardinal, traditional grammars –especially those of Spanish and Catalan– often analyze the singular indefinite determiner *un(o)* as a quantifier expressing unitary cardinality (e.g., Alarcos 1970: 166ff; Bonet & Solà 1986: 42ff; Badia 1994: 442; Brucart 2002: 1438ff).<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, this perspective becomes problematic when considering that only singular indefinite articles, unlike other quantifiers, can appear in generic and predicative environments (Givón 1981; Chierchia 1998a, 1998b; Leonetti 1999, 2012; Zamparelli 2000; Mari et al. 2013, among others). These possibilities are illustrated in the following examples in Italian.

- (9) a. *\*(Una) pianta ha bisogno di acqua per vivere. Italian*  
           a       planta have.PRES.3SG need of water to live  
           ‘A plant needs water to live.’

[Adapted from Mari et al. 2013: 74, (198b)]

- b. Quello è *\*(un) pappagallo.*  
      this be.PRES.3SG a parrot  
      ‘This is a parrot.’

(9a) is a characterizing sentence that expresses a generalization over plants, while (9b) attributes the property of being a parrot to the subject. In both contexts, the singular indefinite article is used. Importantly, these semantic contexts –generic and predicative– have been argued to correspond to the final stages of the grammaticalization of indefinite articles (Givón 1981; Pozas-Loyo 2022). For instance, Givón (1981) proposes that the grammaticalization process from numeral to indefinite article progresses along a referentiality scale, which can be roughly illustrated as follows.

- (10) Quantifier > Referential > Non-referential > Generic > Attributive

According to Givón (1981) there is broad cross-linguistic evidence showing that indefinite articles develop virtually universally from the unitary quantifier *one*. In the early stages of their diachronic development, the unitary cardinal begins to mark a new

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<sup>18</sup> See also Abney (1987) and Kayne (1994) for discussions on the advantages of a similar analysis of the singular indefinite article in English and French, and Zamparelli (2000) for an overview of various related proposals.



referential argument whose identity is significant in the discourse context. Over time, this use can progressively extend to other indefinite arguments that are non-referential, such as those occurring under the scope of modal or intensional verbs. This non-referential use of the article may then be further extended to other non-referential environments, such as generic and attributive (i.e., predicative) contexts.

Under this view, referentiality becomes the relevant notion that shapes the grammaticalization path of indefinite articles. Only articles, but not quantifiers, can progress along the referentiality scale. This diachronic development is typically gradual, with languages varying in the degree to which the indefinite article has undergone grammaticalization. Givón (1981) argues that Hebrew represents the early stages of grammaticalization, whereas English represents the latest stages. In contrast, most Romance languages are considered to occupy an intermediate stage. This difference in the advancement of the grammaticalization of articles between English and Romance languages is exemplified, for instance, by the use of the indefinite article in predicative positions.

- |                                                                    |                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| (11) a. Thomas is <i>*(a) professor</i> .                          | <i>English</i> |
| b. Thomas è                      ( <i>un</i> ) <i>professore</i> . | <i>Italian</i> |
| Thomas be.PRES.3SG    a    professor                               |                |
| ‘Thomas is a professor.’                                           |                |

In English, the determiner is mandatory, while in Romance languages it has the possibility of being omitted. The licensing of a bare singular in predicative position in Romance is well documented (see, for instance, Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 2003; Zamparelli 2000, 2008b; Beyssade 2011; Dobrovie-Sorin 2013; Espinal 2013). This use is especially productive with nominal copulas denoting what Zamparelli (2008b) dubs as *role nouns*, which include family relations and professions.<sup>19</sup> In other cases involving nominal

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<sup>19</sup> Intriguingly, Espinal (2013) points out the existence of Catalan examples like the following, in which a singular count noun can occur bare in predicate position, despite not referring to a role noun.

(i) És                      *senyor*.  
be.PRES.3SG    mister  
‘He behaves like a gentleman.’

(Espinal 2013: 80, (26a))

According to Espinal (2013: 80ff), a non-role nominal like *senyor* in (i) is licensed in this configuration because it functions as a multidimensional property-type nominal. As such, it has multiple dimensions and can be gradable in at least one of them, depending on contextual parameters. The meaning of *senyor* thus includes various measure functions that locate individuals along a scale and interpret them relative to a contextually supplied standard value. In essence, thus, (i) establishes a relation between the subject and the conventional expectations for individuals who behave like gentlemen.

copulas, the indefinite article appears to be generally obligatory, as shown in (9b). This suggests that while the indefinite article in Romance may not be as fully grammaticalized as in English, it has made significant progress in its development from quantifier to article.

There is an additional argument supporting the distinction between unitary quantifiers and singular indefinite articles. Krifka (2004) notes that only the unitary cardinal, but not the indefinite article, can be associated with the number scale. Consequently, only the former can be used as a reply to a *wh*-question introduced by a quantity *wh*-word. This is shown below.

(12)Q: How many students came to see you?

A: #A / one student (came to see me).

Setting aside potential differences between the cardinal and the indefinite article for now, and given the uniformity observed across Romance languages, I will not further address the expression of indefiniteness with singular count nouns in this thesis – except for cases involving morphologically singular count nouns unmarked for number, which will be addressed in Chapter 5. Instead, my focus will primarily be on plural and mass nouns, which exhibit a much more intriguing and substantial degree of cross-linguistic variation. The next section offers an initial exploration of this variation.

### **2.3 Plural and mass indefinites in Romance: the state of the art**

The considerable variation in how indefiniteness is expressed across Romance languages is well-documented and has been the subject of extensive research. Indeed, both this variation and the distinct strategies employed by each Romance language to convey indefiniteness with plural and mass nouns have been explored in numerous descriptive and analytic contributions (see, for instance, Renzi 1997, 2001; Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 1996, 2003; Chierchia 1998a, 1998b; Bosveld-de Smet 1998, 2004; Zamparelli 2000; Dobrovie-Sorin 2001; de Swart & Farkas 2005, de Swart 2006; Stark 2007, 2008; 2016; Le Bruyn 2007, 2010; Le Bruyn & Pozas-Loyo 2014; Cardinaletti & Giusti 2018, 2020; Giusti 2021a; Squartini 2021; Espinal & Cyrino 2022a, 2022b). Nevertheless, given the broader objectives of this thesis outlined in the previous chapter, it is essential to provide a general overview of these cross-linguistic differences, which will be discussed in relation to

various syntactic and semantic factors. This overview will serve as a useful roadmap for the discussion in the subsequent chapters, which will primarily focus on Italian.

Before proceeding, however, it is useful to begin this approximation with observations drawn from traditional grammars of Italian. Among these, Renzi (1997, 2001), in line with normative generalizations, notes that Italian employs two canonical strategies to convey an indefinite interpretation with plural and mass nouns: either by using a bare plural or mass noun or by introducing it with the so-called *partitive article*. The relevant examples from Chapter 1 are repeated below.

- (13)a. Carlo ha raccolto pomodori. *Italian*  
           Carlo AUX pick.PTCP tomatoes  
       b. Carlo ha raccolto dei pomodori.  
           Carlo AUX pick.PTCP di+ART tomatoes  
           ‘Carlo picked tomatoes.’

The following sections provide a preliminary exploration of the distributional and interpretative differences between these two forms, as well as their counterparts in Catalan, Spanish, and French. This initial approximation will lay the groundwork for the discussions in subsequent chapters by identifying certain unresolved issues that justify a more in-depth study of these constructions.

### 2.3.1 *Distributional properties*

This section begins a cross-linguistic exploration of the two canonical Italian indefinite forms in (13), focusing on their syntactic distribution in comparison with the other indefinite forms in other Romance languages. Let us start with BNs.

#### 2.3.1.1 Romance plural and mass BNs

A prominent and well-documented characteristic of the Italian indefiniteness system concerns its ability to license plural and mass BNs in internal argument positions (Delfitto & Schroten 1991; Longobardi 1994, 2001, 2005; Renzi 1997, 2001; Chierchia 1998a, 1998b; Delfitto 2005; among many others), as illustrated in (14).

- (14)a. Ernest ha scritto libri. Italian  
 Ernest AUX write.PTCP books  
 ‘Ernest wrote books.’
- b. Ernest ha comprato olio.  
 Ernest AUX buy.PTCP oil  
 ‘Ernest bought oil.’

Unlike English, Italian (and Romance languages more broadly) disallows BNs in preverbal positions, especially when they occur unmodified. This restriction, known as the Naked Noun Constraint (Suñer 1982), stipulates that unmodified nominal expression lacking an overt determiner cannot function as preverbal subjects in Romance.<sup>20</sup> This is illustrated in the following example.

- (15) \**Cani* stanno correndo. Italian  
 dogs AUX run.GER

As shown in (15), Italian BNs are ungrammatical as external arguments. However, they are licensed as internal subjects of unaccusative constructions (Burzio 1981, 1986; Cordin 1988), such as the verb *arrivare* ‘to arrive’ in (16) or the pronominal passive in (17).

- (16) Sono arrivati treni per ore. Italian  
 AUX arrive.PTCP trains for hours  
 ‘There arrived trains for hours.’
- (17) A Milano, non si trovano case in affitto.  
 at Milan not SI find.PRES.3PL houses in rent  
 ‘In Milan, you can’t find houses to rent.’

---

<sup>20</sup> Chierchia (1998b) and Longobardi (2001), in line with previous literature (e.g., Contreras 1986, 1996), observe that such restrictions tend to dissolve when the BN is made *heavier*, either through coordination with another nominal expression, or through various types of modification, as illustrated below.

(i) Elefanti di colore bianco passeranno il Giudizio Universale domani alle 5.  
 elephants of color white undergo.FUT.3PL the judgment universal tomorrow at.the 5  
 ‘White-colored elephants will undergo the Final Judgment tomorrow at 5.’

Moreover, Italian BNs are not restricted to internal positions of lexical verbs; they are also allowed in the complement position of prepositions, as shown in (18):

- (18) Ho mangiato *riso* con *asparagi*. *Italian*  
 AUX eat.PTCP rice with asparagus  
 ‘I ate rice with asparagus.’

According to Longobardi (1994), the restricted distribution of argumental BNs in Italian –being limited to the complement position of lexical heads– indicates that their underlying syntactic structure contains an empty D head, which must be governed by an overt lexical category, whether a V or a P. Crucially, this hypothesis is formulated within the *Government and Binding* framework (Chomsky 1981). Consequently, one of the objectives of this study is to provide a formal and more updated account of the distributional restriction of Italian BNs to internal argument positions.

Another context where BNs are licensed in Italian, although not the primary focus of this thesis, is the predicative position. This possibility is illustrated in (19).

- (19) Thomas e Susanna sono *professori*. *Italian*  
 Thomas and Susanna be.PRES.3PL professors  
 ‘Thomas and Susanna are professors.’

The distributional properties observed for Italian BNs also apply to Catalan and Spanish. As illustrated below, unmodified Catalan (20a-20b) and Spanish (21a-21b) BNs are relegated to internal positions and predicative contexts (20c-21c), but are ungrammatical as preverbal subjects (20d-21d).

- (20)a. Hi anaven *clients* des de la ciutat. *Catalan*  
 there go.IPFV.3PL clients from the city  
 ‘Clients from the city used to go there.’

(Brucart 2002: 1455, (25a))

- b. He menjat *arròs* amb *llamàntol*.  
 AUX eat.PTCP rice with lobster  
 ‘I ate rice with lobster.’

- c. El Tomàs i la Susana són professors.  
 the Tomàs and the Susana be.PRES.3PL professors  
 ‘Tomàs and Susana are professors.’
- d. \**Gossos* estan corrent.  
 dogs AUX run.GER

- (21) a. Llegaron trenes durante horas. Spanish  
 arrive.PAST.3PL trains for hours  
 ‘There arrived trains for hours.’
- b. He comido arroz con bogavante.  
 AUX eat.PTCP rice with lobster  
 ‘I ate rice with lobster.’
- c. Tomás y Susana son profesores.  
 Tomás and Susana be.PRES.3SG professors  
 ‘Tomás and Susana are professors.’
- d. \**Perros* están corriendo  
 dogs AUX run.GER

Despite these parallels, a significant difference emerges among Italian, Catalan, and Spanish BNs when they are dislocated to the right or left periphery of the sentence. In these contexts, BNs give rise to different patterns regarding the presence of an overt indefiniteness marker (homophonous with the so-called partitive preposition *di/de*)<sup>21</sup> and pronominalization strategies (Espinal & Giusti 2024). Consider the following contrasts in Italian, Catalan, and Spanish, respectively.

- (22) a. (*Di*) libri, ne ho letti. Italian  
 DE books NE AUX read.PTCP
- b. Ne ho letti, \*(*di*) libri.  
 NE AUX read.PTCP DE books  
 ‘Books, I read some.’

[Adapted from Espinal & Giusti 2024: 2, (3)]

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<sup>21</sup> The reason why *di/de* are labeled as indefiniteness markers rather than prepositions will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

- (23) a. *\*<sup>/??</sup>(De) llibres, n'he llegit.* *Catalan*  
 DE books EN-AUX read.PTCP  
 b. *N'he llegit, \*(de) llibres.*  
 EN-AUX read.PTCP DE books  
 'Books, I read some.'

[Adapted from Espinal & Giusti 2024: 2, (3)]

- (24) a. *Libros, he leído.* *Spanish*  
 books AUX read.PTCP  
 b. *He leído, libros.*  
 AUX read.PTCP books  
 'Books, I read some.'<sup>22</sup>

Two significant differences can be observed when comparing Italian and Catalan with Spanish. First, in Italian and Catalan –but not in Spanish– a dislocated BN is preceded by the overt marker of indefiniteness *di/de*. However, while this marker is generally obligatory with a dislocated BN in Catalan (23), it may be omitted in Italian when the BN is dislocated to the left periphery, as in (22) (Renzi 2001; Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016). In both languages, however, the pronominal clitic *ne* remains obligatory.

Second, Italian and Catalan display the resumptive pronoun *en/ne* for the BN (Todolí 2002; Martí-Girbau 2010; Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016; Rigau 2022; Espinal & Cyrino 2022a, 2022b; Espinal & Giusti 2024), whereas Spanish lacks an equivalent form, as

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<sup>22</sup> Laca (1999: 918) points out that Spanish exhibits a clear tendency to dislocate postverbal bare constituents in two types of structures: when the dislocated element functions either as a focus, as in (i), or as a topic, as in (ii).

- (i) *VINO TINTO me ofreció, cuando sabe que lo detesto.* *Spanish*  
 wine red me offer.PST.3SG when know.PRES.3SG that CL detest.PRES.1SG  
 '(S)he offered me RED WINE, when (s)he knows I hate it.'  
 (ii) *Déme patatas. -Lo siento, patatas no quedan.*  
 give-me.IMP potatoes CL feel.PRES.1SG potatoes not remain.PRES.3PL  
 'Give me potatoes. -I'm sorry, we don't have any potatoes left.'

(Laca 1999: 918, (50a), (51b))

Crucially, in neither case Spanish displays the indefiniteness marker *de* or the clitic *en*. See also Laca (2013).

illustrated in (24).<sup>23</sup> The presence of the indefiniteness marker *di/de* with Italian and Catalan dislocated BNs, as well as their systematic pronominal resumption by the clitic *ne/en*, rather than by other accusative clitics, is not straightforwardly accounted for and therefore call for a principled explanation.

A more important cross-linguistic difference related to BNs, however, emerges when comparing these languages to French. It is widely documented that French, in contrast to other Romance languages, does not allow plural and mass BNs in argument position (Delfitto & Schroten 1991; Delfitto 1993; Bosveld-de Smet 1998, 2004; Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 2003; de Swart 2006; Stark 2007, 2008; Ihsane 2008; Dobrovie-Sorin & Beyssade 2012; Crisma & Longobardi 2020, among many others). The unavailability of argumental BNs in French is attested in the following examples.

- (25)a. \*Dans la rue jouaient *enfants*. *French*  
in the street play.IPFV.3PL children  
[Adapted from Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 2003: 2, (5a)]
- b. \*Il y a *enfants* qui dorment.  
it there have.PRES.3SG children who sleep.PRES.3PL
- c. \*Il arrive *trains*.  
there arrive.PRES.3SG trains  
‘There arrive trains.’  
[Adapted from Bosveld-de Smet 2004: 42, (1a)]
- d. \*Ernest a écrit *livres*.  
Ernest AUX write.PTCP books

These examples show that French BNs (i) are unavailable as subjects of unergative verbs (25a); (ii) are disallowed as internal arguments of existential (25b) and unaccusative (25c) constructions; and (iii) cannot appear as direct objects of transitive verbs (25d).

Historically, French, as a Romance language derived from Latin, allowed argumental BNs (Mathieu 2009; Larrivée & Goux 2024). Carlier and Lamiroy (2018) show, through

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<sup>23</sup> The categorial status of the clitic *en/ne* has been the subject of extensive debate in the literature of the Romance languages that feature it (i.e., Italian, Catalan, and French). While traditionally authors classify it as a partitive clitic (e.g., Belletti & Rizzi 1981; Rigau 2022), others interpret it as a purely indefinite element, at least in the cases illustrated above (Espinal & Cyrino 2022a, 2022b; Espinal & Giusti 2024). Since this thesis centers on indefinite contexts, I will adopt the latter view and set aside this ongoing debate, which is explored in numerous contributions (e.g., Kayne 1975; Cordin 1988; Cardinaletti & Giusti 1992, 2006; Todolí 2002; Pescarini 2021; among others).



a corpus study, that in Classical Latin the absence of a determiner was the default option, with approximately 77% of occurrences. In Old French, BNs remained productive, with expressions like *manger pain* ‘eat bread’ appearing in approximately 33% of cases (Carlier & Lamiroy 2018). However, their frequency drastically declined during Middle French, as other competing constructions with overt determiners gained ground. By Modern French, the occurrences of BNs had decreased to a mere 6% (Carlier & Lamiroy 2018).<sup>24</sup>

Despite this general restriction, BNs are still licensed in certain non-argumental syntactic environments in French. One such case is that of predicative positions, where plural and mass BNs become available (Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 2003), as shown in (26).

- (26) Jean et Marie sont professeurs. *French*  
 Jean and Marie be.PRES.3PL professors  
 ‘Jean and Marie are professors.’

In this respect, French aligns with Italian, Catalan, and Spanish, all of which also allow predicative BNs.

Based on the preliminary overview of the distributional properties of Romance BNs presented in this section, three main empirical issues have been identified that require a theoretical explanation: (i) the restriction of Romance BNs to internal positions; (ii) the presence of the indefiniteness marker *di/de* with dislocated BNs; and (iii) the resumption of BNs with the clitic *en/ne* in languages that possess this pronominal element. The analysis developed in Chapter 3 will provide a comprehensive account of these issues.

The next section will turn to determined indefinite forms in Italian, comparing them with those of other Romance languages. Consequently, it will also examine how French compensates for the absence of argumental BNs.

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<sup>24</sup> Although BNs are generally disallowed in French, it should be noticed that coordinated BNs with an existential interpretation are still occasionally found in argumental positions in this language (Roodenburg 2004; Beyssade 2011; cf. Heycock & Zamparelli 2003), as illustrated below.

- (i) *Livres et journaux* jonchaient le sol. *French*  
 books and newspapers cover.PRES.3PL the ground  
 ‘Books and newspapers lay everywhere on the ground.’

(Beyssade 2011: 2, (1b))

### 2.3.1.2 Italian *di*+ART; French *des/du*; and Catalan and Spanish *un(o)s*

As discussed, traditional grammars identify *di*+ART as an alternative canonical form for expressing indefiniteness with plural and mass nouns in Italian. Distributionally, *di*+ART can occur in all the environments where BNs are licensed, namely in object position (27) and as postverbal subjects (28). However, unlike BNs, *di*+ART nominals are available as preverbal subjects, as shown in (29).

- (27)a. Ernest ha scritto *dei libri*. *Italian*  
 Ernest AUX write.PTCP *di*+ART books  
 ‘Ernest wrote (some) books.’  
 b. Ha comprato *dell’olio*  
 aux buy.PTCP *di*+ART-oil  
 ‘I’ve bought (some) oil.’  
 (28)a. Sono arrivati *dei treni*.  
 AUX arrive.PTCP *di*+ART trains  
 ‘There arrived (some) trains.’  
 b. È caduta *della neve*.  
 AUX fall.PTCP *di*+ART snow  
 ‘There has fallen (some) snow.’  
 (29) *Dei ragazzi* giocavano per strada.  
*di*+ART boys play.IPFV in street  
 ‘(Some) boys were playing in the street.’

The observation that *di*+ART nominals are available in preverbal subject position, whereas BNs are not, constitutes another empirical issue that calls for an explanation.

Furthermore, the (partial) distributional parallelism between *di*+ART and BNs extends to predicative positions, where the former is also possible, as attested in (30).

- (30) Ungaretti e Pavese sono (*degli*) *scrittori* fondamentali della  
 Ungaretti and Pavese be.PRES.3PL *di*+ART writers fundamental of-the  
 letteratura italiana del Novecento. *Italian*  
 literature Italian of-the nine hundred.  
 ‘Ungaretti and Pavese are fundamental writers of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Italian literature.’



A': *Alcuni* [*studenti* sono venuti a lezione].

some students AUX come.PTCP at class

A'': \**Degli* [*studenti* sono venuti a lezione].

di+ART students AUX come.PTCP at class

'Some students came to class.'

In (32), *di*+ART, in contrast to an indefinite quantifier like *alcuni*, is not felicitous as an answer to quantity-based questions introduced by a quantity *wh*-word, showing that it is not associated with any quantity or number scale.

Given this initial distributional picture of *di*+ART, a comparison with French may prove insightful. To compensate the lack of BN arguments, French, on a par with Italian, has grammaticalized alternative markers of indefiniteness, corresponding to the determiners *des* and *du*. Specifically, *des* introduces plural nouns, while *du* / *de la* / *de l'* are used for mass nouns depending on phonological factors. These variants are illustrated below.

(33)a. Il arrive *des* trains. French

there arrive.PRES.3SG de+ART trains

'There arrive trains.'

(Bosveld-de Smet 2004: 42, (1a))

b. J'ai mangé *du* pain.

I.have eat.PTCP de+ART bread

'I ate bread.'

c. Il est tombé *de la* neige.

there has fall.PTCP de ART snow

'There has fallen snow.'

(Bosveld-de Smet 2004: 43, (1b))

d. Il faut boire *de l'eau*.

one should drink.INF de ART=water

'One should drink water.'

(Bosveld-de Smet 2004: 43, (2b))

As in Italian, these forms are traditionally referred to as *partitive articles* (e.g., Kupferman 1979; Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 2003; Bosveld-de Smet 2004; Ihsane 2008, 2021a) due to their etymological origin, which involves the contraction of the so-called partitive

preposition *de* (from Latin *DE*) and the definite article in all its forms (Carlier 2007; Carlier & Lamiroy 2014; Vincent 2017). However, there is no consensus in the literature regarding the exact categorial status of these forms. Some accounts classify *des* as the plural counterpart of the singular indefinite determiner, and *du* as a proper partitive article.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, in recent years a growing body of research argues that, from a semantic perspective, the unmarked interpretation of these construction is existential, whereas a partitive reading is either more clearly marked (Bosveld-de Smet 1998, 2004; Ihsane 2008) or, in some cases, entirely absent (Carlier 2007, 2021). In light of this ongoing debate, this thesis adopts the more descriptive term *des/du*-phrases to refer to these constructions.

Given their unmarked existential and non-quantificational reading, *des/du*-phrases have been found to occur in predicative positions. While the predicative use of *des* is generally optional in these contexts, it becomes virtually obligatory when the noun denotes professions, functions, titles, or relations (Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 2003; Beyssade & Dobrovie-Sorin 2005; see Zamparelli's 2008b for the term *role nouns*)

- (34)a. Jean et Marie sont (des) professeurs. *French*  
 Jean and Marie be.PRES.3PL de+ART professors  
 'Jean and Marie are professors.'  
(Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 2003: 24, (46a))
- b. Ces animaux sont \*(des) giraffes.  
 those animals BE.PRES.3PL de+ART giraffes  
 'These animals are giraffes.'  
(Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 2003: 1, (2e))

The occurrence of *des*-phrases in predicative environments, which represent the final stages of the grammaticalization process of indefinite articles (recall the referentiality scale in (10)), reinforces the idea that *des*-phrases in (34) correspond to indefinite determiners rather than (covert) quantifiers, even from a syntactic perspective.

In this respect, it is generally observed that *des/du*-phrases, under their unmarked indefinite interpretation, cannot introduce overt partitive constructions. This restriction,

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<sup>26</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of these possibilities, see Kupferman (1979). See also Bosveld-de Smet (1998, 2004), among others.

parallel to that of *di*+ART in (31b), is illustrated in (35), where *des*, unlike other overt quantifiers, cannot head a partitive expression.

- (35) {Beaucoup / certaines /trois / \*des} de ces pommes. *French*  
 many certain three de+ART of these apples  
 (Bosveld-de Smet 2004: 45, (8a))

Bosveld-de Smet (2004: 45) suggests that this restriction has an etymological explanation: *des/du*-phrases originally contained a semantically active definite determiner, which would be incompatible with the definite article introducing the superset of the partitive relation. However, given the observations made in this chapter, it is more likely that the ungrammaticality of (35) results from the lack of a proper quantificational status for *des*.

This hypothesis is further supported by the fact that, on a par with Italian *di*+ART nominals (32), French *des/du*-phrases cannot serve as answers to quantity *wh*-questions either.

- (36) Q: Combien d'étudiants sont venus te voir? French  
 how-many of=students AUX come.PTCP you see.INF  
 'How many students came to see you?'  
 A: \*Des [étudiants sont venus].  
 de-ART students AUX come.PTCP  
 [Adapted from Le Bruyn & Pozas-Loyo 2014: 257, (7)]

Thus far, the comparison between Italian *di*+ART nominals and their French counterparts has revealed a similar syntactic and distributional behavior, suggesting that both constitute genuine indefinite determiners.

Let us now turn to Catalan and Spanish *un(o)s*. *Un(o)s* corresponds to the plural counterpart of the singular indefinite article, realized as *uns* or *unes* in Catalan and *unos* or *unas* in Spanish with masculine and feminine nouns, respectively (Villalta 1994; Laca & Tasmowski 1996; Leonetti 1999; Laca 1999; Gutiérrez-Rexach 2001; Brucart 2002; Martí 2008, 2009; Le Bruyn 2010; Le Bruyn & Pozas-Loyo 2014; Brugé 2016; Espinal & Cyrino 2022a, 2022b; among others).

While both Italian *di*+ART nominals / French *des/du*-phrase and Catalan and Spanish *un(o)s* express indefiniteness, the parallelism between these forms is not entirely symmetrical. Beyond their different etymological origins, this asymmetry arises because the former introduces plural and mass nouns, whereas *un(o)s*, being morphologically and semantically marked for plural, is restricted to plural count nouns and cannot cooccur with mass nouns. This incompatibility may stem from the fact that *un(o)s* functions as an individualizing determiner, which can only range over individuals and not portions of matter. As a result, Catalan and Spanish lack an overt indefinite determiner for mass nouns. This distinction sets Ibero-Romance languages apart from Italian and French, which have not grammaticalized a plural indefinite article derived from the unitary cardinal and have instead developed a form originating from the partitive preposition *de*.<sup>27</sup>

Let us examine more closely the distributional properties of *un(o)s*. Like its Italian and French cognates, *un(o)s* can occur in direct object position, as the internal argument of unaccusative predicates, and in preverbal position. These possibilities are illustrated below for Catalan and Spanish, respectively.

- (37)a. Ernest va escriure *uns llibres*. Catalan  
 Ernest AUX.PAST write.INF UNS books  
 ‘Ernest wrote some books.’
- b. Van arribar *uns trens*.  
 aux.PAST arrive.INF UNS trains  
 ‘There arrived some trains.’
- c. *Uns gossos* estan corrent.  
 UNS dogs AUX run.GER  
 ‘Some dogs are running.’
- (38)a. Ernest escribió *unos libros*. Spanish  
 Ernest write.PAST UNOS books.  
 ‘Ernest wrote some books.’
- b. Han llegado *unos trenes*.  
 AUX arrive.PTCP UNOS trains  
 ‘There arrived some trains.’

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<sup>27</sup> A vestige of the Latin form *UNUS* in Italian –as well as in Catalan and Spanish– is preserved in the correlative construction *gli uni (...) gli altri* ‘the ones (...) the others.’

c. *Unos perros están corriendo.*

UNOS dogs AUX run.GER

‘Some dogs are running.’

As for non-argumental environments, similar to the other indefinite forms discussed thus far, Catalan and Spanish *un(o)s* can occur in predicative contexts, especially when the noun is modified.<sup>28</sup> This use is shown in (39), where the adjectives *excel·lents* ‘excellent’ and *magníficos* ‘magnificent’ facilitate the licensing of *un(o)s*.

(39)a. En Joan i la Maria són (uns) professors excel·lents. *Catalan*  
 The Joan and the Maria be.PRES.3PL uns professors excellent  
 ‘Joan and Maria are excellent professors.’

b. Borges y Onetti son (unos) escritores magníficos. *Spanish*  
 Borges and Onetti be.pres.3pl unos writers magnificent  
 ‘Borges and Onetti are magnificent writers.’

(Pozas-Loyo 2022: 23, (30))

Following Givón’s (1981) account of the grammaticalization pathways of indefinite articles, it can be argued that *un(o)s* has progressively lost its quantificational origin and has become a grammaticalized indefinite article. This intuition is confirmed by *un(o)s*’ inability to function as the quantifier of a proper partitive construction (Leonetti 1999), a behavior that closely aligns with that of Italian *di*+ART and French *des/du*-phrases seen above.<sup>29</sup> This incompatibility is illustrated in the following example in Catalan and Spanish.

(40) \*Es van salvar dotze passatgers, uns dels quals estaven  
 SE AUX.PAST save.INF twelve passengers UNS of-the REL AUX  
 dormint en el moment de l’accident.  
 sleep.GER in the moment of the-accident *Catalan*

<sup>28</sup> The presence of the indefinite article *un(o)s* in predicative environments often correlates with evaluative and metaphorical nuances, which usually associate with a pejorative connotation (Laca 1996; see also Zamparelli 2008b for a similar observation with respect to Italian).

<sup>29</sup> This restriction does not appear to be equally stringent in Latin American Spanish, where examples can be found in which *unos* heads proper partitive structures. See Brugè (2016: 45, footnote 21) for a list of real examples.



[Adapted and translated from Leonetti 1999: 842, (131a)]

- (41) \*Se han salvado doce pasajeros, *unos de los cuales* estaban  
SE AUX save.PTCP twelve passengers UNOS of the REL be.IPFV.3PL  
durmiendo en el momento del accidente. *Spanish*  
sleep.GER in the moment of-the accident

[Adapted from Leonetti 1999: 842, (131a)]

Additionally, the lack of a proper quantificational structure explains why *un(o)s* is excluded from the number scale, as confirmed by the following examples, which show the inability of *un(o)s* to serve as an appropriate answer to *wh*-questions introduced by a quantity *wh*-word.

- (42) Q: Quants estudiants van venir a veure't? *Catalan*  
how-many students aux.PAST come.INF at see-you  
'How many students came to see you?

A: #*Uns estudiants* (van venir a veure'm).  
UNS students aux.PAST come.INF to see-me

[Inspired apud Le Bruyn & Pozas-Loyo 2014: 260, (21)]

- (43) Q: ¿Cuántos estudiantes fueron a verte? *Spanish*  
how-many students go.PAST to see-you  
'How many students came to see you?

A: #*Unos estudiantes* (vinieron a verme).  
UNOS students come.PAST to see-me

[Adapted from Le Bruyn & Pozas-Loyo 2014: 260, (21)]

The four indefinite forms discussed in this section –*di+ART*, *des/du*, and *un(o)s* – have been shown to exhibit parallel distributional patterns and similar syntactic constraints, supporting their classification as genuine indefinite determiners. These distributional properties, which partially distinguish these forms from BNs, raise several empirical issues that deserve explanation. Therefore, Chapter 3 will provide a formal account of the determiner status for *di+ART*, and explain the availability of *di+ART*, but not BNs, in preverbal subject positions.

The next section will turn to the interpretative properties of each construction, with particular attention to the types of predicates they combine with and their respective scopal properties.

### 2.3.2 *Interpretative properties*

This section presents some interpretative differences between Romance BNs, Italian *di*+ART nominals, French *des/du*-phrases, and Spanish and Catalan *un(o)s*. A first grammatical factor that may shed light on these differences concerns the types of predicates that select for these nominal expressions

#### 2.3.2.1 Predicate type and related phenomena

A useful tool for exploring the interpretative properties of the indefinite expressions under investigation is Carlson's (1977) taxonomy of predicates, already outlined in Chapter 1. To begin, let us consider Romance BNs, using Italian as a representative in the following examples.

- (44)a. \**Cani* stanno correndo. *Italian*  
           dogs   AUX    run.GER  
       b. \**Cani* sono           intelligenti.  
           dogs   be.PRES.3PL intelligent  
       c. \**Cani* sono           molto   comuni.  
           dogs   be.PRES.3PL very     common

A comparison of these examples with the interpretative properties of English BNs discussed in Chapter 1 reveals that Romance BNs behave differently in at least two key respects. The first difference concerns the Naked Noun Constraint, which stipulates that Romance BNs cannot occur unmodified in preverbal subject position. This restriction applies not only to s-level predicates, (e.g., 44a), but also to i-level (44b) and k-level (44c) predicates.

However, Romance BNs can markedly occur in preverbal positions when they are modified or made *heavier*, especially in bureaucratic prose or formal registers, where these constructions are frequently employed (Renzi 1997, 2001; see also footnote 20).

- (45) *Soldati sperduti* correvano per le strade. *Italian*  
 soldiers lost run.IPFV.3PL for the streets.  
 ‘Lost soldiers were running through the streets.’

(Renzi 2001: 375, (119b))

A second notable difference between English and Romance BNs concerns kind denotation and genericity. As mentioned in Chapter 1, i-level and k-level predicates in English trigger a generic interpretation of their BN argument. However, as the examples in (44b,c) suggest, Romance BNs seem incompatible with these predicate types. This incompatibility may, in fact, be a result of the Naked Noun Constraint. Nonetheless, ungrammaticality also arises with predicates that select for generic direct objects, such as the verb *odiare* in (46).

- (46) *Odio* *\*(il) caffè / \*(le) ciliegie.* *Italian*  
 hate.PRES.1SG the coffee the cherries  
 ‘I hate coffee / cherries.’

These examples confirm that Romance languages use plural (or singular, *cf.* Chapter 1) definite descriptions to convey generic readings and suggest that Romance BNs, unlike their English counterparts, cannot convey a kind or generic interpretation.

A caveat is necessary, however, as the presence of a generic interpretation for Romance BNs in general, and Italian BNs specifically, is subject to ongoing debate. While Chierchia (1998a) argues that Italian BNs can denote kinds, this view has been widely contested (see, for instance, Longobardi 2001; Zamparelli 2002; Borik & Espinal 2015). These objections are mainly grounded in the ungrammaticality of examples like (44c) and the one below, where even a modified BN (*cf.* footnote 20) cannot function as the subject of a k-level predicate.

- (47) *\*Elefanti di colore bianco* sono estinti. *Italian*  
 elephants of color white be.PRES.3PL extinct  
 ‘White-colored elephants have become extinct.’

(Longobardi 2001: 343, (13a))

However, it is worth acknowledging that some examples in the literature report modified preverbal BNs combining with (some) i-level. This possibility is illustrated in (48).

- (48) %*Cani da guardia di grosse dimensioni* sono efficienti/ aggresivi.  
 dogs of guard of big dimensions be.PRES.3PL efficient aggressive  
 ‘Watchdogs of large sizes are efficient / aggressive.’ *Italian*  
 [Adapted from Longobardi 2001: 341, (9a)]

Given the debated nature of these examples and the variability in judgments, as explicitly acknowledged by most authors, this thesis adopts the more conservative and prevailing view that Italian and Romance BNs convey an existential interpretation and they do not denote kinds (Casalegno 1987; Laca 1990, 1999; Leonetti 1999; Zamparelli 2002; Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 2003; Borik & Espinal 2015). Any generic interpretations they potentially convey are restricted to specific contexts and restricted grammatical conditions.

BNs behave relatively uniformly across Romance languages and predicate types. Therefore, I now turn to the behavior of determined indefinite forms in these contexts, focusing on *di*+ART constructions as a primary point of comparison. While the previous section posited that these nominals are easily licensed in preverbal positions, this claim requires further clarification. Certain restrictions –often overlooked in the literature– appear to govern the licensing of *di*+ART nominals in subject position.

First, it is noteworthy that *di*+ART nominals can appear in the subject position of k-level predicates. However, when they do, they can only receive a taxonomic, sub-kind interpretation, as illustrated below.

- (49) *Dei tapiri* sono in pericolo di estinzione. *Italian*  
*di*+ART tapirs be.PRES.3PL in danger of extinction  
 ‘Some (types of) tapirs are on the verge of extinction.’

This behavior, which parallels that of other indefinite expressions such as the singular indefinite article (Krifka et al. 1995; Chierchia 1998b; Zamparelli 2000; Borik & Espinal 2015) sets *di*+ART indefinites apart from other generic nominals.

Furthermore, *di*+ART indefinites are generally disallowed as subjects of i-level predicates. Consider the following examples.

- (50) a. *??Dei bambini sono curiosi.* *Italian*  
           di+ART steps be.PRES.3PL curious  
       b. *??Della gomma è elastica.*  
           di+ART rubber be.PRES.3SG elastic

In (50), the existential, non-partitive reading of *di*+ART is infelicitous in the subject position of i-level predicates, especially without any emphatic intonation.

Interestingly, a comparable restriction has been observed for Spanish (and Catalan) *un(o)s* and French *des/du*-phrases. Leonetti (1999: 842), for example, notes that *unos* cannot occur as the subject of i-level predicates, and more broadly, is incompatible with stative predicates. This restriction is exemplified in (51).

- (51) *??En este ayuntamiento, unos concejales son honestos.* *Spanish*  
       in this city hall UNOS councilmen be.PRES.3PL honest  
       Intended: ‘In this city hall, some councilmen are honest.’

[Adapted from Leonetti 1999: 842, (129a)]

Similarly, Bosveld-de Smet (2004: 49) observes that, under a purely existential, non-partitive reading, French *des/du*-phrases are generally incompatible with i-level predicates, as shown in (52).

- (52) a. *\*/??Des enfants sont très observateurs.* *French*  
           de+ART children be.PRES.3PL very observant  
       b. *\*/??Du caoutchouc est élastique.*<sup>30</sup>  
           de-ART rubber be.PRES.3SG elastic

(Bosveld-de Smet 2004: 49, (21))

The incompatibility of *des/du*-phrases with i-level predicates has often been attributed to their inherently unbounded character. This unboundedness is assumed to make such expressions highly sensitive to the availability of spatio-temporal boundaries (Kleiber 1981; Bosveld-de Smet 2004; Carlier 2021). Allegedly because of this unbounded character, *des/du*-phrases are claimed to be unavailable as preverbal subjects of s-level predicates

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<sup>30</sup> These judgments do not appear to be so categorical as they are sometimes reported in the literature. Some French speakers seem in fact to accept these sentences (see Corblin 1987).

as well, unless explicit spatial (or temporal) contextual information is provided in the sentence. This claim is based on contrasts like the following, which contain the predicate *être visible* ‘to be visible’.

- (53) %*Des pas sont visibles.* *French*  
 de+ART footprints be.PRES.3PL visible

(Bosveld-de Smet 2004: 49, (22a))

- (54) *Des pas sont visibles sur la neige.*  
 de+ART footprints be.PRES.3PL visible on the snow  
 ‘(Some) footprints are visible in the snow.’

[Adapted from Bosveld-de Smet 2004: 49, (23a)]

Although rarely discussed in the literature, the same constraint appears to hold for Italian *di*+ART nominals as well.

- (55) ??*Dei passi sono visibili.* *Italian*  
 di+ART footprints be.PRES.3PL visible

- (56) *Dei passi sono visibili nella neve.*  
 di+ART footprints be.PRES.3PL visible in.the snow  
 ‘(Some) footprints are visible in the snow.’

Following Bosveld-de Smet (2004), the contrast between (55) and (56) would allegedly suggest that Italian *di*+ART indefinites, on a par with French *des*-phrases, tend to be unavailable as preverbal subjects of s-level predicates, unless explicit spatial or temporal information is provided in the sentence.

Nevertheless, at least two clarifications are in order regarding this generalization. First, Bosveld-de Smet (2004: 49) classifies the verb *être visible* as a s-level predicate. However, this classification is questionable. Notice, for instance, that in Catalan, example (56) would require the auxiliary *ser* not *estar* ‘be’: *unes petjades són /\*estan visibles a la neu*. Given that the auxiliary alternation between *ser* / *estar* is generally considered a reliable diagnostic for distinguishing between i- and s-level predicates in Catalan and Spanish (Solà 1987; Brucart 2012, among others), this example suggests that *to be visible* aligns more closely to i-level predicates rather than s-level predicates.

Second, even if we concede that *to be visible* is a s-level predicate, the incompatibility of French *des*-phrases and Italian *di*+ART nominals with this predicate in the absence of explicit spatiotemporal information cannot straightforwardly be attributed to their alleged unbounded character. In fact, the same restriction applies to the singular indefinite article, which is generally assumed to be inherently bounded (Krifka 1989).

- (57) ??*Un passo è visibile.* *Italian*  
a footprint be.PRES.3SG visible
- (58) *Un passo è visibile nella neve.*  
a footprint be.PRES.3SG visible in.the snow  
‘A footprint is visible in the snow.’

In light of these examples, the oddness of indefinite expressions, whether inherently bounded or not, in the absence of explicit temporal and spatial information appears to be a more pervasive phenomenon. This is likely attributable to other grammatical factors, possibly related to general considerations of informativeness. Consequently, I set this issue aside and assume that *di*+ART nominals are generally available as subjects of s-level.

Furthermore, it is important to notice that the incompatibility of the indefinite expressions under discussion with i-level predicates, however, does not preclude a generic interpretation. For instance, the examples in (59) show that Italian *di*+ART nominals can in fact function as subjects of characterizing statements (Krifka et al. 1995).

- (59)a. *Dei veri italiani mangiano (sempre) gli spaghetti.* *Italian*  
di+ART true Italians eat.PRES.3PL always the spaghetti  
‘True Italians (always) eat spaghetti’

(Zamparelli 2008a: 306, (17b))

- b. *Dei bambini coraggiosi non piangono!*  
di+ART kids brave not cry.PRES.3PL  
‘Brave kids don’t cry!’

(Renzi 1997: 373, (108b))

A comparable pattern is observed with Catalan and Spanish *un(o)s* and French *des/du*-phrases. While plural indefinites are generally considered incompatible with generic interpretations (e.g., English *some*; Farkas 2002), instances of *unos* with generic readings,

though severely constrained, have been documented (Laca & Tasmowski 1996; Pozas-Loyo 2022). Examples (60a) and (60b) illustrate this use in Catalan and Spanish. These sentences express a generalization about millionaires and inopportune words, respectively.

- (60)a. [No em puc creure que aquests dos siguin milionaris.]  
 not me can believe.INF that these two be.SUBJ.PRES.3PL millionaires  
*Uns milionaris no viatgen en segona classe. Catalan*  
 UNS millionaires not travel.PRES3PL in second class  
 ‘[I can’t believe these two are millionaires.] Millionaires don’t travel in second class.’

[Translated and adapted from Laca & Tasmowski 1996: 113, (6)]

- b. *Unas palabras inoportunas* tienen a veces consecuencias  
 unos.FEM words inopportune have.PRES.3PL at times consequences  
*más graves que un insulto. Spanish*  
 more serious than an insult  
 ‘Inopportune words sometimes have greater consequences than an insult.’

(Laca & Tasmowski 1996: 113, (6))

Similarly, French *des/du*-phrases can also function as subjects of characterizing sentences (Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 2003; Dobrovie-Sorin & Beyssade 2012; Le Bruyn & Pozas-Loyo 2014), as illustrated in the following example.

- (61) *Des droites convergentes* ont un point en commun. *French*  
 de+ART lines converging have.PRES.3PL a point in common  
 ‘Converging lines have a point in common’

(Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 2003: 30, (56b))

The fact that Italian *di*+ART nominals (along with French *des*-phrases and Catalan and Spanish *un(o)s*) can receive a generic interpretation in characterizing statements must therefore be explained.

That said, from the perspective of Givón’s (1981) referentiality scale, the ability of these indefinite determiners to convey generic interpretations provides additional



A significant interpretative property that distinguishes Spanish and Catalan *un(o)s* from Romance BNs, Italian *di*+ART nominals, and French *des*-phrases, however, relates to a distinction made in the literature between inclusive and exclusive pluralities. Inclusive plurals englobe individual atoms and sums of individuals within their domain of reference, whereas exclusive plurals include only sums of individuals (Bosveld-de Smet 1998; de Swart 2006; Spector 2007; Martí 2008; Le Bruyn & Pozas-Loyo 2014). Crucially, while BNs are generally assumed to correspond to inclusive plurals, Spanish *unos* has been argued to function as an exclusive plural (Martí 2008; Le Bruyn & Pozas-Loyo 2014). This distinction is corroborated by the following contrast. In (62), a plural BN allows for a situation involving the presence of a single referent, whereas in (63), *unos* is infelicitous in the same context.

(62) Q: ¿Viste *niños* jugando en el patio? *Spanish*  
 see.PST.2SG kids play.GER in the patio  
 ‘Did you see any kids playing in the garden?’  
 A: Sí, vi a uno.  
 yes, see.PST.1SG DOM one  
 ‘Yes, I saw one.’

<sup>31</sup> Some scholars (e.g., Villalta 1994; Laca & Tasmowski 1996; Gutiérrez-Rexach 2001) have indirectly questioned the classification of Spanish (and Catalan) *un(o)s* as a standard indefinite article, arguing that it preferentially conveys collective interpretations, unlike Italian *di*+ART and French *des*-phrases (as well as other existential quantifiers or numeral cardinals). This is shown in the following contrast, where *unos*, but not *di*+ART, are ungrammatical in contexts that force a distributive interpretation.

- (i) a. \**Unos hombres* se pusieron una camisa.  
UNOS men SE put.PAST.3PL a shirt  
b. *Degli uomini* indossavano una camicia.  
di+ART men wear.IPFV.3PL a shirt  
'Some men were wearing a shirt.'
- (Villalta 1994, (5))

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(63)Q: ¿Viste a *unos niños* jugando en el patio?  
 see.pst.2SG DOM UNOS kids play.GER in the patio  
 ‘Did you see any kids playing in the garden?’

A: #Sí, vi a uno.  
 Yes, see.PST.1SGDOM one  
 ‘Yes, I saw one.’

[Adapted from Martí 2008: 7, (12)]

This contrast is replicated in Catalan, as shown in (64), where the plural indefinite *uns* also excludes an answer involving a unique referent.

(64)Q: Has suspès *uns estudiants*? *Catalan*  
 AUX fail.PTCP uns students  
 ‘Have you failed any student?’  
 A: #Sí, n’he suspès un.  
 yes NE-AUX fail.PTCP one

In contrast, Italian *di*+ART nominals and French *des*-phrases behave differently with respect to the inclusive/exclusive distinction. Unlike *un(o)s*, they are felicitous in contexts that imply the presence of a singular referent, thereby behaving similarly to inclusive plurals. This behavior is illustrated in (65) and (66).

(65)Q: Hai bocciato *degli studenti*? *Italian*  
 AUX fail.PTCP di+ART students  
 ‘Have you failed any students?’  
 A: Sí, ne ho bocciato uno.  
 yes, NE AUX fail.PTCP one  
 ‘Yes, I failed one.’

(66)Q: As-tu vu *des enfants*? *French*  
 have.PRES.2SG-yousee.PTCP de+ART children  
 ‘Have you seen any children?’  
 A: Oui, j’en ai vu un.  
 Yes, I-EN have.PRES.1SG see.PTCP one  
 ‘Yes, I saw one.’

These distinctions in terms of inclusiveness and exclusiveness will be examined in Chapter 3 in relation to telicity.

Overall, this section has identified several interpretative differences among the indefinite forms analyzed in this thesis –namely, BNs, *di*+ART, *des/du*, and *un(o)s* – which will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter 3. Specifically, I have shown that while BNs are excluded from the external argument position across all predicate types, the other forms can generally occur, at least, as subjects of s-level predicates. Additionally, whereas Romance BNs rarely, if ever, convey generic interpretations, such readings are markedly available for the other forms. Finally, Spanish and Catalan *un(o)s* exhibit a distinct behavior compared to the other indefinites with respect to the inclusive/exclusive distinction. The next section delves deeper into additional interpretative contrasts, particularly concerning scope interactions.

#### 2.3.2.2 Scope relations

This section builds on the distinction between weak and strong indefinites, already introduced in Chapter 1. BNs cross-linguistically correspond to weak indefinites. Consequently, they are expected to license only narrow scope readings in the presence of other scope-bearing elements in the sentence. The lack of scope effects with BNs is illustrated in the following Italian sentences, which contain (i) a negative marker (67a); (ii) an intensional predicate that creates an opaque context (67b); and (iii) a universal quantifier (67c).

- (67)a. *Non ho letto libri.* *Italian*  
 not AUX read.PTCP books  
 ‘I didn’t read books.’
- b. *Sto cercando libri da leggere.*  
 AUX look.for.GER books of read  
 ‘I’m looking for books to read.’
- c. *Tutti gli studenti leggono libri.*  
 all the students read.PRES.3PL books  
 ‘All the students read books.’

As the English translations indicate, when an Italian BN cooccurs with negation, as in (67a), it can only be interpreted under the scope of the negative marker. This implies that the speaker did not read any book. A wide scope interpretation, whereby there is a set of specific books that the speaker did not read, is unavailable.

Similarly, in (67b), the sentence denotes the situation where the speaker is looking for any book to read, which is consistent with a narrow scope interpretation under the intensional predicate. A wide scope reading, in which there are certain books that the speaker is looking for, is not available.

Finally, in (67c), where the BN cooccurs with a universal quantifier, no scope ambiguities arise either. The sentence expresses the generalization that all students read non-specific books, excluding the reading where there are certain books that all students read.

Turning now to the scope behavior of Italian *di*+ART nominals as compared to French *des/du*-phrases, and Spanish and Catalan *un(o)s*, a more intricate and interesting pattern emerges. Italian *di*+ART indefinites can convey specific readings (Chierchia 1998a; Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016). Consequently, they give rise to scope ambiguities when cooccurring with other scope-bearing elements in the sentence. Consider the following examples.

- (68)a. *Non ho letto dei libri.* *Italian*  
 not AUX read.PTCP *di*+ART books  
 ‘I didn’t read books / I didn’t read some books.’
- b. *Sto cercando dei libri da leggere.*  
 AUX look.for.GER *di*+ART books of read  
 ‘I’m looking for some books to read.’
- c. *Tutti gli studenti leggono dei libri.*  
 all the students read.PRES.3PL *di*+ART books  
 ‘All the students read some books.’

In (68a), the cooccurrence of a *di*+ART nominal with a negated main predicate allows two distinct interpretations. On one hand, the sentence can denote the situation where the speaker did not read any book (i.e., a narrow scope reading). Notably, among all the indefinite expressions with an overt determiner discussed in this section, *di*+ART is the only one that can be easily interpreted under the scope of negation. On the other hand, the same sentence can also be interpreted as referring to the situation where there are certain books that the speaker did not read (i.e., a wide scope interpretation).

Similarly, (68b) allows both a narrow and a wide scope interpretation of *di*+ART in the presence of an intensional predicate. That is, the sentence can either describe a situation where the speaker is looking for any book to read (narrow scope), or a situation where there are certain books that the speaker is looking for (wide scope).

Finally, a similar pattern is observed in (68c), in relation to a universal quantifier. The sentence can express a generalization that all students read books (narrow scope) or specify that there are certain books that all students usually read (narrow scope). Chapter 3 provides a theoretical analysis of this scopal ambiguity.

Let us now compare this scope pattern with that of French *des/du*-expressions. The literature frequently highlights that these nominal expressions exhibit an exceptionally weak specifying force when introducing their referents (Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 2003; Bosveld-de Smet 1998, 2004; Dobrovie-Sorin & Beyssade 2012). As a result, they are generally considered unable to convey specific readings –a behavior reflected in their limited ability to generate scope ambiguities when they cooccur with other scope-bearing elements in the clause.

Consider first examples containing an intensional predicate and the universal quantifier *tous*.

- (69)a. Je *cherche*                      *des*      *livres*      à lire.                      *French*  
           I look.for.PRES.1SG    de+ART books      at read  
           ‘I look for books to read.’
- b. *Tous* les étudiants lisent                      *des*      *livres*.  
           all the students read.PRES.3PL de+ART books  
           ‘All the students read books.’

In their unmarked interpretations, these sentences are generally considered unambiguous. In (69a), the sentence denotes a situation where the speaker is looking for any books to read, corresponding to a narrow scope interpretation of the *des*-phrase under the intensional predicate. The reading whereby there are certain specific books that the speaker is looking for is usually considered infelicitous. Similarly, in (69b), the interaction between the *des*-phrase and the universal quantifier *tous* can only yield a reading where all students read some non-specific books. The alternative reading, in which there are certain books that all the students read, is also generally regarded as infelicitous in the literature on French.

The interplay between *des*-phrases and negation, however, deserves additional examination. *Des*-phrases are widely regarded as displaying a strong tendency to escape the scope of the negative marker, a behavior sometimes attributed to the positive polarity status of this construction (Dobrovie-Sorin 2021). In fact, when a French (plural or mass) indefinite nominal appears within the scope of negation, it generally surfaces as a bare *de* expression. This is shown in the contrast in (70), where only a bare *de*, but not a *des*-phrase, can occur postverbally under the scope of the negative marker.

- (70) Jean *n'a pas filmé d'ours / \*des ours.* *French*  
 Jean neg-AUX not film.PTCP DE-bears de+ART bears  
 'Jean didn't film any bears.'

(Dobrovie-Sorin 2021: 189, (2a))

In sum, French *des/du*-phrases appear to be the closest correlative to Romance BNs, as both nominals do not appear to give rise to scope ambiguities (especially in relation to intensional predicates and other quantifiers). This is indeed the view taken by Dobrovie-Sorin and Laca (2003). Chapter 3, however, will provide a more fine-grained picture of the interpretative properties of French *des/du*-phrases, which will show that these nominal expressions can, under certain conditions, display scope ambiguities, challenging this widely held view (see also Galmiche 1986; Bosveld-de Smet 1998; Ihsane 2008; Carlier 2021).

Let us now turn to Catalan and Spanish *un(o)s*. For the sake of simplicity, the discussion will focus on Spanish examples, although the same observations apply to Catalan. The Spanish indefinite determiner *unos* can convey wide scope readings when it cooccurs with other logical operators in the clause. Consider the following examples.

- (71)a. *No leí unos libros.* *Spanish*  
 not read.PAST UNOS books  
 'I didn't read some books.'
- b. *Estoy buscando unos libros para leer.*  
 AUX look\_for.GER UNOS books for read  
 'I am looking for some books to read.'

- c. *Todos los estudiantes leen unos libros.*  
 all the students read.PRES.3PL UNOS books  
 ‘All the students read some books.’

In (71) *unos* combines with different scope-bearing elements. In almost all cases *un(os)* gives rise to scope ambiguities. However, when *unos* cooccurs with negation, as in (71a), the sentence describes a situation where there is a set of specific books that the speaker did not read. This corresponds to a wide scope interpretation of the nominal expression over the negative marker. Intriguingly, a narrow scope reading, in which the speaker did not read any book, is unavailable. This apparent incompatibility with narrow scope readings under negation has led Martí (2008, 2009) to analyze *unos* as a positive polarity items.

Cross-linguistically, positive polarity is a condition often associated with strong indefinite nominals. This perspective is particularly prevalent in the literature on the singular indefinite article and the stressed version of English *some* (Giannakidou 1997, 1998; Szabolcsi 2004; Chierchia 2006), both of which tend to escape the scope of negation. Although the tendency of strong indefinite nominals –especially those with scalar properties (Kadmon & Landman 1993; Krifka 1995; Chierchia 2006; Israel 2011; among others)– to be interpreted above the scope of negative markers is well-documented, it is important to note that treating *unos* as a positive polarity item, even if tangential to the main scope of this thesis, may not fully capture its behavior. Examples in which these nominals are interpreted below the scope of negation have been reported in the literature. Consider the following example, noted by Espinal and Cyrino (2022a).

- (72) *No encontré unos locales adecuados.* *Spanish*  
 not find.1SG.PAST UNOS premises suitable  
 ‘There are some suitable premises I didn’t find. / I didn’t find any suitable premises.’

(Espinal & Cyrino 2022a: 19, (27c))

This sentence allows both a wide and a narrow scope interpretation of *unos*. On one hand, (72) can mean that there is a set of specific premises that the speaker did not find, corresponding to a wide scope interpretation. On the other hand, the sentence can also describe a situation where the speaker did not find any suitable premises, which corresponds to a

narrow scope interpretation. This dual interpretative possibility suggests that, while *unos* tends to favor wide scope readings, it does not preclude narrow scope interpretations altogether.

To summarize, this section has examined the interaction of Romance indefinite expressions with other logical operators. As weak indefinite expressions, Romance BNs can only license narrow scope interpretations. In contrast, the other indefinite forms present more significant variation. Italian *di*+ART nominals consistently allow both narrow and wide scope readings in the presence of scope-bearing elements, whereas French *des*-phrases predominantly prefer narrow scope interpretations. Spanish and Catalan *un(o)s*, while aligning more closely to *di*+ART indefinites, still exhibit a tendency for wide scope readings when cooccurring with negation. In Chapter 3, I develop a novel formal analysis of *di*+ART nominals to account for these scope differences, particularly in comparison to BNs and French *des*-phrases.

Thus far, this chapter has focused on the standard indefinite forms traditionally described for the Romance languages under investigation to express indefiniteness. However, as noted in Chapter 1, Italian also employs certain non-canonical strategies involving definite descriptions to convey indefinite and non-maximal meanings. Next section briefly presents these alternative strategies.

## **2.4 Indefiniteness, non-maximality, and definite descriptions in Italian**

With the partial exception of Rolhfs (1968), traditional grammars of Italian have failed to recognize three non-canonical uses of definite descriptions that convey either indefinite or non-maximal interpretations. This section introduces these possibilities, which I classify as *plural and mass indefinite definites* (Section 2.4.1), *numberless indefinite definites* (Section 2.4.2), and *representative interpretations* of definites (Section 2.4.3). These constructions are the focus of Chapters 4, 5, and 6, respectively. In the following, I will briefly outline the main theoretical aspects related to these constructions, identify problems with previous accounts, and address relevant issues that require an adequate explanation. The upcoming discussion will necessarily be less detailed than Section 2.3, as the relevant constructions have largely been overlooked not only in traditional grammars but also in the existing theoretical literature. The chapters that follow will delve deeper into these underexplored phenomena.



### 2.4.1 Plural and mass indefinite definites

The first non-canonical indefinite expression I introduce in this section is an idiosyncratic indefinite interpretation associated with plural and mass definite descriptions in Italian. Following Zamparelli (2002), I refer to these uses as *indefinite definites* (IDs). A relevant example from Chapter 1, repeated below as (73), illustrates this phenomenon.

- (73)c. Carlo ha raccolto *i<sub>def/indef</sub>* pomodori. *Italian*  
Carlo AUX pick.PTCP the tomatoes  
‘Carlo picked (the) tomatoes’

As the English translation indicates, sentence (73) allows both a definite and a non-definite interpretation of the definite description in object position, as reflected by the subscript *def/indef*.

Chapter 4 examines these constructions in detail. There, I offer first a more precise characterization of their exact semantic contribution. For the time being, it suffices to note that the reading exemplified in (73) deviates from the default definite interpretation of the determiner. Therefore, I also present empirical arguments showing how these two readings can be distinguished. However, the fundamental question raised by this example concerns the formal account of the semantic distinction between the definite and indefinite interpretation associated with the superficially identical form in (70). Addressing this question is precisely the central objective of Chapter 4.

Furthermore, although traditional grammars of Italian have largely overlooked this phenomenon, more recent analytical contributions have acknowledged the existence of IDs (e.g., Zamparelli 2002; Donazzan & Gritti 2013; Cardinaletti & Giusti 2018ff; Leonetti 2019; Pinzin & Poletto 2021, 2022). Nonetheless, there is scarce consensus regarding the precise syntactic environments in which IDs are licensed and how the ID interpretation is compositionally derived. Chapter 4 presents new empirical data indicating that these uses are restricted to internal argument positions of predicates and prepositions –paralleling the distribution of BNs– and critically assesses previous approaches to this phenomenon.

Finally, some studies suggest that IDs may also be available, albeit to a lesser extent, in other Romance languages (e.g., Zamparelli 2002; Giusti 2021a). However, drawing on differences in scope behavior, I argue in Chapter 4 that IDs represent a language-specific interpretative possibility of Italian. In contrast, definite descriptions in the other languages

Having clarified the research motivations, key properties, and gaps in the literature on IDs, I now turn to the second non-canonical, non-definite use of the definite article in Italian, which occurs with superficially singular count nouns.

As observed in Chapter 1, Italian displays a second idiosyncratic use of the definite article with an indefinite interpretation. This construction, which involves morphologically singular count nouns, is illustrated in (74).

- This indefinite definite construction is remarkable in two main respects. First, the definite description does not convey a definite and referential reading. Second, as perceivable especially from the English translation in (74b), the non-definite interpretation seems to be compatible with both singular and plural entailments. This flexibility, along with the precise semantic contribution of this construction, will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5, which focuses specifically on this phenomenon. For now, it suffices to note that such number-neutrality is not observed with the singular indefinite article, as perceivable from (75).

- (75) Questo hotel ha una piscina. Italian  
 this hotel have.PRES.3SG a pool  
 ‘This hotel has {a pool / \*pools}.’

Because of this compatibility with both singular and plural entailments, I will refer to these peculiar Italian definite descriptions as *numberless indefinite definites* (henceforth NIDs). Building on these preliminary observations, the primary aim of Chapter 5 is to develop a compositional account that explains both the indefinite interpretation of the definite article and the number-neutral reading of the morphologically singular count noun in the NID construction in Italian.

Additionally, as NIDs have remained largely unexplored in the literature, Chapter 5 offers a detailed examination of the grammatical conditions that license this reading. In a nutshell, I show that NIDs are licensed in the object position of HAVE-predicates expressing a HAVE-relation, provided that the resulting VP denotes a characterizing property of the external argument.

Finally, in Chapter 5 I also argue that the availability of NIDs in Italian represents a marked choice across Romance: other Romance languages, by contrast, generally employ morphologically singular BNs, which are unmarked for number. Consequently, a final objective of Chapter 5 is to offer a principled explanation for the presence of NIDs in Italian.

In the next section, I turn to a final non-canonical and non-maximal interpretation associated with definite descriptions in Italian.

### 2.4.3 *Representative interpretations of plural definites*

In this final subsection I provide a brief overview of a peculiar construction that has not only been overlooked in traditional grammars of Italian but is also rarely discussed in cross-linguistic analytical contributions on plural definite descriptions. This construction, which I refer to as a *representative interpretation* (RI), is analyzed in detail in Chapter 6. Below, I present an illustrative example of this use.

- (76) *Gli antichi Romani hanno costruito questo ponte.*  
 the ancient Romans AUX build.PTCP this bridge  
 ‘The ancient Romans built this bridge.’

[Translated and adapted from von Koss Torkildsen 2002: 2, (1.1)]

The sentence in (76) is true even if not literally all ancient Romans built the unique bridge in context. This observation underscores the peculiar nature of RIs, which differentiates them from canonical and maximal definite descriptions. It also makes them highly relevant to the general interest of this thesis, as they arguably parallel the non-maximal interpretation of IDs analyzed in Chapter 4. In both cases, the relevant definite descriptions do not appear to be associated with any maximality requirements. This parallel has led some scholars to treat RIs and IDs as the same constructions (e.g., Zamparelli 2002). However, in Chapter 6 I provide empirical arguments –primarily based on scope interactions and cross-linguistic distribution– that show that the two uses are distinct. While IDs represent genuinely indefinite expressions, RIs, although conveying a non-maximal interpretation, retain their definite meaning and carry existence presuppositions. As such, RIs, in contrast to IDs, are virtually possible cross-linguistically, as definiteness is a universal feature of language.

Beyond this contribution, the central aim of Chapter 6 is to provide a formal account of RIs. In essence, I argue that, although they are generally plural, RIs denote singular atomic entities, namely representative groups. I also present empirical evidence based on the behavior of these constructions with respect to quantificational distributivity and grammatical reciprocity, which support this group-denoting analysis.

The discussion developed in Chapter 6 also addresses another significant gap in the literature. Generally, the literature on pluralities and definiteness fails to recognize RIs, often assimilating them to non-maximal definites, as defined in Brisson (1998). However, I argue that the apparent similarities between non-maximality and representativity naturally follow from the analysis I develop, whereas crucial differences between the two cannot be accounted for by unified accounts of the two phenomena.

Before delving into the analytical portion of this dissertation, this chapter concludes with a brief exploration of the Italo-Romance linguistic panorama and the indefiniteness systems of Italo-Romance varieties, as these varieties exhibit greater variation in their indefinite forms. This discussion is also relevant for analyzing different phenomena in the subsequent chapters, particularly *di*+ART in Chapter 3 and IDs in Chapter 4.

## 2.5 The Italo-Romance panorama

This chapter has emphasized a clear distinction, supported by traditional grammars, between canonical / standard indefinite forms in Italian –specifically, BNs and *di*+ART nominals– and non-canonical / non-standard expressions, such as IDs, NIDs, and RIs. Therefore, it is essential to provide a brief overview of the sociolinguistic situation of Italian to establish the precise boundaries between these two levels of the language. Additionally, it is necessary to explore the indefiniteness systems of Italo-Romance varieties, which, due to their non-standard status, are expected to exhibit a greater degree of variation. This is precisely the focus of the next sections.

### 2.5.1 *On standard, non-standard, and dialectal varieties*

The sociolinguistic landscape of Italian is shaped by a dynamic interplay between standard Italian and the various regional and local dialects, an interaction that has significantly influenced the diachronic development of the language (Rolhfs 1968; Ledgeway 2000, 2003; Maiden 1995; Maiden & Perry 1997; Manzini & Savoia 2005, among many others). As a result, contemporary Italian is not a uniform entity but rather a complex system in which competing linguistic patterns coexist, largely due to the persistent bidirectional contact between the national language and the local dialectal varieties. Therefore, a central feature of the linguistic profile of Italian is the continued influence of the dialects, which extends even to individuals that are not speakers of them (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2020; Lebani & Giusti 2022).

To better understand the complexities of this interaction, it is essential to explore the different levels of language use in Italy. Scholars typically distinguish at least four levels: standard Italian, non-standard informal / popular Italian, regional dialects, and local dialects.<sup>32</sup> For the sake of simplicity, a tripartite division will be adopted here.

The first level is formal or standard Italian, which is historically rooted in the Florentine dialect spoken in Tuscany. This dialect gained prestige in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, largely due to the literary works of poets like Dante Alighieri, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. This literary tradition was further consolidated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Alessandro Manzoni, whose *I promessi sposi* became a foundational text for the codification of the modern Italian

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<sup>32</sup> This classification is not straightforward and may diverge from author to author. For a detailed discussion of the interplay among regional Italian, popular Italian, and the dialects, see Maiden (1995, chapter 5).

language after the unification of Italy in 1861. Nowadays, standard Italian is considered the language of formal settings, education, media, and official communication.

At the other end of the spectrum lie the regional and local dialects, which have historically served as the primary spoken variety for much of the Italian population. All Italo-Romance varieties are *primary dialects* (Coşeriu 1980; Loporcaro 2013; Berruto 2018), as they developed directly from Vulgar Latin, alongside the other major Romance languages. Therefore, these dialects often differ significantly from standard Italian in terms of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Moreover, they often possess rich literary traditions and continue to be used in informal context. However, due to their status as non-standard varieties and the fact that, with the exception of Friulian and Sardinian, they are not officially recognized by the Italian government, many of these dialects remain peripheral to the national linguistic discourse and are, in many cases, endangered.

Between these two poles is informal or popular Italian, a more flexible and hybrid variety that blends elements of both standard Italian and the dialects. This variety is predominantly used in informal contexts and may exhibit dialectal influences, especially in areas where the dialects have a stronger presence. Informal Italian serves as the primary mode of communication for many Italians in everyday life, particularly in informal settings, and can vary significantly depending on the speaker's regional background. It is also important to note that not all speakers are fully competent in all three registers and varieties.

The interaction between these three levels –standard, informal, and dialectal– has shaped the evolution of Italian in significant ways. Historically, formal or standard Italian was primarily a written language, which was used predominantly in literature, religion, and administration, and was barely spoken in everyday communication. In contrast, the spoken language was largely dominated by regional dialects. This diglossic situation, where the two varieties were used in different social contexts, persisted until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. A significant shift occurred in the 1970s, when broader access to education and the spread of mass media enabled more Italians to develop a functional competence in standard Italian. This process of *nationalization* of Italian was gradual, but by the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, over half of the population had mastered and regularly used Italian in any communicative setting (Maiden 1995). Nevertheless, dialects have not disappeared; they remain in use, particularly in rural areas and among older generations, although their use is still often stigmatized in formal contexts.

Given this sociolinguistic background, we can now return to the distribution of the indefinite forms of interest across these different registers. While the boundaries between these levels of language are often blurred, the distribution of indefinite expressions follow certain general patterns. In standard Italian, in accordance with traditional and normative grammars, indefiniteness is primarily expressed through the two canonical forms discussed in this chapter, namely BNs and *di*+ART. These forms are also found, to varying degrees, also in informal Italian, where, however, they may compete with alternative, non-canonical forms, such as IDs, but also NIDs and RIs. The situation within the dialectal varieties is more complex and deserves a dedicated discussion. Therefore, the following section provides a more detailed exploration of indefiniteness systems across the dialects.

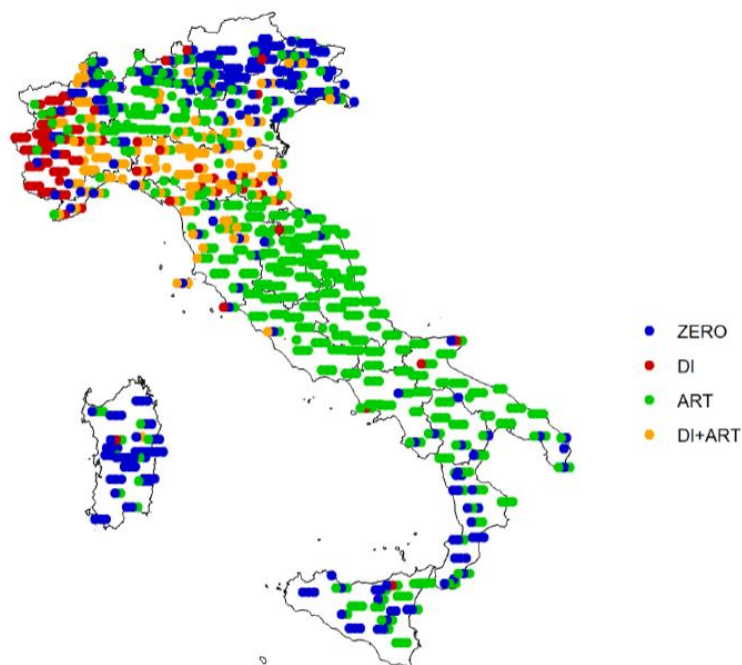
### 2.5.2 Indefiniteness in Italo-Romance

The indefiniteness systems of Italo-Romance dialects have been the focus of several recent studies (e.g., Cardinaletti & Giusti 2018, 2020; Pinzin & Poletto 2021, 2022; Lebani & Giusti 2022). Cardinaletti and Giusti (2018), for instance, base their observations primarily on an analysis of three maps of the AIS atlas (*Sprach- und Sachatlas Italiens und der Südschweiz, Jahberg and Jud 1928–1940*). These maps document instances of narrow scope, weak indefinite plural and mass nominal expressions (i.e., map 1037 [*if there was*] water; map 1343 [*go to the cellar*] *to take* wine; and map 637 [*to look for*] violets). Before turning to Cardinaletti and Giusti’s (2018) findings, however, it is important to acknowledge that the AIS atlas dates back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and was primarily designed as an exclusively lexical source, which complicates a thorough syntactic analysis of the data.

Nonetheless, Cardinaletti and Giusti (2018) identify at least four types of indefinite forms that involve plural and mass nouns across Italo-Romance varieties: (i) BNs (labeled as *zero*); (ii) plural and mass IDs, referred to as ART by the authors; (iii) *di*+ART; and (iv) a bare *di* with no overt realization of ART. Notably, these different forms are often found to coexist in the same variety.

These findings are visually represented in the following figure, taken from Lebani & Giusti (2022: 4), which integrates the data from the three AIS maps (number 637, 1037, and 1343). In this figure, each surveyed location in the AIS atlas is marked by three partially overlapping, color-coded bullets. The leftmost bullet in each location represents the

indefinite form used in the context *[to go look for] violets*; the middle bullet corresponds to the context *if there was water*, and the rightmost bullet to the context *[to go to the cellar] to take wine* (right point).



**Figure 1:** rendering of the AIS maps numbers 637, 1037, and 1343 (from Lebani & Giusti 2022: 4, Figure 1)

Despite considerable intra- and cross-linguistic variation across dialects and AIS maps, two principal axes emerge from Figure 1, which reflect the organization of indefinite forms across the Italian peninsular. The vertical axis, spanning from the extreme north to the extreme south, correlates with the use of IDs, (marked in green and labeled as ART in Cardinaletti & Giusti 2018; Lebani & Giusti 2022). This form is widely attested throughout most regions and across the whole territory, yet its presence declines at the northern and southern extremes, where BNs (marked in blue and labeled as *zero*) are instead preferred. Notably, the ID form often coexists with other indefinite expressions, such as *di+ART* (marked in orange), in many dialects, although it becomes the dominant or exclusive choice in regions of Central-Southern Italy and Northern Calabria.

The horizontal axis, by contrast, spans across the Gallo-Italic dialects, stretching from the northwestern regions (i.e., Val d'Aosta, Piedmont, and partially Liguria and Northern Tuscany) towards Emilia and Romagna. This axis reflects the widespread use of *di+ART*, which is prevalent throughout this area. However, at the extremes of this axis,



*di*+ART alternates with two additional forms: bare *di* (marked in red), attested especially in certain Valdaostan, Piedmontese, and Ligurian varieties, and BNs, which are predominant in the easternmost regions, especially in Veneto and Friuli.

The findings of Cardinaletti & Giusti (2018) are partially corroborated by Pinzin and Poletto's (2021, 2022), who analyze data from the *Atlante Sintattico d'Italia (ASIt)* on certain Northern Italian dialects, alongside additional fieldwork.<sup>33</sup> In their studies, Pinzin and Poletto observe that the microvariation attested within these dialects mirrors the broader variation across Romance languages, which, as discussed earlier in this chapter, alternate especially between BNs and *di*+ART nominals.

With this broader picture in mind, the remainder of this thesis will focus primarily on Italian and the other Romance languages discussed in this chapter. However, references to microvariation within Italo-Romance dialects will be made when relevant, particularly in Chapters 3 and 4. For reasons of scope and space, however, the discussion will often concentrate on two contrasting Northern Italian regional dialects, namely Lombard and Venetan.

Several factors motivate the selection of these two varieties and the exclusion of other central and southern dialects from closer investigation. First, the author of this thesis is a speaker of a Lombard variety. The term *Lombard* encompasses a heterogeneous group of Gallo-Romance dialects no longer uniquely identified with Milanese. More specifically, Lombard is often divided between Western Lombard, spoken in the provinces of Milan, Novara, Varese, Como, Sondrio, and Canton Ticino, and corresponding to the variety spoken by the author of the thesis; and Eastern Lombard, spoken in the provinces of Bergamo and Brescia, along with the areas of Pavia, Cremona, Mantua and the peripheral Valtellina (Sanga 1997: 253). Despite their diversity, these dialects share a common Gallo-Romance origin, and, accordingly, are expected to show a preference for *di*+ART while making only limited use of BNs. Although Figure 1 confirms the limited use of BNs in Lombard varieties, the anticipated prevalence of *di*+ART is not supported by the data, as these varieties appear to favor IDs. This discrepancy will be revisited in Chapter 4, where a small corpus study will provide further empirical support for this observation and its implications for the theoretical proposal developed there.

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<sup>33</sup> ASIt is freely accessible at <http://asit.maldura.unipd.it/>. This database contains data extracted from different questionnaires in which speakers of various Italian dialects were asked to translate an Italian input into their respective dialect.

Venetan, by contrast, is comparatively more homogeneous and is often characterized by its *agallicità* (“non-Gallicness”) within the continuum of Northern Italian dialects (Zamboni 1988; Tuttle 1997). As a result, Venetan tends to disfavor *di*+ART nominals and instead prefers BNs –a general preference that is also confirmed by Figure 1.

Additionally, the linguistic judgments consulted throughout this thesis were mostly provided by speakers from these two regions. Finally, the choice to focus on regional rather than local varieties will be further clarified in Chapter 4, where the brief ASIt corpus study will be presented. In short, prioritizing regional varieties has facilitated the inclusion of a broader dataset and has allowed for more robust empirical observations.

Having now overviewed both the macrovariation among major Romance languages and the microvariation within Italo-Romance dialects, we are well-positioned to proceed with the analytical investigation developed in the subsequent chapters.

### 3 Italian *di*+ART nominals

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter begins the analytical portion of the thesis and focuses on the Italian indefinite construction that I have labeled *di*+ART. This construction, which introduces plural and mass nouns, is illustrated in italics in the examples below from Chapter 1.

(1) a. Carlo ha comprato *dei pomodori*.

Carlo AUX buy.PTCP *di*+ART tomatoes

‘Carlo bought (some) tomatoes.’

b. Carlo ha comprato *dell’olio*.

Carlo AUX buy.PTCP *di*+ART-oil

‘Carlo bought (some) oil.’

As discussed in previous chapters, this form –shared with French– corresponds to a morphologically complex determiner. This determiner, diachronically derived from the Latin preposition *de* ‘from’ (Carlier 2007; Carlier & Lamiroy 2014, 2022; Luraghi & Albonico 2021), is homophonous with the so-called *preposizione articolata* ‘articulated preposition’, the conflation of the Italian preposition *di* ‘of’ and the definite article in all its inflected forms (Chierchia 1998a; Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016; Luraghi & Albonico 2021; Pinzin & Poletto 2021). This chapter provides additional evidence supporting the determiner status of this construction, while going against accounts that classify it as a covert quantifier.

Recall that, in contrast to French, Italian allows an additional prototypical indefinite form built around plural and mass nouns, namely BNs. As already noted in Chapter 1, however, the coexistence of *di*+ART and BNs in Italian raises questions of optionality and free variation, which are rather unexpected under the architecture of grammar assumed in this thesis. Additionally, this coexistence also poses significant typological issues. In this regard, the literature often correlates the respective presence or absence of a BN or a *di*+ART / *des*-phrase in a given language with the presence or absence of explicit morphological number (and gender) material on the noun (see, for instance, Delfitto & Schroten 1991; Stark 2007, 2008; 2016; Crisma & Longobardi 2020; Pinzin & Poletto 2022; Guardiano et al. 2022). More concretely, it is generally assumed that languages with rich

morphological number material on the noun –like Catalan and Spanish, which systematically realize plural morphology overtly on the noun with the morpheme *-s*– can license BNs. By contrast, languages without overt number morphology on the noun, on the other hand, do not allow argumental BNs because they rely on other projections within the DP domain to mark number morphology overtly. As a result, French employs *des*-phrases (e.g., *du / de la / de l'* for singular mass nouns and *des* for plural count nouns) to overtly mark number and convey indefiniteness.

Against this typological picture, Italian stands out among Romance languages. On the one hand, it displays morphophonological number marking on the noun, thus allowing argumental plural and mass BNs.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, it also uses *di*+ART nominals – alongside other indefinite forms– to express indefiniteness.

With this general picture in mind, and in view of the ambivalent nature of Italian, this chapter pursues three main objectives. First, it aims at reviewing the existing literature on *di*+ART, focusing especially on works by Chierchia (1998a), Storto (2003), and Zamparelli (2008a), and pointing out the problematic aspects of each proposal. This review lays the foundations for establishing the adequate syntactic and semantic assumptions about this construction and the expression of indefiniteness in Italian and Romance in general. Concretely, building on much recent literature (e.g., Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016, 2018, 2020; Espinal & Cyrino 2022a, 2022b), I propose a unified syntactic analysis of Romance BNs, Italian *di*+ART nominals, and French *des*-phrases.

Given this unified structure, and the coexistence in Italian of both BNs and *di*+ART expressions, the second objective is to re-examine the distributional and interpretative differences between these two indefinite forms introduced in the previous chapter. In essence, while BNs are assumed to correspond to plain weak indefinites, *di*+ART nominals are argued to be easily associated with a specific reading when the indefinite expression is bound to a semantic choice function that takes wide scope at the level of logical

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<sup>34</sup> The status of Number in Italian, as compared to Catalan and Spanish, has been claimed to be special within Romance, and assigned a lower morphosyntactic position –also hosting gender– in the nominal domain (Manzini 2020; cf. Passino 2009, Lampitelli 2010, 2014). This is mainly because vocalic inflections on the noun in Italian alternate between gender and number, suggesting that plural is associated with a lower position within the nominal spine and externalized together with gender. See, however, Cavarani (2018) and Pomino (2012) for different instantiations of number in Italian dialects. See also Bouchard (2002) for number differences between English and French, and Dobrovie-Sorin (2012) for categorizing Number as a morphosyntactic feature. We come back to the status of number in Italian and Romance later on in this chapter. Following Cyrino and Espinal (2020), this thesis assumes that the pluralized feature is a modifying feature syntactically adjoined to D (or alternatively *δ*) in unmarked cases in Romance, but a modifying feature adjoined to N (or *n*) in marked ones.

representation. This distinction explains why BNs are relegated to postverbal positions and can only convey non-specific, narrow scope readings, whereas *di*+ART nominals can easily enter scope relations with logical operators.

Lastly, the third objective is to compare Italian *di*+ART expressions with French *des*-phrases. This comparison is motivated by their etymological correspondence and the claim that French *des*-phrases constitute the closest counterpart to Romance BNs (Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 2003). The differences in distribution and semantic import reveals that only *di*+ART nominals exhibit referential boundedness –defined as the ability to identify and delimit a referent– and are compatible with a telic interpretation of the event in which they occur. In contrast, French *des*-phrases are referentially unbounded (Bosveld-de Smet 1998, 2004; De Swart 2006; Ihsane 2021b; and Carlier 2021) and are generally associated with atelic readings. These differences are attributed to the (non-)existence of alternative competing forms. In other words, while *des*-phrases lack competing alternatives, *di*+ART nominals compete with BNs for the expression of (different flavors of) indefiniteness. From a diachronic perspective, the competition between *di*+ART and BNs makes the former less advanced in grammaticalization as compared to French *des*-phrases. This accounts for the clear tendency for specificity and strong indefiniteness of *di*+ART. From a synchronic perspective, however, it is proposed that the coexistence of *di*+ART and BNs is not a case of syntactic competition but is part of the mapping from syntax to exponence. Finally, it is also argued that the possibility of a telic interpretation and a “small quantity” reading for *di*+ART expressions (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016) is not syntactically encoded but pragmatically driven.

The chapter is structured as follows. Section 3.2 revisits the literature on *di*+ART nominals. Section 3.3 presents the cross-categorial and cross-linguistic comparison with BNs (Section 3.3.1) and French *des*-phrases (Section 3.3.2). Section 3.4 introduces a novel interpretative puzzle. Section 3.5 develops a theoretical proposal based on a unified syntactic structure for the expression of indefiniteness in Romance (Section 3.5.1) and a choice function analysis for strong indefinite expressions (Section 3.5.2). Section 3.6 discusses telicity and ‘small quantity’ meanings, attributing the differences between Italian *di*+ART nominals and French *des*-phrases to the (non-)existence of competing (synchronic and diachronic) morphophonological alternatives. Section 3.7 concludes the chapter.

### 3.2 Previous approaches

This section sets out as a critical overview of the existing literature on Italian *di*+ART nominals, which have been the subject of growing interest in the last decades. Concretely, and in chronological order, this section reviews contributions by Chierchia (1998a), Storto (2003), and Zamparelli (2008a).

#### 3.2.1 Chierchia (1998a)

One of the earliest formal analyses of the Italian *di*+ART form is presented in Chierchia (1998a). According to this proposal, the complex *di*+ART is structurally first generated within a PP due to the incorporation of the definite article *i* sitting in a lower D complement of P into the preposition *di* located in P. This process results in the formation of the complex head *dei*, which subsequently raises to the higher DP projection. The assumed syntactic representation for the nominal expression *dei ragazzi* is illustrated in (2).

$$(2) \quad [DP \textit{ dei} [NP \textit{ dei} [PP [P' \textit{ dei} [DP \textit{ } [NP \textit{ ragazzi}]]]]]]$$

Under this account, the PP is treated as the complement of a null partitive noun, which selects the preposition and serves as an intermediate landing site for the movement of the *dei* complex. Consequently, *di*+ART nominals are assumed to be genuine partitive DPs, structurally parallel to canonical partitive constructions, although they are headed by an empty noun. Under this analysis, then, the complex *di*+ART is understood as the morpho-syntactic composition of a partitive preposition and a definite determiner.

The morphosyntactic composition is reflected in the semantics proposed for this construction: Chierchia (1998a) posits that *di*+ART has a fully compositional interpretation, as the semantics of both the partitive relation and that of the definite determiner contribute to the interpretation of the whole nominal. More precisely, Chierchia (1998a) argues that the preposition *di* is interpretatively empty, and that the “part-of” relation is provided by the incorporation of the article into P and then into the empty noun. The formal representation of *dei ragazzi* is illustrated below.

$$(3) \quad \begin{aligned} \text{a. } \leq o \text{ } \iota &= \lambda P \lambda x [ \leq (x, \iota P) ] \\ \text{b. } \leq o \text{ } \iota(\textit{ragazzi}) &= \lambda x [ \leq (x, \iota \textit{ragazzi}) ] \end{aligned}$$

(Chierchia 1998a: 90, (33))

The result of this composition, applied to the noun *ragazzi*, yields the property of being subgroups of the maximal sum of boys. This N-P-D complex, then, raises to the higher D position. This movement involves type-shifting of the partitive relation via the existential operator  $\exists$ , yielding the desired determiner-like meaning of *di*+ART, as illustrated below.

(4) a.  $dei\ ragazzi = \exists(\leq o\ \iota(\text{boys})) = \lambda P\exists x[\text{boys}(x) \wedge P(x)]$

b.  $dei = [\text{D part} + di + i] = \exists\ o \leq o\ \iota$

(Chierchia 1998a: 90, (34))

(4a) represents the result of the existential type-shift, while (4b) illustrates the semantic composition of the determiner.

This semantic treatment, based on the existential type-shift, naturally captures the ambiguous scope behavior associated with *di*+ART introduced in the previous chapter and repeated below in relation to negation.<sup>35</sup>

(5) Non ho visto *dei ragazzi*. [both  $\neg\exists$  and  $\exists\neg$ ]  
 not AUX see.PTCP *di*+ART boys  
 ‘I didn’t see {boys / some boys}.’

[Adapted from Chierchia 1998a: 91, (35c)]

Moreover, one of the consequences of Chierchia’s (1998a) compositional analysis concerns presuppositionality. Under his proposal, the incorporated definite article is semantically active, carrying therefore its canonical presupposition of existence. As evidence in support of the presuppositional status of *di*+ART nominals, Chierchia (1998a) provides the following contrast.

(6) a. Non ci sono *folletti*. *Locative or existential*  
 not there be.PRES.3PL elves  
 ‘There are no elves.’

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<sup>35</sup> A semantic analysis of *di*+ART as a plain existential quantifier, however, needs to be further refined, especially in light of the peculiar scope behavior of this construction, which will be addressed in Section 3.4.

- b. Non ci sono *folletti capaci di tanto*. *Loc. or exist.*  
 not there be.PRES.3PL elves capable of much  
 ‘There are no elves capable of so much.’
- (7) a. Non ci sono *dei folletti*. *Loc. only*  
 not there be.PRES.3PL di+ART elves  
 ‘There are no elves.’
- b. Non ci sono *dei folletti capaci di tanto*. *Loc. or exist.*  
 not there be.PRES.3PL di+ART elves capable of much  
 ‘There are no elves capable of so much.’

(Chierchia 1998: 91-92, (37))

Italian existential sentences allow both existential and locative interpretations.<sup>36</sup> As shown in (6), a BN in these contexts is compatible with both interpretations, regardless of the presence of the coda *capaci di tanto*. In contrast, Chierchia (1998a) argues that *di+ART*, without an overtly realized coda, can only receive the locative interpretation. This behavior is attributed to the existence presupposition triggered by the definite article incorporated into *di*, which makes it incompatible with the existential reading (Zucchi 1995). When the coda is present, on the other hand, the existential reading becomes available, as the coda occurs outside the scope of the indefinite determiner.

Nevertheless, Chierchia’s (1998a) semantic analysis faces significant challenges, related especially to the assumed partitive and presuppositional interpretations of *di+ART*. First, as Storto (2003) points out, Chierchia (1998a) assumes that the empty N postulated for these constructions is responsible for the alleged partitive interpretation, as it introduces a part-of relation  $\leq$ . However, Barker (1998) shows that genuine partitive constructions denote a proper part-of relation (i.e.,  $<$ ), which entails that the extension of the embedded noun includes additional elements, which are not included in the denotation of the partitive construction itself. Now, consider the contrast in (8).

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<sup>36</sup> This ambiguity has been related to the well-known observation that Italian appears not to be subject to strong definiteness effects. We come back to this issue in greater detail in Chapter 5.



- (8) a. [#*Alcuni dei marziani* che sono atterrati nel mio giardino]<sub>i</sub> mi  
 some of.the Martians that AUX land.PTCP in.the my garden me  
 hanno detto che loro<sub>i</sub> sono gli ultimi rappresentanti della  
 aux tell.PTCP that they be.PRES.3PL the last representatives of.the  
 loro specie.  
 their species  
 ‘Some of the Martians that landed in my backyard told me that they are the last  
 representatives of their species.’
- b. [*Dei marziani* che sono atterrati nel mio giardino]<sub>i</sub> mi  
 di+ART Martians that AUX land.PTCP in.the my garden me  
 hanno detto che loro<sub>i</sub> sono gli ultimi rappresentanti della  
 AUX tell.PTCP that they be.PRES.3PL the last representatives of.the  
 loro specie.  
 their species  
 ‘Some Martians that landed in my backyard told me that they are the last  
 representatives of their species.’

(Storto 2003: 8, (8))

Given that the proper partitive construction *Alcuni dei marziani* in (8a) denotes a proper part-of relation, it presupposes the existence of other Martians different from those denoted by the partitive expressions. This contradicts the continuation of the sentence, which states that there do not exist other Martians. In contrast, (8b) shows that *di*+ART nominals do not encode a proper part-of relation and can therefore be felicitously used in the same scenario. This contrast shows that *di*+ART indefinites are not associated with the partitive interpretation claimed by Chierchia (1998a) and should not be categorized as partitive constructions –neither overt nor covert.

Second, under Chierchia’s (1998a) compositional analysis, the definite article incorporated into *di*+ART nominals is claimed to contribute its canonical presuppositional meaning. However, Storto (2003) offers the following contrast as a counterargument to the presuppositional status of this indefinite expression.

- (9) a. #Mi piacerebbe trovare *alcuni dei dodo*, ma so che  
 me like.COND find.INF some of.the dodos but know.PRES.1SG that  
 oramai sono estinti.  
 nowadays be.PRES.3PL extinct  
 ‘#I would like to find some of the dodos, but I know that they are extinct  
 nowadays.’
- b. Mi piacerebbe trovare *dei dodo*, ma so che  
 me like.COND find.INF di+ART dodos but know.PRES.1SG that  
 oramai sono estinti.  
 nowadays be.PRES.3PL extinct  
 ‘I would like to find some dodos, but I know that they are extinct nowadays.’  
 (Storto 2003: 9, (9))

The canonical partitive construction in (9a) presupposes the existence of dodos and therefore contradicts the continuation of the sentence, which asserts their extinction. In contrast, the *di*+ART nominal in (9b) is perfectly compatible with the same context. This shows that the indefinite expression does not carry any presupposition of existence.

In sum, Chierchia’s (1998a) analysis of *di*+ART is inconsistent with the examples provided by Storto (2003), which show that this form neither encodes the partitive semantics associated with the partitive preposition *di* or the postulated empty noun, nor inherits the presupposition of existence from the incorporated definite article. Next section turns to an alternative analysis proposed by Storto (2003).

### 3.2.2 Storto’s (2003) alternatives

As discussed earlier, Storto (2003) critically evaluates Chierchia’s (1998a) analysis of *di*+ART, presenting compelling arguments against its semantic assumptions. In response, Storto (2003) proposes two alternative analytical possibilities to account for both the scopal properties of this construction and the data in (8) and (9), which show that *di*+ART neither encodes partitivity nor presuppositionality. These alternatives are outlined below.

On the one hand, as a first alternative, Storto (2003) proposes a syntactic or lexical ambiguity for *di*+ART. According to this proposal, the presuppositional meaning attributed to this form by Chierchia’ (1998a) in view of the examples in (7), where the presupposition of existence allegedly conflicts with the existential interpretation of existential

sentences, could arise from a partitive structure on the lines of that proposed by Chierchia (1998a) himself. Simultaneously, the canonical indefinite readings of *di*+ART would result from a plain determiner structure.

The second alternative, on the other hand, involves analyzing *di*+ART as structurally parallel to non-partitive indefinite quantifiers, such as *alcuni* ‘some’ and the cardinal *due* ‘two’. On this view, *di*+ART would derive its scopal properties from an underlying quantificational structure that allows it to interact with other logical operators in the sentence. Importantly, this quantificational analysis would not require *di*+ART to be presuppositional.

However, both proposals face several challenges. To begin with, Storto’s (2003) first alternative, which posits a lexical or syntactic ambiguity for *di*+ART, is not theoretically desirable in view of a minimal architecture of language, as acknowledged by Storto (2003) himself. I argue that an eventual presuppositional interpretation for this *di*+ART necessarily results from a covert proper partitive construction, which is only superficially homophonous with the indefinite determiner, but structurally and interpretatively different. The existence of a covert partitive construction is supported by the following original examples, which attest that, in marked cases, a covert partitive construction morphologically identical to *di*+ART appears to give rise to quantity-based scalar implicatures.

- (10)a.  $\emptyset$  *Dei miei amici* sono venuti.  
 $\emptyset$  of-the my friends be.PRES.3PL come.PTCP  
 ‘Some of my friends came.’
- b. *Tutti i miei amici* sono venuti.  
 all the my friends be.PRES.3PL come.PTCP  
 ‘All my friends came.’

When a speaker utters (10a), containing a covert partitive, as opposed to the universally quantified counterpart in (10b), it generates the scalar implicature that *not all friends of mine came*.

Evidence for the scalar properties of this partitive construction comes from the well-documented observation that quantitative implicatures can be easily cancelled in upward entailing environments (Grice 1975; Rett 2020). This is exactly what appears to happen with the covert partitive, as shown in (11).

- (11) Ho letto         $\emptyset$  *dei*        *libri* *di* *Chomsky*. O meglio, ho letto  
 aux read.PTCP  $\emptyset$  of-the books of Chomsky or better aux read.PTCP  
 tutti i libri di Chomsky.  
 all the books of Chomsky  
 ‘I read #(some of) Chomsky’s books. In fact, I read all of Chomsky’s books.’

These examples imply that this construction is necessarily inserted in Chierchia’s (2004) positive quantifier scale, as it generates quantitative implicatures. This possibility demonstrates that the *dei* in (11) is not equivalent to a plain *di*+ART determiner, which were shown in Chapter 2 not to be included in any number or quantity scale, as they cannot function as an answer to a *wh*-question introduced by a quantity word. Crucially, this contrasts with other quantifiers, as shown in the following example repeated from Chapter 2.

- (12) Q: Quanti studenti sono venuti a lezione?  
 how.many students AUX come.PTCP at class  
 ‘How many students came to class?’  
 A: a. *Alcuni* / *molti* / *tre* [studenti sono venuti a lezione].  
 some several three students AUX come.PTCP at class  
 ‘Some / several / three students came to class.’  
 b. \**Degli* [studenti sono venuti a lezione].  
 di+ART students AUX come.PTCP at class

On the other hand, Storto’s (2003) second alternative, which attributes *di*+ART a structure parallel to that of other indefinite quantifiers like *alcuni*, faces more significant empirical challenges. First, from a structural perspective, Chierchia (1998a) notes that, unlike *bona fide* syntactic quantifiers, *di*+ART cannot be coordinated with other overt quantificational expressions, as shown in (13).

- (13)a. *Alcuni* ma non *molti* ragazzi.  
 some but not many boys

- b. \**Dei* ma non *molti* ragazzi.

di+ARTbut not many boys

Intended: ‘Some but not many boys.’

(Chierchia 1998a: 92, (38b), (38d))

Similarly, Cardinaletti and Giusti (2016) observe that the nominal complement of *di*+ART expressions, in contrast to that of other quantifiers, cannot be resumed by the clitic *ne*, as attested below.

- (14)a. *Ne* ho visti *alcuni*.

NE AUX see.PTCP some

- b. \**Ne* ho visti *dei*.

NE AUX see.PTCP di+ART

[Adapted from Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016: 69, (48a-b)]

Furthermore, as originally pointed out by Renzi (2001: 372), and resumed by Cardinaletti & Giusti (2016: 71), *di*+ART, unlike proper quantifiers such as *alcuni*, can occur in the argument position of a universal quantifier like *tutti* ‘all’.<sup>37</sup>

- (15)a. *Ha* fatto *tutti dei discorsi strani*.

AUX make.PTCP all di+ARTspeeches strange

‘(S)he made (some) strange speeches.’

- b. \**Ha* fatto *tutti alcuni discorsi strani*.

AUX make.PTCP all some speeches strange

[Adapted from Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016: 71, (55a), (55d)]

<sup>37</sup> Interpretatively, in (15a) the universal quantifier *tutti* does not simply quantify over individual speeches but rather attributes the property of being strange to all relevant speeches in the discourse domain. Intriguingly, this sentence parallels the Catalan example in (i), taken from Espinal ad Cyrino (2022a: 549, footnote 24):

(i) A l’arbre de Nadal hi ha tot de regals. Catalan  
at the-tree of Christmas there have.PRES.3SG all de presents  
‘Under the Christmas tree there are many presents.’

Finally, recall that *di*+ART can occur in predicative positions, as expected from plain indefinite articles. Crucially, this is not a possibility for proper quantifiers like *alcuni*.

- (16)a. Ungaretti e Pavese sono (degli) scrittori.  
 Ungaretti and Pavese be.PRES.3PL di+ART writers  
 ‘Ungaretti and Pavese are writers.’  
 b. #Ungaretti e Pavese sono alcuni scrittori.  
 Ungaretti and Pavese be.PRES.3PL some writers

Moreover, *di*+ART, in contrast to other quantifiers, cannot function as the quantificational element of a proper partitive construction.

- (17)a. \*Ho letto dei di quei libri.  
 AUX read.PTCP di+ART of those books  
 (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016: 71, (53a))  
 b. Ho letto alcuni di quei libri.  
 AUX read.PTCP some of those books  
 ‘I read some of those books.’

From a semantic standpoint, on the other hand, Cardinaletti and Giusti (2016) further argue that *di*+ART and a quantifier like *alcuni* differ in scope properties. While *alcuni* obligatorily takes wide scope, *di*+ART, as seen in the previous chapter, allows both wide and narrow scope readings. This distinction is evident in the following contrast.

- (18)a. Non ho visto dei ragazzi.  $\neg > \exists / \exists > \neg$   
 not aux see.ptcp di+art boys  
 ‘I didn’t see any / some boys.’  
 b. Non ho visto alcuni ragazzi.  $\exists > \neg$  only  
 not aux see.ptcp some boys  
 ‘I didn’t see some boys.’

However, it must be acknowledged that the above difference in scope patterns exclusively holds with negation, as with other quantifiers, both *alcuni* and *di*+ART show scope ambiguities.

- (19)a. Tutti gli studenti hanno letto *dei* libri.  $\neg > \exists / \exists > \neg$   
all the students AUX read.PTCP di+ART books  
‘All the students read some books.’
- b. Tutti gli studenti hanno letto *alcuni* libri.  $\neg > \exists / \exists > \neg$   
all the students AUX read.PTCP some books  
‘All the students read some books.’

As a last piece of semantic evidence against a quantificational analysis of *di*+ART, it is important to note that this indefinite form, but not other quantifiers, are compatible with genericity.

- (20)a. *Dei veri italiani* mangiano (sempre) gli spaghetti.  
di+ART true Italians eat.PRES.3PL always the spaghetti  
‘True Italians (always) eat spaghetti’  
(Zamparelli 2008a: 306, (17b))
- b. *Alcuni veri italiani* mangiano (sempre) gli spaghetti.  
some true Italians eat.PRES.3PL always the spaghetti  
‘Some true Italians (always) eat spaghetti’

Both *dei* and *alcuni* are grammatical in the above scenarios. However, only *dei* can be used to express a generalization about (all) true Italians, whereas *alcuni* can only express a generalization about some true Italians.

In sum, both the syntactic and semantic evidence discussed in this section not only argues against Storto’s (2003) alternatives but also confirms that *di*+ART corresponds to an indefinite determiner, not associated with a quantificational structure. Next section discusses a third existing analysis for *di*+ART nominals, which is put forward by Zamparelli (2008a).

### 3.2.3 Zamparelli (2008a)

Zamparelli's (2008a) proposal shares significant similarities with Chierchia's (1998a) raising analysis of Italian *di*+ART nominals. Concretely, the final structure proposed by Zamparelli (2008a) for this indefinite expression is illustrated below.

- (21) [DP<sub>1</sub> *dei* [NumP ~~*dei*~~ [PP [NP ~~*ragazzi*~~] [P' ~~*dei*~~ [DP<sub>2</sub> *i* [NP *ragazzi*]]]]]]

(Zamparelli 2008a: 323, (64c))

Although similar, some differences between Chierchia's (1998a) and Zamparelli's (2008a) structures are worth discussing. First, in Zamparelli's (2008a) reformulation of the raising analysis, the postulated NP is not an empty partitive noun that selects a PP as its complement, as claimed in Chierchia's (1998a). Instead, it functions as the specifier of a partitive PP, which is selected by NumP. Furthermore, the PP in Zamparelli's (2008a) structure is not a genuine partitive PP headed by a preposition and incorporating a definite description, as in Chierchia (1998a). Rather, it is a PP headed by an operator R/P that selects both an indefinite NP as its specifier and a DP headed by a definite article as its complement. A final crucial difference is that, under Zamparelli's (2008a) proposal, the definite DP is kind-denoting.

Several issues with Zamparelli's (2008a) theory should be addressed. One major issue, discussed by Cardinaletti and Giusti (2016), involves partitivity. As illustrated in (22), *di*+ART indefinites can select for measure nouns like *quintali* 'quintals' or *chili* 'kilograms'. These measure nouns, however, cannot appear in a proper partitive structure, as shown in (23).<sup>38</sup>

- (22)a. Comprerò     *dei*     *quintali di carciofi*.  
                   buy.FUT.1SG   *di*+ART   quintals of artichokes  
                   'I will buy quintals of artichokes.'
- b. Ho     raccolto     *dei*     *chili di patate*.  
                   aux   pick.PTCP   *di*+ART   kilos of potatoes

<sup>38</sup> On the contrary, measure nouns are highly productive in pseudo-partitive constructions, as shown below.

- (i) Ho comprato *tre quintali* {*di* / \**dei*} *carciofi*.  
       AUX buy.PTCP three quintals of of.the artichokes  
       'I will buy three quintals of artichokes.'

For a detailed discussion on the differences between partitive and pseudo-partitives constructions, see Falco and Zamparelli (2019), Alexiadou and Stavrou (2020), and Espinal and Cyrino (2022b).



‘I picked kilos of potatoes.’

(Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016: 62, (14))

- (23) \*Comprerò {alcuni / tre} dei quintali di carciofi che avete  
buy.FUT.1SG some three of-the quintals of artichokes that AUX  
raccolto quest’anno.  
pick.PTCP this-year

(Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016: 62, (15))

Importantly, the examples in (22) are problematic also for Zamparelli’s (2008a) claim that the postulated definite DP within the complex *di*+ART is kind-denoting. Nominal expressions containing measure nouns do not denote kinds: it is difficult to conceptualize a natural class comprising the maximal sum of quintals (or kilograms) in the real world. This is because measure nouns are semi-lexical Ns and have a functional meaning, whereas kind-denoting expressions contribute descriptive content (Csirmaz & Stavrou 2017; Alexiadou & Stavrou 2020). Consequently, they cannot function as arguments of s-level predicates that do not select for measures, as shown below.<sup>39</sup>

- (24) \*Ho {visto / comprato} tre quintali.  
AUX see.PTCP buy.PTCP three quintals

The purported kind-denoting interpretation of the definite article within the *di*+ART complex is also inconsistent with its incompatibility in combination with k-level predicates. Consider the following contrast, which shows that only canonical definite descriptions, but not *di*+ART nominals, can freely combine with such predicate type.

- (25)a. *I veri cavalieri* sono estinti.  
the true knights be.PRES.3PL extinct  
‘True knights are extinct.’  
b. \**Dei veri cavalieri* sono estinti.  
*di*+ART true knights be.PRES.3PL extinct

(Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016: 76, (75))

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<sup>39</sup> See also Cardinaletti and Giusti (2016) for a similar observation.

The incompatibility of *di*+ART with genuine kind denotation is further corroborated by the following examples containing nouns that denote natural species in combination with k-level predicates. In these cases, only *di*+ART nominals, but not plural definites, lead to a taxonomic, sub-kind interpretation, as confirmed by the English translations.

- (26)a. *I tapiri sono in pericolo di estinzione.*  
the tapirs be.PRES.3PL in danger of extinction  
‘Tapirs are on the verge of extinction.’
- b. *Dei tapiri sono in pericolo di estinzione.*  
*di*+ART tapirs be.PRES.3PL in danger of extinction  
‘Some (types of) tapirs are on the verge of extinction.’

On the other hand, evidence against treating *di*+ART nominals as partitive PPs comes from the observation that left-dislocated *di*+ART phrases are generally pronominalized by an accusative clitic, whereas PPs headed by the preposition *di* are resumed by the genitive clitic *ne*.<sup>40</sup> Consider the following contrast.

- (27)a. *Dei biscotti, Gianni li / \*ne ha mangiati.*  
*di*+ART cookies Gianni CL.ACC CL.GEN AUX eat.PTCP.PL  
‘Some cookies, Gianni ate them.’
- b. *Di questa notizia, ne / \*lo hanno parlato tutti.*  
of this news CL.GEN CL.ACC AUX talk.PTCP everybody  
‘Everybody has talked about this news.’

[Adapted from Cardinaletti & Giusti (2016: 67, (40a-b))]

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<sup>40</sup> Recently, however, Giusti (2021b) has shown that *di*+ART nominals with a non-specific, narrow scope interpretation can also be resumed by the (property-denoting) clitic *ne*, as shown in (i), where the indefinite takes scope below negation. We come back to this issue in the next section.

- (i) a. Non ho scritto (delle) lettere.  
not AUX write.PTCP *di*+ART letters  
‘I didn’t write letters.’
- b. Non ne ho scritte.  
not NE AUX write.PTCP.PL  
‘I didn’t write any (of them).’

(Giusti 2021b: 50, (26a-b))

Furthermore, as observed by Rizzi (2001: 529) *di*+ART can appear embedded under a preposition. This behavior contrasts with a general ban against the cooccurrence of two consecutive monosyllabic prepositions in Italian. Compare (28a) and (28b).

- (28)a. È venuto con *degli* amici.  
 aux come.PTCP with *di*+ART friends  
 ‘He came with (some) friends.’
- b. \*Ha spiato da *sul* balcone.  
 aux spy.PTCP from on-the balcony

The review of previous studies on Italian *di*+ART indefinites has revealed that these nominal expressions cannot be assimilated to prepositions, proper partitive constructions, or quantifiers (*contra* Storto 2003). Furthermore, it has been shown that the definite article incorporated into these constructions is semantically inert, as it contributes neither an existence presupposition (*contra* Chierchia 1998a), nor denotes kinds (*contra* Zamparelli 2008a). Instead, this section has established that Italian *di*+ART nominals correspond to genuine indefinite determiners. Building on these findings, the analytical proposal developed in this chapter aims to provide a detailed account of these characteristics. Before proceeding, however, it is essential to revisit the comparison of *di*+ART with BNs and French *de*-phrases initiated in the previous chapter. This additional examination will reveal more fine-grained differences, providing more informed details to refine our analysis.

### 3.3 Expanding the cross-categorical and cross-linguistic explorations

This section expands the comparison of Italian *di*+ART nominals with both Romance BNs and French *des*-phrases, incorporating additional syntactic and semantic considerations. The discussion begins with Romance BNs.

#### 3.3.1 Italian ‘*di*+ART’ nominals and Romance BNs

Recall that the presence of argumental BNs in a language has been correlated with the presence of explicit number material on the noun. A recent morphosyntactic account of the surprising coexistence of *di*+ART and BNs in Italian is found in Stark (2016). Concretely, Stark (2016) postulates the existence of a functional head within the nominal

domain which is labeled *Individuation* (Ind<sup>o</sup>). This functional head is claimed to host number features and to be necessary to derive nominal arguments. In Spanish Ind<sup>o</sup> is assumed to be consistently realized by the plural morph /s/, deriving BNs in this language. In French, on the other hand, Ind<sup>o</sup> is always realized by *de*, as this language lacks overt number morphs, explaining the obligatory presence of *des/du*-phrases. The details of the analysis are not relevant for the present discussion. However, Stark (2016) argues that in Italian Number is realized lower on N and is probed by a higher instantiation of that feature on Ind<sup>o</sup> *via* Downward Agree. This probing mechanism leads to an optional movement of N to Ind<sup>o</sup>: when movement occurs, a BN surfaces, while when it does not, *di* is inserted instead, deriving *di*+ART nominals. In sum, Stark (2016) treats the Italian indefiniteness pattern in terms of optionality. A primary objective of this section, however, is to demonstrate that the apparent optionality between *di*+ART nominals and BNs is, in fact, illusory. To do so, it is necessary to find contexts where only one of the two forms is possible.

A first point of divergence that is worth considering concerns specificity. In Chapter 1, it has been stated that the relevant notion of specificity adopted in this thesis is *referential anchoring*, by which a nominal expression is referentially anchored by a contextually salient function to the referent of another expression in the sentence (von Stechow 2002, 2011; von Stechow & Kempson 2004). In this respect, it is important to note that Romance BNs can never convey specificity (see, among others, Suñer 1982; Laca 1990, 1999; Longobardi 1994, 2001, 2005; Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 1996, 2003; Renzi 1997, 2001; Chierchia 1998a; Brucart 2002; Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016, 2018; Pinzin & Poletto 2021), whereas *di*+ART indefinites are easily associated with a specific interpretation. This contrasting behavior is made evident by several linguistic diagnostics.

First, let us take a look at the availability of a relative clause in the following examples.

- (29)a. \*Oggi ho incontrato ragazzi che mi avevano presentato  
today AUX meet.PTCP boys that me AUX.IPFV.3PL introduce.PTCP  
ieri.  
yesterday

b. Oggi ho incontrato *dei ragazzi* che mi avevano  
 today AUX meet.PTCP di+ART boys that me AUX.IPFV.3PL  
 presentato ieri.  
 introduce.PTCP yesterday

‘Today I met some boys someone introduced to me yesterday.’

(Pinzin & Poletto 2021: 16-17, (10)-(11))

In (29a), the presence of a relative clause modifying the BN *ragazzi* triggers a specific interpretation of the nominal expression. Under this condition, the BN becomes ungrammatical. Conversely, the *di*+ART nominal in (29b) is perfectly grammatical in the same context, confirming that these forms easily license specific readings (Chierchia 1998a; Storto 2003; Le Bruyn 2007, 2010; Zamparelli 2008a; Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016; Pinzin & Poletto 2021, 2022).

Some clarifications are necessary, as the exact extent to which specific readings are available with *di*+ART nominals remains a matter of open debate in the literature. According to Cardinaletti and Giusti (2016), specificity is possible with *di*+ART only when the determiner introduces plural count nouns, as in (29b). Conversely, the authors argue – based on the example in (30) – that specific readings are unavailable for mass *di*+ART nominals.<sup>41</sup>

(30) Non ho bevuto *del vino*.  
 not AUX drink.PTCP di+ARTwine  
 ‘I didn’t drink wine.’

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<sup>41</sup> For Pinzin and Poletto (2021), the judgments are not so clear-cut either. They offer the following example, in which the dislocated mass *di*+ART indefinite apparently receives a specific interpretation.

(i) *Del pane*, l’ho mangiato, dell’altro no.  
 di+ART bread CL=AUX eat.PTCP di+ART=other not  
 ‘I ate part of the bread, while I left some of it.’

(Pinzin & Poletto 2021: 16, (9))

However, it should be noticed that this sentence carries a covert partitive reading –reflected by the English translation– which is structurally and interpretatively distinct from the relevant indefinite reading of *di*+ART.

- a. #Ho bevuto (del) *Prosecco* e (del) *Cabernet*, ma non ho  
 AUX drink.PTCP di+ART *Prosecco* and di+ART *Cabernet* but not AUX  
 bevuto (del) *Ribolla* o (del) *Sauvignon*.  
 drink.PTCP di+ART *Ribolla* or di+ART *Sauvignon*  
 ‘I drank some *Prosecco* and some *Cabernet*, but I didn’t drink some *Ribolla* and  
 some *Sauvignon*.’
- b. Ho bevuto solo (dei) *liquori* e (dell’) *acqua minerale*.  
 AUX drink.PTCP only di+ART spirits and di+ART-water mineral  
 ‘I only drank (some) spirits and (some) mineral water.’

(Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016: 60, (7))

According to Cardinaletti and Giusti (2016), a mass *di*+ART nominal cooccurring with negation is only compatible with the continuation in (30b), which corresponds to a narrow scope, non-specific reading.

Intriguingly, a similar observation has been made by Bosveld-de Smet (1998) for French *des*-phrases. Consider the following example, where a specific reading is considered ungrammatical with mass *du/de la*-phrases as well.

- (31) \**De l’etoffe* que j’avais achetée hier traînait par terre.  
 de+ART-fabric that I-AUX buy.PTCP yesterday lay.IPFV on ground  
 (Bosveld-de Smet 1998: 33, (68))

Nevertheless, in what follows I provide evidence suggesting that specific readings are in fact (marginally) possible also with mass *di*+ART nominals. First, it is worth noting that the literal translation of the French example in (31) is grammatical in Italian, as illustrated in (32).

- (32) *Della stoffa* che ho comprato ieri giaceva per terra.  
 di+ART fabric that AUX buy.PTCP yesterday lay.IPFV on ground  
 ‘Some fabric I bought yesterday was laying on the ground.’

Second, examples where non-partitive mass *di*+ART nominals receive a specific interpretation can be easily found. Consider, for instance, the following example.

- (33)a. [...]questa sera ho mangiato *del pane che avevo messo*  
 this evening AUX eat.PTCP di+ART bread that AUX.IPFV put.PTCP  
*a tostare.*<sup>42</sup>  
 to toast  
 ‘This evening I ate some bread that I toasted.’
- b. \*Questa sera ho mangiato *pane* che avevo messo a tostare.  
 This evening AUX eat.PTCP bread that AUX put.PTCP to toast

The presence of a specific reading for the mass *di*+ART nominal in (33a) is further confirmed by the ungrammaticality of a bare mass noun in the same context in (33b). These examples indicate that specific readings are also available for mass terms introduced by *di*+ART. Setting aside this issue for now, the remainder of the chapter will be mainly focused on plural indefinites, although Section 3.5 will shed some light on the restricted availability of specific readings with mass nouns.

Another property distinguishing *di*+ART from BNs concerns preverbal subject positions. Recall that only the former indefinites, although with certain restrictions, can occur as external arguments, while unmodified BNs are excluded from the same environments. This contrast is illustrated below.

- (34)a. \**Bambini* suonavano le campane.  
 children ring.IPFV.3PL. the bells
- b. *Dei bambini* suonavano le campane.  
 di+ART children ring.IPFV.3PL the bells  
 ‘(Some) children were ringing the bells.’

The third diagnostics presented in this section relates to the interactions that these nominal expressions establish clause-internally with logical operators and quantifiers. Cross-linguistically, BNs can only license narrow scope readings with negation (35a), intensional predicates (35b), and the universal quantifier (35c). The relevant examples from Chapter 2 are repeated below.

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<sup>42</sup> Example retrieved from <https://www.medicitalia.it/consulti/farmacologia/910868-ingestione-pane-bruciato-in-gravidanza.html>; January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024

- (35)a. *Non ho letto libri.*  $\neg > \exists$  only  
 not AUX read.PTCP books  
 ‘I didn’t read books.’
- b. *Sto cercando libri da leggere.* LOOK FOR  $> \exists$  only  
 AUX look.for.GER books of read  
 ‘I’m looking for books to read.’
- c. *Tutti gli studenti leggono libri.*  $\forall > \exists$  only  
 all the students read.PRES.3PL books  
 ‘All the students read books.’

Conversely, *di*+ART nominals display an ambiguous scope behavior in the same contexts, as shown again below.

- (36)a. *Non ho letto dei libri.*  $\neg > \exists / \exists > \neg$   
 not AUX read.PTCP *di*+ART books  
 ‘I didn’t read books / I didn’t read some books.’
- b. *Sto cercando dei libri da leggere.* LOOK FOR  $> \exists / \exists >$  LOOK FOR  
 AUX look.for.GER *di*+ART books of read  
 ‘I’m looking for some books to read.’
- c. *Tutti gli studenti leggono dei libri.*  $\forall > \exists / \exists > \forall$   
 all the students read.PRES.3PL *di*+ART books  
 ‘All the students read some books.’

It is important to emphasize that the ambiguous scope behavior exhibited by *di*+ART is somewhat unexpected from a syntactic perspective: substantial evidence supports the conclusion that this indefinite form does not correspond to a quantifier. Consequently, it structurally lacks the inherent quantificational force required to enter scope relations with other scope-bearing elements in the clause. The theoretical account developed below must, therefore, address and explain this scope behavior.

Let us now turn to pronominalization phenomena. Non-specific Romance BNs can only be resumed by the property-denoting clitic *ne*, whereas specific *di*+ART nominals can function as coreferential antecedents for the entity-denoting accusative clitic *li* (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016; Giusti 2021b; Espinal & Cyrino 2022a; Espinal & Giusti 2024, 2025). This contrast is illustrated below.



- (37)a. Ernest ha letto *libri* e anche Edgar *ne* ha letti.  
 Ernest AUX read.PTCP books and also Edgar ne AUX read.PTCP  
 ‘Ernest wrote books, and so did Edgar.’
- b. Ernest ha letto *dei libri<sub>i</sub>* e anche Edgar *li<sub>i</sub>* ha letti.  
 Ernest AUX read.PTCP di+ART books and also Edgar CL AUX read.PTCP  
 ‘Ernest read some books and Edgar read them too.’

The examples provided above, in which BNs and *di*+ART nominals are pronominalized by the property-denoting clitic *ne* and the entity-denoting clitic *li*, respectively, offer additional support for the hypothesis that *di*+ART indefinites are easily associated with a specific and referential interpretation at some stage of their derivation. This interpretative ability also needs to be accounted for in our theoretical proposal.

So far, we have established that *di*+ART nominals allow both specific and non-specific interpretations, whereas BNs are limited to non-specific readings. This pattern, however, is *a priori* consistent with optionality, as BNs appear to be possible in a subset of contexts where *di*+ART indefinites are licensed. That is, the two indefinite forms may still be seen as optional competitors, but only in a subset of cases. Therefore, it is now necessary to find contexts in which only BNs, but not *di*+ART nominals, are possible.

In this regard, a useful diagnostic is telicity. It is a well-established empirical observation that BNs are cross-linguistically restricted to internal argument positions of predicates that denote atelic events (Krifka 1989, 1992; Landman & Rothstein 2010, 2012a, 2012b, among many others). In (38a), for instance, the BN is only compatible with the temporal adjunct *per un’ora* ‘for an hour’, which forces an atelic reading of the event. By contrast, the *di*+ART nominal in (38b) triggers an atelic reading of the predicate with which it combines, as made evident by the compatibility with the temporal modifier *in un’ora* ‘in an hour’. Notably, an atelic interpretation is not entirely ungrammatical for (38b), as indicated by the use of ‘#’ (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2018). This possibility is especially prominent among speakers coming from geographical areas whose underlying dialectal varieties do not display BNs (e.g., Anconetano), as they appear to be more inclined to accept an atelic interpretation for *di*+ART indefinites (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2020, Giusti *p.c.*).

- (38)a. Ho raccolto *more* { \*in un'ora / per un'ora }.  
 AUX pick.PTCP blackberries in an-hour for an-hour
- b. Ho raccolto *delle more* { in un'ora / #per un'ora }.  
 AUX pick.PTCP di+ART blackberries in an-hour for an-hour  
 'I've picked (some) blackberries in an hour / for an hour.'
- (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2018: 142, (12b)-(14b))

In relation to the above contrast –and telicity more in general, the literature has identified another crucial property that distinguishes *di*+ART nominals and BNs, which may shed light on the optionality issue. Concretely, Cardinaletti and Giusti suggest that *di*+ART phrases, in contrast to BNs, convey an indefinite reading associated with an additional “small quantity” meaning. According to these authors, therefore, the event denoted in (38b) prefers a telic interpretation as it involves picking an indefinite small quantity of blackberries.

Interestingly, the presence of a quantitative meaning associated with *di*+ART nominals is further confirmed by a study on certain northern Italian varieties conducted by Pinzin and Poletto (2021). This study revealed that speakers of the Friulian variety frequently translated Italian *di*+ART indefinites using quantity markers such as *un pok* ‘a bit’ in their dialect.

These last two differences –related to telicity and small quantity readings– become particularly significant for excluding the existence of true optionality between the two forms. First, it is important to note that the compatibility with telicity and small quantity is related to an observation made by Pinzin and Poletto (2021), who show that *di*+ART indefinites are incompatible with sentences denoting what they call “habitual long-term activities”, that is, sentences describing events that occur over a long period of time. This incompatibility is demonstrated below.

- (39) Costruisco (\**delle*) *case* da 30 anni, ma una così brutta  
 build.PRES.1SG di+ART houses from 30 years but one so ugly  
 non l'ho mai vista.  
 not CL=AUX never see.PTCP  
 'I've been building (\*some) houses for 30 years, but I've never seen such an ugly one.'

[Adapted from Pinzin & Poletto 2021: 17, (12)-(13)]

This example illustrates that *di*+ART indefinites, unlike BNs, are incompatible with a habitual long-term sentence. I argue that this incompatibility arises because the presence of such a nominal expression in this context would trigger an infelicitous interpretation, according to which the speaker has been building the same (small) set of houses for 30 years. Notice that the same unacceptable interpretation would be triggered by the use of the strong indefinite *some* in English, as the provided translation shows. This test illustrates a significant environment where only BNs, but not *di*+ART nominal, are acceptable, thereby confirming that no true optionality exists between the two forms.

A second environment that constitutes evidence for the lack of optionality, closely related with the above observation, is the outcome of a questionnaire run in Cardinaletti and Giusti (2020). In this study, Italian speakers provided acceptability judgments for sentences with different indefinite nominal expressions. Crucially, in a negative habitual sentence like *I don't eat potatoes*, which forces a narrow scope interpretation of the indefinite nominal expression in object position, only 3 out of 82 participants accepted the *di*+ART form in (40a). The rest of participants preferred either a BN (40b), an indefinite definite (40c), or both.

(40)a. Non mangio *delle patate*.

not eat.PRES.1SG *di*+ART potatoes

b. Non mangio *patate*.

not eat.PRES.1SG potatoes

c. non mangio *le<sub>indef</sub> patate*.

not eat.PRES.1SG ART potatoes

Intended reading: 'I don't eat potatoes.'

These results clearly indicate that *di*+ART nominals favor a specific interpretation, preventing thus a narrow scope reading under negation in habitual contexts. The preferred wide scope reading, on the contrary, would correspond to an infelicitous interpretation whereby there is a (small) set of specific potatoes that I don't habitually eat.<sup>43</sup>

However, consider the affirmative counterpart of (40a) below.

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<sup>43</sup> This tendency for a wide scope, specific reading with respect to negation is reminiscent of the behavior of Spanish *unos* and French *des*-phrases, which led Martí (2008, 2009) and Dobrovie-Sorin (2021) to attribute a positive polarity status to these forms.

- (40)a'. #Mangio *delle* patate.  
 eat.PRES.1SG di+ART potatoes  
 Intended reading ‘I eat potatoes.’

To convey the generalization that the speaker usually eats potatoes, the use of a *di*+ART indefinite is infelicitous. This incompatibility arises because the indefinite expression in object position entails that the speaker usually eats a small set of potatoes, or, alternatively, a set of specific (types of) potatoes. This shows that *di*+ART nominals are not only incompatible with long-term sentences, but with habituality more broadly.

In sum, this section has shown that the purported optionality between BNs and *di*+ART indefinites is only apparent, as these forms differ significantly in their behavior as preverbal subjects and across seven diagnostic tests that highlight the specialization of *di*+ART for specificity: (i) ability to cooccur with relative clauses; (ii) ability to be coreferential antecedents for entity-denoting pronominal anaphora; wide scope readings with (iii) negation; (iv) intensional predicates; and (v) universal quantifiers; (vi) compatibility with telicity; and (vii) small quantity meaning. Nevertheless, it has also been observed that only BNs, but not *di*+ART nominals, are felicitous in habitual long-term scenarios and in habitual sentences. Table 1 summarizes these differences. The complementary distribution illustrated in the table categorically excludes true optionality.

	Romance BNs	Italian <i>di</i> +ART
Co-occurrence with relative clauses	-	+
Preverbal subject	-	+
Wide scope with negation	-	+
Wide scope with intensional predicates	-	+
Wide scope with universal quantifiers	-	+
Coreferentiality	-	+
Telicity	-	+
Small quantity reading	-	+
Habitual long-term sentences	+	-
Habitual sentences	+	-

Table 1. Romance BNs and Italian *di*+ART nominals

The differences observed above between Romance BNs and Italian *di*+ART nominals, call for a comparison with French, a language that only possesses one indefinite form, namely *des*-phrases. Next section is devoted precisely to this comparison.

### 3.3.2 French ‘*des*-phrases’

The comparison between Italian *di*+ART nominals and French *des*-phrases has a twofold motivation. First, *des*-phrases are often regarded as the closest counterpart of Romance BNs (e.g., Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 2003). Second, they represent the morphological equivalent of Italian *di*+ART indefinites, as confirmed also by their parallel diachronic evolution (Luraghi & Albonico 2021; Carlier & Lamiroy 2022). This section therefore examines the behavior of French *des*-phrases across grammatical environments analogous to those considered above.

Although *des*-phrases are often equated with BNs, it is necessary to notice that they behave differently, and therefore closer to *di*+ART indefinites, with respect to many of the diagnostics introduced in the previous section. For instance, Carlier (2021) note that *des*-phrases, unlike BNs, can occur unmodified as preverbal subjects of s-level predicates (*cf.* Bosveld-de Smet 2004). Consider the following sentence, corresponding to the literal translation of the Italian example in (34b).

(41) *Des enfants sonnaient les cloches.* (M. Déon)<sup>44</sup>

de+ART children ring.IPFV.3PL the bells

‘(Some) children were ringing the bells.’

(Carlier 2021: 83, ex. (13))

Moreover, French *des*-phrases are known to be compatible with specificity (Bosveld-de Smet 1998, 2004; Ihsane 2008, among others). This ability is illustrated in (42), which corresponds to the Italian example in (35b), where the *des*-phrase is felicitous when cooccurring with a relative clause.

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<sup>44</sup> Notably, in most cases, Carlier (2021) discusses real examples found in existing French texts.

- (42) Aujourd'hui, j'ai rencontré *des garçons* qu'on m'avait  
 today I-AUX meet.PTCP de+ART boys that-one CL-AUX  
 présentés hier.  
 introduce.PTCP yesterday  
 "Today I met some boys someone introduced to me yesterday."

The compatibility with specific readings attested above implies that *des*-phrases should easily scopally interact with other logical operators in the sentence. Nonetheless, the situation is not so clear-cut, as there does not appear to be consensus in the literature regarding the scope abilities of *des*-phrases. Most authors regard wide scope readings of French *des*-phrases as a marginal possibility, often considered to be distinctively marked (e.g., Attal 1976; Bosveld-de Smet 1998, 2004; Dobrovie-Sorin & Beyssade 2012). However, let us take a look at the following examples containing intensional predicates.

- (43)a. Berthe veut rencontrer *des linguistes*.  
 Berthe want.PRES.3SG meet.INF de+ART linguists.  
 'Berthe wants to meet some linguists.'

(Galmiche 1986: 48, (36))

- b. "Giscard veut parler à *des intellectuels de gauche*. [...]  
 Giscard want.PRES.3SG talk.INF to de+ART intellectuals of left  
 Il a suggéré, entre autres noms, le vôtre". (G. Halimi)  
 he AUX suggest.PTCP among other names the yours  
 "Giscard wants to talk to some left-wing intellectuals. [...] He suggested,  
 among other names, yours".'

(Adapted from Carlier 2021: 87, (26))

- c. [Il e]st allé à plusieurs reprises sous le feu de l'ennemi chercher  
 he AUX go.PTCP to several times under the fire of the-enemy seek.INF  
*des blessés<sub>i</sub>* entre les tranchées françaises et allemandes et  
 de+ART wounded among the ditches French and German and  
*les<sub>i</sub>* a ramenés. (H. Bordeaux)  
 them AUX bring.back.PTCP  
 'He went several times under enemy fire to seek some wounded persons among  
 the French and German ditches and brought them back.'

(Carlier 2021: 95, (50))

Although the wide scope interpretation of the *des*-phrase is generally considered marginal and marked, Galmiche (1986: 48) maintains that a wide scope reading is available for the indefinite expression in (43a), as the sentence is compatible with the scenario where there are certain specific linguists that Berthe wants to meet.

In (43b), moreover, Giscard appears to have in mind certain left-wing intellectuals he wants to talk to, which would correspond to a wide scope reading of the *des*-phrase over the intensional predicate. This reading would align with an epistemically specific interpretation (*sensu* Haspelmath 1997, Farkas 2002; von Heusinger 2011, among others).

Similarly, (43c) is argued by Carlier (2021) to be compatible with a scenario where certain identifiable wounded individuals were retrieved from the French and German trenches, which aligns with a wide scope reading of the indefinite over the alleged intensional predicate *chercher*.

However, some clarifications about the reliability of the latter two examples are necessary. On the one hand, it is worth pointing out that although (43b) seems to suggest that Giscard had a mental list of potential left-wing intellectuals he wished to approach, this does not conclusively show the existence of a wide scope interpretation for the *des*-phrase. In fact, the sentence is also compatible with an alternative scenario in which Giscard wanted to engage with any left-wing intellectual, and the individual mentioned in the continuation –namely the hearer– was accidentally one of the several potential unidentified candidates.

On the other hand, the characterization of *aller chercher* lit. ‘to go seek’ in (43c) as an intensional predicate creating an opaque context is also open to debate. The sentence denotes a situation where the subject goes to retrieve wounded individuals from the battlefield. Therefore, the predicate does not seem to create an intensional context in which some specific individuals are sought by the subject. Despite the debatable lack of intensionality, however, the relevance of this example is reinforced by the observation that the *des*-phrase in (43c), unlike Romance BNs, functions as a coreferential antecedent for entity-denoting pronominal anaphora. This indicates that, on a par with Italian *di*+ART nominals, as seen in (37b), the French *des*-phrase appears to be associated with a specific, referential interpretation in this context.

Nonetheless, it is important to stress that the most natural and unmarked pronominalization strategy for *des*-phrases, when they are associated with their unmarked non-

specific reading, involves the property-denoting clitic *en*. This is illustrated in (44), which corresponds to the French equivalent of the Italian example in (37b).

- (44) Ernest a lu des livres et Edgar en a lu aussi.  
 Ernest AUX read.PTCP de+ART books and Edgar CL AUX read.PTCP also  
 ‘Luc read books and so did Claudia.’

Moreover, *des*-phrases display a clear tendency to escape the scope of negation, a behavior attributed to the positive polarity status of these indefinites by Dobrovie-Sorin (2021). This is shown in (45), where the *des*-expression is interpreted above negation.

- (45) Des Juifs ne voulaient pas sortir de leurs maisons. Ils ont été  
 de+ART Jews NEG want.IPFV not exit.INF of their homes they AUX AUX  
 tués sur place. (F. Milewski)  
 kill.PTCP on spot  
 ‘Some Jews did not want to leave their homes. They were killed on the spot.’  
 (Carlier 2021: 89, (30))

This example describes the situation where certain Jews were killed because they did not want to exit their homes. Such a wide scope interpretation becomes easily available because the *des*-phrase structurally appears outside the domain of negation, being the preverbal subject of the negated main predicate. In fact, if the indefinite would have occurred within the scope of the negative operator, it would have surfaced postverbally as a bare *de* indefinite (i.e., *de Juifs*).<sup>45</sup>

As for the interaction with universal quantifiers, *des*-phrases are usually considered to prefer narrow scope interpretations. This aligns with their scope behavior with intensional predicates discussed above, where wide scope readings are generally marked and marginal. The narrow scope behavior is attested in (46).

- (46) Tous les participants du workshop ont lu des livres de

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<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, Carlier (2021: 89) reports existing examples with a seemingly narrow scope interpretation of a *des*-phrase with negation, acknowledging, however, that the wide scope reading is more frequent.



all the participants of-the workshop AUX read.PTCP de+ART books of  
*statistique*.  $\forall > \exists$  only  
 statistics

‘All workshop participants read books of statistics.’

(Carlier 2021: 90, (33b))

This sentence is argued to be compatible only with a narrow scope reading, whereby all workshop participants read different (non-specific) books of statistics. Despite the apparent unavailability of wide scope readings for the *des*-phrase in (46), examples are reported in the literature where wide scope interpretations appear to be possible for this indefinite expression. Consider (47).

- (47) Chaque dimanche, *des amis* viennent nous visiter.  
 every Sunday de+ART friends come.PRES.3PL us visit.INF  
 ‘Every Sunday, some friends come to visit us.’

(Bosveld-de Smet 1998: 38, (78b), reported also in Ihsane 2008: 139, (34a))

Example (47) is assumed to be scopally ambiguous. On the one hand, the sentence can denote a situation where different friends visit the speaker every Sunday, which aligns with a narrow scope reading of the *des*-phrase below the scope of the universally quantified expression *chaque dimanche* ‘every Sunday’. On the other hand, however, the sentence can also be used to describe the situation where the same specific group of friends regularly visits the speaker every Sunday, which is implied by the indefinite expression taking wide scope at LF.

As far as scope behavior is concerned, *des*-phrases appear to occupy an intermediate position between Romance BNs and *di*+ART nominals. Similar to BNs, *des*-phrases generally favor narrow scope interpretations, particularly in contexts involving intensional predicates and quantifiers. However, unlike BNs, wide scope readings are not categorically ruled out for *des*-phrases, a behavior that aligns them closer to *di*+ART indefinites.

Let us turn to telicity. It is usually claimed that French *des*-phrases cannot force a telic interpretation of the event denoted by the predicate with which they combine as internal arguments (Bosveld-de Smet 1998, 2004; Carlier 2021; cf. Ihsane 2021b). In this regard, Carlier (2021) offers the following example, which shows that a *des*-phrase is only compatible with the atelic temporal modifier *pendant cinq minutes*.

- (48) Marie a mangé des pommes { \*en une minute / pendant cinq  
 Marie AUX eat.PTCP de+ART apples in one minute for five  
 minutes}.

minutes

‘Marie ate apples { \*in one minute / for five minutes }.’

(Carlier 2021: 92, (40b))

Given the attested compatibility with atelicity, and the observation made above for Italian, it is worth to note that no ‘small quantity’ meaning has been attributed to *des*-phrases in the literature. On the contrary, Bosveld-de Smet (2004: 44) argues that “NPs construed with *des* and *du* have neither intrinsic quantitative nor intrinsic identificational force”. Precisely the lack of a quantitative interpretation is claimed to make *des*-phrases incompatible with telicity. In other words, the event described in (48) is not interpreted as one in which Marie ate a small quantity of apples, arguably precluding a telic interpretation.<sup>46</sup>

Accordingly, the lack of a small quantity readings for *des*-phrases predicts their compatibility with long term activities and habitual contexts. This prediction is confirmed by the French translation of the long-term habitual sentence in (39) from Italian.

- (49) Je construis des maisons depuis 30 ans...

I build.PRES.1SG de+ART houses since 30 years

‘I’ve been building (\*some) houses for 30 years...’

Moreover, *des*-phrases can also be used in the object position of an habitual statement, as attested in the following example expressing the generalization that horses eat carrots.

- (50) Les chevaux mangent des carottes.

the horses eat.pres.3pl de+ART carrots

‘Horses eats carrots.’

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<sup>46</sup> See, however, Ihsane (2021b) who provides minor examples in which *des*-phrases are compatible with telicity in relation to epistemic specificity. We come back to this issue in Section 6.

To summarize, the discussion in this section highlights significant distinctions between French *des*-phrases and Romance BNs across different diagnostics. Specifically, it has been shown that *des*-phrases, partially like Italian *di*+ART nominals, display: (i) the ability to convey specific readings when co-occurring with relative clauses; (ii) the ability to occur as unmodified preverbal subjects; (iii) the ability to function as coreferential antecedents for entity-denoting pronominal anaphora (although they have been shown to be typically pronominalized by the property-denoting clitic *en*); and the ability to convey wide scope interpretations with (iv) intensional predicates, (v) negation, and (vi) universal quantifiers, even if the latter scenarios are generally considered to correspond to marked and marginal readings.<sup>47</sup> This is why they are classified as -/+ in Table 2. However, French *des*-phrases have been shown to behave similarly to BNs and differently from with respect to (vii) telicity; (viii) small quantity readings; (ix) long-term sentences; and (x) habitual sentences in general.

	<b>Romance BNs</b>	<b>French <i>des</i>- phrases</b>	<b>Italian <i>di</i>+ART</b>
<b>Co-occurrence with relative clauses</b>	-	+	+
<b>Preverbal subject</b>	-	+	+
<b>Wide scope with negation</b>	-	-/+	+
<b>Wide scope with intensional predicates</b>	-	-/+	+
<b>Wide scope with universal quantifiers</b>	-	-/+	+
<b>Coreferentiality</b>	-	-/+	+
<b>Telicity</b>	-	-	+
<b>Small quantity reading</b>	-	-	+
<b>Habitual long-term sentences</b>	+	+	-
<b>Habitual sentences</b>	+	+	-

**Table 2.** Romance BNs, French *des*-phrases, and Italian *di*+ART nominals

Table 2 illustrates that Italian *di*+ART nominals, unlike Romance BNs and French *des*-phrases, convey telic interpretations and ‘small quantity’ meanings. This possibility

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<sup>47</sup> Dobrovie-Sorin and Beyssade (2012), building on Attal (1976) and Bosveld-de Smet (1998), attribute the marginal wide scope behavior of *des*-phrases –but not of mass *du/de la*-phrases– to their ability to convey a marked, strong reading. These authors assume that this capacity likely stems from the presence of an overt determiner, which signals the choice of a particular plurality isolated from other pluralities in the domain of reference.

comes as a significant surprise, given that neither indefinite form is associated with a proper quantificational structure. We come back to this issue below. Before proceeding, however, we now delve deeper into the interaction between Italian *di*+ART indefinites and other quantifier-like expressions within the same clause.

### 3.4 A new puzzle

This section presents an interpretative puzzle – previously unaddressed in the literature on *di*+ART nominals – which arises from a detailed examination of the scope behavior of this indefinite form.

The observations presented above, along with the literature review conducted in the earlier parts of this chapter, have conclusively established that *di*+ART nominals lack any inherent quantificational structure. However, as this section will demonstrate, these indefinites do not semantically correspond to simple existential quantifiers of the generalized quantifier type either (*cf.* Le Bruyn 2007). This conclusion stems from an empirical observation that, to the best of my knowledge, has not been addressed in the existing literature. Concretely, as illustrated in (51), *di*+ART expressions exhibit the ability to interpretatively escape scope islands.<sup>48</sup>

- (51) Tutti i professori hanno sentito la notizia che *degli* studenti  
all the professors AUX hear.PTCP the news that *di*+ART students  
hanno copiato.  
AUX cheat.PTCP  
‘All the professors have heard the news that some students cheated.’

The sentence above allows for three readings, each corresponding to a different scope position of the *di*+ART expression at the level of semantic representation: a narrowest, an intermediate, and a widest scope. The narrowest scope interpretation corresponds to a bound variable reading of the nominal expression. Under this reading, (51) denotes a situation where all the contextually salient professors heard the news that some unidentified students cheated. The intermediate reading, on the other hand, is often dubbed as the “functional reading”. This interpretation corresponds to a situation where each professor

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<sup>48</sup> Island-free scope behavior is a cross-linguistic phenomenon typically associated with indefinites expressions. It has been extensively studied in relation to the English indefinite determiner *a(n)* (Fodor & Sag 1982; Abush 1994; Reinhart 1997; Winter 1997; among many others).

heard the news that a different group of students cheated. That is, it involves a reading where the students that cheated co-vary with the professors hearing the news.<sup>49</sup> Finally, the widest scope reading of the *di*+ART nominal in (51) corresponds to an interpretation in which there exist some specific students such that all professors heard the news that these particular students cheated. Crucially, under this reading, the *di*+ART nominal *degli studenti* needs to (apparently) take scope over the universal quantifier. However, this reading implies that *degli studenti* interpretatively escapes the syntactic island created by the relative clause modifying the noun *notizia*.

The scope freedom displayed by *di*+ART mirrors that of other (strong) indefinites, such as Spanish and Catalan *un(o)s*, but contrasts with that of other (strong) quantifiers like the universal *tutti* ‘every’ in Italian, as well as *ogni* ‘each’, or the proportional quantifier *most*, whose scope behavior is severely constrained by syntactic islands (Fodor & Sag 1982). This contrast is illustrated in the following examples in Catalan and Italian, respectively.

- (52)a. Alguns professors han sentit la notícia que *uns* *estudiants* han  
 some professors AUX hear.PTCP the news that some students AUX  
 copiat. Catalan  
 cheat.PTCP  
 ‘Some professors heard the news that some students cheated.’
- b. Alcuni professori hanno sentito la notizia che *tutti i miei studenti*  
 some professors AUX hear.PTCP the news that all the my students  
 hanno copiato. Italian  
 AUX cheat.PTCP  
 ‘Some professors heard the news that every student of mine cheated.’

The sentence in (52a), involving the strong indefinite *uns* in Catalan, is compatible with the three interpretations described for the Italian example in (51). By contrast, the example in (52b), which contains the universal quantifier *tutti*, is not ambiguous and is only

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<sup>49</sup> The existence of an intermediate reading of indefinites has been a subject of considerable debate. Fodor and Sag’s (1982), for instance, propose that strong indefinites are ambiguous between a quantificational and a referential interpretation, with the latter allowing for an island-free scope behavior. Therefore, under this view, intermediate scopes are predicted to not be available. However, there are scholars such as Farkas (1981), Abusch (1994), Schlenker (2006), among others, who contend that the intermediate readings do, in fact, exist. This perspective challenges a strict quantificational vs. referential analysis and suggests a more nuanced view of the interpretive possibilities associated with indefinites, as defended in this chapter.

compatible with an interpretation in which the expression *tutti i miei studenti* is interpreted below the scope of the existential introduced by *alcuni* at LF. Specifically, the sentence denotes the situation where there exist some professors that heard the news that every student of mine failed.<sup>50</sup>

Let us now turn to French *des*-phrases. As mentioned in the previous section, *des*-phrases typically align with Romance BNs and only license narrow scope interpretations in the presence of the universal quantifier. However, Ihsane (2008) offers the following example, which shows that *des*-phrases can be in fact interpreted outside syntactic islands.

- (53) Tous les étudiants ont raconté plusieurs histoires qui impliquaient  
all the students AUX tell.PTCP several stories that involve.PRES.3PL  
*des membres* de la famille royale.  
de+ART members of the family royal  
‘All the students told several stories that involved some members of the Royal Family.’

(Ihsane 2008: 152, (76a))

Ihsane (2008: 152ff) notes that this sentence is compatible with three different interpretations, each related to a different scope position of the *des*-phrase. Under the narrowest possible reading, the example in (53), in line with (51), describes a situation where all students told stories involving any unspecified member of the Royal Family. Under the widest scope interpretation, where the *des*-phrase takes scope outside the relative clause and above the universal quantifier, the sentence implies that all students told stories about the same specific members of the Royal Family. Lastly, Ihsane (2008) observes that (53) also allows for an intermediate scope reading, in which the members of the Royal Family covary with the students telling the stories.

Building on a longstanding tradition (e.g., Beghelli 1995; Zamparelli 2000, among others), Ihsane (2008) accounts for these different readings by proposing a multi-layered, telescopic DP structure for *des*-phrases, comprising distinct functional projections within

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<sup>50</sup> As will become clearer in the following pages, the availability of the widest reading of *uns* in (52a) but not of *tutti* in (52b), is captured by the syntactically-driven approach to indefiniteness, specificity and anti-specificity postulated by Espinal and Cyrino (2022a). Notice that only *uns*, but not *tutti*, is argued to select for DE-phrases. Hence, only *uns*, in contrast to *tutti*, is predicted to allow the application of a semantic choice function and to exhibit a similar scope pattern to that of *di*+ART nominals.

the DP. According to this proposal, French *des*-phrases exhibit a three-way ambiguity: *des*-phrases that take widest scope are considered inherently referential; intermediate *des*-phrases are assumed to be quantificational and therefore unable to escape scope islands; and those that take narrowest possible scope are taken to be property-denoting. Moreover, to account for these three distinct scope readings, Ihsane (2008) maps each type of *des*-phrase –corresponding to a distinct interpretation– onto a different functional projection, targeted by a Quantifier Raising mechanism (May 1977, 1985).

In the next section, however, an alternative proposal will be developed. In stark contrast with Ihsane’s (2008) syntactic account, the theory to be outlined below adopts a more minimalist approach to the structure of indefiniteness in Romance.

### 3.5 The proposal

#### 3.5.1 The structure of indefiniteness in Romance

A growing body of recent literature highlights the advantages of positing a unified structure for plural (and mass) indefinite expressions in Romance. For instance, Cardinaletti and Giusti, in a series of contributions on Italian and Italo-Romance varieties (e.g., Giusti 1992, 2002, 2015, 2021a; Cardinaletti & Giusti 2015, 2016, 2018, 2020), advocate for the following structure for Italo-Romance indefinites.

$$(54) \quad [_{DP} \ 0_{def/indef} / de_{indef} [_{D'} \ 0/il/lo/la/i/gli/le \ [_{NP}]]]$$

[Adapted from Cardinaletti & Giusti 2018: 141, (10)]

This structure naturally captures the existence of the four plural and mass Italo-Romance indefinite forms introduced in previous chapters: BNs, bare *di*, plural/mass indefinite definites, and *di*+ART. These forms, in fact, correspond to the four logical possibilities for the surface realization of the structure in (54). More concretely, (i) BNs surface when both SpecDP and the D head are covert; (ii) bare *di* corresponds to the overt realization of SpecDP and the covert expression of the D head; (iii) indefinite definites result from the covert realization of SpecDP combined with the overt realization of the D head (as *il / lo / la / l' / i / gli / le*); and, finally, (iv) when both SpecDP and the D head are overtly realized, *di*+ART nominals are derived. These four possibilities are illustrated in the following table.

Spec	Head	Output with mass Ns	Output with plural Ns
0	0	<i>vino</i>	<i>violette</i>
0	<i>il</i>	<i>il vino</i>	<i>le violette</i>
<i>di</i>	0	<i>di vino</i>	<i>di violette</i>
<i>di</i>	<i>il</i>	<i>del vino</i>	<i>delle violette</i>

**Table 3.** Indefinite determiners in Italo-Romance [Adapted from Cardinaletti & Giusti 2018: 141, (10)].

This proposal not only supports the determiner status of *di*+ART nominals but has also the welcome advantage of providing a minimalist and unified structure for the indefinite forms in Italo-Romance.

Some clarifications are in order, however. For instance, it is important to note that the structure in (54) equally applies to definite and indefinite plural and mass expressions. In Cardinaletti and Giusti’s framework, (in)definiteness is attributed to a (c)overt (in)definite operator sitting in SpecDP. The morphologically definite article in the D head, meanwhile, is claimed to encode mere morphological features associated with N (e.g., number, gender, and case) and to be semantically inert.

This assumption is plausible and consistent with the analysis of indefiniteness, as the indefinite operator *di* is morphophonologically realized in two of the four Italo-Romance indefinite forms, and it also appears with right or left dislocated BNs. The relevant examples are repeated below from Chapter 2.

- (55)a. *(Di) libri, ne ho letti.*  
DE books NE AUX read.PTCP  
b. *Ne ho letti, di libri.*  
NE AUX read.PTCP de books  
‘Books, I read some.’

(Espinal & Giusti 2024: 2, (3))

Despite these advantages, the proposal encounters significant challenges, especially when the analysis of definiteness is considered. First, it remains unclear what is the exact semantic contribution of the (c)overt indefinite operator, as the Cardinaletti and Giusti do not specify whether they assume that it is *de* that introduces existential quantification or if the quantificational force necessary to become a semantic argument of the predicate comes from elsewhere in the derivation (e.g., VP-level existential closure à la Heim 1982;



*cf.* Diesing 1992). Furthermore, a central theoretical issue concerns the fact that Cardinaletti and Giusti’s theory goes against standard semantic analyses of definiteness, which take definite articles to unambiguously translate into iota functions at the level of logical representation. Lastly, a more pressing empirical concern arises with the postulated covert definite operator. As will be discussed also in the following chapters, the postulation of abstract semantic operators is theoretically consistent and explanatorily adequate only if they have overt linguistic instantiations in some languages. However, across the Romance languages examined in the present thesis, definiteness is systematically expressed via definite articles, while the proposed definite operator appears to never be overtly realized.<sup>51</sup>

In view of these shortcomings, the present dissertation adopts the unified account for plural and mass indefinite forms in Romance proposed by Espinal and Cyrino (2022a, 2022b). Specifically, Espinal and Cyrino (2022a, 2022b) posit the following syntactic structure for Romance plural and mass indefinite expressions, respectively.<sup>52</sup>

- (56)a.  $[_D DE [_D [_{iPLURALIZER:PL} [_{D_{def}} [n]]]]]$                       - *indefinite plural count nouns*  
       b.  $[_D DE [_D D_{def} [n]]]$                                                       - *indefinite mass nouns*

[Adapted from Espinal & Cyrino 2022a: 55, (13)]

According to this account, indefiniteness in Romance results from an indefinite operator *DE* syntactically merged above a definite determiner. Following Cyrino and Espinal (2020), the structure in (56a) illustrates that, within the nominal domain, the *PLURALIZER* in Romance is syntactically adjoined to *D* – or, alternatively, a categorized *d* root – and is syntactically opaque, sharing the same label as its host (namely, *D*).<sup>53</sup> Thus, in unmarked cases the *PLURALIZER* functions a modifying feature on *D* (Dobrovie-Sorin 2012, see also Bouchard 2002), and instantiations of plural marking within the nominal domain are conceived of as the output of morphophonological concord, a post-syntactic operation.

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<sup>51</sup> Another potential issue with Cardinaletti and Giusti’s account, as pointed out in Espinal & Cyrino (2022b), concerns the positioning of the indefinite operator *de* in SpecDP, despite its inability to take a phrasal form.

<sup>52</sup> The proposal aligns with Zamparelli’s (2000) and Ihsane’s (2008) insights that multiple layers should be postulated within the DP. However, unlike these approaches –which posit that definiteness has a more complex structure than indefiniteness– the structure in (56) assumes that indefiniteness is built on top of definiteness.

<sup>53</sup> This account departs from the standard view (e.g., Borer 2005; Wiltschko 2008; Alexiadou 2019) by assuming that Number in Romance does not project a morphosyntactic functional head. This issue is revisited in Chapter 5.

At Spell-Out, both the operator DE and the lower D head can display different morphophonological instantiations, either with an overt or covert exponent. As a result, much like Cardinaletti and Giusti’s proposal, the theory of indefiniteness developed by Espinal and Cyrino (2022a, 2022b) offers a minimalist and elegant structural account for all plural and mass indefinite forms in Romance. According to this analysis, Romance BNs arise when neither the indefinite operator DE nor the D head are realized; Italian *di*+ART and French *des*-phrases involve the overt Spell-Out of both elements; bare *di/de*, found in both French and Italo-Romance, reflects the overt realization of DE alone; and indefinite definites correspond to the overt realization of the D, with DE remaining silent.

With this structural architecture in place, let us turn to the semantic analysis of the indefinite forms corresponding to the structure in (56). From a semantic perspective, the indefinite operator DE parallels Partee’s (1987) type shifting operator IDENT. Accordingly, at the level of logical representation, DE shifts entities of type  $\langle e \rangle$ —corresponding to the denotation of the definite description below DE, derived by the iota operator contributed by the definite article—into property-denoting expressions of type  $\langle e, t \rangle$ . This semantic type is widely associated with weak indefinites in the literature (McNally & Van Geenhoven 1997; Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 2003; McNally 2004, 2020; Dobrovie-Sorin et al. 2005, 2006, among others). A crucial distinction between Cardinaletti and Giusti’s analysis and Espinal & Cyrino’s thus lies in the treatment of the definite article: in the latter approach, the definite article is assumed to be semantically active in the early stages of the derivation, only to be later nullified by the indefinite operator DE.

One might question whether the proposal outlined in this section essentially mirrors Chierchia’s (1998a) analysis of *di*+ART nominals, as both posit that the definite article in these constructions lexicalizes the *iota* function at some stage in the derivation. However, it is important to note a key difference: in Chierchia’s (1998a) compositional account, the definite article remains semantically active throughout the entire derivation, maintaining its usual presupposition of existence. By contrast, in the approach developed here, the semantic contribution of the definite article in the structure in (57) is entirely canceled by the indefinite operator DE. This distinction is crucial, as it captures the non-presuppositional nature of *di*+ART nominals, as demonstrated by Storto (2003) and further discussed in Section 3.2.1.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> The assumptions underlying the account defended in this thesis also differ from Zamparelli’s (2008a) analysis of *di*+ART nominals, which posits that the definite article contributes kind-denotation.

Given the unified account adopted in this dissertation, an adequate explanation is required for the distributional and interpretative differences between Romance BNs and Italian *di*+ART nominals discussed in Chapter 2 and earlier sections of this chapter. In particular, if DE is of type  $\langle e \langle e, t \rangle \rangle$ , why should *di*+ART nominals behave differently from BNs, especially with respect to their ability to appear in preverbal subject position, their different pronominalization strategies, their availability in generic and habitual contexts, and their scope behavior?

### 3.5.2 A choice function analysis of ‘*di*+ART’

This section develops a novel semantic analysis of *di*+ART nominals. Building on the hypothesis that a single syntactic structure can correspond to distinct logical types (Williams 1983), I propose that *di*+ART indefinites, along with French *des*-phrases, differ from BNs in their ability to introduce stable discourse referents. To account for this distinction, I adopt Dobrovie-Sorin & Beyssade (2012: 72ff) assumption that the presence of an overt determiner is required to convey a strong reading. Consequently, unlike BNs, *di*+ART nominals (and French *des*-phrases) can introduce discourse referents and convey strong readings because the overt determiner signals the selection of a particular plurality, distinct from others within the domain of reference. This isolated plurality, marked by the presence of an overt determiner, is thus interpreted as a plural individual – a distinct plural entity from any other plural entity in the relevant domain (Dobrovie-Sorin & Beyssade 2012).

Semantically, this distinction can be captured by arguing that the indefinites overtly introduced by *di*+ART are not existentially bounded by an existential closure operation at the text- or VP-level (Heim 1982). Instead, I propose that they introduce discourse referents bound to a semantic choice function (Reinhart 1997; Winter 1997; von Heusinger 2011, among others).<sup>55</sup> The possibility to contribute discourse referents displayed by *di*+ART nominals (and *des*-phrases) accounts for their ability to appear preverbally and to license specific readings, as these indefinite expressions can be associated with a choice function that takes wide scope.

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<sup>55</sup> Intriguingly, Pinzin and Poletto (2022) have recently independently postulated a choice function feature in the morphosyntactic composition of *di*+ART expressions. However, their approach is purely morphosyntactic and, as the same authors explicitly acknowledge, should not be equated with Reinhart’s (1997) original proposal. Moreover, their approach does not address the exceptional scope behavior of *di*+ART discussed in this chapter.

As discussed in Chapter 1, this dissertation adheres to a definition of specificity in terms of referential anchoring (von Heusinger 2011, 2019), according to which a specific reading is brought about by the anchoring of a referent to another salient element in the discourse domain (e.g., the subject, quantified expression, or even the speaker). More concretely, I assume that the specific readings associated with *di*+ART nominals result from the application of a semantic choice function. Choice functions are functions that take non-empty sets as their input (i.e., the extension of the common noun introduced by *di*+ART) and return specific (sub-)sets as their output, which are necessarily members of the initial set. Therefore, choice functions convey referential specificity (Winter 2002).

Let us see in more detail the consequences of the approach just proposed. First, this proposal accounts for several of the properties discussed earlier, such as the ability to co-occur with relative clauses, establish coreference with entity-type resumptive pronouns, and engage in scope interactions with logical operators –especially, as discussed in the remainder of this section, with universal quantifiers.

Second, this proposal naturally accounts for the availability of generic readings for *di*+ART nominals in characterizing sentences, as illustrated in the example repeated below from Chapter 2.

- (57) *Dei veri italiani mangiano (sempre) gli spaghetti. Italian*  
*di+ART true Italians eat.PRES.3PL always the spaghetti*  
 ‘True Italians (always) eat spaghetti’

(Zamparelli 2008a: 306, (17b))

Since I assume that only *di*+ART indefinites, but not BNs, introduce discourse referents, it follows that they are not only bound by choice functions but also by most operators, including the generic one, which is obligatorily present in characterizing statements (Krifka et al. 1995; see Dobrovie-Sorin & Beyssade 2012; Le Bruyn & Pozas-Loyo 2014 for similar observations regarding French *des*-phrases). This implies that the generic interpretation of *di*+ART indefinites does not stem from genuine kind-denotation but rather from the presence of a generic operator at the level of semantic representation (Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 2003; Dobrovie-Sorin & Beyssade 2012; Le Bruyn & Pozas-Loyo 2014).<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Recall that Romance languages use definite descriptions to refer to kinds (Laca 1990; Zamparelli 2002; Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 2003; Borik & Espinal 2015, among many others)

As a result, *di*+ART cannot denote kinds but only trigger taxonomic interpretations in combination with k-level predicates, as discussed in Section 3.2.3. Their generic interpretation, therefore, differs from that of (plural) definites and instead aligns with that of characterizing sentences containing the singular indefinite article. In this regard, Corblin (1987) notes that singular and plural indefinites compete in characterizing environment, with Romance languages generally preferring the singular indefinite article as the default option for generic sentences without kind reference, provided plurality is not inherently at stake.

Third, and perhaps more importantly, an account based on choice functions provides a natural explanation for the island-free scope behavior that characterizes *di*+ART indefinites, as choice functions can be existentially bound at any scope position (Reinhart 1997, Winter 1997). Consider once again example (51), repeated below for convenience as (58), together with the proposed semantic representations of its three possible readings in (59).

- (58) Tutti i professori hanno sentito la notizia che *degli* studenti  
all the professors AUX hear.PTCP the news that *di*+ART students  
hanno copiato.  
AUX cheat.PTCP

‘All the professors have heard the news that some students cheated.’

- (59)a.  $\forall x[\text{professors}(x) \rightarrow \text{heard}(x, \text{the news that } x\text{'s students copied})]$   
– *narrowest scope: bound variable interpretation of the indefinite*  
b.  $\forall x[\text{professors}(x) \rightarrow \exists f[\text{CH}(f) \wedge \text{heard}(x, \text{the news that } f(\text{students}) \text{ copied})]]$   
– *intermediate scope: “functional” reading of the indefinite*  
c.  $\exists f[\text{CH}(f) \wedge \forall x[\text{professors}(x) \rightarrow \text{heard}(x, \text{the news that } f(\text{students}) \text{ copied})]]$   
– *widest scope: specific reading of the indefinite*

(59a) illustrates the bound variable interpretation of the indefinite, which corresponds to the narrowest scope reading. For the remaining two readings, I postulate that the *di*+ART indefinite is interpreted *in situ* but is bound to an existentially quantified choice function that can take intermediate or wide scope with respect to the universal quantifier. Under the intermediate reading in (60b), for each professor, there exists a function such that each professor heard the news that the sub-set of students selected by that function cheated. Lastly, the widest scope interpretation is captured by a representation in which there exists

a choice function such that all the professors heard the news that the set of students selected by the choice function cheated.

Fourth, if the specific readings conveyed by *di*+ART nominals correspond to referential interpretations, as implied by the present choice function account, a possible explanation for the marginal availability of specific readings with mass nouns can be sketched. If specific readings are referential readings, the denotation of the noun introduced by the indefinite determiner needs to be atomizable –that is, reducible to atomic parts– as referential readings refer to specific *individuals*. Consequently, the apparent lack of specific readings of *di*+ART in combination with mass nouns observed in Section 3.3 necessarily relates to the ontological domain of reference that characterizes mass nouns and distinguishes them from plural count nouns. Both plural and mass nouns are known to exhibit cumulative reference (Quine 1960; Krifka 1989), and their domain of reference is traditionally structured as a join semi-lattice that follows a part-of relation (Link 1983; Landman 1989a, 1989b). Despite this similarity, however, pluralities form an *atomic* join semi-lattice with atoms – i.e., individual entities – as their bottom line. Mass nouns, in contrast, refer to amounts of matter rather than sets of individuals. This means that they are to be non-atomic, at least not in their linguistic representation (Link 1983; Landman 1989a, 1989b; Doetjes 2011). Consequently, their extension can be argued to correspond to a join semi-lattice lacking the bottom line.

Crucially, I propose that it is precisely this ontological difference that renders the application of a semantic choice function to a mass noun to refer to a specific, referentially anchored portion of matter, more difficult to achieve, as referential readings single out one or more *individuals*.<sup>57</sup> Despite this difficulty, however, Section 3.3 has shown that mass nouns can indeed receive a specific interpretation when other prosodic or syntactic factors restrict the referential boundaries of the portion of matter denoted by the mass nouns. These factors include, among others, contrastive anaphors, relative clauses, or contrastive focus. Following von Stechow's (2011: 1030) observation that “the more descriptive content a noun phrase has, the more likely it is to have a specific reading”, I assume that when additional factors contribute more descriptive content to a mass noun, a specific reading becomes more feasible to achieve. In such cases, a choice function may apply to mass nouns as well, as in example (33a): [...] *questa sera ho mangiato del pane che avevo messo a tostare* ‘this evening I ate some bread I toasted.’

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<sup>57</sup> For a similar account in relation to the lack of specific readings with mass *de/de la*-phrases in French, see Ihsane (2008)

The proposal outlined in this section successfully explains the specific and generic readings associated with *di*+ART expressions, their exceptional scope behavior, and the relative difficulty of obtaining specific readings with mass *di*+ART. Nonetheless, an important question remains: why cannot BNs be picked up by choice functions, despite Espinal and Cyrino’s (2022a, 2022b) unified structural analysis, which treats them on par with Italian *di*+ART and French *des*-phrases?

I have argued that only overt DE-indefinites, but not BNs, feature the presence of an overt determiner. Therefore, only the former introduce discourse referents and are compatible with strong readings, since the overt determiner signals the choice of a particular plurality within the domain. In contrast, BNs cross-linguistically correspond to weak indefinite expressions and, therefore, denote properties of type  $\langle e, t \rangle$  (Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 1996, 2003; Laca 1999; McNally 2004, 2020; Dobrovie-Sorin et al. 2006, among others). In other words, unlike *di*+ART nominals, BNs do not introduce discourse referents, but merely contribute descriptive content, which must be existentially bound to function as a semantic argument of a transitive verb. This raises an important compositional question: how can the property denoted by a BN combine with a transitive predicate, given that transitive predicates typically combine with nominal expressions of type  $\langle e \rangle$  via functional application.

To resolve this compositional issue, I propose that an existential quantifier is introduced within the nuclear scope via a VP-level existential closure operation. This operation crucially introduces a variable that the property denoted by the BN predicates over (*cf.* Van Geenhoven 1998). This operation can be formally represented as follows.<sup>58</sup>

$$(60) \quad \lambda P_{\langle e, t \rangle} \lambda x \exists y [V(x, y) \wedge P(y)]$$

[Adapted from Van Geenhoven 1998:132, (1)]

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<sup>58</sup> Alternatively, one could hypothesize that the descriptive content contributed by BNs is existentially closed in a lexical manner, via semantic incorporation (Masullo 1992; Van Geenhoven 1995). This is indeed what McNally (2004: 130) seems to hint at, suggesting that Spanish BNs “resemble incorporated nominals [...] without requiring that they be incorporated in any interesting syntactic or morphological sense”. By contrast, McNally and Van Geenhoven (1997) take a more categorical stance, arguing that all weak indefinites are semantically incorporated. However, this perspective entails that all transitive verbs that select argumental BNs (and weak indefinites in general) are lexically ambiguous, alternating between a variant allowing semantic incorporation (of type  $\langle \langle e, t \rangle \langle e, t \rangle \rangle$ ), and the canonical variant selecting two entities (of type  $\langle e, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle$ ).

As shown in (60), I propose that it is not the BN itself that introduces a variable at the level of logical representation, but rather the existential quantifier introduced by the VP-level existential closure operation (*cf.* Heim 1982; Diesing 1992).

This account naturally explains the behavior of BNs discussed in section 3.3. First, it accounts for why BNs are obligatorily resumed by the property-denoting clitic *ne*, as they denote properties rather than individuals. Second, it explains their relegation to postverbal positions, given that existential closure applies locally at the VP-level. Finally, it provides an explanation for their obligatorily narrow scope behavior: since their existential force is introduced within the VP, BNs cannot scope over other scope-bearing elements, which by definition have scope above the VP domain.

This section has fleshed out our syntactic and semantic assumptions concerning the expression of indefiniteness in Romance. Additionally, an explanation has been provided for the interpretative and distributional differences between Romance BNs and Italian *di*+ART nominals / French *des*-phrases. I have argued that, despite sharing the same syntactic structure –namely, (56)– Italian *di*+ART nominals and French *des*-phrases introduce discourse referents that are subsequently interpreted via a semantic choice function at the level of logical representation. This mechanism accounts for the island-free scope behavior exhibited by these nominal expressions. The next section will address the differences between Italian *di*+ART indefinites and French *des*-phrases, focusing primarily on their (a)telicity and the (absence of a) small quantity reading.

### 3.6 Italian *di*+ART indefinites versus French *des*-phrases

This section aims to explain two significant contrasts between Italian *di*+ART nominals and French *des*-phrases observed above: (i) while *des*-phrases, along with Romance BNs, are associated with an atelic reading, *di*+ART nominals tend to be compatible with telicity; and (ii) only *di*+ART expressions, unlike *des*-phrases, are associated with a “small quantity” reading (see Table 2).

I contend that these differences cannot be derived from their shared syntactic structure in (56). Instead, I propose that these contrasts are pragmatically driven, arising as conversational implicatures (Grice 1989). This hypothesis is grounded on two key assumptions: (i) the absence of inherent quantificational structure for both nominals; and (ii) the inadequacy of purely semantic distinctions, such as quantization or inclusiveness, to fully account for their divergent behavior with respect to telicity.



### 3.6.1 *On telicity and small quantity readings*

As mentioned above, *di*+ART nominals, unlike *des*-phrases, are generally compatible with a telic interpretation of the event in which they occur, despite the absence of a quantificational structure that would provide adequate referential boundaries. The relevant contrast is repeated below.

- (61)a. Marie a mangé des pommes {\*en une minute / pendant cinq  
 Marie AUX eat.PTCP de+ART apples in one minute for five  
 minutes}.  
 minutes  
 ‘Marie ate apples {\*in one minute / for five minutes}.’  
 (Carlier 2021: 92, (40b))
- b. Ho raccolto delle more {in un’ ora / #per un’ ora}.  
 AUX pick.PTCP di+ART blackberries in an hour for an hour  
 (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2018: 143, (14b))

Two main explanations can be found in the literature for the atelic behavior of French *des*-phrases. First, it is important to note that *des*-phrases are usually considered to be unbounded (e.g., Bosveld-de Smet 2004: 44; Ihsane 2021b: 227).<sup>59</sup> Since referential (un)boundedness is assumed to have an impact on (a)telicity (Krifka 1989, 1992), a referentially bounded nominal is expected to correlate with a telic interpretation of the event, whereas a referentially unbounded nominal with an atelic reading. Crucially, however, this traditional explanation raises at least two issues with respect to the contrast between the French and the Italian data. On one hand, both French *des*-phrases and Italian *di*+ART indefinites have been shown to participate in scope interactions with quantifiers (recall, for instance, examples (51) and (53)). This behavior suggests that the two forms share a bounded reference (*cf.* Carlier 2021), which would lead to a telic interpretation for both kinds of nominals. Conversely, if referential boundedness was the adequate notion for

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<sup>59</sup> According to Ihsane (2021b: 228) “In the nominal domain, (un)boundedness can be related to different semantic oppositions, such as the singular/plural or the mass/count oppositions (Corver 2015): According to Corblin et al. (2004: 19), it is because *des*-NPs (and the singular *du*-NPs) do not ‘delimit individual referents that *en*-adverbials are out’.” Similarly, Carlier (2021: 77) argues that: “contrary to the indefinite singular *un*-NPs, which conceives its referent as spatially *bounded*, *du/des*-NPs do not specify the spatial limits of their referent, whether this referent is composed of individuals (*des*) or not (*du*).”

capturing the behavior of *di*+ART, the bounded interpretation of this nominal would be still left unexplained, given the absence of a proper quantificational structure.

Second, Le Bruyn and Pozas-Loyo (2014) attribute the atelic behavior of French *des*-phrases to their inherent inclusive plurality. In particular, *des*-phrases are assumed to be able to range over both individual atoms and sums thereof. As such, they are compatible with situations where only atomic individuals are involved, as illustrated in the following dialogue.

(62) Q: As-tu vu des enfants?

AUX-you see.PTCP de+ART children

A: Yes, I saw one.

(Le Bruyn & Pozas-Loyo 2014: 260, (19))

The inclusive / exclusive distinction is further claimed to have an impact on telicity. According to Le Bruyn and Pozas-Loyo (2014), the ability to range over both singularities and pluralities makes them true of both larger and shorter temporal intervals, arguably explaining their compatibility with temporal modifiers introduced by *for*, as shown in (63).

(63) J'ai cueilli des fraises pendant trois heures

I=AUX pick.PTCP de+ART strawberries for three hours

'I picked strawberries for three hours.'

(Le Bruyn & Pozas-Loyo 2014: 261, (26c))

Crucially, however, this account fails to capture the behavior of Italian *di*+ART. Despite the compatibility with telicity observed in (61b), *di*+ART must still be classified as an inclusive plural, as it can be used in contexts akin to those illustrated for French in (62).

(64) Q: Hai bocciato degli studenti?

AUX fail.PTCP di+ART students

'have you failed any students?'

A: Sì, ne ho bocciato uno.

yes CL AUX fail.PTCP one

'Yes, I failed one.'

I conclude that, by means of these criteria, the differences between French and Italian remain unexplained: *di*+ART indefinites allow telic modifiers neither because they are quantificational or quantized, nor because they are inclusive. Therefore, an alternative explanation for the contrast between Italian *di*+ART and French *des* phrases is required.

In light of the account developed in this chapter, I argue that the compatibility of *di*+ART with telicity cannot be attributed to grammatical factors. Since the syntactic structure of *di*+ART parallels that of BNs and *des*-phrases, no syntactic constraints can inherently impose a telic interpretation exclusively for *di*+ART. This, I argue, is the reason why an atelic interpretation is not entirely ungrammatical for this indefinite form and is, in fact, preferred for speakers of those dialectal varieties that lack BNs, as observed in Section 3.3. The origin of the bounded interpretation of *di*+ART must therefore be sought beyond syntax.

I argue that *di*+ART's tendency to convey a specific reading plays a crucial role in this interpretation. Consider that when the referent of *delle more* in (61b) is specific (i.e., referentially anchored, in the current framework), the speaker has in mind a particular set of blackberries they picked. Consequently, no proper subset of *delle more* interpreted specifically constitutes the same specific set denoted by *delle more*. This implies that the referent denoted by *delle more* in this specific reading is not divisible. Furthermore, the sum of *delle more* + *delle more* cannot be the same specific set blackberries (i.e., the same specific quantity of blackberries denoted by *delle more*). Therefore, a specifically interpreted *di*+ART nominal lacks cumulative reference in Quine's (1960) sense.

Conversely, this implies that when *di*+ART indefinites are interpreted specifically, their reference is bounded, as they refer to a specific quantity known to –or referentially anchored to– either the speaker or the subject. Because of this bounded reference, they can impose a telic interpretation on the event denoted by the predicate they combine with.

This account also explains why *delle more* in (61b) is (marginally) compatible with an atelic aspect, especially for speakers from regions where local dialects lack BNs. In such cases, *delle more* can receive the (usually) less-preferred non-specific interpretation. Under this reading, *di*+ART reference is not bounded but cumulative, as with Romance BNs, and, especially, French *des*-phrases, which do not exhibit a clear tendency for specific readings.

Evidence for this proposal comes from example (65), which shows that, when a non-specific interpretation for *di*+ART is forced, the indefinite expression becomes naturally compatible with atelicity.

- (65) Ho cercato (dei) sassi per appesantire l'ombrellone  
 aux seek.PTCP di+ART rocks for weigh\_down the-beach\_umbrella  
 {per ore / ??in un'ora}  
 for hours in an-hour  
 'I've been seeking stones as counterweights for the umbrella {for hours / #in an hour}.'

This sentence describes a situation where the subject has been seeking (a plurality of) stones to use them as counterweights for the umbrella, which corresponds to a non-specific interpretation of the indefinite expression (parallel to a BN).

Significantly, in this context, an atelic interpretation of the *di*+ART nominal is preferred, although the indefinite remains associated with a “small quantity” reading. Therefore, the example in (65) not only shows that, when interpreted non-specifically, *di*+ART nominals display a cumulative reference parallel to that of BNs, but also that telicity and “small quantity” meaning are independent and uncorrelated notions (*pace* Cardinaletti & Giusti 2018). Crucially, this fluctuating and partially overlapping behavior can only be accounted for by postulating the same syntactic structure for the two forms. Still, the above example illustrates that specificity has an impact on telicity. Consequently, the reason why only Italian *di*+ART nominals favor a specific reading must be due to some sort of specialization for this interpretation, which, as will be discussed, likely results from their coexistence with a competing alternative, namely BNs.

As a final note, it is relevant to note that Pinzin and Poletto (2021) argue for a morphosyntactic [qu]-feature in the derivation of *di*+ART, which the authors assume to be directly responsible for the quantitative meaning. While their approach anchors this interpretation in morphosyntax, the discussion in this section has demonstrated that the “small quantity” reading is not syntactically encoded. Instead, I have argued that, when *di*+ART indefinites are referentially anchored to a contextually salient function, they fulfill a specialized role: encoding strong indefiniteness. By singling out a particular group of individuals within their domain of reference, *di*+ART nominals inherently impose a delimitation on their referents. This characteristic –which cannot be attributed to specificity

(cf. (65))– is likely related to their partitive etymology, as *di*+ART originally entailed the extraction of a sub-plurality from a larger set. Consequently, this delimitation leads to a “small quantity” reading without requiring a dedicated quantificational feature. Essentially, I attribute this interpretation arises to the referential anchoring and partitive origin inherent to *di*+ART nominals, rather than from any specific syntactic feature or configuration.

Given this account of telicity and ‘small quantity’ meanings, the crucial differences between *di*+ART and *des*-phrases –particularly linked to the tendency to convey specificity and strong indefiniteness of the former expression– ultimately boils down to the (non-)coexistence with alternative competing forms. The next section addresses precisely this topic.

### 3.6.2 *On the (non-)existence of competing alternatives*

Grammatical theories of competition have traditionally posited that intra-speaker variation –such as the alternation and partial overlap between BNs and *di*+ART nominals observed among Italian speakers for expressing indefiniteness– stems from the existence of competing grammars (Kroch 1989, 1994). Within the Principle and Parameters framework (Chomsky 1981), this competition is usually conceptualized as arising from competing parameter settings. However, this notion of competition cannot be applied to our case, where BNs, *di*+ART nominals (and French *des*-phrases) are assumed to share an identical syntactic structure (i.e., (56)). In cases like that at hand, where two (or more) forms are associated with the same underlying configuration (e.g., *driver of trucks* vs. *truck driver*), they cannot be said to compete with one another, nor can one syntactically block the other (Ackema & Neeleman 2001).

In view of this account of grammatical competition, it must be concluded that there is no genuine syntactic competition between *di*+ART and BNs for the expression of indefiniteness in Italian. While some interpretative distinctions do exist between the two forms –particularly related to specificity, telicity, and small quantity readings– these differences cannot be attributed to grammar alone.

How, then, can the notion of competition in this context be reconceptualized in an adequate way? It is essential to recognize that although the two Italian forms have an identical syntactic structure and share the same base meaning constrained by syntax (i.e., indefiniteness), they differ in their morphophonological realization of the syntactic spine

in (56). BNs lexicalize only the lower portion of the structure, corresponding to the nominal domain, while *di*+ART indefinites lexicalize the totality of terminal nodes. This distinction suggests that the competition between the two forms does not operate at the syntactic level but rather at the level of Vocabulary Insertion (Nevins 2012). In the process of vocabulary insertion into syntactic trees, two scenarios are possible: the syntactic and semantic features associated with a vocabulary item may either match the target syntactic tree or rather correspond to a super-tree of it. This, I propose, is precisely what occurs in the case of vocabulary insertion of Romance indefinite structures. While BNs and *di*+ART nominals share the same formal features, *di*+ART indefinites represent the complete syntactic tree at the time of vocabulary insertion, whereas BNs instantiate only a subset of the structure. In this sense, competition shifts from the syntactic to the morphophonological domain: vocabulary items compete for insertion when their structural features either match or are contained within the structure of a given syntactic node.<sup>60</sup>

From this perspective, the lack of competition in French, which does not possess a form analogous to BNs beside *des*-phrases, contrasts with the situation in Italian, where *di*+ART nominals coexist with at least one alternative form, namely BNs, during vocabulary insertion. I propose that, precisely due to this competition, one of the two forms needs to specialize in meaning, ending up expressing specificity and strong indefiniteness. Out of the two forms, Italian speakers prefer *di*+ART for expressing such stronger meaning, as this is the only form that morphophonologically realizes all terminal nodes of the structure in (56). Conversely, this interpretation is blocked for BNs, which are consistent with their cross-linguistic function as property-denoting expressions and can therefore only convey weak indefiniteness.

Diachronically, this view aligns with Kroch's (1994: 6) argument that doublets with a similar semantic import survive only when they differentiate in meaning. Around the 13<sup>th</sup> century, *di*+ART began conveying a proper indefinite, non-partitive interpretation (Carlier 2007; Carlier & Lamiroy 2014; Albonico & Luraghi 2021), thereby entering into competition with BNs. To survive, *di*+ART needed to retain a distinct semantic role, one that remained compatible with its partitive origin. In this regard, Pozas-Loyo (2022: 11) observes that non-specific uses typically emerge later in the grammaticalization chain (see also Givón's 1981 referentiality scale). If in a language an indefinite determiner can

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<sup>60</sup> This approach is in line with Katzir's (2007) theory of competition, which posits that the alternatives to a structure  $\varphi$  are all the structures that are at most as complex as  $\varphi$ .

have a non-specific reading, then it can be concluded that in that language the indefinite expression is highly grammaticalized. Likely as a result of the lack of competing alternatives, French *des*-phrases appear more grammaticalized than *di*+ART nominals, as they convey a non-specific interpretation more easily, whereas a wide scope, specific reading is generally considered marked. The tendency to express specific interpretations of *di*+ART, by contrast, can be attributed to its diachronic competition with BNs, which likely hindered its progression along the grammaticalization pathway.

From a synchronic standpoint, on the other hand, this specialization of *di*+ART can be captured by assuming a Gricean-like reasoning that relies on meaning contribution beyond grammar. Specifically, in a linguistic opposition between two paradigmatic elements, such as BNs and *di*+ART nominals, the meaning of one form (e.g., *di*+ART) does not solely depend on its inherent features but relies on the co-existence of an alternative form at the time of speech interaction. When a speaker opts for a *di*+ART indefinite instead of a BN, they signal to the listener that the nominal is likely to be interpreted differently from a BN, which would have been used otherwise. If the BN has by default a weak indefinite reading, the *di*+ART form is more likely to be interpreted as a strong indefinite, as it can be associated with a contextually salient choice function at the level of logical representation. This, in turn, leads to the conversational inference of a “small quantity” reading for the indefinite –likely stemming from its partitive origin– and a telic interpretation of the event in which it occurs, both absent with BNs.

In summary, analyzing the differences between the two paradigmatic indefinite forms found in Italian requires considering both what is explicitly said and the implications of what is left unsaid but could have been expressed. Based on a Gricean reasoning, the pragmatic contribution of *di*+ART indefinite is not identical to that of a BN. Therefore, one expression might be pragmatically more relevant than the other in a specific conversational setting depending on the purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which the speaker is engaged.

### 3.7 Conclusions

This chapter has examined Italian *di*+ART nominals. In the first part of the chapter, a critical review of the existing literature on this form has been conducted, showing that *di*+art nominals do not involve a quantificational structure (*contra* Storto 2003), presuppositionality (*contra* Chierchia 1998a), or kind denotation (*contra* Zamparelli 2008a).

Moreover, *di*+ART nominals have been compared both with Romance BNs and French *des*-phrases. It has been shown that *di*+ART indefinites, in contrast to BNs, are able to occur as unmodified preverbal subjects and to convey specific readings, a possibility attested by the ability of *di*+ART nominals to (i) co-occur with restrictive relative clauses; (ii) function as coreferential antecedents for entity-denoting pronouns; license wide scope readings with (iii) negation; (iv) intensional predicates; and (v) universal quantifiers. Moreover, *di*+ART indefinites also (vi) force a telic interpretation of the event in which they occur; and (vii) convey a small quantity interpretation. Conversely, they are incompatible with long-term sentences and (negative) habitual statements. This (partial) complementary distribution demonstrates that there exists no real optionality between the two forms (*pace* Stark 2016).

To account for these differences, it has been observed that only *di*+ART nominals introduce stable discourse referents at the level of logical representation. More concretely, I have proposed that their specific readings are obtained by associating the indefinite determiner with a choice function that can take wide scope at the level of logical representation. This account explains why *di*+ART can enter scope alternations with logical operators and be interpreted outside syntactic islands, a previously unobserved scope behavior.

In comparing *di*+ART nominals with French *des*-phrases, on the other hand, I have argued that *di*+ART indefinites, but not *des*-phrases, specialize for the expression of specificity and strong indefiniteness as the result of their coexistence with a competing form (i.e., BNs). From a diachronic perspective, I have observed that the competition between these two forms has hindered the progression of the former along the grammaticalization pathway, making it less grammaticalized compared to French *des*-phrases. From a synchronic perspective, I have proposed that the coexistence of *di*+ART and BNs is not a case of syntactic competition but is part of the mapping from syntax to exponence. Finally, I have also argued that the possibility of a telic interpretation and a “small quantity” reading for *di*+ART expressions (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016), but not *des*-phrases, is not syntactically derived but pragmatically driven by a Gricean reasoning.



## 4 Italian plural and mass indefinite definites<sup>61</sup>

### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explore one of the two non-prototypical strategies used in (informal) Italian to express indefiniteness, as introduced in the earlier chapters of this dissertation. Specifically, the focus of this chapter is on the indefinite interpretations associated with plural and mass definite descriptions in Italian, which I term *indefinite definites* (henceforth IDs). These uses are illustrated in italics in the sentences below, repeated from Chapter 1.

- (1) a. Giacomo ha mangiato *le<sub>def/indef</sub> patate*.  
Giacomo AUX eat.PTCP the potatoes  
‘Giacomo ate (the) potatoes.’  
b. Giacomo ha mangiato *il<sub>def/indef</sub> pane*.  
Giacomo AUX eat.PTCP the bread  
‘Giacomo ate (the) bread.’

Examples like those (1) are generally compatible with both a definite and an indefinite interpretation of the plural and mass definite descriptions *le patate* and *il pane* (Zamparelli 2002; Cardinaletti & Giusti 2018; cf. Leonetti 2019; Pinzin & Poletto 2021), as indicated by the subscript *def/indef*. However, when a proper singular count noun is used in the same context, the only available meaning becomes the default definite interpretation (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2018), as illustrated in the following example.<sup>62</sup>

- (2) Giacomo ha mangiato *la<sub>def/#indef</sub> patata*.  
Giacomo AUX eat.PTCP the potato  
‘Giacomo ate #(the) potato.’

The theoretical significance of IDs is twofold. On the one hand, despite being morphologically definite, these constructions allow an indefinite interpretation. A

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<sup>61</sup> This chapter is a re-elaboration of the study published as Morosi and Espinal (2025).

<sup>62</sup> As will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter, the definite description in (2) is structurally and interpretatively distinct from numberless indefinite definites like *indossare la cravatta* ‘to wear (a) tie(s)’.

fundamental argument that shows that the definite descriptions under investigation do not correspond to their canonical unique / maximal interpretation (Frege 1892; Russel 1905; Strawson 1950; Hawkins 1974, 1978; Sharvy 1980; Link 1983) is based on scope. Specifically, IDs can only take narrow scope with respect to negation and quantificational expressions (as also described by Zamparelli 2002; Cardinaletti & Giusti 2018). This scope behavior is illustrated in (3) and (4).<sup>63</sup>

- (3) I vegetariani *non* mangiano *la*<sub>#def/indef</sub> *carne*.  
the vegetarians not eat.PRES.3PL the meat  
‘Vegetarians don’t eat (#the) meat.’
- (4) Mangia *le*<sub>#def/indef</sub> *verdure* *tutti i* *giorni*.  
eat.PRES.3SG the vegetables all the days  
‘She eats (#the) vegetables every day.’

The sentence in (3) is a characterizing sentence that expresses a generalization about vegetarians, stating that they don’t eat meat. To obtain this reading, the direct object needs to scope below the negative marker. Crucially, a definite article with an indefinite, narrow scope interpretation is allowed in Italian precisely in this environment. This scope behavior, which in fact corresponds to the only possible interpretation for IDs (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2018), shows that this construction differs from canonical definites. Canonical definites are referential expressions and, therefore, they are always computed outside the scope of logical operators (see Carlson’s 1977 notion of “scopelessness”). Such wide scope reading would trigger an infelicitous interpretation according to which vegetarians

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<sup>63</sup> Example (3) is partly inspired by the following example in Cardinaletti and Giusti’s (2020: 689) questionnaire, in which speakers were asked acceptability judgments.

(i) Nella tua varietà di italiano parlato, un vegetariano direbbe:

[In your variety of spoken Italian, a vegetarian would say]:

- a. Non mangio *carne*.  
not eat.PRES.1SG meat
- b. Non mangio *la carne*.  
not eat.PRES.1SG the meat
- c. Non mangio *di carne*.  
not eat.PRES.1SG DE meat
- d. Non mangio *della carne*.  
not eat.PRES.1SG di+ART meat
- e. Non mangio *certa carne*.  
not eat.PRES.1SG certain meat

‘I don’t eat meat.’

don't eat the (same) referentially unique amount (or type) of meat salient in the context of utterance.<sup>64</sup>

A similar scope pattern can be observed in combination with the universal quantifier *tutti* in (4). This habitual sentence denotes the situation in which the subject eats vegetables every day. Also in this case, the ID *le verdure* scopes below the universally quantified expression *tutti i giorni*, as a wide scope reading –typically associated with a canonical scopeless definite– would correspond to a scenario where the subject eats the same set of vegetables every day, which is clearly at odds with our world knowledge.

On the other hand, the second research interest for IDs comes from the cross-linguistic diversity displayed by Romance languages in relation to this construction, a phenomenon that is generally not recognized in the literature. For instance, Giusti (2021a: 266) claims, on the basis of the following Spanish, Catalan, and French examples, that “the definite article can (marginally) appear in nominals with indefinite interpretation in all Romance languages except the most lateral ones, namely Portuguese and Romanian”.

- (5) a. Bebo (el) *agua embotellada*.  
           drink.PRES.1SG           the water bottled  
       b. Bec (l') *aigua en ampolla*.  
           drink.PRES.1SG           the water bottled  
       c. Je bois (de) *l'eau en bouteille*.  
           I drink.PRES.1SG de the-water bottled  
           ‘I drink bottled water.’

(Giusti 2021a: 266, (11b), (11c), (11d))

<sup>64</sup> It may be argued that the presence of *i vegetariani* in subject position conceptually activates the referent of *la carne* (Myers et al. 2000; Arnold 2010; Brocher et al. 2016; Brocher & von Heusinger 2018; among others), potentially triggering an existence presupposition and leading to a wide scope reading of the ID. However, consider the following example:

(i) Maria non ha mangiato *la<sub>indef</sub>carne* per tutta settimana, perchè {non  
       Maria not AUX eat.PTCP the meat for all week because not  
       ce n'era / perchè non *ne* aveva a casa}.  
       CL CL-be.IPFV.3SG because not CL AUX.IPFV.3SG at home  
       ‘Maria didn't eat meat all week because {there wasn't any / she didn't have any at home}.’

These examples further illustrate that IDs are consistently interpreted under the scope of negation, regardless of the kind of subject. Moreover, these nominal expressions are not associated with any existence presupposition, as they are resumed by the property-denoting clitic *ne* (Espinal 2010; Espinal & Giusti 2024, 2025), and they are compatible with continuations that explicitly negate the existence of meat in the context.

These sentences are especially noteworthy, as they resemble a much-discussed example in the literature originally due to Laca (1990), which is reported in (6).

- (6) Los Guamba-mamba comen *el salmón crudo*.  
 the Guamba-mamba eat.pres.3pl the salmon raw  
 ‘Gwamba-mamba eat the salmon raw.’

[Adapted from Laca 1990: 34, (28a)]

At first glance, Giusti’s (2021a) and Laca’s (1990) examples may appear to involve an indefinite –that is, existential– interpretation of their definite direct objects, parallel to that found in Italian. However, as Laca (1990) aptly notes, the presence of the definite article in (6) is required because the construction expresses what she terms an *inclusive reading*. Specifically, this inclusive reading can be paraphrased as ‘Gwamba-Mambas (normally) eat *all* the salmon they eat raw’ (Laca 1990: 33–34, emphasis mine), which shows that this example involves an inclusive –i.e., universal– reading of the definite description, which is fully compatible with the canonical definite interpretation contributed by the iota function as a maximizing operator.<sup>65</sup> A similar reasoning applies to Giusti’s examples in (5), which can likewise be paraphrased as ‘I (normally) drink all the water I drink bottled / in a bottle.’ Here too, then, the interpretation aligns with the traditional inclusive meaning of the definite description.<sup>66</sup>

Therefore, closer examination reveals that the availability of IDs in other Romance languages claimed in the literature is only apparent, as the definite articles in the above examples appear to contribute their canonical semantics. As a matter of fact, when a context forcing a narrow scope existential interpretation is provided, definite descriptions are

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<sup>65</sup> The term ‘inclusiveness’, although typically employed with a different connotation, originates from Hawkins (1974, 1978) and has been subsequently adopted by Lyons (1999), among others. This thesis, however, adopts the more widely used term *maximality* (Sharvy 1980), which has an equivalent meaning. Moreover, for discussion on the closely related concept of *quasi-universal* readings, see also Condoravdi (1992, 1994).

<sup>66</sup> Notably, the expressions *el salmón crudo* or *el agua embotellada* constitute cases of secondary predications (Den Dikken 1998, 2006), which can be analyzed as small clauses headed by a relator that articulates a subject-predicate relation. N+Adj combinations involving secondary predication structures are typically introduced by definite determiners, particularly in Romance.

In this regard, Laca (1990: 35) further observes that, in the examples under discussion, predicative adjectives are usually interpreted as the focus of the utterance, while the remaining elements of the sentence are presupposed or “taken for granted”. Thus, while predicative adjectives occupy the focus of the sentence, the definite nominal *per se* falls within the topical portion. Building on this observation, Laca (1990) argues for a correlation between inclusive readings in direct object position – a position otherwise associated with focus – and nominals that are excluded from the focus of the utterance. From this perspective, the definite determiner in these cases functions as a topic marker.

categorically excluded in Catalan, Spanish, and French. Consider the following sentences, corresponding to the translations of the Italian examples in (3) and (4).

- (7) a. Els vegetarians *no* mengen (<sup>#</sup>*la*) *carn*. *Catalan*  
the vegetarians not eat.PRES.3PL the meat  
‘Vegetarians don’t eat meat.’  
b. Menja (<sup>#</sup>*les*) *verdures* *cada dia*.  
eat.PRES.3PL the vegetables every day  
‘She eats vegetables every day.’
- (8) a. Los vegetarianos *no* comen (<sup>#</sup>*la*) *carne*. *Spanish*  
the vegetarians not eat.PRES.3PL the meat  
‘Vegetarians don’t eat meat.’  
b. Come (<sup>#</sup>*las*) *verduras* *todos los días*.  
eat.PRES.3PL the vegetables all the days  
‘She eats vegetables every day.’
- (9) a. Les végétariens *ne* mangent *pas* {<sup>#</sup>*la* / *de*} *viande*. *French*  
the vegetarians NEG eat.PRES.3PL not the de meat  
‘Vegetarians don’t eat meat.’  
b. Elle mange {<sup>#</sup>*les* / *des*} *légumes* *tous les jours*.  
she eat.PRES.3PL the de+ART vegetables all the days  
‘She eats vegetables every day.’

As a result of the incompatibility of a definite description in contexts forcing a genuine existential interpretation, I conclude that IDs represent an idiosyncratic possibility specific to Italian grammar and not found in the other Romance languages under scrutiny.

In light of the above discussion, this chapter mainly addresses the following three research questions: (i) what is the exact contribution of IDs at the level of semantic representation? (ii) What are the grammatical conditions that license an indefinite reading for the definite article in Italian? And (iii) why is Italian special among Romance languages for allowing this construction with plural and mass indefinites (in addition to BNs and *di*+ART nominals)?

As for the first question, I critically examine the existing literature on IDs. By reviewing the three main trends of analysis of this construction, I conclude that IDs do not correspond (i) to (short) weak definites in the sense of Carlson and Sussman (2005) and

Carlson et al. (2006) (*contra* Leonetti 2019; Pinzin & Poletto 2021, 2022); (ii) to directly kind-denoting definites (*contra* Donazzan & Gritti 2013); and (iii) to existential expressions derived from kind denotation (*contra* Zamparelli 2002). Instead, I propose that IDs correspond to genuine (weak) indefinite nominals.

Regarding the second question, and to capture the observed genuinely indefinite interpretation of IDs, I adopt Espinal & Cyrino's (2022a, 2022b) structure of indefiniteness introduced in the previous chapter. Moreover, I also consider different aspectual classes of verbs, perfective / imperfective distinctions, and temporal modifiers. I propose that the indefinite reading of the definite DP emerges when the event denoted by the VP in which it occurs denotes incremental homogeneity, which is defined as incremental preservation of cross-temporal identity of an event and of its event type (Landman 2008; Landman & Rothstein 2010, 2012a, 2012b). This notion, which is at the basis of habitual VPs and *per* 'for' temporal modifiers, explains the preference of IDs for habitual and atelic environments.

Lastly, to address the third question, I consider two northern Italo-Romance dialects and the coexistence of competing patterns in bi(dia)lectal contexts. I suggest that IDs are found in informal Italian as a result of the influence of its underlying dialects. In other words, I postulate that only informal Italian, but not other Romance languages, displays alternative forms for the expression of weak indefiniteness (namely, BNs and IDs) due to language / dialect substrata.

The chapter is organized as follows. Section 4.2 provides an overview of the relevant data, as no clear consensus emerges in the literature regarding the exact semantic and syntactic environments that license IDs. Section 4.3 is devoted to the revision of the three major trends of analysis of Italian IDs, showing that these uses do not correspond to (i) (short) weak definites (Section 4.3.1), to (ii) directly kind-denoting definites (Section 4.3.2), and to (iii) existentials derived from kind denotation (Section 4.3.3). In Section 4.4 I develop an analysis for IDs, which assumes a common determiner structure for BNs, IDs, and *di*+ART, and associates the licensing of IDs with the incremental homogeneity of the event in which they occur. In Section 4.5 I address the different rate of occurrence of IDs in two northern Italian dialects, taking the role of dialectal substrata as the main determining factor in the emergence of IDs in informal Italian. Finally, Section 4.6 concludes the chapter.

## 4.2 Overview of the data

This section provides an overview of the relevant data involving IDs in Italian, given that there is no unified perspective in the literature on their productivity and distribution. For instance, Cardinaletti and Giusti (2018, 2020) argue that IDs represent a productive strategy for expressing indefiniteness in (informal) Italian and Italo-Romance, particularly when the relevant indefinite expressions are found in object position. This view aligns with their analysis of definite articles in Italian, which are assumed to be void of any definiteness import. As a result, this view implies that IDs are available in the object position of virtually all s-level predicates.

Nevertheless, this take is not without contend, as claims have been made in the literature that IDs are severely degraded in perfective environments (Donazzan & Gritti 2013). These claims are apparently supported by contrasts like the following.

(10)a. Maria mangiava *le<sub>def/indef</sub> angurie*.

Maria eat.IPFV.3SG the watermelons

‘Maria {used to eat / was eating} watermelons.’

b. Maria ha mangiato *le<sub>def/#indef</sub> angurie*.

Maria AUXeat.PTCP the watermelons

(Donazzan & Gritti 2013: 184, (12))

While the nominal expression *le angurie* can be easily associated with an indefinite interpretation in the imperfective environment in (10a), perfective aspect appears to trigger the default definite reading of the definite description. For the time being, I note that this restriction is not systematic, as already corroborated by our initial examples in (1). Moreover, the compatibility of IDs with perfective aspect is further evidenced by the following examples, in which both the plural definite *le angurie* and the mass noun *l’anguria* can receive an indefinite interpretation irrespective of their occurrence in a perfective context.

(11)a. Sin da bambina, Maria ha (sempre) mangiato *le<sub>def/indef</sub> angurie*.

since of kid Maria AUX always eat.PTCP the watermelons

‘Since she was a kid, Maria has (always) eaten (the) watermelons.’

b. Oggi, Maria ha mangiato *l<sub>def/indef</sub>’anguria*.

Today Maria AUX eat.PTCP the-watermelon

‘Today, Maria ate (the) watermelon.’

The existence of examples like those above shows that the availability of IDs is independent of the perfective / imperfective distinction, a behavior that must be accounted for in the proposal developed in Section 4.4. Moreover, the example in (11a) shows that habitual readings are available even with perfective verbs, an issue that will be revisited in greater detail in Section 4.3.2 and Section 4.4.2. In Section 4.4.2, I will also explore the perfective / imperfective distinction. In line with the examples above, it will be shown that IDs can also occur in perfective environments, provided the events in which they participate allow for an incrementally homogeneous interpretation.

Let us now turn to the distribution of IDs, as also in this case there does not appear to be consensus in the literature. Cardinaletti and Giusti (2018) provide examples in which IDs occur only in object position. According to Zamparelli (2002: 4), on the other hand, the distribution of IDs is more unconstrained and quite diverse. Specifically, the author argues that IDs can be found as direct objects, postverbal subjects, subjects of passives, and preverbal subjects, even if the availability of IDs in the latter environment seems to be more restricted. On closer inspection, however, I conclude that IDs can only occur in the object position of transitive verbs and prepositions, and as internal subjects of unaccusative structures (either with unaccusative verbs or with passive constructions), but crucially never as preverbal subjects of transitive and unergative verbs.

Let us see this distribution in more detail with examples. First, the sentence in (12) exemplifies the occurrence of IDs in the complement position of both a V and a P, which parallels the distribution of Romance BNs. This sentence is compatible with an interpretation in which Maria just ate (some) spaghetti with (some) clams.

- (12) Maria ha mangiato *gli<sub>def/indef</sub> spaghetti* con *le<sub>def/indef</sub> vongole*.  
 Maria AUX eat.PTCP the spaghetti with the clams  
 ‘Maria ate (the) spaghetti with (the) clams.’

Furthermore, the example in (13) illustrates the possibility to associate the internal definite subject of an existential construction with an indefinite interpretation.



- (13) La casa è sporchissima. In cantina ci sono  
 the house be.PRES.3SG dirty.SUPERLATIVE in basement there be.PRES.3PL  
*i<sub>def/indef</sub> topi...*  
 the mice  
 ‘The house is extremely dirty. In the basement there are mice.’  
 [Adapted from Zamparelli 2002: 312, (28)]

Similarly, the sentence in (14) exemplifies the use of an ID as the internal argument of an unaccusative verb or in a topicalized position.

- (14)a. Arrivavano *i<sub>def/indef</sub> treni* ogni 5’ per tutto il giorno.  
 arrive.IPFV.3PL the trains every 5 for all the day  
 b. *I<sub>def/indef</sub> treni* arrivavano ogni 5’ per tutto il giorno.  
 the trains arrive.IPFV.3PL every 5 for all the day  
 ‘(The) trains were arriving every 5 minutes all day long.’

Finally, the examples in (15) show that IDs appear to be unavailable as preverbal subjects of a transitive or unergative predicate. In this case, the definite descriptions in preverbal position can only receive their canonical definite interpretations and refer to the contextually salient maximal sum of children.

- (15)a. *I<sub>def/#indef</sub> bambini* hanno mangiato una mela.  
 the children AUX eat.PTCP an apple  
 ‘#(The) children ate an apple.’  
 b. *I<sub>def/#indef</sub> bambini* stanno dormendo.  
 the children AUX sleep.GER  
 ‘#(The) children are sleeping.’

As mentioned above, the categorical unavailability of IDs as external subjects is not universally agreed upon (*cf.* Zamparelli 2002). In Section 4.3.3, I will provide further arguments in favor of this conclusion.

Given the debated nature of the conditions that favor IDs in Italian, I have considered four grammatical factors that may affect their licensing: (i) verb classes (activities, accomplishments, achievements, and states), (ii) aspectual (perfective, imperfective)

distinctions, (iii) habitual and iterative constraints, and (iv) temporal (*per* ‘for’, *in* ‘in’) modifiers. The novel findings of this examination, which have been verified with additional speakers of Italian, are reported in Table 1 in Appendix A. These results show that: (i) the four classes of verbs may combine with ID plural count and ID mass nouns in internal argument position; (ii) the availability of an indefinite reading for the definite article in Italian is independent of aspectual perfective vs. imperfective distinctions; (iii) in habitual (and iterative) contexts an indefinite reading is preferred over the definite one; and (iv) an indefinite interpretation is more easily available with *per* ‘for’ temporal modifiers, while a definite reading is triggered in association with *in* ‘in’ temporal adjuncts.

In summary, the present section, in line with Cardinaletti and Giusti’s (2018) observation, has shown that definite plurals and definite mass nouns can be productively associated with an indefinite interpretation in informal Italian. This non-canonical interpretation of definite articles, however, parallels both the interpretative and distributional properties of BNs. Concretely, both BNs and IDs systematically receive a narrow scope interpretation with respect to negation and other quantifiers. Moreover, on a par with BNs, it has been shown that IDs are commonly associated with internal argument positions of transitive verbs (activities, accomplishments, and the verb *avere* ‘have’) and prepositions (e.g., *con* ‘with’), and they can also be found as subjects of intransitive verbs (achievements, and *esserci*). The formal account developed in Section 4.4 will need to account for the parallel interpretation and distribution of IDs and BNs.

Before proceeding, however, the next section reviews the main analytical approaches to IDs that can be found in the literature. In this section, I will argue that none of these theories can adequately account for the whole range of data under scrutiny.

### 4.3 Previous approaches

Three main trends of analysis of Italian IDs can be identified in the literature. Specifically, it has been contended that IDs should be assimilated to short weak definites (henceforth WDs) in the sense of Carlson and Sussman (2005) and Carlson et al. (2006). This is the proposal advanced by Leonetti (2019) and also suggested in recent work by Pinzin and Poletto (2021, 2022).<sup>67</sup> Other authors, such as Donazzan and Gritti (2013) have claimed,

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<sup>67</sup> Other scholars, such as Gerards (2020) and Gerards and Stark (2022), associate IDs in Italian, along with analogous constructions in Old Spanish and Francoprovençal, with other weakly referential definites. Specifically, they argue that these constructions denote *Representative Object Interpretations* (henceforth ROIs,

building on previous work by Pires de Oliveira and Rothstein (2011, 2013) on Brazilian Portuguese, that Italian IDs are to be analyzed as generic expressions directly denoting kinds. This possibility has also been assumed by Pinzin and Poletto (2021, 2022) themselves. Finally, Zamparelli (2002) argues that the indefinite, existential reading of Italian IDs is derived from the (alleged) primary kind-denotation of Romance plural definites by means of Chierchia's (1998b) semantic operation of Derived Kind Predication. Let us see these three approaches in more detail.

#### 4.3.1 *Weak definites*

A short WD is a definite DP that occurs in the object position of a transitive verb (or a V + P structure), and together with this V (or V + P) forms a complex predicate that encodes some stereotypical information, usually associated with a typical or characteristic activity with respect to some accessible background knowledge (i.e., an *event kind* Schwarz 2014; Espinal & Cyrino 2017) (Carlson and Sussman 2005; Carlson et al. 2006; Aguilar-Guevara and Zwarts 2011, 2013; Aguilar-Guevara 2014; Krifka & Modarresi 2016, among many others).<sup>68</sup> Consider the following sentences containing examples of WDs in English.

- (16)a. John read *the newspaper*.  
       b. Mary went to *the hospital*.

The definite descriptions *the newspaper* and *the hospital* in the above sentences are referred to as WDs because they are weakly referential. In other words, in contrast to canonical definites, these constructions do not refer to the unique, contextually salient individual satisfying the descriptive content of the noun introduced by the definite article. This non-referential interpretation of the definite description is further corroborated by

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as in *In Alaska we filmed the grizzly*; Krifka et al. 1995: 78, ex. (124f)). These interpretations are assumed to be available in what is called a *kind-oriented mode of talk* (Krifka et al. 1995). Typically, however, ROIs are built around morphologically singular definite DPs with a presuppositional reading (e.g., *the grizzly*). In contrast, IDs are associated with plural or mass nominal expressions that show a non-specific, non-maximal, and non-presuppositional interpretation.

<sup>68</sup> The term (*long*) *weak definites* is originally due, to the best of my knowledge, to Poesio (1994), who examines constructions involving definite descriptions that do not seem to be subject to uniqueness requirements (e.g., *the village is located on the side of a mountain*). For a discussion of two semantically distinct types of definite articles –*strong* and *weak*– in German and other languages, see Schwarz (2009). Additionally, for insights into the emergence of strong and weak definite articles in Romance languages, see Bernstein et al. (2018, 2019, 2021).

their narrow scope behavior with respect to other scope-bearing elements in the sentence, such as the negative operator or the universal quantifier. This scope pattern, resembling that of IDs discussed above, is illustrated below.

- (17)a. John didn't read *the newspaper* today.  
 b. All the students went to *the hospital*.

Under a WD interpretation, (17a) denotes a situation in which John didn't read any newspaper today, which corresponds to a narrow scope reading of the definite description below the negative marker. A wide scope (or scopeless) reading would trigger the default definite interpretation of the nominal expression. In this case, the sentence would describe a scenario where John didn't read the unique and familiar newspaper in context. Similarly, the WD interpretation of *the hospital* in (17b) is compatible with a situation in which each student was sent to a potentially different hospital, an interpretation that can only arise if the definite description is interpreted below the scope of the universal quantifier in subject position. A wide scope reading, by contrast, would correspond to a reading where all the students went to the same, contextually unique, hospital in context.

Building on these similarities, Leonetti (2019) suggests a broader view of WDs that includes VPs containing IDs in Italian like those presented in the previous section and additional examples like *mettere lo zucchero nel sugo* 'to put sugar in the sauce' and *il gatto con gli stivali* 'the cat with boots'. This suggestion is not only based on the parallel occurrence in object position, the non-unique and non-familiar reference, and the narrow scope behavior of WDs and IDs, but also on the observation that the two constructions appear to share additional properties concerning sloppy identity in elliptical contexts and restrictions on modification. Let us begin with sloppy identity by considering the following examples.

(18) *Sloppy identity*

- a. Gianni ha cucinato *le<sub>def/indef</sub> verdure* e anche Paolo  
 Gianni AUX cook.PTCP the vegetables and also Paolo  
 lo ha fatto.  
 CL AUX do.PTCP  
 'Gianni cooked vegetables and Paolo did too.'  
 (Gianni and Paolo cooked different vegetables)

b. Lola *went to the hospital* and Alice did too.

(Lola and Alice could have gone to different hospitals)

(Aguilar-Guevara 2014:16, (15a))

In (18a) the ID *le verdure* allows a disjoint interpretation in the two VPs, exactly like the WD *the hospital* in (18b). In other words, (18a) is compatible with a situation where Gianni and Paolo cooked different vegetables and (18b) with a situation where Lola and Alice went to different hospitals. This reading is different from that of canonical definites, which requires a rigid reference of the definite description in an elliptical context.

Turning to the constraints on modification mentioned above, consider the following sentences.

(19) *Restrictions on modification*

- a. Gianni ha raccolto *idef/indef pomodori* {*San Marzano* / <sup>#</sup>che erano  
Gianni AUX pick.PTCP the tomatoes San Marzano that be.IPFV.3PL  
sull'albero} e anche Paolo lo ha fatto.  
on.the-tree and also Paolo CL AUX do.PTCP  
'Gianni picked {(the) San Marzano tomatoes / <sup>#</sup>(the) tomatoes that were on the  
tree}, and Paolo did so too,'
- b. Lola went to *the* {*psychiatric* / <sup>#</sup>old} hospital and Alice did too.

(Aguilar-Guevara 2014: 19, (38))

The ID *i pomodori* in (19a) allows an indefinite interpretation when restricted by the taxonomic modifier *San Marzano* but not when modified by a restrictive relative clause, which triggers the default definite interpretation of the definite description. Crucially, this seems to be exactly what happens with the WD *the hospital* in (19b), which only allows modification by classificatory adjectives like *psychiatric*, but not *old*.

Despite this parallel behavior, however, several differences set WDs apart from IDs. WDs show additional grammatical properties.<sup>69</sup> For instance, WDs are known to be subject to severe lexical restrictions, as a consequence of their conventional interpretation.

<sup>69</sup> For a complete list of the properties that characterize WDs, see Aguilar-Guevara (2014).

Therefore, a change on either the N or the V selecting for the WD forces the strong reading of the determiner. This is illustrated below.

(20) John {*read* / <sup>#</sup>*saw*} {*the newspaper* / <sup>#</sup>*the book*}.

While the VP *read the newspaper* easily licenses a WD interpretation of its object, the same reading become unavailable in combination with a different V or N (e.g., *saw the newspaper*, or *read the book*).

Furthermore, the conventional character of WDs is assumed to provide them with an enriched meaning. That is, a VP containing a WD conveys more meaning than what is strictly encoded in their compositional semantics. For example, a sentence like *Mary went to the hospital* conventionally means that Mary went to the hospital and that she probably received medical attention.

Finally, WDs are also subject to severe number restrictions, as they are usually built –despite some minor exceptions (e.g., *do the dishes*)– around singular count nouns. In fact, a pluralization of the singular count noun triggers the canonical definite interpretation of the definite description, as illustrated below.

(21) John read *the* {*newspaper* / <sup>#</sup>*newspapers*}.

Crucially, none of the properties just described apply to IDs. As presented in Section 4.2, and further detailed in Appendix A, IDs can occur with all types of verbs and nouns. Consequently, in contrast to WDs, a change in the verb or noun does not prevent an ID interpretation, as shown in the following examples.

(22) Gianni ha {*raccolto* / *comprato* / *mangiato*} {*i*<sub>def/indef</sub> *pomodori* /  
Gianni AUX pick.PTCP buy.PTCP eat.PTCP the tomatoes  
*le*<sub>def/indef</sub> *zucchine* / *le*<sub>def/indef</sub> *violette*}.  
the zucchini the violets  
'Gianni {*picked* / *ate* / *bought*} (the) {*tomatoes* / *zucchini* / *violets*}.

Moreover, IDs do not denote conventional or stereotypical activities. As a result, they are not associated with any enriched semantics. In other words, a sentence containing an ID, such as *Gianni ha mangiato i pomodori*, does not compositionally convey any

meaning beyond what is explicitly encoded in the meaning of its individual components. The only exception is the indefinite interpretation of the definite determiner, for which a formal analysis will be provided in Section 4.4.

Additionally, the nominal head of an ID, in contrast to WDs, can either be a plural count or a mass noun. In fact, IDs discard singular number, as a singular definite DP would have as its extension a unique individual atomic entity (as mentioned in Section 4.1).

Lastly, the conventional character of WDs makes them cross-linguistically stable (e.g., *read the newspaper* in English; *leggere il giornale* in Italian; *leer el periódico* in Spanish; *llegir el diari* in Catalan), at least in those languages spoken in areas that are socio-culturally similar. As demonstrated in Section 4.2, however, IDs are specific to Italian and not found in other closely-related languages.<sup>70</sup>

In light of these significant differences, I conclude that WDs and Italian IDs constitute different interpretative possibilities associated with definite descriptions.<sup>71</sup> Next section examines an alternative account of IDs, based on kind-denotation.

#### 4.3.2 *Kinds*

A second approach to IDs is found in Donazzan and Gritti (2013). These authors, building on previous work by Landman & Rothstein (2010, 2012a, 2012b) on English bare plurals, and Pires de Oliveira and Rothstein's (2011, 2013) study on bare nominals in Brazilian Portuguese, assimilate IDs to intensional arguments, and ultimately claim that they directly refer to intensional kinds.<sup>72</sup>

Recall that the intensional interpretation of weak nominal expressions and their association with kind-denotation has its origin in Carlson's (1977) semantic treatment of bare arguments of k-level predicates in English. Landman and Rothstein (2010, 2012a, 2012b) extend this assumption to all bare arguments of all predicate types. Consider the following example.

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<sup>70</sup> As a further distinguishing property, it may be important to note that WDs show strict discourse referential restrictions. Therefore, they prefer pronominalization by pro-VPs, such as *to do so*. While IDs are compatible with the same pronominalization strategy, as shown in (18), they usually allow resumption by third person pronouns, as illustrated below.

(i) I vegetarians, *la*<sub>#def/indef</sub> *carne* non *la* mangiano.  
the vegetarians the meat not CL eat.PRES.3PL  
'Vegetarians don't eat meat.'

<sup>71</sup> For a similar conclusion reached independently, see Giusti (2022).

<sup>72</sup> See Chierchia (2023) for a proposal on these lines.

(23) Mary ate *mangos*.

Under Landman and Rothstein's approach, the s-level predicate *eat* in (23) is claimed to be systematically ambiguous between an episodic interpretation in which EAT has an individual theme (i.e., a mango or a plurality of mangos) and a generic / gnomic interpretation in which EAT involves the  $k_{\text{MANGO}}$ . This view contradicts Carlson's (1977) traditional analysis of bare arguments in English, which posits that English BNs receive a kind interpretation when they combine with k- and i-level predicates but are unambiguously interpreted existentially when they combine with s-level predicates.

Furthermore, Landman and Rothstein claim that it is precisely the intensional nature of the thematic argument of the verb EAT that leads to an atelic interpretation of the event in (23). In other words, these authors establish a direct correlation between the referential properties of the alleged intensional internal argument and the aspectual interpretation of the VP.

Following this line of reasoning, Donazzan and Gritti (2013) apply the same analysis to Italian IDs, arguing that these nominal expressions, on a par with English BNs, are directly kind-denoting even when selected by s-level predicates. Moreover, Donazzan and Gritti (2013: 183) propose that "it is the aspectual class of the verbal predicate and the aspectual modification of the sentence that play a major role for licensing the weak interpretation of the nominal expression".

Nevertheless, as Table 1 in Appendix A shows, both claims appear to be false. First, it has been observed that the ID reading in Italian can be obtained in the internal argument position of predicates that do not trigger a generic interpretation of the object (i.e., with the four classical aspectual class of verbs). Second, as discussed in Section 4.2, an indefinite reading for a definite internal argument in Italian is possible irrespective of the aspectual modification of the VP. In fact, IDs are possible with both perfective and imperfective aspects.

As evidence supporting a kind analysis of IDs, Donazzan and Gritti (2013: 207) also claim that the acceptability of these interpretations improves when the DP is modified by an adjective or a PP that conveys a sub-kind reading (i.e., with taxonomic modification). This contrast is illustrated in the following pair of sentences.



(24)a. Gianni scriveva *le<sub>def/#indef</sub> lettere*.

Gianni write.IPFV.3SG the letters

‘Gianni {was writing / used to write} #(the) letters.’

(Donazzan & Gritti 2013: 207, (67a))

b. Quand’era impiegato in comune, Gianni scriveva *le<sub>def/indef</sub>*

when-be.IPFV.3SG employed in town-hall Gianni write.IPFV.3SG the

*lettere commerciali*.

letters business

‘When he was employed at the town hall, Gianni used to write (the) business letters.’

(Donazzan & Gritti 2013: 208, (68a))

In what follows, however, I provide several objections against this claim. First, it has been already noted that the ID reading is available both in perfective and imperfective environments (as confirmed by most examples in Appendix A). Moreover, it is important to note that an ID interpretation is also licensed with modifiers that do not necessarily introduce sub-kind readings, as illustrated in (25), an example provided also by Donazzan and Gritti (2013).

(25) Quando abitavamo in Canada, Gianni scriveva *le<sub>def/indef</sub> lettere*

when live.IPFV.1PL in Canasa Gianni write.IPFV.3SG the letters

*alla mia famiglia*.

to.the my family

‘When we were living in Canada, Gianni used to write (the) letters to my family.’

(Donazzan & Gritti 2013: 208, (68b))

This sentence not only shows that an indefinite interpretation is available also with non-taxonomic modifiers, but also that the ID reading does not denote kinds, as the complex nominal expression in (25) contains a possessive determiner directly referring to the first person.

Furthermore, the definite DP *le lettere* can in fact be associated with an ID in an appropriate context, irrespective of the presence of taxonomic modification, as shown in the example below.

- (26) [At the front, and in order to help other soldiers,]  
 a. Gianni scriveva *le<sub>def/indef</sub> lettere*.  
 Gianni write.IPFV.3SG the letters  
 ‘Gianni {was writing / used to write} (the) letters.’

As additional evidence against an analysis of IDs in terms of kind-denotation, consider first the following example.

- (27) Marco ha cucinato ancora *le<sub>def/indef</sub> cazzo di patate*.  
 Marco AUX cook.PTCP still the dick of potatoes  
 ‘Marco cooked fucking potatoes again.’

This example shows that the ID interpretation remains available also with expressive modifiers. In this regard, it is interesting to note that the expressive term *cazzo*, which cannot be considered a (sub-)kind modifier, appears to be a fully grammaticalized element along the lines of Cavirani-Pots (2020), as attested by the lack of gender and number agreement with the plural feminine noun *patate*. As such, this item can be analyzed as a purely functional element located in a functional-like projection responsible for expressivity in the nominal domain (Gutzmann 2019). Alternatively, the expressive item could also be located within the DP domain.<sup>73</sup> Importantly, both syntactic positions would block the availability of any kind-denotation for the definite object, thus precluding an analysis of IDs based on genericity and kind-denotation like the one proposed by Donazzan and Gritti (2013).

As a last comment regarding the postulated association between indefiniteness and genericity, let us consider the entailment pattern illustrated in the minimal pair below.

- (28) I francesi hanno inventato *le<sub>gen</sub> patate fritte*.  
 the French AUX invent.PTCP the potatoes fried  
 ‘The French invented fried potatoes.’  
 ≠ I francesi hanno inventato *le<sub>gen</sub> patate*  
 the French AUX invent.PTCP the potatoes  
 ‘The French invented potatoes.’

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<sup>73</sup> For a proposal on these lines, see Cavirani et al. (2024).

- (29) I      francesi hanno    mangiato    *le<sub>indef</sub> patate    fritte*.  
          the    French    AUX      eat.PTCP    the      potatoes    fried  
          ‘The French ate fried potatoes.’  
       ⊨ I      francesi    hanno mangiato    *le<sub>indef</sub> patate*  
          the    French    AUX      eat.PTCP    the      potatoes  
          ‘The French ate potatoes.’

In (28) the main verb *inventare* is a k-level predicate that selects for a generic direct object. As a result, the definite description *le patate fritte* is interpreted as denoting a sub-kind of potatoes. Notably, k-level predicates of this type do not allow upward entailments (Laca 1990; Krifka et al. 1995). In contrast, in (29) the main verb *mangiare* is an s-level predicate that selects for an ID object modified by a PP that refers to a sub-kind of potatoes. Crucially, upward entailment is possible in this case.

The contrast outlined above has several implications for Donazzan and Gritti’s (2013) proposal. First, it shows that the association of a definite internal argument with an indefinite (non-maximal, non-presuppositional, upward entailing) interpretation is orthogonal from its modification by a taxonomic modifier (witness the ID *le patate* in (29)). Second, this association cannot be accounted for by any theory that treats s-level predicates analogously to k-level ones –that is, any theory positing that s-level predicates select for generic objects. This further demonstrates that IDs cannot be analyzed as referring to intensional kinds, as such an approach would fail to explain the observed contrast.

In truth, the entailment pattern observed above would, in principle, follow from any theory that treats the object of (29) as an existentially interpreted nominal expression at any level of representation. However, Donazzan and Gritti’s (2013) proposal holds precisely that *le patate* in (29) is kind-denoting throughout the whole derivation, with the eventual existential interpretation arising as a pragmatic inference driven by the episodic, non-gnomic interpretation of the predicate. In my view, this analysis cannot adequately account for the entailment contrast, as both instances of *le patate fritte* would be assigned a kind-denoting interpretation.

These contrasts lead me to conclude that IDs must be distinguished from intensional kind-denoting expressions. Moreover, in this section it has been shown that the emergence of indefinite readings for definite internal arguments in Italian should be distinguished from the aspectual interpretation of the VP in which it occurs. Specifically, I have argued that the indefinite reading of a definite internal argument does not depend on the

perfective / imperfective aspectual distinction or the availability of taxonomic modification. The following section explores a related proposal that attributes the existential reading of IDs to a semantic operation independently required in the theory of grammar.

#### 4.3.3 *Existentials derived from kind-denotation by Derived Kind Predication*

This section examines the proposal put forward in Zamparelli (2002). Inspired by a Neo-Carlsonian view (Chierchia 1998b), this author argues that the existential interpretation of plural and mass definite descriptions in Italian is derived from kind-denoting definite descriptions via the DKP operation. In essence, Zamparelli (2002) posits that this existential reading emerges through a semantic process analogous to the derivation of the existential interpretation of BNs in English proposed by Chierchia (1998b).

Recall that Chierchia (1998b: 364) proposes that the existential reading of BNs in English is derived from their kind denotation by means of the semantic rule of DKP, defined as follows:

#### (30) *Derived Kind Predication*

If P applies to objects and k denotes a kind, then

$$P(k) = \exists x[\cup k(x) \wedge P(x)]$$

As formalized in (30), DKP is a type shifting rule that turns a kind-denoting argument into an existentially bound indefinite whenever the predicate applies to objects. This operation accounts for the existential reading of the BN subject *lions* in (20a), as the nominal expression denoting a kind occurs in the argument slot of a predicate that does not select for kinds.<sup>74</sup> This type mismatch triggers the application of DKP, as illustrated in (31b), which automatically inserts existential quantification over the instantiation of the kind lion, thus deriving the desired existential reading of the BN.

(31)a. *Lions* are ruining my garden.

b. Ruining my garden ( $\cap$ lions)  $\Leftrightarrow \exists x[\cup \cap$ lions(x)  $\wedge$  ruining my garden (x)]

(Chierchia 1998b: 364, (31c)-(32))

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<sup>74</sup> In contrast to Chierchia (1998b), Zamparelli (2002) adopts the view that BNs in Italian never denote kinds, and thus that the existential reading of BNs in Romance is not obtained by DKP. This thesis aligns with Zamparelli's (2002) view that BNs in Italian (and Romance) do not denote kinds (see also Longobardi 1994, 2001, 2005; Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 2003; Borik & Espinal 2015).

Zamparelli (2002) assumes that definite plurals in Italian are the systematic counterpart of bare plurals in English in this respect, as both share the same kind denotation.

A first point of divergence between Zamparelli's (2002) approach and the framework adopted in this thesis concerns precisely the generic interpretation of plural definites in Italian (and Romance). While Zamparelli (2002) assumes that plural definites in Italian directly denote kinds, this thesis aligns with Borik and Espinal's (2015) view, which holds that plural definites in Romance are unambiguously derived by the iota operator. Accordingly, the eventual generic reading of plural definites emerges through the intensionalization of the maximalized semantics associated with them. Under this approach, DKP does not apply to Italian plural definites, as these expressions lack the kind-denotation necessary for this semantic operation to derive an existential reading.

A more concerning empirical issue with Zamparelli's (2002) analysis, moreover, arises from the following contrast between English and Italian.

(32)a. *Rabbits* are in the cage.

b. *I conigli sono nella gabbia.*  
     the rabbits be.PRES.3PL in.the cage  
     ‘#(The)rabbits are in the cage.’

If the existential reading of English BNs and Italian IDs was derived by the same semantic mechanism, namely DKP, one would expect the two nominal phrases to behave uniformly in all relevant cases. The contrast in (32), however, shows that this prediction does not hold. The English locative sentence in (32a) allows an existential meaning for the BN *rabbits*, derived by DKP. In contrast, the subject *i conigli* in the Italian example in (32b) can only refer to the maximal sum of individuals in the discourse domain that have the property of being rabbits, an interpretation that is fully consistent with the semantics of the definite article as a maximizing operator (Sharvy 1980). Crucially, (32b) shows that its preverbal subject does not allow for an indefinite existential reading (allegedly derived by DKP), which in Italian would typically be expressed using *di*+ART: *Dei conigli sono nella gabbia*.

Nonetheless, to provide evidence for the claim that English BNs and Italian IDs behave uniformly, Zamparelli (2002) provides the following example, which purportedly shows that plural definites in Italian can in fact be interpreted existentially.

- (33) Nel 1986 *i ladri* hanno svuotato il mio appartamento.  
 in.the 1986 the thieves AUX empty.PTCP the my apartment  
 ‘In 1986, {the / %some} thieves emptied my apartment.’

[Adapted from Zamparelli 2002: 312, (32)]

According to this author, beyond its canonical definite interpretation referring to a specific group of thieves, *i ladri* can also refer to “some random, ill-defined or unidentifiable” thieves (Zamparelli 2002: 312).

However, the question arises whether this apparent existential flavor corresponds to a genuine existential reading. There are significant reasons to believe that the definite external argument in (33) does not simply convey an existential interpretation parallel to that derived by DKP for English BNs. First, it is important to note that the sentence in (33) is arguably not the most natural way to express the fact that there exist some thieves that emptied my apartment in Italian. To obtain a plain existential reading, a speaker of Italian would probably use a *di*+ART indefinite instead.

If the reading of the definite plural in (33) does not correspond to the one expressed by the  $\exists$  operator introduced by DKP, what, then, is its intended interpretation? I here suggest two alternative possibilities. On the one hand, *i ladri* may constitute a case of a non-maximal (Brisson 1998; Lasersohn 1999; Križ 2016; Bar-Lev 2021, among others) or representative interpretation of the definite DP (von Koss Torkildsen 2002; cf. Krifka et al.’s 1995 ROIs). On the other hand, it could be hypothesized that the definite description introduces an instance of the so-called functional or quasi-universal reading (Condoravdi 1992, 1994; Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 1996).

According to the first alternative, *i ladri* would refer to a *representative* group of thieves, much like *the Romans* in (34a).<sup>75</sup> Alternatively, it could be argued to introduce a non-maximal reading, analogous to *the townspeople* in (34b).

- (34)a. *The Romans* built this bridge. (von Koss Torkildsen 2002: 2, (1.1))  
 b. *The townspeople* are asleep. (Brisson 1998: 34, (15))

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<sup>75</sup> For the time being, I have intentionally chosen not to be explicit about the precise meaning associated with representative interpretations. Chapter 6 would provide a more detailed definition and semantic formalization of what I consider to be a representative interpretation of a plural definite DP.

Even in English, in the absence of any antecedent and bridging context, the plural definite subjects in (34) do not appear to be associated with any maximality requirements. Rather, they denote a representative or non-maximal group of individuals: for these sentences to be true, it is not necessary that literally *all* the Romans built this bridge nor that *all* the townspeople are asleep.

Some diagnostics can be used to distinguish the non-maximal / representative interpretation from the ID reading. The first difference relates to the cross-linguistic availability of representative and non-maximal interpretations, which appear to be found in at least all languages that display definite determiners. Given this cross-linguistic stability, representative readings –unlike IDs– are expected to be easily translatable into other languages. This prediction is not only confirmed by the existence of English examples like those in (34), but also by (35), which shows that Zamparelli’s (2002) example is equally acceptable in Catalan and Spanish.

- (35)a. El 1986 *els lladres* em van buidar l’apartament. *Catalan*  
the 1986 the thieves me AUX.PST empty.INF the-apartment  
b. En 1986 *los ladrones* vaciaron mi apartamento. *Spanish*  
in 1986 the thieves empty.PST my apartment  
‘In 1986, the thieves emptied my apartment.’

As shown in Section 4.1, this is crucially not the case for the examples containing genuine IDs, which are remarkably not translatable to other languages with articles.

A more reliable diagnostic for distinguishing between the representative / non-maximal and the ID reading of definite DPs lies in their interaction with negation. The expression *i ladri* in (33) appears to carry a presupposition of existence of thieves, rather than asserting their existence. This implies that the interpretation associated with the definite plural subject is distinct from the one inferred by the existential operator introduced by the DKP rule, which can only take scope below other logical operators (Chierchia 1998b; Dayal 2004, 2013). This behavior aligns the definite description in (33) more closely with non-maximal and representative definites, which refer to non-maximal groups of individuals but presuppose the existence of their referent. Consequently, unlike IDs, these definite descriptions, on a par with canonical definites, display a scopeless behavior and can only be interpreted outside the scope of negation. This is precisely what happens when negation is inserted in a sentence like (36).

- (36) Nel 1986 *i ladri* non hanno svuotato il mio appartamento.  
 in-the 1986 the thieves not AUX empty.PTCP the my apartment  
 ‘In 1986, the thieves did not empty my apartment.’

This sentence denotes a situation in which the group of thieves salient in context did not empty my apartment. This shows that the definite description in (25) necessarily carries an existence presupposition that projects and survives negation. As a result, the subject *i ladri* does not take a proper narrow scope reading with respect to the negative operator. As discussed in Section 4.1 in relation to example 3, This behavior contrasts sharply with that of IDs, which can only license narrow scope interpretations. What is more, this behavior also differs from that of existentials derived *via* DKP, which assert existence, but never presuppose it (Chierchia 1998b; Dayal 2004, 2013). Given these differences, I contend that the preverbal subjects of transitive verbs cannot be analyzed as instances of IDs, a conclusion that challenges the predictions of Zamparelli’s (2002) account.

Alternatively, one might also propose that (33) involves a reading in which *i ladri* receives a universal or quasi-universal interpretation (Condoravdi 1992, 1994; Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 1996). According to this view, however, the existence of thieves would also be presupposed rather than asserted. Furthermore, it is important to note that even if *i ladri* was associated with all (relevant) thieves (and not just arbitrary ones) who acted at a specific time and place, it would still be necessary to explain the source of the universal reading in the absence of quantified contexts and contextually restricted adverbials. Lastly, one would also have to account for the alleged existential reading of the definite subject, which is independent from the universal interpretation.

Furthermore, the same objections raised in the preceding section against the claim that IDs denote kinds at some stage of their derivation apply equally to Zamparelli’s (2002) analysis. Specifically, it has been demonstrated that IDs are compatible with non-taxonomic modifiers, as illustrated in example (25), where *alla mia famiglia* blocks a sub-kind reading of the definite description *le lettere*. Crucially, in the absence of proper kind denotation, the DKP operation cannot be applied to derive an existential reading. Similarly, expressive modifiers do not preclude the availability of ID readings. This possibility is also unexpected under Zamparelli’s (2002) account, which assumes that the application of DKP should be exclusively triggered by kind-denoting nominal expressions.



This discussion indicates that the proposed logical equivalence between Italian plural definite DPs and English BNs should be reconsidered, as the predictions of the classical analysis of English BNs cannot be straightforwardly extended to definite plurals in Romance. Furthermore, I also conclude that the DKP operation is not required in this case, as an existential interpretation cannot be derived from definite (and mass) plurals in languages that have lexically specified indefinite DPs and indefinite BNs to express an existential meaning with plural count (and mass) nouns.

In summary, this section has reviewed the three major analytical approaches proposed for Italian IDs in the literature. As discussed, each proposal faces significant theoretical and / or empirical challenges. To overcome these challenges, the next section characterizes in more detail Italian IDs and develops a new theoretical proposal that addresses two main grammatical questions: (i) what are the syntactic structures of IDs and the VPs that allow their internal definite arguments to be interpreted as indefinites, and (ii) what are the semantic conditions that VPs must satisfy to license an indefinite reading for an internal argument.

## 4.4 The proposal

### 4.4.1 *The structure of IDs and habitual VPs*

In this section, I begin by outlining the syntactic structures I assume for IDs and habitual VPs.

First, regarding the syntactic structure of IDs, it has been noted in earlier sections that these expressions convey an existential, non-maximal, non-presuppositional, and upward-entailing interpretation. To account for this genuinely indefinite reading and building on the proposal outlined in the previous chapter, I argue that the most suitable, economical, and minimalist way to capture the indefinite reading of definite descriptions in Italian is to posit the same structure for IDs as for BNs and *di*+ART indefinites.

As discussed, two accounts propose a unified structure for the expression of indefiniteness in Italian and Romance: Cardinaletti and Giusti (2016ff) and Espinal and Cyrino (2022a, 2022b). In the previous chapter, several arguments against the former proposal were presented. However, additional significant issues arise in light of the data discussed in this chapter. Specifically, Cardinaletti and Giusti's account posit the same structure for definite and indefinite expressions, the only difference being the presence of a definite or

indefinite operator in SpecDP. The relevant structure proposed by Cardinaletti and Giusti is given in (37).

$$(37) \quad [_{DP} \ 0_{def/indef} / de_{indef} [_{D'} \ 0/il/lo/la/i/gli/le \ [NP]]]$$

[Adapted from Cardinaletti & Giusti 2018: 141, (10)]

This unified structure predicts that definite and indefinite interpretations should be equally available, as they are constrained by identical grammatical factors. However, this prediction does not hold. Not only do IDs appear to be degraded in certain perfective contexts, but they are also categorically excluded from external argument positions. This outcome is unexpected in Cardinaletti and Giusti's account, which posits that plural and mass definite and indefinite expressions in Italian are derived from the same structure.

Consequently, I consider that the availability of IDs is better captured by assimilating them to Espinal and Cyrino's (2022a, 2022b) structure for indefiniteness, as represented again below.

$$(38) \text{a. } [_{D} DE [_{D} [iPLURALIZER:PL] [D_{def} [n]]]] \quad \text{- plural count IDs}$$

$$\text{b. } [_{D} DE [_{D} D_{def} [n]]] \quad \text{- mass nouns IDs}$$

[Adapted from Espinal & Cyrino 2022a: 55, (13)]

Under this structure, IDs are formally derived by merging a covert indefinite operator DE –which remains silent at Spell Out– to a definite determiner. This proposal has its antecedents in approaches like Zamparelli (2000) and Ihsane (2008), which postulate several layers within the DP spine. However, unlike those analyses, where definiteness is built on top of indefiniteness, and unlike Cardinaletti and Giusti's model, which assigns the same structural complexity to definiteness and indefiniteness, the structure in (38) builds indefinite interpretations on top of definite ones by means of an additional D projection whose head is an abstract operator DE responsible for weak indefiniteness.

I argue that this framework accounts more straightforwardly for two key observations: the last resort nature of IDs noted by Zamparelli (2002: 325), and their relegation to internal argument positions. These properties follow naturally from the semantic derivation associated with the above structure. First, the structure in (38) predicts that indefinite readings should be less readily available than definite ones, as the former are structurally derived from the latter, rather than vice versa. Moreover, in this structure, the

operator DE shifts entities into property-denoting expressions of type  $\langle e, t \rangle$ . As discussed, this logical type has been extensively attributed to plural and mass BNs in the literature on Romance (Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 1996, 2003; Laca 1999; McNally 2004, 2020; Dobrovie-Sorin et al 2005, 2006; among others). I propose that not only do BNs denote properties, but so do IDs.

Building on the arguments presented in the previous chapter, I propose that for IDs to function as semantically adequate arguments of the verb, an existential quantifier – introduced by an existential closure operation (Heim 1982) and applying within the nuclear scope (Diesing 1992)– binds a variable that the property denoted by IDs predicates over, as represented in (39). Crucially, this analysis rests on the assumption that it is not the ID itself that introduces a variable, but rather the existential quantifier contributed by the existential closure operation (*cf.* Heim 1982, Diesing 1992).

$$(39) \quad \lambda P_{\langle e, t \rangle} \lambda x \exists y [V(x, y) \wedge P(y)]$$

[adapted from Van Geenhoven 1998: 132, (1)]

Since the existential quantifier introduced by this existential closure operation is inserted within the nuclear scope, this proposal not only naturally accounts for the restrictions of IDs to internal arguments positions but also explains their obligatory narrow scope behavior, as other logical operators, by definition, mandatorily take scope above the VP domain.

Beyond the syntax attributed to IDs, some additional assumptions regarding the structure of habitual VPs need to be made explicit, given especially the availability of IDs and habitual readings with both perfective and imperfective aspect noted in Section 4.2. To account for these possibilities, I adopt the analysis of habituality proposed by Boneh and Doron (2013). Concretely, these authors treat the habitual operator *Hab* –universally present in habitual sentences– as a modal modifier adjoined to VP and selected by *Asp*. This can be represented as in (40).

$$(40) \quad [_{TP} [ T ] [_{AspP} [ \{Perf / Imperf\} ] [_{VP} [ Hab ] [_{VP} ] ] ] ]$$

[Adapted from Boneh & Doron 2013: 180, (12)]

According to this structure, the operator Hab is distinct from the head of AspP, contrary to the traditional view in the literature (*cf.* Comrie 1976; Bonomi 1997; Cipria & Roberts 2000; Ferreira 2005, a.o.). As a result, Hab can serve as the input of both perfective and imperfective aspect. Crucially, this relative hierarchical ordering between Asp and Hab explains the compatibility of both readings with habitual contexts. Furthermore, it accounts for the fact that both perfective and imperfective aspects combine with IDs in habitual environments, as already observed in example (11a) repeated below for convenience.

- (41) Sin da bambina, Maria ha (sempre) mangiato *le<sub>def/indef</sub> angurie*.  
 since of kid Maria AUX always eat.PTCP the watermelons  
 ‘Since she was a kid, Maria has (always) eaten (the) watermelons.’

Next section focuses more closely on the semantic requirements that VPs must satisfy to license an indefinite reading for their definite internal argument in Italian. I hypothesize that the relevant licensing factor is the notion of *incremental homogeneity* at the VP level. Incremental homogeneity can further combine with the habitual operator Hab, given that habitual statements are inherently incrementally homogeneous.

#### 4.4.2 *Incremental homogeneity at VP level*

Before outlining a formal characterization of incremental homogeneity, it is important to consider some additional properties that have been attributed to IDs in the literature. For instance, in a questionnaire on informal Italian, Cardinaletti and Giusti (2020) found that IDs were especially productive in generic and habitual environments. Similarly, in an investigation on some northern Italian dialects, Pinzin and Poletto (2021) intuitively relate the availability of IDs with “habitual long-term activities”, although this term is left formally undefined. Furthermore, Gerards (2020) and Gerards and Stark (2022) suggest that a habitual reading of the predicate strongly favors the use of apparently similar constructions in Old Spanish and Francoprovençal (see also footnote 67). Finally, as attested in Table 1 in Appendix A, IDs prefer atelic over telic temporal modifiers.

On the other hand, as previously discussed, Donazzan and Gritti (2013) claim that the referential properties of intensional arguments have a direct impact on the atelicity of the VP and the homogeneity of the eventuality structure. This claim is based on the

assumption that the intensional nature of the thematic argument of an s-level predicate such as *eat* –which for Landman and Rothstein has a kind reference– is what drives the VP to be interpreted as atelic (see Section 4.3.2). By contrast, following Carlson’s (1977) original idea, I here assume that k-reference is incompatible with s-level predicates like *eat* (*contra* Landman & Rothstein 2010; Donazzan & Gritti 2013; Chierchia 2023). Concretely, I assume that the object of a s-level predicate like *eat* either refers to an object entity of type  $\langle e \rangle$  (when the head of D is a canonical definite article), or to a property of type  $\langle e, t \rangle$  (when DE is adjoined to D and derives IDs).

Building on these observations and assumptions, and with the main goal of addressing the initial research question regarding the semantic requirements that VPs must satisfy to cause an indefinite reading for their definite internal arguments, I hypothesize that IDs are the output of incremental homogeneity at the VP level (Landman & Rothstein 2010, 2012a, 2012b). This hypothesis is grounded on several ingredients. First, I assume that eventualities are either states or events. Moreover, eventualities have running times  $\tau(e)$ , which are defined as the time interval at which an event  $e$  takes place. Second, I subscribe to the view that all habitual readings are incrementally homogeneous eventualities. Third, following Landman (2008) and Landman and Rothstein (2010), I define incremental homogeneity as incremental preservation of cross-temporal identity of an event and of its event time, between the running time of the onset of that event (i.e.,  $\tau(O(e, V))$ ) and the running time of that event itself (i.e.,  $\tau(e)$ ). Fourth, following Boneh and Doron (2013), I assume that the core notion underlying habituality is event iteration, which requires that at least two events must be considered to obtain a habitual reading.

In this theory, *incrementality* is a purely temporal notion, according to which  $j$  incrementally extends  $i$  if  $i$  is an initial subinterval of  $j$ :  $i \subseteq_{\text{in}} j$ . Moreover, the notion of incrementality relies on *cross-temporal identity*, conceived as an equivalence relation between events. Concretely,  $e_1$  is cross-temporally identical to  $e_2$  (i.e.,  $e_1 \sim e_2$ ) iff  $e_1$  and  $e_2$  count as one and the same event (i.e., if they count as one event). Finally, the notion of *event onset* refers to the smallest eventuality of type  $V$  such that the onset of this event is cross-temporal identical to  $e$  and its running time is an initial subinterval of the same event (i.e.,  $\tau(O(e, V)) \subseteq_{\text{in}} e$ ).

With these notions in place, the proposed formal definition of incremental homogeneity is provided below.

(42) Definition of *incremental homogeneity*

Let  $\alpha$  be a VP with event type  $\alpha$  and a verbal event type  $V$ ,

let  $e \in V$  and  $e \in \alpha$ ,

$e$  is *incrementally homogeneous* wrt  $\alpha$  and  $V$  iff

for every interval  $i$ : if  $\tau(O(e, V)) \subseteq_{in} i \subseteq_{in} \tau(e)$

then there is an eventuality  $e'$  of event type  $\alpha$  such that:

$e' \sim e$  and  $\tau(e') = i$ ,

and, furthermore,  $ITER(\alpha) = *e''(e'' \subset e)$

[adapted from Landman & Rothstein 2010: 237 and Boneh & Doron 2013: 181]

The first restriction of this formula imposes that homogeneity requires some initiating event or onset of  $e$ : the onset of  $e$ , relative to  $V$  (i.e.,  $O(e, V)$ ) is the smallest eventuality of type  $V$  such as that  $O(e, V)$  is cross-temporal identical ( $\sim$ ) to  $e$  and the running time of this onset ( $\tau(O(e, v))$ ) is a subinterval of  $e$  that starts at the same time as  $e$ . Thus, the onset is the first stage where the incremental sequence of events cross-temporally identical to  $e$  reaches a stage big enough to count as the same event type, since an eventuality  $e'$  is cross-temporally identical to  $e$  ( $e' \sim e$ ) iff  $e'$  and  $e$  count as ‘one and the same event’ and the running time of eventuality  $e'$  is identified with an initial subinterval of  $e$ . The last part of the formula introduces an operation of event iteration that is interpreted as a plurality of events (Link 1983) such that  $ITER(\alpha)$  is incrementally homogeneous for any event  $e''$  included in  $e$ .<sup>76</sup>

In what follows, I examine in greater detail how the definition in (42) provides an adequate explanatory framework for the data presented in Table 1 of Appendix A. Starting with activities, consider the VP containing an ID *comprare i indef tulipani* ‘to buy tulips’. The event type of this VP is also an activity. Therefore, I reason that the event type of this VP is incrementally homogeneous iff there is an onset of this event –namely  $O(e, COMPRARE\_I\_TULIPANI)$ – which is the smallest event in  $\tau(e)$  that is big enough to count both as buying tulips and as cross-temporally identical to  $e$ . Crucially, the VP *comprare i indef tulipani* is homogeneous down to events or larger intervals that qualify as buying tulips. These are activities that most commonly involve buying more than one tulip, and,

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<sup>76</sup> As outlined in the definition above, I follow Boneh and Doron’s (2013) understanding of iteration as involving plural events (in terms of Kratzer 2008). This perspective contrasts with Landman and Rothstein’s (2010: 251) approach, who argue that the iteration operation applies specifically to the onset of the event. In their account, “the onset event is big enough to be of the iteration event type”.

as such, inherently constitute an event iteration of buying tulips. *Per* ‘for’ phrases modify activities, since they are cumulative (Krifka 1989). The ID internal argument does not block this modification because the object DP is a property-denoting expression.

Second, let us consider states, especially possessive states, such as those exemplified by the verbal event type *avere* ‘to have’. The event type of a possessive state containing an ID such as *avere le<sub>indef</sub> pulci* ‘to have bugs’ in Table 1 is also a state. Therefore, the event type of the VP is incrementally homogeneous iff there is an onset of *e*,  $O(e, AVERE\_LE\_PULCI)$ , which corresponds to the smallest initial state in  $\tau(e)$  that is sufficiently large to qualify as containing bugs and is also cross-temporally identical to *e*, even though the reference of the object may vary in subsequent cross-temporally identical events. *Per*-phrases apply felicitously to states such as *avere le<sub>indef</sub> pulci* not because *le<sub>indef</sub> pulci* refers to a kind, but because it denotes a(n existentially bound) property.

Interestingly, the data in Table 1 shows that *per* modifiers not only apply to activities and stative predicates, but also to accomplishments and achievements. This implies that *per*-phrases can modify all four classes of verbal event types, making them atelic. This comes as a significant challenge for existing analyses of event types. As noted by Landman and Rothstein (2010), activity predicates are lexically constrained to be incrementally homogeneous down to the event level, while stative predicates are homogeneous down to individual instants. On the other hand, accomplishments and achievements are typically considered non-homogeneous (Bennet & Partee 1972; Dowty 1979), as they involve either a causative event followed by a result state or a change of state. This difference would predict that these two event types should not be compatible with *per* modifiers.

However, Table 1 shows that accomplishments behave similarly to activities. If the event type of the VP is an accomplishment, such as *spalare la<sub>indef</sub> neve* ‘to shovel snow’, the event becomes incrementally homogeneous if there exists an onset of the event,  $O(e, SPALARE\_LA\_NEVE)$ , and for every interval of *i*, the running time of the onset of that event,  $\tau(O(e, V))$ , is an initial subinterval of *i* included in  $\tau(e)$ . Moreover, for an eventuality of *spalare la<sub>indef</sub> neve* to be true, it is necessary to consider an incremental sequence of events cross-temporally identical to *e*, and an initial event in  $\tau(e)$  that is long enough to count both as shoveling snow and as cross-temporally identical to *e*. This holds even when different amounts of snow are removed with a shovel in each subevent *e'* that is cross-temporally identical to *e*. The accomplishment *spalare la<sub>indef</sub> neve* is homogeneous

down to complex eventualities –namely, an external causing event followed by a final state– that count as an event of shoveling snow. As such, *per*-phrases can apply to these complex eventualities, which are cumulative. Furthermore, event iterations are also expected to be felicitous. This is confirmed by their compatibility with modifiers like *ogni N* in Table 1.

Finally, let us examine achievements, as exemplified by the verbal event type *arrivare* ‘to arrive’. For the VP *arrivare i<sub>indef</sub> treni* ‘to arrive trains’, which is also classified as an achievement, the event type is considered incrementally homogeneous if there is an onset of the event,  $O(e, \text{ARRIVARE\_I\_TRENI})$ , that is cross-temporally identical to  $e$  and constitutes the smallest initial event within  $\tau(e)$ , big enough to be compatible with the arrival of several different trains. The achievement *arrivare i<sub>indef</sub> treni* is homogeneous down to complex eventualities, namely a change of state / location followed by a final state, that together count as an event of there arriving trains. Just as with other event types, *per* phrases apply to these complex, cumulative eventualities. Additionally, event iteration is also felicitous, as supported by the use of *ogni N* modifiers. Overall, the data in Table 1 illustrates that not only activities and states, but also accomplishments and achievements, exhibit characteristics of incremental homogeneity and event iteration. This is evidenced by their compatibility with *per* and *ogni N* modifiers.

Having hypothesized that ID readings for definite plurals and definite mass nouns are the output of incremental homogeneity of the VP they are part of, the (apparent) contrast observed by Donazzan and Gritti (2013) regarding the availability of IDs in perfective and imperfective environments, as reported in (10) and repeated in (43), can now be explained.

(43)a. Maria mangiava *le<sub>def/indef</sub> angurie*.

Maria eat.IPFV.3SG the watermelons

‘Maria {used to eat / was eating} watermelons.’

b. Maria ha mangiato *le<sub>def/#indef</sub> angurie*.

Maria AUXeat.PTCP the watermelons

(Donazzan & Gritti 2013: 184, (12))

I have argued that IDs can potentially appear as internal arguments of all verbs across all aspectual classes, as long as the resulting event exhibits incremental homogeneity. Consequently, I suggest that the contrast in (43) arises because it is particularly difficult to



identify an initial onset of the event of eating a plurality of watermelons that is both sufficiently small to be considered an initial sub-event and large enough to be cross-temporally identical to the same event in the episodic context in (43b). On the other hand, the extended duration of the habitual sentence in (43a) allows for the identification of an appropriate initial onset event, namely  $O(e, \text{MANGIARE\_LE\_ANGURIE})$ , which can be considered cross-temporally identical to the event of eating multiple watermelons. This is because the process of eating multiple watermelons typically takes a sequence of events within  $\tau(e)$  and typically takes place over an extended period of time.

Moreover, we can also account for why this contrast disappears, as illustrated in (11), repeated as (44).

- (44)a. Sin da bambina, Maria ha (sempre) mangiato *le<sub>def/indef</sub> angurie*.  
 since of kid Maria AUX always eat.PTCP the watermelons  
 ‘Since she was a kid, Maria has (always) eaten (the) watermelons.’
- b. Oggi, Maria ha mangiato *l<sub>def/indef</sub> anguria*.  
 today Maria AUX eat.PTCP the-watermelon  
 ‘Today, Maria ate (the) watermelon.’

(44a) illustrates the improved availability of the ID reading with perfective aspect in a habitual sentence. This is because the extended time span of the habitual context facilitates the identification of a suitable onset for the event of eating multiple watermelons, thereby allowing for an incrementally homogeneous interpretation of the event. What is more, my hypothesis also explains the previously unnoticed possibility of an indefinite reading in an episodic (and perfective) environment, where the same common noun *anguria* receives a mass denotation, as in (43b). In this context, it is unnecessary to identify an onset event that involves the consumption of a plurality of watermelons. On the contrary, even a minimal onset event, where Maria simply eats a small quantity of watermelon, is sufficient to qualify as the same, cross-temporally identical event. The availability of an adequate event onset allows for a straightforward, incrementally homogeneous interpretation of the VP in question.

As a final note before concluding this section, it may be relevant to mention an additional example that apparently illustrates that an ID reading becomes unavailable in a perfective context. Consider the sentence in (45).

- (45) Dan Brown ha appena scritto *i<sub>def</sub>/#i<sub>ndef</sub>* *best-sellers*.  
 Dan Brown AUX just write.PTCP the best-sellers  
 ‘Dan Brown wrote the best-sellers.’

This example can only be interpreted as denoting the situation where Dan Brown just wrote the contextually maximal salient sum of the best-sellers. However, it is important to note that the same restriction appears even in habitual environments, as illustrated below.

- (46) Dan Brown ha scritto *i<sub>def</sub>/#i<sub>ndef</sub>* *best-sellers* per anni.  
 Dan Brown AUX write.PTCP the best-sellers for years  
 ‘Dan Brown wrote the best-sellers for years.’

Under the theory developed in this chapter, this incompatibility arises from the difficulty of identifying an initial subevent that is long enough to count as writing more than one best-seller. A best-seller becomes such only when it is fully written and further validated by critics and the audience, which is a process that likely takes many years. This makes it difficult to identify an adequate initial subevent, thus blocking the ID interpretation in this context. In fact, this restriction appears to be lexically related to the N *best-sellers*. Notice that the following example, where *best-sellers* is replaced by *libri* ‘books’, drastically improves the ID interpretation.

- (47) Dan Brown ha scritto *i<sub>def</sub>/i<sub>ndef</sub>* *libri* per anni.  
 Dan Brown AUX write.PTCP the books for years  
 ‘Dan Brown wrote (the) books for years.’

Thus far, I have examined the grammatical conditions that license an indefinite reading for the plural and mass definite article in Italian. Let us now turn to the final research question relevant for this chapter: why is Italian unique among Romance languages in allowing this construction?

## 4.5 The cross- and intra-linguistic puzzles

To address this issue adequately, it is useful to divide the research question into two parts. First, is there a principled correlation between the absence of BNs in a given Italo-Romance variety and the preference for IDs in the same dialect? Based on a small corpus study of two northern Italian dialects, reported in Section 4.5.1, I observe that an existing variety with a more restricted use of BNs displays a higher incidence of IDs when translating a BN from Italian into the corresponding dialect. These preliminary findings suggest that IDs may have originally developed as a replacement for BNs in dialects that lack this indefinite form.

Second, why is that only Italian, and not Spanish, Catalan, or French, ended up exhibiting the ID form? In light of the systematic and bidirectional influence between Italo-Romance dialects and Italian, in Section 4.5.2 I advance the plausible conjecture that the use of IDs, which likely originated in the dialects, permeated the national language. This phenomenon is not observed in other Romance languages, presumably because they either lack a rich dialectal substratum capable of developing such a form, already possess two productive indefinite expressions (e.g., BNs and *un(o)s* in Spanish and Catalan), or they do not experience any competition between indefinite constructions (as is the case with French).

### 4.5.1 The AISIt data on Lombard and Venetan

In order to address the former question, let us provide an initial descriptive observation. As observed by Cardinaletti and Giusti (2018) in an investigation of three maps of the AIS atlas (*Sprach- und Sachatlas Italiens und der Südschweiz, Jahberg and Jud 1928–1940*), the possibility of licensing IDs appears to be widespread throughout the majority of dialects across the entire Italian peninsula. The presence of IDs is observed to coexist with other indefinite forms (e.g., *di*+ART nominals) in most Italo-Romance dialects. However, it appears to represent the exclusive choice for expressing indefiniteness in several dialects of central and southern Italy, extending at least as far south as northern Calabria.<sup>77</sup> This widespread use of IDs has been corroborated, at least partially, by the investigations of Pinzin and Poletto (2021, 2022), based on data from the *Atlante Sintattico d'Italia*

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<sup>77</sup> Recall, however, that the AIS atlas only contains three maps featuring examples of narrow scope weak indefinite nominal expressions (i.e., map 1037 [*if there was*] *water*; map 1343 [*go to the cellar*] *to take wine*; and map 637 [*to look for*] *violets*). Furthermore, the atlas dates back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and was primarily conceived as a lexical source, which prevents a thorough syntactic analysis of the data.

(ASIt) and additional fieldwork. Here, the use of IDs is noted to be available in most northern Italian varieties as well. However, Pinzin and Poletto’s findings reveal that areas in the extreme north and northeast of the peninsula exhibit a marked presence for BNs. This tendency is particularly pronounced in Veneto and Friuli, where speakers of the local dialects systematically favor this form.

Given this geographical distribution, I aim to test the hypothesis that the use of IDs is particularly prominent in varieties where BNs are less productive. Specifically, I propose that the presence of IDs correlates with the absence of BNs in a given language, a pattern that would suggest that IDs developed as a replacing form to cover the unavailability of BNs.

To evaluate this hypothesis, I selected two representative northern Italian regional dialects: one with a productive use of BNs (e.g., Venetan, spoken in the Veneto region) and one that constrains their occurrence (e.g., Lombard, spoken in Lombardy).<sup>78</sup> In particular, I considered the datapoints from the ASIt corpus where the Italian input contained a BN to examine the corresponding translations in varieties with and without BNs. The straightforward expectation is that varieties permitting BNs will consistently translate an input BN in Italian with an output displaying the same form in the dialect. Conversely, dialects with limited or no use of BNs are expected to produce more IDs in their translations.

The ASIt corpus contains four entries shared by Lombard and Venetan that include a BN (under the scope of negation) in the Italian input.<sup>79</sup> These entries are as follows. For the details on the outputs of the translation task, refer to Appendix B.

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<sup>78</sup> The rationale for focusing on Lombard and Venetan was motivated in Chapter 2. In essence, these two varieties exhibit distinct tendencies in BN usage: Lombard, due to its Gallo-Romance nature, shows limited BN use, whereas Venetan, characterized by its non-Gallicness, favors BNs over di+ART nominals. Additionally, regional varieties were prioritized over local ones to expand the ASIt dataset, resulting in a robust sample of over 160 Venetan speakers and more than 40 Lombard speakers. Central and southern varieties were excluded due to insufficient ASIt representation. Notably, however, Anconetano, which entirely lacks BNs (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016, 2018), further supports the hypothesis put forward here, as its ASIt data systematically features IDs.

<sup>79</sup> The ASIt data pool presents several limitations. Entries containing a BN are relatively scarce, and all of them occur within negated contexts. While this ensures a narrow scope interpretation of the indefinite nominal expression in object position, it does in fact introduce an undesirable bias in the interpretation of the nominal expression. Moreover, the four data points include only two verbs (*buy* and *eat*) paired with two bare nominal objects (*fruit* and *apples*). Additionally, the corpus contains responses from a limited number of speakers, some of whom did not provide answers to all the inputs. For lack of an alternative, I proceed to comment on the available data. However, further empirical research is necessary to obtain a more comprehensive picture.

- (48)a. Entry 66: *Non mangia mai frutta, quella ragazza*  
                   ‘She never eats fruit, that girl’;
- b. Entry 69: *Non comprano mai frutta, le mie sorelle*  
                   ‘They never buy fruit, my sisters’;
- c. Entry 73: *Non compri mai mele*  
                   ‘You never buy apples’;
- d. Entry 74: *Non mangiamo mai frutta*  
                   ‘We never eat fruit’.

Regarding Venetan, the results are quite compelling. As expected, speakers of this variety consistently translated Italian inputs containing a BN into the same form in their dialect. Across all four entries, outputs featuring a BN account for approximately 90% of the total responses. IDs, on the other hand, are used sparingly, comprising about 10% of the outputs in three of the four entries.

The outcomes for Lombard are less straightforward. Firstly, it is important to note that the data pool for Lombard is smaller than that of Veneto. Additionally, the results display greater variation, with speakers seemingly divided into two groups: those who opt for the BN form of the input and those who favor the definite article with an indefinite interpretation. Despite this diversity, the comparison with Venetan results is revealing. While occurrences of IDs in Venetan were marginal, with a mean of 8.55% and a maximum of 11% in entry 73, Lombard shows a marked preference for IDs. In this case, IDs have a mean occurrence of 54.39%, reaching a maximum of 65% in entry 69. This reveals a clear tendency in Lombard to translate BNs into IDs.

As for the relatively high occurrence of BNs in Lombard, several plausible explanations must be considered. First, all the entries featured a negative sentence, which certainly biased the translations. Second, the Lombard variety is more heterogeneous than the Venetan one, which could account for greater fluctuation in the results. Third, it is important to acknowledge that participants engaged in translation tasks tend to replicate structures present in the input—in this case, BNs—even if such structures are not inherently part of the target grammar. Furthermore, without detailed sociolinguistic information about the participants, it is possible that these speakers are more exposed to Italian and use it more frequently in their daily communicative acts, to the extent that it constitutes their dominant language. As a final remark, it is worth noting that only one instance of di+ART nominals was identified in the Lombard data pool. This suggests that the di+ART

form does not directly compete with BNs or IDs in expressing weak indefiniteness, as it appears to be specialized for conveying specificity in this Gallo-Romance variety, much as it is in Italian (as discussed extensively in the previous chapter). This specialization is likely a result of the influence of the national language.

Despite these considerations, a compelling pattern emerges from the data discussed in this section. Speakers of Venetan –a variety where BNs are predominant– consistently use BNs in their translations. In contrast, speakers of Lombard tend to replace BNs with IDs, indicating a clear preference for this form in their dialects. These results support the initial hypothesis that IDs emerge as a replacement for BNs in dialects that lack this construction.

#### 4.5.2 *Why only Italian?*

In response to the second question, namely what makes Italian unique among Romance languages concerning the presence of IDs, I can only advance a conjecture, which I believe, however, to be highly plausible. I hypothesize that the use of IDs –which likely originated in certain Italo-Romance dialectal varieties as a replacing form for BNs, as suggested by the results of the previous section– has permeated the national language. In particular, to account for the presence of IDs in Italian, I rely on the coexistence of competing grammars, in a slightly different sense from that originally proposed by Kroch (1994, 2001).<sup>80</sup>

Concretely, I emphasize the relevance of the role of dialects in the diachronic development of Italian by giving special importance to the coexistence of competing patterns arising from the constant language / dialect contact. In this regard, it is important to note that speakers of regional varieties have been found to be often influenced by the underlying dialect of their geographical area even if they are not speakers of such dialect (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2020; Lebani & Giusti 2022; Molinari 2022; Procentese et al. 2024). Intriguingly, situations of this sort, where two languages with different sociolinguistic statuses but grammatically similar interact, are often described by the term *bi(dia)lectalism* (Grohmann & Leivada 2012, Rowe & Grohmann 2013). In such environments, the boundaries between the two varieties become blurred, leading to a high degree of grammatical hybridism. This results in the incorporation of forms from both varieties into a

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<sup>80</sup> The notion of competing grammars has been traditionally employed to account for parametric differences (e.g., head-directionality) in language change.

single grammatical system, causing equivalent constructions to compete within the same syntactic and semantic environments (Leivada et al. 2017; Grohmann et al. 2020).<sup>81</sup>

In the case at hand, I specifically posit that speakers of Italian (and its underlying dialects) have two competing patterns for expressing weak indefiniteness: BNs and IDs. Building on the discussion in the previous chapter, I hold that *di*+ART nominals are excluded from such competition due to their specialization for specificity and strong indefiniteness, as confirmed by their incompatibility with long-term sentences and habitual environments.<sup>82</sup>

What role, then, IDs concretely play? In the preceding section, it was argued that IDs seem to replace BNs in dialects that lack the latter form. The presence of IDs in these dialects might then be transferred to the national language by speakers that adopt the alternative form and start using it in informal settings. This use might spread across the territory, gaining frequency until it permeates the national language as a consequence of the constant language / dialect contact.

Although this suggestion remains speculative, the situation just described is typical of bialectal environments: two forms –syntactically and semantically equivalent and pertaining to the grammar of the national language and to the grammar of the dialect– often concur and compete in the same syntactic and semantic environments within the highly hybridized grammar of speakers of both varieties.

Crucially, this process can only be captured by an analysis that postulates the same structural organization for the two forms, as defended in this thesis. Specifically, I propose that IDs and BNs, which are structurally analogous, compete in internal argument positions, provided the resulting event allows for an incrementally homogeneous interpretation. This competition offers a natural explanation for the overlapping syntactic

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<sup>81</sup> The impact of the dialects on the national language –both in its formal and informal registers– has already been explored, for instance, in relation to so-called *phrasal verbs* in Italian (Benincà & Poletto 2006; Iacobini 2009). In these works, the argument is made that the higher presence of these constructions in Italian –unexpected under Talmy’s (2000) typology and in comparison to other Romance languages– is not due to the influence of Germanic languages over northern dialects. Instead, the presence of these constructions is attributed to the influence of the dialects themselves, which already featured phrasal verbs in the 13th century.

<sup>82</sup> Being specialized for strong indefiniteness does not mean that *di*+ART nominals are categorically excluded from expressing non-specific readings. This is especially true for speakers from regions where the underlying dialects do not allow BNs (Cardinaletti and Giusti 2016; Giusti *p.c.*) and whose dialectal grammar is consequently closer to that of French than to standard Italian. Nonetheless the results presented in Appendix B support the conclusion that *di*+ART nominals are specialized for specificity also in Lombard, a Gallo-Romance variety.

distribution of IDs and BNs, namely their occurrence in the complement position of lexical heads and their parallel interpretation, characterized by narrow scope, non-specificity, and weak indefiniteness.

This theorizing may also shed light on why this phenomenon occurs in Italian (and some Italo-Romance varieties), but not in other Romance languages that do not license argumental BNs, such as French. I argue that this difference arises because the grammar of an Italo-Romance dialect competes with that of formal/standard Italian, whereas speakers of French generally do not have access to a similar competing alternative pattern. Recall that, unlike French, Italian allows argumental BNs. This means that at least one of the competing grammars available to a speaker from a geographical area where BNs are absent in the local dialect does indeed include this form. When such a speaker needs to express weak indefiniteness in either the dialect or the national (informal/popular) language, they can choose between the BN (available in formal/standard Italian) or the ID (available in the regional/local dialect). Crucially, both forms are viable options given the postulated structures in (38) for Romance indefinites, with the distinction between IDs and BNs being a matter of the overt or covert Spell-Out of the lower D head.<sup>83</sup>

This also explains why IDs are not present in Spanish and Catalan either. Spanish and Catalan, along with all underlying Ibero-Romance varieties, possess a stable and productive weak indefinite form, namely BNs, alongside a form specialized for strong indefiniteness, namely *un(o)s*. Therefore, the productivity and stability of BNs in Spanish and Catalan prevent the necessity for adopting IDs. This contrasts with Italian, where the lack of a robust presence of BNs in certain dialectal varieties leads to the incorporation of IDs into the national language.

One might wonder why Italo-Romance varieties specifically chose the ID form, considering that the bare *di*+N configuration is also a potential phonological realization of

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<sup>83</sup> In this regard, an interesting cross-linguistic correlation with a genetically unrelated language, Basque, is especially noteworthy, as pointed out by Leonetti (2019), referring to Etxeberria (2010). In its current state, almost all varieties of Basque lack BNs and instead use morphologically definite expressions to express weak indefiniteness. Notably, Etxeberria (2021) observes that BNs were in fact present in old Basque. As this form was diachronically lost, speakers of Basque replaced it with morphologically definite descriptions. This observation is supported by Souletin, traditionally considered the most conservative variety of Basque, and therefore representing an old version of the language. Intriguingly, this variant preserves BNs but does not license an indefinite interpretation with definites. In our view, this pattern aligns well with the general diachronic perspective outlined in this chapter in terms of competing grammars. As Kroch (1994: 6) points out, doublets like those observed in Italian and in Basque – pairs of parallel forms with identical semantic import, in our terms – compete in usage until one succeeds and replaces the other. This is what happened in Basque, as shown by Etxeberria (2021), and this is what seems to be occurring in contemporary Italian.



Espinal and Cyrino’s (2022a, b) structure. Interestingly, some dialects, particularly in southern Piedmont, Liguria, and northern Tuscany – regions strongly influenced by French – use this form to convey weak indefiniteness (Battye 1990; Cardinaletti & Giusti 2018; Pinzin & Poletto 2021).

Regarding the general preference for the ID form, I argue that there is a concrete grammatical reason behind this choice. As repeatedly noted, the presence or absence of a BN in a language has been correlated with the presence or absence of overt rich morphological number marking on the noun, which explains the contrast between Spanish / Catalan and French. Intriguingly, Lombard varieties generally pattern like French in this respect, as shown below.

- (49) Te comprat mai {*ul pom / i pom*}. *Lombard*  
 you buy.PRES.2SG never the.SG apple the.PL apples  
 ‘You never buy {the apple / (the) apples}.’

In Lombard, no explicit number marking is found on the noun (as attested by the invariable form *pom* ‘apple(s)’), making the lack of BNs expected. Consequently, due to the influence of Italian, it is also expected that such varieties would resort to IDs to express the same meaning. Crucially, this observation provides further support for the formal analysis of IDs presented in the present chapter. Recall in this sense that in Espinal and Cyrino’s (2022a, 2022b) structure in (38a), D (or *d*) is the only head syntactically modified by a number feature in Romance.<sup>84</sup>

In summary, I have proposed a plausible conjecture to address the intra-linguistic and cross-linguistic puzzles arising from the indefinite interpretation of the morphologically definite article in Italo-Romance languages, a phenomenon not observed in other closely related languages. I have discussed that IDs are notably prevalent in Italian dialects where BNs are not used, presumably as an alternative replacement form. This usage has likely permeated the national language through dialect and language contact, gradually reaching the majority of speakers. This perspective sheds light on the complex landscape of indefiniteness in Italian, which Pinzin & Poletto (2022) aptly describe as an “indefinite maze.” I suggest that the three available indefinite forms found in both informal Italian and its dialectal varieties –namely BNs, di+ART, and IDs– compete and distribute themselves

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<sup>84</sup> This also supports the view that Number is morphologically realized on the determiner in Romance (as proposed by Bouchard 2002; Dobrovie-Sorin 2012, Cyrino & Espinal 2020).

across the full spectrum of indefiniteness. Di+ART indefinites specialize for specificity and strong indefiniteness, while BNs and IDs compete in expressing weak indefiniteness.

#### 4.6 Conclusions

This chapter has explored the phenomenon of indefinite interpretations associated with morphologically definite articles preceding plural count and mass nouns in Italian. Concretely, the chapter has addressed three main research questions: (i) what is the exact contribution of IDs at the level of semantic representation? (ii) What are the grammatical conditions that license an indefinite reading for the definite article in Italian? And (iii) why is Italian special among Romance languages for allowing this construction with plural and mass indefinites (in addition to BNs and *di*+ART nominals)?

As for the first question, after a critical examination of the literature, I have shown that IDs (i) should not be assimilated to WDs (*contra* Leonetti 2019, Pinzin & Poletto 2021, 2022); (ii) do not function as kind-denoting definite descriptions (*contra* Donazzan & Gritti 2013); and (iii) cannot be derived from the alleged primary kind denotation of plural definites (*contra* Zamparelli 2002). Instead, I have proposed that IDs convey a genuinely existential, non-maximal, non-presuppositional, and upward entailing interpretation.

In response to the second question, I first presented novel evidence showing that IDs, like BNs, can only occur in internal argument positions of all aspectual verb classes. Moreover, I observed a productive use of IDs in habitual, iterative, and atelic contexts, irrespective of the perfective / imperfective aspectual dichotomy. To account for these observations and the existential reading of IDs, I proposed an analysis that aligns with the unified structure for Romance indefinites postulated by Espinal and Cyrino (2022a, 2022b), as outlined in the previous chapter. Under this analysis, indefiniteness in Romance arises from a type-shifting indefinite operator DE, which is merged atop a definite determiner. This operator turns a definite description (of type  $\langle e \rangle$ ) into a property-type expression (of type  $\langle e, t \rangle$ ), which predicates over the variable introduced by the existential quantifier of the VP existential closure operation in the nuclear scope. Additionally, I argued that the observed productivity in habitual and iterative contexts, and with *per* ‘for’ modifiers should be attributed to the requirement that IDs occur as internal arguments of predicates denoting incrementally homogeneous events.

Lastly, I addressed the third question concerning the distribution of IDs, BNs, and *di*+ART nominals for the expression of indefiniteness in Italian and its dialectal varieties, in contrast to other Romance languages. Through a small corpus study of two northern Italo-Romance regional dialects, namely Lombard and Venetan, I conjectured that the use of IDs is more prevalent –presumably as a replacement form– in the dialectal variety that employs fewer BNs. I also discussed the hypothesis that this use has permeated the national language due to the bidirectional influence between Italian and its dialects on speakers of these varieties, which arguably provides an explanation for why only informal Italian, as opposed to other Romance languages, employs IDs.

# Appendices

## A1 Distribution of IDs

**Table 1.** Distribution of IDs depending on four different aspectual classes of verbs (column 1), two examples per verb class (column 2), a perfective / imperfective aspectual distinction (column 3), a habitual (and iterative) verbal context (column 4), and a temporal *per* / *in* modification (columns 5 and 6, respectively).

Classes of verbs	Examples	Perfective/imperfective	Habitual (iterative)	Temporal modifiers ( <i>per</i> )	Temporal modifiers ( <i>in</i> )
Activities	<i>Comprare i tulipani</i>	La mamma ha comprato <sub>i<sub>def</sub>/indef</sub> tulipani.  La mamma comprava <sub>i<sub>def</sub>/indef</sub> tulipani (mentre io aspettavo fuori)	La mamma compra <sub>i<sub>#def</sub>/indef</sub> tulipani (tutti i giorni) da oltre un anno.	La mamma ha comprato <sub>i<sub>#def</sub>/indef</sub> tulipani (per giorni).	La mamma ha comprato <sub>i<sub>def</sub>/indef</sub> tulipani (in dieci minuti)
	<i>Preparare il pane</i>	Gianni ha preparato <sub>il<sub>def</sub>/indef</sub> pane.  Gianni preparava <sub>il<sub>def</sub>/indef</sub> pane (mentre Maria preparava <sub>il<sub>def</sub>/indef</sub> biscotti).	Gianni prepara <sub>il<sub>#def</sub>/indef</sub> pane (ogni giorno) da quando è bambino.	Gianni ha preparato <sub>il<sub>#def</sub>/indef</sub> pane (per ore).	Gianni ha preparato <sub>il<sub>def</sub>/indef</sub> pane (in un'ora)
Accomplishments	<i>Raccogliere i pomodori</i>	Quel contadino ha raccolto <sub>i<sub>def</sub>/indef</sub> pomodori.  Quel contadino raccoglieva <sub>i<sub>def</sub>/indef</sub> pomodori (mentre la moglie raccoglieva <sub>le<sub>def</sub>/indef</sub> patate)	Quel contadino raccoglie <sub>i<sub>#def</sub>/indef</sub> pomodori (ogni estate) da quando è bambino.	Quel contadino ha raccolto <sub>i<sub>#def</sub>/indef</sub> pomodori (per un'ora)	Quel contadino ha raccolto <sub>i<sub>def</sub>/indef</sub> pomodori (in un'ora)
	<i>Spalare la neve</i>	Il mio vicino ha spalato <sub>la<sub>def</sub>/indef</sub> neve.  Il mio vicino spalava <sub>la<sub>def</sub>/indef</sub> neve.	Il mio vicino spala <sub>la<sub>#def</sub>/indef</sub> neve (ogni inverno) da quando ci siamo trasferiti.	Il mio vicino ha spalato <sub>la<sub>#def</sub>/indef</sub> neve (per ore).	Il mio vicino ha spalato <sub>la<sub>def</sub>/indef</sub> neve (in due ore).
Achievements	<i>Arrivare i treni</i>	Sono arrivati <sub>i<sub>def</sub>/indef</sub> treni.  Arrivavano <sub>i<sub>def</sub>/indef</sub> treni (mentre aspettavo in stazione).	In questo paese arrivano <sub>i<sub>def</sub>/indef</sub> treni (ogni cinque minuti) da trent'anni.	Sono arrivati <sub>i<sub>#def</sub>/indef</sub> treni (per ore)	Sono arrivati <sub>i<sub>def</sub>/indef</sub> treni (in tre minuti)
	<i>Ottenere il petrolio</i>	[...] I cinesi e i birmani avevano già ottenuto	I cinesi e i birmani	I cinesi e i birmani	I cinesi e i birmani

		il <sub>def/indef</sub> petrolio scavando pozzi. <sup>85</sup> I cinesi e i birmani ottenevano il <sub>def/indef</sub> petrolio scavando pozzi prima del XVII secolo.	ottengono il <sub>#def/indef</sub> petrolio scavando pozzi (ogni anno) da decenni.	hanno ottenuto il <sub>#def/indef</sub> petrolio scavando pozzi (per anni).	hanno ottenuto il <sub>def/#indef</sub> petrolio scavando pozzi (in un giorno).
States	<i>Esserci le cimici dei letti</i>	A Parigi ci sono state le <sub>def/indef</sub> cimici dei letti. C'erano le <sub>#def/indef</sub> cimici dei letti a Parigi.	A Parigi ci sono le <sub>#def/indef</sub> cimici dei letti (ogni anno) da dieci anni.	A Parigi ci sono state le <sub>#def/indef</sub> cimici dei letti (per anni).	#A Parigi ci sono state le <sub>def/indef</sub> cimici dei letti (in un anno).
	<i>Avere le pulci</i>	Ho avuto le <sub>def/indef</sub> pulci in casa. Ho avuto le <sub>def/indef</sub> pulci in casa.	Ho avuto le <sub>#def/indef</sub> pulci in casa (ogni anno) per oltre dieci anni.	Ho avuto le <sub>#def/indef</sub> pulci in casa (per anni).	#Ho avuto le <sub>def/indef</sub> pulci in casa (in un anno).

<sup>85</sup> Example extracted from <https://www.epertutti.com/ricerche/Il-petrolio23821.php> on December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

## A2 The ASIt outputs.

The *Atlante Sintattico d'Italia (ASIt)* is a database hosted by the Università di Padova and Università di Venezia, freely accessible at <http://asit.maldura.unipd.it/>. This database contains data from various Italian dialects, collected through different questionnaires that asked speakers to translate Italian sentences into their respective dialects. For the data presented in this appendix, we initially narrowed our focus to the regions of Veneto and Lombardy using the appropriate search menu. Subsequently, we selected the tag *ogg indef* (indicating ‘indefinite direct object’). This search returned 32 results for both Lombardy and Veneto. From these results we ultimately selected only four entries, as detailed below, which contained a bare nominal direct object in the Italian input. The search was conducted in December, 2023.

### Venetan

- (1) 66 – *Non mangia mai frutta, quella ragazza* ‘She never eats fruit, that girl.’

- Total outputs:	164/165	99.40%
- Outputs with BNs	156/165	94.55%
- Outputs with IDs	4/165	2.4%
- Output <i>di+art</i>	1/165	0.61%
- Output with <i>un pomo</i>	1/165	0.61%
- Output with <i>manco un fruto</i>	1/165	0.61%
- Output with <i>un fia de fruta</i>	1/165	0.61%
- No output	1/165	0.61%

- (2) 69 – *Non comprano mai frutta, le mie sorelle* ‘They never buy fruit, my sisters.’

- Total outputs	159/160	99.37%
- Output with BNs	143/160	89.37%
- Outputs with IDs	16/160	10%
- No output	1/160	0.63%

- (3) 73 – *Non compri mai mele* ‘You never buy apples.’

- Total outputs	160/161	99.38%
- Outputs with BNs	141/161	87.58%
- Outputs with IDs	18/161	11.18%
- Output with <i>di+art</i>	1/161	0.62%
- No output	1/161	0.62%

(4) 74 – *Non mangiano mai frutta* ‘They never eat fruit.’

- Total outputs	159/160	99.37%
- Outputs with BNs	141/160	88.13%
- Outputs with IDs	17/160	10.63%
- Outputs with <i>di</i> +art	1/160	0.62%
- No output	1/160	0.62%

### Lombard

(5) 66 – *Non mangia mai frutta, quella ragazza* ‘She never eats fruit, that girl.’

- Total outputs:	39/40	97.5%
- Outputs with BNs:	15/40	37.5%
- Outputs with IDs:	22/40	55%
- Other outputs (bare <i>di</i> (?))	2/40	5%
- No output	1/40	2.5%

(6) 69 – *Non comprano mai frutta, le mie sorelle* ‘They never buy fruit, my sisters.’

- Total outputs	38/40	95%
- Output with BNs	11/40	27.5%
- Output with IDs	26/40	65%
- Output with bare <i>di</i>	1/40	2.5%
- Other input	1/40	2.5%
- No output	1/40	2.5%

(7) 73 – *Non compri mai mele* ‘You never buy apples.’

- Total outputs	40/41	97.57%
- Outputs with BNs	15/41	36.58%
- Outputs with IDs	22/41	53.66%
- Outputs with bare <i>di</i>	3(?) / 41	7.31%
- No output	1/41	2.44%

(8) 74 – *Non mangiano mai frutta* ‘They never eat fruit.’

- Total outputs	40/41	97.57%
- Outputs with BNs	20/41	48.78%
- Outputs with IDs	18/41	43.90%
- Outputs with <i>di</i> +art	1/41	2.44%
- Outputs with <i>briccha de fruta</i>	1/41	2.44%
- No output	1/41	2.44%



## 5 Italian numberless indefinite definites

### 5.1 Introduction

The present chapter serves as a natural continuation of the discussion developed in chapter 4, as it also investigates certain non-canonical interpretative possibilities associated with the Italian definite article. Unlike the ID construction analyzed in the previous chapter, however, the present chapter exclusively focuses on definite descriptions formed with morphologically singular count nouns that are unmarked for number, thereby excluding both plural and mass nouns. I refer to this non-canonical form as *numberless indefinite definites* (henceforth, NIDs). The chapter specifically examines constructions like those exemplified in italics below.

- (1) In questo hotel c'era *la piscina*.  
In this hotel there-be.IPFV.3SG the pool  
'There {was / were} (a) pool(s) in this hotel.'
- (2) Oggi, Fabio ha indossato *la cravatta*.  
today Fabio AUX wear.PTCP the tie  
'Today, Fabio wore (a) tie(s).'
- (3) Tutti gli italiani hanno *la macchina*.<sup>86</sup>  
all the Italians have.PRES.3PL the car  
'All Italians have (a) car(s).'

All the examples above are compatible with the default unique and familiar interpretation typically associated with definite descriptions.<sup>87</sup> In other words, in an out-of-the-blue context, the nominal expressions in italics can refer to the contextually salient, unique, and familiar pool, tie, and car, respectively. However, my primary focus in this chapter is on the indefinite interpretation illustrated in the English translations. Under this reading, a sentence like (1a) states that the relevant hotel in context possesses one or more pools.

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<sup>86</sup> Example retrieved from <https://forum.finanzaonline.com/threads/cose-una-politica-industriale.1214141/> on November 19th, 2024.

<sup>87</sup> Even though the examples in (1) – (3) can be interpreted with the default definite reading of the definite descriptions in italics, when not necessary, I have opted to include only the relevant non-definite reading in the English translation for clarity reasons. Moreover, throughout this chapter, I will systematically translate the morphologically definite description using both a singular and a plural indefinite form. The reasons for this choice will become clearer in the following pages.

Notably, to the best of my knowledge, these constructions have not been discussed in the literature on Italian. In the rare instances where they are mentioned, they are often assimilated to the ID construction discussed in the previous chapter (e.g., Kupisch & Koops 2007; Ippolito 2017; Leonetti 2019). The rationale for treating NIDs as distinct from IDs will be elaborated upon in the following sections.

There are three primary theoretical motivations for analyzing NIDs in this thesis. First, despite their morphologically definite form, these constructions convey an indefinite, non-specific, existential interpretation. Second, although they are morphologically singular, NIDs convey a number-neutral interpretation in the sense of Farkas & de Swart (2003). Third, they constitute a marked option within Romance, as these languages employ distinct strategies to convey similar meanings. Let us explore these three aspects in greater detail through relevant examples.

A relevant argument to demonstrate that NIDs convey an indefinite reading concerns their scope behavior. Unlike canonical definites, NIDs are only compatible with non-specific existential interpretations and are therefore expected to license narrow scope readings. This prediction is borne out, as already perceivable in the example (3). This sentence conveys the generalization that all Italians have (at least) one car, which corresponds to a narrow scope reading of the definite description below the universal quantifier in subject position. A wide scope reading, in contrast, would lead to the infelicitous interpretation that all Italians share the same, unique car—a situation clearly at odds with our knowledge of the world.

Moreover, the same scope pattern is attested in the following examples, involving a negative context (4) and another universal quantifier (5).

- (4) In questo hotel non c'era *la piscina*.  
 In this hotel not there-be.IPFV.3SG the pool  
 'There was no pool in this hotel.'
- (5) Fabio indossa *la cravatta* ogni domenica.  
 Fabio wear.PRES3SG the tie every Sunday  
 'Fabio wears a tie every Sunday.'

The sentence in (4) denotes a situation in which the relevant hotel in context didn't have any pool, which is only possible if the definite description *la piscina* takes scope below the negative marker at the level of logical representation. A scopeless / wide scope

reading, in contrast, would correspond to a situation where there was a unique, salient, and familiar pool in context such that the hotel didn't possess it. Similarly, (5) denotes the situation where Fabio wears a potentially different tie every Sunday, a reading that can only be obtained if the definite description scopes below the universal quantifier.

The second reason for analyzing NIDs, relates to the label *numberless*, which I have adopted for these constructions, following Espinal's (2010) analysis of morphologically singular BNs in Catalan and Spanish. This label captures the number-neutral behavior of NIDs. Following Farkas and de Swart (2003), I define number-neutrality as the ability of a morphologically singular nominal expression to be compatible with both atomicity and non-atomicity entailments. This property is illustrated in the following examples, inspired by the diagnostics for number-neutrality proposed in Espinal & McNally (2007, 2011).

- (6) Questo hotel ha *la piscina*. Una in giardino e una in  
 This hotel have.PRES.3SG the pool one in patio and one in  
 terrazzo.  
 terrace  
 'This hotel has (#a) pools. One in the patio and one in the terrace.'
- (7) Tutti gli italiani hanno *la macchina*. E spesso anche due  
 all the Italians have.PRES.3PL the car and often also two  
 per famiglia.<sup>88</sup>  
 for family  
 'All Italians have (#a) cars. And often even two per family.'

The sentence in (6), containing *la piscina*, is compatible with a continuation that requires the presence of a plurality of pools. Crucially, this continuation is available even though the definite description is not morphologically plural. Similarly, in (7) *la macchina* allows for a continuation involving more than one car. These examples demonstrate that the singular morphology of NIDs does not preclude their interpretation to be compatible with plural, non-atomic referents.

This behavior is not coincidental and emerges systematically with all instances of NIDs, as further illustrated in the following examples.

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<sup>88</sup> Example retrieved from <https://forum.finanzaonline.com/threads/cose-una-politica-industriale.1214141/> on November 19th, 2024.

- (8) a. Questo edificio ha *l'ascensore*. Uno per ogni ala.  
 this building have.PRES.3SG the-lifter one for each wing  
 'This building has (an) elevator(s). One for each wing.'
- b. La bicicletta ha *il portapacchi*. Uno sul manubrio  
 the bike have.PRES.3SG the baggage holder one on.the handlebars  
 e uno sulla ruota posteriore.  
 and one on.the wheel rear  
 'The bike has (a) baggage holder(s). One on the handlebars and on the rear wheel.'

The above examples contain a NID. As it can be perceived from the continuation of the sentences, these nominal expressions are compatible with non-atomicity entailments, as they are felicitous in contexts where the existence of a plurality is explicitly expressed.

Crucially, it is important to note that number-neutrality is a distinctive feature uniquely associated with NIDs in Italian. Neither the singular indefinite article nor the other plural indefinite forms analyzed in the thesis –namely BNs, *di*+ART, and IDs– are compatible with both atomicity and non-atomicity entailments. This incompatibility is evident in the examples below, which contain the singular indefinite article (9) and plural indefinites (10), respectively.

- (9) Questo hotel ha *una piscina*. #Una in giardino e una in  
 This hotel have.PRES.3SG a pool one in patio and one in  
 terrazzo.  
 terrace  
 'This hotel has a pool. #One in the patio and one in the terrace.'
- (10) Hanno raccolto { $\emptyset$  / *dei* / *i\_{indef}*} *pomodori*.  
 AUX pick.PTCP  $\emptyset$  di+ART ART tomatoes  
 'They picked tomatoes.'
- a. Una cassa di Pachino e una di San Marzano.  
 a trunk of Pachino and one of San Marzano  
 'A trunk of Pachino tomatoes and one of San Marzano tomatoes.'
- b. #Un Pachino.  
 a Pachino

Substituting the NID in (6) with a singular indefinite article renders the sentence infelicitous. This demonstrates that the singular indefinite article cannot convey number-neutral readings and is restricted to situations involving atomic referents. Conversely, the plural indefinite expressions in (10) are only felicitous with the continuation in (10a), which entails the existence of a plurality of individuals satisfying the property denoted by the noun. In contrast, the continuation in (10b), entailing the presence of a unique individual, is infelicitous in the same context. This incompatibility shows that the plural indefinite expressions in question are both syntactically and semantically plural. Consequently, the proposal outlined in Section 5.4 will need to provide a formal, compositional account to explain the number-neutral readings uniquely associated with NIDs.

The third research interest stems from the cross-linguistic diversity observed in Romance languages. Let us consider this variation more closely by examining the following examples –partly inspired by Kupisch and Koops (2007: 190, (2))– in Italian, French, Spanish, and Catalan, respectively.

(11) a. Se Maria avesse {una / la / \*Ø} macchina, viaggerebbe per  
 if Maria have.SUBJ.3SG a the Ø car, travel.COND.3SG for  
 tutta Europa. *Italian*  
 all Europe

b. Si Maria avait {une / #la / \*Ø} voiture, elle voyagerait à  
 if Maria have.SUBJ.3SG a the Ø car she travel.COND.3SG at  
 travers tout l'Europe. *French*  
 across all the-Europe

‘If Marie had a car, she would travel all over Europe.’

c. Si María tuviese {un / #el / Ø} coche, viajaría por toda  
 if María have.SUBJ.3SG a the Ø car travel.COND.3SG for all  
 Europa. *Spanish*  
 Europe

‘If Marie had a car, she would travel all over Europe.’

d. Si la Maria tingués {un / #el / Ø} cotxe, viatjaria per tot  
 if the Maria have.SUBJ.3SG a the Ø car travel.COND.3SG for all  
 Europa. *Catalan*  
 Europe

‘If Marie had a car, she would travel all around Europe.’

The examples in (11) involve a counterfactual conditional. The protasis contains a morphologically singular indefinite nominal expression, which necessarily takes narrow scope with respect to the conditional. Excluding the singular indefinite article, which has been shown to disallow number-neutral interpretations, a compelling pattern emerges from these examples. Concretely, Romance languages appear to be split into three groups, each corresponding to a distinct strategy. The first group, represented by Italian alone, employs NIDs. A second group, including Spanish and Catalan, avoid a definite description in this context, using instead a morphologically singular BN, which has been shown to represent a rather productive phenomenon (Espinal & McNally 2007, 2011; Espinal 2010).<sup>89</sup> To draw a parallelism with Italian NIDs, I will refer to the Spanish and Catalan constructions as *numberless bare nouns* (henceforth, NBNs). This is motivated by the observation that, on a par with NIDs, NBNs license number-neutral interpretations as well. Consider the following example in Catalan.

- (12) A l’hotel hi ha piscina. Unaal jardí i una al  
 at the-hotel there have.PRES.3SG pool one at.the patio and one at.the  
 terrat.  
 terrace  
 ‘There {is / are} pool(s) at the pool. One in the patio and one in the terrace.’  
 [Adapted from Espinal & McNally 2011: 124, (69)]

This sentence shows that, like NIDs, the NBN in (12) is compatible with a continuation entailing the presence of a plurality.

Lastly, French (and English), lacking both NIDs and productive NBNs, resorts to the singular indefinite article exclusively. The pattern emerging from (11) suggests that the NID strategy is marked within Romance, as most languages, including Spanish and Catalan, prefer NBNs in the same contexts.

With these preliminary observations in mind, the present chapter addresses three main research questions: (i) what grammatical factors license NIDs in Italian? (ii) How

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<sup>89</sup> Portuguese and Romanian pattern roughly like Spanish and Catalan, and differently from Italian, in this respect, as they can license morphologically singular BNs (Munn & Schmitt 2001, 2005; Schmitt & Munn 2003; Dobrovie-Sorin 2013; Cyrino & Espinal 2015, a.o.).

is the NID interpretation compositionally derived? And (iii) how can cross-linguistic variation be accounted for?

As for the first question, I will build especially on Espinal and McNally's (2007, 2011) and Espinal's (2010) work on Spanish and Catalan BNs. Considering different contrasts in Italian, I argue that NIDs are only licensed in a particular syntactic configuration, namely in the object position of HAVE-predicates expressing a HAVE-relation (Borthern 2003). However, the possibility of licensing NIDs emerges only when the resulting  $V_{\text{HAVE}} + \text{NID}$  combination denotes a characterizing property of the external argument.

Regarding the second question, I propose a compositional account of the meaning of NIDs that integrates both the syntactic structure of the morphologically singular definite description and its combination with the HAVE-predicate. Specifically, I argue that the number-neutrality of NIDs arises from the absence of morphological number features (or any Num projection) in their syntactic derivation. As a result, their structure aligns with the denotation of so-called definite kinds in Romance languages (Borik & Espinal, 2015). However, this denotation introduces a type clash when combining with the HAVE-predicate. To resolve this, I adopt Chierchia's (1998b) Derived Kind Predication, which yields the desired existential interpretation of NIDs while also accounting for additional properties associated with these constructions.

Finally, in addressing the third question, I explore two possible explanations. On the one hand, I entertain the hypothesis that the presence of the definite article in NIDs may be semantically expletive –a view more closely aligned with Carindaletti & Giusti's (2016ff) account of (in)definiteness in Italian– but syntactically required, in contrast to what happens in Spanish and Catalan. This requirement may result from the highly grammaticalization status of the determiner system in Italian, as suggested by Kupisch and Koops (2007). However, I present arguments that call this hypothesis into question. Consequently, I propose a more plausible alternative, which derives the presence of NIDs from the greater variation of indefinite forms unique to Italian and independent general grammatical principles such as The Blocking Principle.

This chapter is organized as follows. Section 5.2 delimits the phenomenon of interest and examines the grammatical factors critical for its licensing. Section 5.3 evaluates three potential approaches to NIDs, which are based on (i) pseudo-incorporation (Section 5.3.1), (ii) the lack of definiteness effects in Italian (5.3.2), and (iii) covert semantic operators (Section 5.3.3), such as the indefinite operator DE introduced in previous chapters. It concludes that none of these approaches adequately accounts for the full range of data

under discussion. Section 5.4 comprises the analytical core of the chapter. In section 5.4.1, I develop a strictly compositional analysis of NIDs, based on two main components: (i) a kind denotation for the definite DP; and (ii) the application of DKP when combining with the predicate. Section 5.4.2 offers two further arguments supporting the proposal, focusing on scope behavior and constraints on modification. Section 5.5 compares the present proposal with two seemingly related constructions: Krifka et al.'s (1995) Representative Object Interpretations (ROIs) (Section 5.5.1) and Zamparelli's (2002) analysis of Italian IDs (Section 5.5.2). Section 5.6 addresses the cross-linguistic patterns introduced above and provides an account for the cross-linguistic variability of NIDs. Finally, Section 5.7 concludes the chapter.

## 5.2 Delimiting the phenomenon

This section offers a detailed examination of the properties associated with NIDs and explores the grammatical factors that govern their licensing. The observations in the previous section indicate that NIDs are unique to Italian grammar and exhibit both an indefinite and number-neutral interpretation. Additionally, unlike Spanish and Catalan, Italian does not appear to license NBNs.

However, some exceptions to this categorical generalization must be acknowledged, as Italian appears to display a residual use of morphologically singular BNs in certain fixed or idiomatic expressions. Consider the following examples.

- (13)a. Ha comprato *casa* / *\*appartamento*.  
 AUX buy.PTCP house apartment  
 Literally: '(S)he has bought house / \*apartment.'
- b. Ho trovato *parcheggio* / *\*garage*.  
 AUX find.PTCP parking spot garage  
 Literally: 'I've found parking spot / \*garage.'

The lexicalized nature of these constructions is evident from the ungrammaticality arising when the bare singular is substituted for a cognate term or a near-synonym (e.g., *casa* vs. *appartamento*, *parcheggio* vs. *garage*).

Moreover, Italian also allows singular BNs in certain analytic VPs. Consider, for instance, the examples in (13).



(14)a. Fare *sciopero*; fare *fiesta*.

do.INF strike do.INF party

b. Scioperare; festeggiare

strike.INF party.INF

As it will become evident in subsequent sections, however, this use must be set apart from Spanish and Catalan NBNs, since *fare* ‘to do’ does not classify as a HAVE-predicate. For the time being, it is sufficient to note that the examples in (14a) feature analytic unergative constructions, which result from the conflation of a light DO-predicate with a singular BN. In most cases, in fact, these analytic forms have a synthetic counterpart, as shown in (14b).<sup>90</sup>

Finally, instances of bare singulars under the scope of negation have been documented in the literature (Benincà 1980, 2012; Longobardi 1994; Renzi 2001):<sup>91</sup>

(16)a. Non ho aperto *libro*.

not AUX open.PTCP book

Literally: I haven’t opened book (‘I haven’t studied at all’)

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<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, Italian also licenses the coordination of singular BNs in argument position (Heycock & Zamparelli 2003).

(i) a. Un gatto nero ed un cane scuro si azzuffavano per strada.

a cat black and a dog dark SI fight.IPFV.3PL for street

‘A black cat and a dark dog were fighting in street.’

b. *Cane e gatto* erano ugualmente luridi.

dog and cat be.IPFV.3PL equally filthy

‘Cat and dog were equally filthy.’

(Heycock & Zamparelli 2003: 444, (3a))

The coordinated BNs in (14b) refer anaphorically to the cat and dog previously introduced in the discourse, thus corresponding with a definite interpretation.

<sup>91</sup> This behavior aligns singular BNs in Italian with negative polarity items (see also Kayne 1975 for French *de+N* constructions) and may reflect a general tendency to avoid overt determiners under the scope of negation. A similar pattern is observed in Spanish and Catalan, where (plural and mass) BNs are preferred over *un(o)s* in negative contexts, as illustrated below.

(i) a. No comí (#*unas*) *manzanas*.

not eat.PERF UNOS apples

b. No vaig menjar (#*unes*) *pomes*.

not AUX eat.INF UNS apples

‘I didn’t eat apples.’

b. Non ha detto *parola*.

not AUX say.PTCP word

Literally: (S)he hasn't said word ('(S)he didn't speak.')

(Benincà 2012: 95, (ii) in footnote 2)

Renzi (2001: 427ff) suggests that in such cases, the bare singular is incorporated into the main verb, as indicated by the idiomatic interpretation these constructions give rise to. Intriguingly, Benincà (2012) further notes that the acceptability of BNs under the scope of negation improves drastically when what she calls a "kind-defining relative" is inserted, as shown in the contrast below.

(17)a. ??Non è arrivata *ragazza*.

not AUX arrive.PTCP girl

b. Non è arrivata *ragazza* che avesse il bagaglio intatto.

not AUX arrive.PTCP girl that have.SUBJ the luggage intact

'No girl arrived with her luggage intact.'

Returning to Italian NIDs, it is important to note that a significant distributional characteristic of NIDs is that they only occur in direct object positions. Their unavailability in other syntactic environments is attested in the following examples.

(18)a. *La macchina* è stata comprata da Maria.

the car AUX AUX buy.PTCP by Maria

'{The / #a} car has been bought by Maria.'<sup>92</sup>

b. È arrivata *la macchina* a tutta velocità.

AUX arrive.PTCP the car at all speed

'{The / #a} car arrived fastly.'

c. *La macchina* correva veloce per l'autostrada.

the car run.IPFV fast for the-highway

'{The / #a} car was running fast on the highway.'

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<sup>92</sup> When the plural definite form is omitted in the English translation and an existential reading is marked as infelicitous, it should be understood that the NID reading is unavailable. In such cases, the only possible interpretation becomes the default definite reading.

(18a) features a passive construction in which the definite *la macchina* occurs in preverbal subject position. In (18b), the same DP functions as the postverbal subject of the unaccusative predicate *arrivare* ‘arrive’. Finally, in (18c), the definite description appears as the external argument of the unergative predicate *correre* ‘run’. Crucially, in all three contexts, the NID reading is unavailable, leaving the default definite meaning as the only possible interpretation. Under this reading, *la macchina* refers to the unique salient car in the context of utterance.

In view of these examples, the emerging generalization is that NIDs are not merely restricted to internal argument positions, as is the case for Italian IDs. Their distribution is in fact even more constrained, as they can exclusively occur as direct objects.

Nevertheless, the availability of NIDs in object position is not unrestricted and requires further specification. Consider the following sentence.

- (19) Questo hotel ha pulito la piscina.  
 This hotel AUX clean.PTCP the pool  
 ‘This hotel cleaned {the / #a} pool.’

In (19), a morphologically singular definite description occurs in the object position of an agentive verb like *pulire* ‘to clean’. However, as made manifest in the English translation, the NID reading is unavailable: the sentence can only describe a situation in which (the members of the staff of) the relevant hotel cleaned the uniquely salient pool in context.<sup>93</sup> This example contrasts with (20), where a NID interpretation is licensed.

- (20) Questo hotel ha la piscina.  
 this hotel have.PRES.3SG the pool  
 ‘This hotel has (a) pool(s).’

To account for the contrast observed above, I adopt the proposal put forth by Espinal and McNally (2007, 2011) for Spanish and Catalan NBNs, and I posit that Italian NIDs

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<sup>93</sup> This behavior aligns with Cardinaletti and Giusti’s (2018) observation regarding IDs, discussed in the previous chapter. According to these authors, a singular definite description in Italian is by default compatible only with a definite reading. The relevant example is repeated below.

(i) Giacomo ha mangiato la patata.  
 Giacomo AUX eat.PTCP the potato  
 ‘Giacomo ate #(the) potato.’

are licensed exclusively in the object position of so-called HAVE-predicates.<sup>94</sup> More precisely, they occur in the object position of have-predicates when these express a HAVE-relation in the sense of Borthen (2003). Following Borthen (2003: 190) and Espinal and McNally (2011: 99), a (*profiled*) HAVE-relation can be defined as “an asymmetrical relation between two arguments, called *the possessor* and *the possessed*, where the possessor is superior to the possessed rather than the other way around.”. This general definition of a HAVE-relation, therefore extends beyond predicates that explicitly express possession, such as Italian *avere* ‘to have’ or *possedere* ‘to possess’, to include also certain verbs that entail a possessive relation, such as those considered so far (e.g., *indossare* ‘to wear’; *mettere* ‘to put’; *comprare* ‘to buy’; or even the existential construction *esserci* in (1)). This first assumption explains why NIDs are unavailable with an agentive verb like *pulire* in (19), which does not entail a possessive relation between a possessor and a possessed.

Nonetheless, the restriction on HAVE-predicates expressing a HAVE-relation is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the licensing of NIDs. Consider, for instance, the following contrasts.

- (21)a. Questo hotel ha *la piscina*.  
       this hotel have.PRES.3SG the pool  
       ‘This hotel has (a) pool(s).’  
       b. Questo hotel ha *la stanza*.  
       this hotel have.PRES.3SG the room  
       ‘This hotel has {the / #a} room.’
- (22)a. Il bagno ha *la finestra*.  
       the bathroom have.PRES.3SG the window  
       ‘The bathroom has (a) window(s).’  
       b. La casa ha *la finestra*.  
       the house have.PRES.3SG the window  
       ‘The house has {the / #a} window.’

All the above sentences involve a HAVE-predicate expressing a HAVE-relation, with a morphologically singular definite DP in object position. However, only the (a) versions of

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<sup>94</sup> For a detailed characterization of HAVE-predicates see Le Bruyn et al. (2016) and references therein.

these examples license a NID reading, whereas in the (b) cases, the definite description is obligatorily interpreted with the canonical definite meaning.

To explain these contrasts, I again build on Espinal and McNally (2007, 2011) analysis of NBNs in Spanish and Catalan. Specifically, I adopt the view that, like Spanish and Catalan NBNs, Italian NIDs are only licensed in the object position of HAVE-predicates expressing a HAVE-relation, provided the resulting  $V_{\text{HAVE}}^+\text{NID}$  combination denotes a characterizing property of the external argument. Following Espinal and McNally (2011: 101), I define a characterizing property as any property that is relevant to discern whether an individual has the property in question or not. In other words, a characterizing property is any property that can be used to distinguish between individuals belonging to the same class.

With this assumption in mind, the contrasts in (21) and (22) are easily explained. In (21a), the NID interpretation of *la piscina* is possible because, based on our world knowledge, having one or more pool qualifies as a characterizing property of hotels. This is because this property can be used to distinguish between different hotels, namely those that have a pool and those that do not. Crucially, this is not the case for (21b). Here, having one or more rooms does not count as a sufficient characterizing property of hotels, as all hotels, by definition, have rooms. Consequently, the relevant NID interpretation for the object *la stanza* cannot be licensed, thus leaving the default definite interpretation of the definite description as the only remaining interpretative possibility.

Similarly, the definite description *la finestra* in (22a) allows for a NID interpretation because having one or more windows is a sufficient characterizing property of bathrooms, as there are bathrooms that may have a window and bathrooms that do not. In contrast, having a window does not qualify as a characterizing property for the subject in (22b), *la casa*. This is because, according to our conceptual knowledge, houses generally have windows. Therefore, this property cannot be used to distinguish between individual houses. As evident, this contrast is robust and provides a natural explanation for the absence of the NID interpretation in certain instances of HAVE-predicates.

As a final note, it is important to highlight that the availability of the NID construction in Italian is far more productive than one might initially assume. In fact, based on the observations outlined in this section, NIDs are expected to be potentially compatible with virtually all HAVE-predicates denoting a possession relation, provided that this relation can be interpreted as a distinguishing characteristic of the subject. This perspective suggests that while lexical restrictions on the type of verbs involved in a NID reading are to

be expected –namely, they must be HAVE-predicates entailing possession relations– similar restrictions should not apply to the type of nouns involved. This prediction is indeed supported by the following examples, where a change in the noun does not prevent the licensing of NIDs.

- (23) Questo hotel ha {la piscina / l'ascensore / la palestra}.  
 this hotel have.PRES.3SG the pool the-elevator the gym  
 'This hotel has {(a) pool(s) / (an) elevator(s) / (a) gym(s)}.'
- (24) Fabio indossa {la cravatta / la camicia / il cappello /  
 Fabio wear.PRES.3SG the tie the shirt the hat  
 gli occhiali}.<sup>95</sup>  
 the glasses  
 'Fabio wears {(a) the(s) / (a) shirt(s) / (a) hat(s) / glasses}.'

As shown in these examples, virtually any noun can license a NID interpretation, as long as the VP in which it occurs establishes a HAVE-relation that characterizes its external subject.

Overall, this section has addressed the first research question of the chapter, showing that the licensing of the relevant NIDs represents a productive strategy in Italian for expressing indefiniteness, although contingent on specific grammatical factors. Concretely, it has been established that NIDs are licensed in the object position of specific verbs, namely HAVE-predicates that establish a HAVE-relation qualifying as a distinguishing property of the external argument. Next section examines three potential approaches to these Italian constructions.

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<sup>95</sup> Interestingly, a *pluralia tantum* noun like *occhiali* 'glasses' appears to license a NID reading, as evidenced by its compatibility with a non-atomicity entailment in (i). This possibility was also acknowledged by Espinal (2010: 986, footnote 4) in relation to *pluralia tantum* in NBN configurations in Catalan.

(i) Porto gli occhiali. Sia da vista che da sole.  
 wear.PRES.1SG the eyeglasses both of sight that of sun  
 'I wear glasses. Both prescription glasses and sunglasses.'

As will become clear in subsequent sections, the availability of a number-neutral interpretation for a *pluralia tantum* like *occhiali* suggests that such nouns should be analyzed as default count nouns, despite their lexical marking with plural morphology.

### 5.3 Possible approaches

Building on the properties of NIDs outlined in the previous section, three potential approaches can be considered: (i) a pseudo-incorporation account; (ii) an approach that attributes the presence of NIDs to the absence of definiteness effects in Italian; and (iii) an analysis based on a covert semantic operator that neutralizes the definite semantics of the definite article in NID construction. The following subsections explore each of these approaches in detail.

#### 5.3.1 *NIDs and pseudo-incorporation*

The most obvious candidate for the analysis of NIDs is pseudo-incorporation. Pseudo-incorporation is one type of noun incorporation, a phenomenon extensively discussed in the literature (Mithun 1984, 1986; Farkas & de Swart 2003; Dobrovie-Sorin et al. 2006; Borik & Gehrke 2015). To the best of my knowledge, the concept of pseudo-incorporation was first introduced by Dayal (2003) to analyze Hindi BNs in constructions that resemble Spanish and Catalan NBNs. Espinal and McNally's (2011), building on Dayal's (2003) proposal, propose a pseudo-incorporation account for Catalan and Spanish NBNs, which share all the relevant properties of NIDs, except for the presence of a definite article. Next section discusses this proposal.

##### 5.3.1.1 Espinal and McNally (2011)

Following Espinal (2010), Espinal and McNally (2011) first address the number-neutral reading of Spanish and Catalan NBNs. Despite their apparent singular morphology, these NBNs do not refer to particularized individual entities, whether object-level entities or kinds. Instead, for constructions like *tenir piscina* (lit. 'to have pool'), Espinal and McNally (2011) propose that the bare nominal expression is morphologically unmarked for number and denotes a property of kinds, rather than a property of individuals (or a predicate property).<sup>96</sup> Specifically, the authors adopt the following syntactic structure and corresponding denotation for NBNs.

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<sup>96</sup> For a precise characterization of these three property types, see Espinal (2010). See also Espinal and Giusti (2024) for different strategies to pronominalize these properties in Catalan and Italian.

(25)a.  $[_{NP} N]$

b.  $\llbracket N \rrbracket = \lambda P \lambda x^k [P(x^k)]$       where  $x^k \in K$  (domain of kinds)

((25b) from Borik & Espinal 2015: 182, (16))

In the formula in (25b),  $P$  represents a property that applies to the domain of kinds, thus  $P(x^k)$ . Crucially, NBNs are assumed to convey a number-neutral interpretation due to the absence of a syntactic Number projection in their underlying structure (Espinal 2010; Espinal & McNally 2011). This follows from the assumption that Number is a morpho-syntactic category that can be semantically associated with Carlson's (1977) realization (or instantiation) operator, which relates intensional kinds to their individual instantiations (Dépréz 2005; Espinal 2010; Espinal & McNally 2011; Borik & Espinal 2012, 2015; Gerhke & McNally 2012, among others).

This assumption explains the contrast in number-neutrality between NBNs and singular indefinites like *una piscina* 'a pool'. Unlike NBNs, singular indefinites comprise a Number projection in their underlying structure. As a result, *una piscina* adheres to the canonical configuration of argumental nominal expressions in languages with number morphology and determiners (see, for instance, Zamparelli 2000; Chierchia 1998b; Longobardi 2001, 2005), which can be minimally represented as in (26).

(26)  $[_{DP} D [_{NumP} Num [_{NP} N]]]$

In this structure, the  $D$  projection is argued to host the (in)definite article,  $Num$  is the locus for number marking, and the  $N$  projection hosts a bare count noun. The semantic composition of this configuration proceeds as follows. First, the bare common noun, which denotes a property of kinds, combines with the Number projection. This combination involves a realization relation that yields a property of individuals. Second, the  $D$  projection turns this property of individuals into an adequate semantic argument of the verb, either by introducing existential quantification when the  $D$  is realized as an indefinite article, or by applying the iota function when realized as a definite article.

Returning to pseudo-incorporation, Espinal and McNally (2011) argue that while NBNs syntactically occupy the direct object position, they do not semantically saturate the verbal predicate. Instead, they treat NBNs as verb modifiers rather than true arguments. Specifically, Espinal & McNally (2011: 110) introduce a lexical rule that applies to predicates selecting NBNs, namely HAVE-predicates that entail a possession relation.



This lexical rule suppresses the THEME argument of the verbal predicate while imposing a condition on use that accounts for the potentially characterizing nature of the resulting VP. This lexical rule is represented as follows.

- (27) **Input:**  $\lambda y \lambda e [\mathbf{V}(e) \wedge \Theta(e) = y \wedge \exists w [C(w)] [\exists e' [\mathbf{depend}(e, e', w) \wedge \mathbf{have}(e') \wedge \mathbf{havee}(e') = y]]]$   
**Output:**  $\lambda e [\mathbf{V}(e) \wedge \exists w [C(w)] [\exists e' [\mathbf{depend}(e, e', w) \wedge \mathbf{have}(e') \wedge \mathbf{havee}(e') = \Theta(e)]]]$   
**Condition on use of output:** The issue of whether the referent introduced by the external argument participates or does not participate in  $e$  must be crucial for characterizing that referent in some way that is immediately relevant in the context.

(Espinal & McNally 2011: 110-11, (43))

The input of the lexical rule specifies that the denoted situation must depend on the existence of a HAVE-relation involving the subject referent in some world  $w$  dependent on contextual restrictions (as represented by the variable  $C$ ). This condition is encoded by the predicate  $\mathbf{depend}(e, e', w)$  and the requirement that the subjacent event  $e'$  must be a HAVE-relation (i.e.,  $\mathbf{have}(e')$ ), with  $y$  as the **havee** of the possessive event.

The output of the rule suppresses the object argument, as the participant corresponding to this suppressed argument is treated as part of the lexical semantics of the predicate (i.e., a modifier of it), rather than being associated with a variable corresponding to the THEME argument. Finally, the condition on use ensures that the predicate denotes a characterizing property of the external argument.

To avoid the compositional challenge posed by the semantic selection of the NBN argument, Espinal and McNally (2011) propose a composition rule that allows the verb and the NBN too combine via function application. This rule is formulated as follows.

- (28) If  $\llbracket \mathbf{V} \rrbracket = \lambda e [\mathbf{V}(e)]$  and  $\Theta$  is an implicit role function defined for  $\mathbf{V}$ ,  
and if  $\llbracket \mathbf{N} \rrbracket = \mathbf{N}$ , a property  
then  $\llbracket [\mathbf{V} \mathbf{V} \mathbf{N}] \rrbracket = \lambda e [\mathbf{V}(e) \wedge \mathbf{N}(\Theta(e))]$

(Espinal & McNally 2011: 112, (44))

Under this rule, a verb from the HAVE-predicate class lexically introduces a participant role that functions as an event modifier. It also imposes a restriction on the THEME-role function, in such a way that the property denoted by the NBN describes the value of this role function.<sup>97</sup>

With this theoretical architecture in place, we can apply the lexical and composition rule above to a Catalan example like *portar barret* (lit. ‘carry hat’), yielding the following representation.

$$(29) \quad \llbracket \textit{portar barret} \rrbracket = \lambda e[\mathbf{portar}(e) \wedge \exists w[C(w)][\exists e'[\mathbf{depend}(e, e', w) \wedge \mathbf{have}(e') \wedge \mathbf{havee}(e') = \theta(e)]] \wedge \mathbf{barret}(\theta(e))]$$

[Adapted from Espinal & McNally 2011: 113, (45)]

As shown in (29), the V+NBN construction *portar barret* depends on (i) a HAVE-relation and (ii) the condition that the havee of this relation is modified by the count noun *barret* ‘hat’.

An analysis along these lines nicely accounts for several properties displayed by the Catalan and Spanish NBN construction, which closely resemble those observed for Italian NIDs. For instance, Espinal and McNally’s (2011) analysis accounts for the obligatory narrow scope of NBNs, as these are treated as (kind) property-denoting expressions pseudo-incorporated into the verb. As such, any existential force associated with NBNs arises from the lexical entailments of the verb. Consequently, existential quantification applies locally at the VP-level, thus being always relegated to occur inside the scope of any other operator in the sentence. Additionally, this proposal provides a natural explanation for why NBNs in Catalan –taken to denote properties (of kinds)– are always pronominalized by the property-denoting clitic *en*, rather than the entity-denoting clitic *el/la* (Espinal 2010; Espinal & McNally 2011; Espinal & Cyrino 2022a; Espinal & Giusti 2024, among others).

However, this pseudo-incorporation analysis encounters a crucial challenge when applied to Italian NIDs. As specified by the composition rule in (28), the nominal expression functioning as the havee participant denotes a property that modifies the THEME of the

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<sup>97</sup> Crucially, the explicit requirement of having a defined role function prevents the above rule to apply to analytic [V V N] structures like *fare sciopero* ‘do strike’ in Italian mentioned in the previous section. In that case, the light verb *fare* ‘do’ does not have any of those defined role functions since it is precisely the **havee** role in the output of (27) that serves as the relevant role function for the verb.

event. Yet, definite descriptions typically denote entities –derived from the iota function introduced by the definite determiner– rather than properties (*cf.* Chapter 4). In this regard, it is worth noting that semantically or morphologically incorporated nominals generally lack the formal features that arguments usually bear, such as case and number morphology and, without virtually any exceptions, definiteness (Gerhke & Borik 2015). This is indeed the case for Spanish and Catalan NBNs, which lack both number and determiner projections. Yet, this is not true for Italian NIDs, which involve the presence of an overt definite D projection.

Despite the incompatibility of pseudo-incorporation with definiteness markers, however, certain definite descriptions have been argued to undergo pseudo-incorporation in the literature –namely, short weak definites (WDs). Let us examine these cases in next subsection.

#### 5.3.1.2 Carlson et al. (2013) and Schwarz (2014)

As discussed in Chapter 4, short WDs are definite DPs that occur in the object position of a transitive verb (or V+P structure). The resulting VP denotes institutionalized or stereotypical situations. The relevant examples are repeated below.

- (30)a. John read *the newspaper*.  
       b. Mary went to *the hospital*.

Unlike canonical definites, the object DPs in these examples do not refer to a contextually unique, salient, or familiar newspaper or hospital. Instead, they refer to any newspaper or hospital, thus aligning more closely with an indefinite interpretation.

Interestingly, WDs and NIDs share certain properties. Besides allowing an indefinite interpretation, both constructions can only license narrow scope readings with respect to other logical operators. This is illustrated below, with examples where WDs cooccur with negation (31a) and a universal quantifier (31b).

- (31)a. John didn't read *the newspaper*.  
       b. Every boxer was sent to *the hospital*.

Under a WD interpretation of its object, (31a) describes a situation where John didn't read any newspaper, which corresponds to a narrow scope interpretation of the definite description below the negative marker. Similarly, (31b) is compatible with a scenario in which each boxer was sent to a potentially different hospital, an interpretation arising when *the hospital* gets scope under the universal quantifier *every* at the level of logical representation.

Additionally, WDs, on a par with NIDs, have been observed to be able to license number-neutral readings (Carlson et al. 2006; Aguilar-Guevara 2014; Schwarz 2014, among others). Consider, for instance, the following example containing the WD *the train*.

(32) Lorenzo took *the train* to go from Milan to Barcelona.

This sentence is consistent with a scenario where Lorenzo took more than one train to travel from one city to the other.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, however, crucial for the licensing of WDs is that the VP denotes a stereotypical event (i.e., an event kind; Schwarz 2014; Espinal & Cyrino 2017). This conventionality endows WD constructions with enriched semantics (Aguilar-Guevara & Zwarts 2013; Carlson et al. 2013; Aguilar-Guevara 2014, Aguilar-Guevara et al. 2019; among others). In other words, WDs typically convey more information than what is strictly encoded in their compositional semantics. For instance, *John read the newspaper* does not simply mean that John read some newspaper but also conventionally implies that he did so to collect information. Similarly, *Mary went to the hospital* does not simply mean that she physically went to the hospital, but it implies that she went there to receive medical attention or to get hospitalized.

To capture the conventionalized nature of WDs, authors like Carlson et al. (2013) and Schwarz (2014) propose a pseudo-incorporation analysis for these constructions. Simplifying, these authors argue that while the definite article in WD configurations contributes its canonical semantics (i.e., the iota function), it does not form part of the VP at the level of logical representation, as it semantically raises out of the VP, and takes scope over the V+N combination.

More concretely, Carlson et al. (2013: 18) propose the following representation for VPs containing a WD such as *read the newspaper*.

- (33)a. [<sub>VP</sub> read [<sub>DP</sub> the [<sub>NP</sub> book]]]  
 b. DEF(read'(newspaper'))

Under Carlson et al.'s (2013) proposal, the canonical VP structure minimally represented in (33a) is associated with the peculiar semantic representation in (33b). In this analysis, the definite article applies above the VP, allowing the common noun to pseudo-incorporate into the verb. This mechanism enables the noun to function as a modifier rather than as a true argument, thereby forming a complex predicate with the verb. Consequently, the nominal expression no longer retains its semantic definiteness, as it directly combines with the verb. Instead, definiteness is argued to be associated with the entire V+N complex.

This approach aims to account for the conventionalized and stereotypical nature of WDs. Familiarity is typically taken to be a core component of the semantics and pragmatics of definite articles (Christophersen 1999), given that definite descriptions generally refer to referents that are familiar or already introduced in the discourse. By attributing this pragmatic component of familiarity to the definite article, and allowing it to scope over the entire pseudo-incorporated V+N structure at the level of logical representation, this analysis explains how the construction as a whole expresses a familiar type of activity (i.e., an event kind).

Nevertheless, applying the same analytical framework to Italian NIDs poses several challenges. For instance, it has been observed that NIDs, unlike WDs, occur in VPs that denote characterizing properties of their subject. Importantly, this characterizing property is not conventional or stereotypical, as there are no general cultural criteria that establish which exact V+NID combinations are possible, and which are not (see Espinal & McNally 2011 for similar observations regarding Spanish and Catalan NBNs). Instead, the acceptability of V+NID combinations rests heavily on contextual factors, which play a crucial role in determining whether the property denoted by the VP can serve to characterize the external argument. This property explains the contrast in (22), repeated below for clarity.

- (34)a. Il bagno ha la finestra.  
 the bathroom have.PRES.3SG the window  
 'The bathroom has (a) window(s).'

- b. La casa ha la finestra.  
 the house have.PRES.3SG the window  
 ‘The house has {the / #a} window.’

In (34a), the VP characterizes the subject *il bagno*, thereby licensing the NID reading. Conversely, in (34b), the VP fails to characterize the subject, rendering the NID reading unacceptable.

Crucially, WDs do not need to characterize the subject. Consequently, contrasts similar to those observed above are not found with WDs, as a change in the subject does not preclude a WD reading. This is evident in the following examples, where the WD interpretation of the object remains available regardless of the presence of a different subject.

- (35) {John / Mary / the students / the committee} read *the newspaper*.

Additionally, with WD constructions, the familiarity contributed by the definite article scoping over the V+N constructions correlates with two further properties: cross-linguistic stability and enriched semantics. Regarding cross-linguistic stability, WDs denote stereotypical or conventionalized events (i.e., familiar event kinds), making them stable across languages spoken by communities with similar socio-cultural conventions (see also the discussion in Section 4.3.1 of Chapter 4). In contrast, NIDs do not denote event kinds, which accounts for their limited cross-linguistic distribution and explains why they are relegated to Italian but not found in other closely related languages.

As for semantic enrichment, Italian NID constructions clearly lack this property as well. For instance, a sentence like *questo hotel ha la piscina* (lit. ‘this hotel has the pool’) does not seem to convey any additional meaning beyond the characterizing relation established between the possessor (i.e., the hotel) and the possessed (the pool). Both cross-linguistic stability and semantic enrichment would be expected if NIDs were (a type of) WDs

A final distinctive morphosyntactic distinction between NIDs and WDs involves pronominalization. WDs denote (familiar) activities, while NIDs denote (stative) possession relations. As such, the former generally prefer pronominalization by pro-VPs, such as *to do so*, while NIDs, due to their stative character, avoid this pronominalization, and typically prefer resumption by third person pronouns, as expected by the presence of an overt definite article in the antecedent. These differences are illustrated below.

- (36) Gianni legge *il giornale* e anche Maria *lo* fa.  
 Gianni read.PRES.3SG the newspaper and also Maria cl do.PRES.3SG  
 ‘Gianni reads the newspaper and so does Maria.’
- (37)a. *#Questo hotel ha la piscina e anche quello lo* fa.  
 this hotel have.PRES.3SG the pool and also that CL do.PRES.3SG
- b. Questo hotel ha *la piscina e anche quello ce*  
 this hotel have.PRES.3SG the pool and also that CL  
*l’ha.*  
 CL-have.PRES.3SG  
 ‘This hotel has (a) pool(s), and that one also has {it / them}.’

Overall, the evidence discussed in this section suggests that Espinal and McNally’s (2011) pseudo-incorporation analysis, originally developed for Spanish and Catalan NBNs, cannot account for Italian NIDs. First, pseudo-incorporated nominals generally lack definiteness marking, whereas Italian NID constructions require the presence of a definite article. Furthermore, pseudo-incorporation analyses of morphologically definite descriptions, such as WDs, associate these constructions with properties like familiarity, cross-linguistic availability, and semantic enrichment –none of which are present in Italian NIDs. Lastly, WDs and NIDs have also been shown to prefer different pronominalization strategies. These differences indicate that WDs and NIDs constitute different interpretative possibilities associated with definite descriptions, and, as such, cannot be subsumed under a single analysis. Next section explores an alternative approach to NIDs.

### 5.3.2 *NIDs and definiteness effects*

A second plausible approach to Italian NIDs consists in associating the presence of this construction with the lack of definiteness effects observed in this language. Recall that, as far back as the seminal work of Milsark (1974), it has been recognized that English prohibits the occurrence of definite (and strong indefinite) DPs in existential sentences. Weak indefinite expressions, on the other hand, are perfectly acceptable in the same environment. This contrast is illustrated below.

- (38)a. <sup>#</sup>There is {*the cat* / *Milo* / *each cat* / *every cat*} in the garden.  
 b. There {is / are} {*a cat* / *some cats* / *two cats* / *many cats*}.

As (38a) shows, strong DPs such definite descriptions, proper names, and universally quantified expressions are infelicitous as internal arguments of English existential sentences, whereas the same restriction does not apply to weak indefinite expressions. This general ban against strong and definite DPs in existential sentences has come to be known as the *definiteness effect* (Milsark 1974, 1978; McNally 1997; Moro 1997; Leonetti 1999; 2008, among many others).

Given the general interest of this chapter, discussing definiteness effects in existential sentences might come out as a surprise: Italian NIDs arise exclusively licensed when they combine with HAVE-predicates, while existential sentences are generally built around BE-predicates. Some caveats are in order, however. First, it is important to note that the existential construction in Catalan is built around the verb *haver* ‘have’ and the locative clitic *hi* (Rigau 1997; Mateu & Rigau 2002; Villalba 2013, 2016; Espinal & McNally 2011). Importantly, given the adequate contextual premises, Catalan existential constructions allow the occurrence of NBNs, as shown in (39).

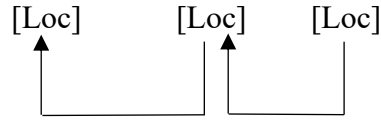
- (39) A aquest hotel hi ha piscina.  
 at this hotel there have.PRES.3SG pool  
 ‘There {is / are} pool(s) in this hotel.’

[Adapted from Espinal & McNally 2011: 102, (31b)]

In this case, the characterizing property denoted by the VP containing the NBN *la piscina* is ascribable to what Espinal & McNally (2011: 123) label an “external situational argument”, namely the locative clitic *hi*. This clitic is argued to bear a locative formal feature and to be merged with the verb at some point in the derivation. Additionally, the clitic *hi* is assumed to be bound to a locative (or temporal) deictic expression to which the characterizing property is eventually ascribed. This is schematically represented below.



(40) [TopP A aquest hotel<sub>i</sub> ... [vP hi<sub>Sit/i</sub> [v ha piscina ]]



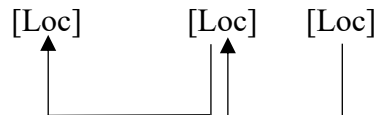
[Adapted from Espinal & McNally 2011: 123, (65)]

Second, it is often argued in the literature that BE and HAVE verbs constitute different phonological exponents, often related to transitivity, of the same semantically vacuous  $V_{BE}$  head (see Kayne 1993; Rigau 1997; Harves & Kayne 2012; and especially Kamparou 2024 and references therein). These accounts, therefore, postulate the unification of possessive and existential sentences. This view has been implicitly assumed in the present chapter, as some of the examples provided so far feature existential sentences, despite the postulated requirement that constrains the occurrence of NIDs to object position of HAVE-predicates. A case in point is our initial example (1), repeated below for convenience.

(41) In questo hotel c'è la piscina.  
 In this hotel there-be.PRES.3SG the pool  
 'There {is / are} (a) pool(s) in this hotel.'

The analysis proposed by Espinal and McNally (2011) for Catalan existential constructions should thus be extended to Italian ones. In other words, the Italian locative clitic *ci* also functions as a situational argument bearing a locative formal feature which is merged with the verb in the derivation, and which is bound to a dislocated (locative or temporal) deictic expression. This is illustrated below.

(42) [TopP In questo hotel<sub>i</sub> ... [vP c'<sub>Sit/i</sub> [v è [DP la piscina ]]]



have been observed to obey severe definiteness effects, whereas Italian does not seem to be subject to the same restrictions (see especially Zucchi 1995 and Leonetti 2008, but also McNally 1997; and Moro 1997; *cf.* Chierchia 1998a; Cruschina 2016). The absence of a ban against definite descriptions in Italian existential sentences is attested in (43).

- (43) C'è {*un gatto / il gatto / Milo*} in giardino.  
there-be.PRES.3SG a cat the cat Milo in garden  
'There is {a cat / the cat / Milo} in the garden.'
- [Inspired by Cruschina 2016: 121, (3a)]

As (43) shows, Italian appears to license strong DPs such as definite descriptions and proper names in existential constructions.<sup>98</sup>

Given the compatibility of definite descriptions in Italian existential sentences, and the simultaneous equivalence between HAVE- and BE-predicates, one might speculate that NIDs are possible in Italian as a consequence of the interplay of these two factors. In other words, NIDs may be licensed in Italian because HAVE- and BE-predicates are equivalent, and Italian is not subject to any definiteness effect, providing a possible explanation for why definite descriptions are used for these constructions.

Nevertheless, the lack of definiteness effects cannot be an adequate explanation for the licensing of NIDs in Italian for several reasons. First, Catalan does not appear to impose stringent restrictions on the occurrence of strong DPs in existential sentences either (Rigau 1988; Villalba 2016; *cf.* Cruschina 2016). Consider the Catalan counterpart of example (43) below.

- (44) Hi    ha                  {*un gat / el gat / en Milo*} al       pati.  
there have.PRES.3SG a   cat   the cat   the   Milo   at.the patio  
'There is {a cat / the cat / Milo} in the patio.'

<sup>98</sup> It is important to notice that the Italian existential construction *c'è / ci sono* 'there is / there are' is ambiguous between a locative and a proper existential interpretation (Zucchi 1995; Chierchia 1998a). Cruschina (2016) argues, in this respect, for a distinction between existential construction proper and pseudo-existentials (further classified in inverse locatives, locatives with a deictic interpretation, and presentational sentences). The term *pseudo-existentials*, thus, englobes those constructions that apparently violate the definiteness effect. Since a proper classification of Italian *ci*-sentences falls outside the scope of this chapter, I will leave this issue aside. For a detailed discussion on the differences between existential and locative sentences, see also Chierchia (1998a), Storto (2003), Partee and Borschev (2008).

This example shows that Catalan licenses definite descriptions as internal arguments of existential construction and thus violates the definiteness effect. Still, it does not license NIDs but uses NBNs instead.

Second, and focusing solely on Italian, it must be remarked that, despite being superficially identical, the definite descriptions in existential sentences and NIDs in V+NIDs complexes that involve a possession relation are interpretatively –and structurally, as will be discussed in Section 5.4– distinct. Consider the following contrast.

- (45)a. In questo hotel c'è *la piscina*.  
           in this hotel there-be.PRES.3SG the pool  
           'There {is / are} (a) pool(s) in this hotel.'
- b. In giardino c'è *il gatto*.  
           in garden there-be.PRES.3SG the cat  
           Literally: 'There is the cat in the garden.' (and not 'there {is / are} (a) cat(s) in the garden.'

(45a) contains the NID *la piscina*. Accordingly, the sentence does not refer to a contextually familiar and unique pool; rather it expresses that the salient hotel in context possesses the characterizing property of having one (or more) pool(s). Crucially, this interpretation is unavailable in (45b), which only licenses the default definite interpretation of the definite description. As such, *il gatto* in (45b) can only refer to a contextually salient, unique, and familiar cat.

This interpretative difference stems from the nature of the HAVE-relation expressed in each example. While (45a) denotes a have-relation that establishes a characterizing property of the subject (i.e., the hotel), the presence of a cat in (45b) does not qualify as a sufficient property to distinguish the garden from other individual gardens, providing an explanation for the lack of a NID interpretation in the latter case.

Given this difference, it is expected that only the NID in (45a), unlike the definite DP in (45b), should allow a number neutral interpretation. This prediction is borne out, as attested in the following contrast.

- (46)a. In questo hotel c'è *la piscina*. Una in giardino e una in  
 in this hotel there-be.PRES.3SG the pool one in garden and one in  
 terrazzo.  
 terrace  
 'There {is / are} (a) pool(s) in this hotel. One in the garden and one in the terrace'
- b. In giardino c'è *il gatto*. #Un siamese e un persiano.  
 in garden there-be.PRES.3SG the cat a Siamese and a Persian  
 'There is the cat in the garden. #A Siamese and a Persian.'

The NID in (46a) is compatible with both atomicity and non-atomicity entailments, as it is compatible with a continuation where the existence of one or more individual pools is explicitly stated. Conversely, a similar continuation is infelicitous in the context of (46b). This demonstrates that the definite description in (46b) is incompatible with non-atomicity entailments, showing that such definite description is not associated with number-neutrality.

In summary, this subsection has shown that associating the presence of NIDs with the lack of definiteness effects in Italian is not analytically adequate for various reasons. First, a comparable absence of definiteness effects is also observed in Catalan, a language that does not license NIDs but instead uses NBNs. More importantly, it has also been shown that NIDs and definite descriptions in existential sentences are interpretatively different, as only the former allow for number-neutrality. This difference stems from the fact that only NIDs occur in characterizing HAVE-relations. Section 5.4 will provide a structural explanation for this contrast. Before that, let us consider a third potential approach to NIDs.

### 5.3.3 *NIDs and covert semantic operators*

A third possible analytical approach to Italian NIDs involves the postulation of a covert semantic operator that cancels definiteness, pretty much in the same vein proposed in the preceding chapters for Italian BNs, *di*+ART nominals, IDs, and Romance plural and mass indefinites in general. Concretely, it could be hypothesized that the indefinite interpretation of NIDs arises from the presence of an abstract indefinite operator adjoined to the definite description. Remaining agnostic about its precise nature, I will label this operator

as  $\delta$ . The purported configuration of NIDs would correspond to the syntactic structure schematically represented in (47).

$$(47) \quad [_D \delta [_D D_{\text{def}} [n]]]$$

Under this structure,  $\delta$  semantically behaves similarly to Espinal and Cyrino's (2022a, 2022b) DE-operator and Partee's (1987) type-shifter IDENT. In other words,  $\delta$  takes a definite description as its input –namely a nominal expression of type  $\langle e \rangle$ , whose denotation is determined by the *iota* function introduced by the definite article– and returns a property-denoting expression of type  $\langle e, t \rangle$ .

This approach could effectively account for the indefinite interpretation associated with NIDs, as well as their obligatory narrow scope behavior. Recall that property-denotation is widely regarded as the semantic type associated with weak indefiniteness (Ladusaw 1994; Dobrovie-Sorin 1997; McNally & Van Geenhoven 1998; McNally 2004, 2020). However, properties do not introduce discourse referents in the discourse but contribute purely descriptive content. Properties combine with the predicate either via semantic incorporation (Van Geenhoven 1998; McNally 2004) or by receiving an existential interpretation through some form of existential closure (roughly as in Diesing 1992). In either case, the existential operator is introduced locally at the VP-level. This ensures that NIDs are necessarily interpreted under the scope of logical operators, which always take scope above the VP domain.

While this approach may seem promising in capturing the indefinite and narrow scope interpretations associated with NIDs, it ultimately amounts to little more than an *ad hoc* stipulation. It is important to note that the assumption made in previous chapters of an indefinite operator DE for plural and mass indefinites in Italian –whether BNs, *di*+ART nominals, or IDs– was not only convenient but also elegant and explanatorily powerful. It provided a unified structural account for all Romance plural and mass indefinite forms, grounded in clear linguistic insights. For instance, DE is not only overtly realized in Italian *di*+ART nominals, French *des*-phrases, and bare *di* expressions in Ligurian and Piedmontese varieties, but is also phonologically expressed when BNs are left- or right-dislocated in Catalan and Italian (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016, 2018; Espinal & Cyrino 2022a, 2022b; Espinal & Giusti 2024). Finally, Espinal and Cyrino's (2022a, 2022b) unified structure of indefiniteness provided a theoretical sound framework for explaining the emergence of IDs in Italo-Romance varieties that lack number exponence

on nouns and, consequently, BNs. In these varieties, IDs constitute the simplest formal option for the overt expression of Number.

In strike contrast, the assumption of an abstract indefinite operator in the syntactic structure of NIDs does not seem to prove equally enlightening. The postulation of covert semantic operators is theoretically insightful and explanatorily adequate only when such operators have a linguistic instantiation in some language or another. Considering the Romance languages under scrutiny in the present thesis, it is crucial to note that the proposed  $\delta$  operator does not receive an explicit phonological realization not only in Italian, but also in none of the other languages. In other words, none of the Romance languages display an overt morphosyntactic item, arguably parallel to DE, in contexts that allow a number-neutral interpretation of nominal expressions such as the object position of characterizing HAVE-predicates. Spanish and Catalan use NBNs, whereas Italian opts for a plain definite description.

Additionally, by the same argument, there seems to be no compelling reason to assume that  $\delta$  should be postulated exclusively in Italian. One would thus expect evidence for it in other languages as well. In general, the availability of covert semantic operators is considered cross-linguistically stable, especially among genetically related languages. However, as the previous sections have made clear, NIDs are an idiosyncratic feature of Italian grammar that does not appear in other Romance languages. Therefore, if we were to adopt an analysis based on the presence of an abstract semantic operator turning a definite description into an indefinite expression, we would need to explain not only why  $\delta$  is never overtly realized in Romance, but also why it is semantically active only in the grammar of Italian. Given the *ad hoc* nature of this proposal and its failure to provide a theoretically insightful explanation for the presence of NIDs, I conclude that it should be set aside.

To summarize this section, I have considered three possible approaches to NIDs in Italian. First, I examined the analysis proposed by Espinal (2010) and Espinal & McNally (2011) for the corresponding NBN construction in Spanish and Catalan, based on pseudo-incorporation. It was noted that this proposal faces several issues when applied to NIDs. For instance, pseudo-incorporated nominals generally lack definiteness markers. In the rare cases in which definite articles are present, as with WDs, they are taken to abstractly scope above the incorporated structure, leading to conventional and enriched interpretations. Crucially none of these properties apply to Italian NIDs.

Second, I proposed a connection between the presence of NIDs and the simultaneous absence of definiteness effects in Italian. Nevertheless, a similar lack of definiteness effects is observed in Catalan, a language that does not license NIDs. Furthermore, I have also shown that definite descriptions in canonical existential constructions and those giving rise to the NID reading differ in their respective interpretation. Specifically, only the latter are licensed in VP combinations that denote characterizing properties and support a number neutral reading, whereas the former convey the default definite, unique, and number-marked interpretation.

Finally, I presented a more abstract, but conceptually plausible hypothesis: the postulation of a covert semantic operator, parallel to IDENT, which turns an entity-denoting expression into a property-denoting one. Nevertheless, I have argued that this hypothesis has limited explanatory potential and constitutes an *ad hoc* analysis. As such, it should be discarded. Having ruled out all three approaches, the next section will propose a strictly compositional analysis for Italian NIDs.

## 5.4 The proposal

This section presents a new theoretical analysis aimed at accounting for the presence, structure, and interpretation of NIDs in Italian. Specifically, it seeks to account for the indefinite, number-neutral interpretation of this construction, and its occurrence in the object position of HAVE-predicates that denote a characterizing property of the external argument. To do so, the focus of Section 5.4.1 will be both on the semantic composition of the NID interpretation and its combination with the HAVE-predicate that selects for it. In essence, I will argue that the structure of NIDs corresponds to the denotation of so-called *definite kinds* (Borik & Espinal 2015), which receive an existential interpretation via Chierchia's (1998b) type shifting operation of Derived Kind Predication (henceforth, DKP) at the time of composing with the verbal predicate. In Section 5.4.2 I will also provide two empirical arguments in favor of the proposal.

### 5.4.1 Building up the NID reading

#### 5.4.1.1 The DP

Let us begin by examining the semantic composition of the DP in a bottom-up fashion, while also outlining the theoretical assumptions adopted in this section.

First, let us consider the morphologically singular count noun in NIDs. I argue that this noun structurally and interpretatively corresponds to NBNs in Catalan and Spanish. Thus, following the general view emerging from Espinal (2010), Espinal & McNally (2011), and Borik & Espinal (2015), I assume, that it has the minimal structure in (48a) and the corresponding denotation in (48b), repeated from (25).

(48)a.  $[_{NP} N]$

b.  $\llbracket N \rrbracket = \lambda P \lambda x^k [P(x^k)]$       where  $x^k \in K$  (domain of kinds)

((48b) from Borik & Espinal 2015: 182, (16))

Moving up on the structure, let us turn to number. In accordance with the assumptions made in previous chapters, I take number to correspond to a morphosyntactic category – i.e., the PLURALIZER – within the DP domain. In unmarked cases, when nominal expressions are marked for plural, this category functions as a modifying feature on D (Bouchard 2002; Dobrovie-Sorin 2012; Cyrino & Espinal 2020).<sup>99</sup> On the semantic side, Number has been argued to correspond to Carlson’s (1977) realization (or instantiation) operator, which relates kinds to their instantiations (Déprez 2005; Borik & Espinal 2012, 2015; Gerhke & McNally 2012, among others).

Therefore, to account for the availability of a number-neutral interpretation for NIDs, I build on Espinal (2010) and Espinal and McNally (2011). Concretely, I argue that number-neutrality arises from the absence of number specification in the morphological composition of NIDs. Therefore, on a par with Spanish and Catalan NBNs, Italian NIDs have a deficient morphosyntactic configuration, lacking any modifying feature of Number (or any Number projection, *cf.* footnote 99) within their DP spine. Accordingly, the proposed syntactic structure for NIDs can be minimally represented as follows.

(49)  $[_{DP} D [_{NP} N]]$

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<sup>99</sup> This assumption, along with the analysis developed in this chapter, aligns with the general theoretical framework adopted in this thesis. For arguments in favor of the assumption that Number is a morphosyntactic feature, see also Pomino (2012) and Cavarani (2018).

However, it should be acknowledged that a more straightforward analysis of NIDs may involve a more conventional view of Number (e.g., Borer 2005; Wiltschko 2008; Borik & Espinal 2015; Alexiadou 2019) as projecting a morphosyntactic functional head within the nominal spine.



Before addressing the semantic composition of (49), two caveats are in order. First, as I have argued, there is no evidence for a morphosyntactic category of Number within the formal structure of NIDs. In other words, NIDs are structurally unmarked for Number. Consequently, I assume that they surface in a morphologically singular form because singular is the default unmarked form for Number, at least in Romance (Corbett 2000; Ackema & Neeleman 2019, among others).<sup>100</sup>

Second, it is important to note that, given the assumed structure of mass indefinites outlined in preceding chapters, the structure of NIDs presented in (49) is essentially identical to that of mass definite descriptions. Consequently, there should be no structural difference between the two VPs below.

- (50)a. *Avere        la    piscina.*  
           have.INF    the    pool  
           ‘To have (a) pool(s).’
- b. *Avere        l’acqua*  
           have.INF    the-water  
           ‘To have the water.’

Crucially, however, despite sharing the same structural configuration, only (50a), which contains a morphologically singular count noun, allows an indefinite interpretation of the definite description *la piscina* and participates in NIDs constructions. In contrast, (50b), which contains a mass noun, can only convey the default definite description of the DP in object position. What accounts for this difference in meaning?

I assume that the mass / count distinction is not structural (as in e.g., Borer 2005), but rather lexical (Rothstein 2010; Landman 2011). In other words, I argue that this grammatical distinction arises from differences in the lexical roots of the respective nouns and, consequently, their respective conceptual content. Notably, only mass nouns, but not morphologically singular count nouns, exhibit cumulative reference (Quine 1960; Krifka 1989; Landman 1989a, 1989b, 2011; Rothstein 2010). This distinction suggests that mass

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<sup>100</sup> Based on Greenberg’s (1966) and Croft’s (2003) morphological criteria for markedness, singular is typically considered the unmarked form in Romance, as in languages like Spanish and Catalan, singular morphemes have no phonological content, whereas the marked plural form is consistently realized as the morph /s/. See also Bale et al. (2010) for a discussion on how morphological markedness does not necessarily correlates with semantic markedness. Here, the use of *unmarked Number* refers strictly to its morphological status, while number-neutrality results from the absence of number specification.

nouns are excluded from NID constructions because NIDs must be built around non-cumulative expressions that are morphologically unmarked for Number, as only such nominal expressions are compatible with number-neutrality.

With these clarifications in mind, let us now examine the semantic composition of the structure in (49). This structure consists of two components: an NBN and a definite article introducing the *iota* function. Recall that *iota* takes any property and maps it onto the unique individual satisfying that property when the extension is a singleton, or to a maximal individual entity if the set is a plurality (Sharvy 1980; Link 1983; Partee 1987; Heim 2011, among many others), as represented below.

$$(51) \quad \iota: P \rightarrow \iota x [P(x)]$$

Following Borik and Espinal (2015), I maintain that the *iota* function applies directly to a property of kinds (of type  $\langle e^k, t \rangle$ ), as defined in (48), yielding a kind expression as its output. That is, this operation selects the unique entity that satisfies this property, namely an atomic kind of type  $\langle e^k \rangle$ . This is exemplified in (52), which illustrates the proposed structure and semantic derivation of the NID *la piscina*.

$$(52) \text{ a. } [{}_{\text{DP}} \text{ la } [{}_{\text{NP}} \text{ piscina}]] \\ \text{ b. } \llbracket \text{ la piscina} \rrbracket = \iota x^k [\text{piscina}(x^k)]$$

The structure in (52a) corresponds to a morphologically singular count definite description unmarked for Number. In the corresponding denotation in (52b), the  $\iota$ -operator binds kind variables, represented as  $x^k$ , to which the kind-property denoted by the noun applies.

The output of this structure and derivation corresponds to what Borik and Espinal (2012, 2015) refer to as *definite kinds*. As the term suggests, definite kinds are claimed to be distinct from *singular kinds* (Carlson 1977; Dayal 2004; Beyssade 2005), as well as from *singular generics* (Chierchia 1998b). Moreover, the denotation of definite kinds differs also from that of so-called *plural kinds* (Beyssade 2005) or *generic plural definites* (Borik & Espinal 2015). Plural generic expressions are conceived of as maximal sums of instantiations of the kind, which receive a generic interpretation when combined with generic predicates (either i- or k-level). I will return to these denotational differences in the following sections.

What is crucial for the current discussion is that the semantic configuration in (52b) yields the unique entity satisfying the kind property denoted by the numberless common noun. Thus, definite kinds refer directly to the kinds themselves, and not to maximal sums of their instantiations. As a result, they correspond to integral entities that do not possess any internal ontological structure.

Having clarified the semantic composition associated with the DP structure of NIDs, which is responsible for their number-neutrality and kind-denotation, we can now turn to how these nominal expressions combine with HAVE-predicates to yield a characterizing property of the external argument. This will be the focus of the next subsection.

#### 5.4.1.2 The VP

Italian NIDs appear in VPs that denote a characterizing possession relation. Moreover, the number-neutral DP involved in these configurations denotes a definite kind. This section delves in the semantic composition of the verbal predicate with the DP object, as this process raises significant compositionality issues.

A closer examination of this compositional process reveals that HAVE-predicates involved in the construction under investigation in this chapter select for object-level arguments: a possession relation involves a possessor (i.e., the haver) and a possessed (i.e., the havee). Crucially, the havee must be an actual object, namely an instantiation of the kind it belongs to, as a possession relation cannot be established between an object entity and a kind entity. This represents a challenge for a coherent composition of the VPs involving NIDs, both conceptually and semantically. Conceptually, a haver cannot possess a kind: the sentence *L'hotel ha la piscina* does not mean that the contextually unique hotel possesses the kind *the pool*. Theoretically, on the other hand, this combination results in a type clash: the have-predicate selects for an object-level argument, while the NID argument denotes a kind-level entity. This type mismatch is illustrated in (53b) for the VP *avere la piscina* in (53a).

(53)a. avere        *la*    *piscina*.

have.INF    the    pool

‘To have (a) pool(s).’

b.  $\#(\text{HAVE}(\iota x^k.\text{piscina}(x^k)))$

To solve this conflict, I adopt Chierchia's (1998b) semantic DKP operation. As discussed, Chierchia (1998b) introduced DKP to explain why English BNs typically yield a generic interpretation when combined with i- and k-level predicates but only an existential reading when they combine with s-level predicates. The original definition of DKP is provided below, along with Chierchia's (1998b) original English example.

(54) *Derived Kind Predication (DKP):*

If P applies to objects and k denotes a kind, then

$$P(k) = \exists x[\cup k(x) \wedge P(x)]$$

(Chierchia 1998b: 364, (31c))

(55)a. *Lions* are ruining my garden.

b. ruining my garden ( $\cap$ lions)  $\Leftrightarrow$  (via DKP)  $\exists x[\cup \cap \text{lions}(x) \wedge \text{ruining my garden}(x)]^{101}$

(Chierchia 1998b: 364, (32))

In Chierchia (1998b), *lions* is assumed to denote a kind, whereas the predicate requires an object-level argument. This mismatch is resolved by an adjustment of the nominal type through DKP, which automatically introduces existential quantification over the instantiations of the kind denoted by the nominal expression. The results states that there are some individual  $x$ , which are instantiations of the kind *lion*, and that function as the internal argument of the complex predicate *ruining my garden*.

The situation with Italian NIDs is similar. As noted, the combination of a HAVE-predicate and a NID also results in a semantic mismatch, given that HAVE-predicates select for object arguments and the DP denotes a kind. I propose that this type clash is locally resolved by adjusting the predicate to introduce existential quantification over instances of the kind, as illustrated in (56b).

(56)a. avere      *la*      *piscina*.

have.INF    the    pool

'To have (a) pool(s).'

b.  $\#(\text{HAVE}(\cup^k \text{piscina}(x^k))) \Rightarrow$  (via DKP)  $\exists x^o(\text{piscina}(x^o)) \wedge \text{HAVE}(x^o)$

<sup>101</sup> Recall that Chierchia (1998a), building on Carlson (1977), assumes an ontological domain of reference where only mass nouns are inherently kind denoting. In contrast, plural count nouns need to be converted into kind-denoting expressions through the use of the down operator  $\cap$ , which will be defined in (57) below.

The type mismatch between the selectional requirements of the HAVE-predicate and the denotation of the NID argument is locally resolved via DKP, which introduces existential quantification over instantiations of the kind denoted by the DP, represented with the variable  $x^o$  ranging over object entities. The result states that there exists one (or more than one) individual  $x^o$  instantiating the kind *piscina*, which functions as the internal argument of the HAVE-predicate. This operation effectively accounts for the indefinite, existential reading associated with NIDs, together with the kind-related flavor of this construction.

Before accounting for the characterizing property of the external argument denoted by the VP when it is inserted in a complete sentence, some clarifications are necessary, as there are noticeable theoretical differences between Chierchia's (1998b) account and the analysis presented in this chapter. First, Chierchia's (1998b) proposal is developed to account mainly for the behavior of plural and mass BNs in English. In contrast, the proposal defended here applies exclusively to Italian NIDs, which, in contrast, are morphologically definite and unmarked for number. One might raise the objection that DKP, as originally formulated, only applies to plural and mass nouns. However, Chierchia (1998b: 364) himself provides examples with singular nominal expressions, demonstrating that DKP can be indistinguishably applied both to singularities and pluralities.<sup>102</sup> This is arguably true for number-neutral expressions as well. I suspect that the general applicability of DKP likely stems from its nature as a last-resort type-shifting operation triggered by a type mismatch between the requirements of the predicate and the semantic type of its argument.

A second, potentially more significant difference concerns ontological and theoretical considerations. According to Chierchia (1998b: 351), kinds are manufactured out of a property by taking the largest member of its extension in a given world or situation by means of the 'down' function, as defined in (57).

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<sup>102</sup> One such case is illustrated in the following example.

- (i) a. *That kind of animal* is ruining my garden.  
 b. ruining my garden (that kind of animal)  $\Leftrightarrow \exists x[\text{that kind of animal}(x) \wedge \text{ruining my garden}(x)]$   
 [Adapted from Chierchia (1998b: 364, (31a))]

Chierchia (1998b: 364) remains agnostic regarding the precise analysis of *kind-of* constructions but maintains that they "uncontroversially denote kinds". Consequently, they trigger the application of DKP when combining with the predicate *ruining my garden*, as shown in (ib).

(57) For any property P and word / situation s,

$$\cap P = \lambda s \iota P_s, \text{ if } \lambda s \iota P_s \text{ in } K$$

undefined otherwise

where  $P_s$  is the extension of P in s

(Chierchia 1998b: 351, (16))

This formal definition of a kind closely resembles that of plural generic DPs (following Borik & Espinal 2015, *i.a.*). An instance of such generic expression is the plural definite *le tigrì* ‘the tigers’ in the following example.

(58) *Le tigrì sono in via d’estinzione.*

the tigers be.PRES.3PL in way of-extinction

‘Tigers are on the verge of extinction.’

Due to the generic interpretation associated with the k-level predicate in (58), the plural definite *le tigrì* refers to the maximal sum of instantiations of the kind *tigers*. In contrast, I argue, following Borik and Espinal (2015), that NIDs denote definite kinds, which result from applying the *iota* function to a common noun unmarked for number. This implies that –contrary to Chierchia’s (1998b) approach – kinds here are conceptualized as integral and undivided entities that do not have any internal structure, at least from a grammatical perspective.

Returning to NIDs, and to account for the characterizing property of the external argument denoted by the VP combination, I build again on Espinal and McNally (2007, 2011). Concretely, I propose the following derivation in (59b) for our (adapted) original sentence, repeated as (59a).

(59)a. *L’hotel ha la piscina.*

$$\begin{aligned} \text{b. } \lambda e \lambda w \iota x \exists y [ & \text{avere}(e, w) \wedge \exists w' [C(w')] ] [ \exists e' [ \mathbf{depend}(e, w, e', w) \wedge \mathbf{have}(e', w') \wedge \\ & \text{havee}(e', w') = y : \text{piscina}(y) \wedge \mathbf{haver}(e', w') = x : \text{hotel}(x) \wedge \mathbf{Char}(x, e', w') ] ] \end{aligned}$$

The derivation in (59b) states that the situation denoted in the world of evaluation  $w$  depends on the existence of a HAVE-relation between two arguments, the subject and the object, in some actual world  $w'$ , which is subject to contextual restrictions, as represented by the variable  $C$ . This condition is captured by the complex predicate **depend**( $e, w, e', w$ )

and the requirement that  $x$  be the **haver** and  $y$  the **havee** in  $e'$ . Lastly, the formula adds the condition **Char**( $x, e', w'$ ), which states that the HAVE-relation must characterize the subject.

In this subsection, I have presented a new compositional analysis of Italian NIDs. First, I have argued that their number-neutrality stems from the absence of number specification in their morphosyntactic configuration. Consequently, the resulting DP denotes a definite kind, as defined in Borik and Espinal (2015). However, when this kind-denoting expression combines with a HAVE-predicate, a type mismatch arises. I have proposed that this conflict triggers the application of Chierchia's (1998b) DKP, which successfully accounts for the indefinite interpretation of the definite description. Moreover, the formalization in (59b) accounts for the restricted occurrence of NIDs in the object position of a HAVE-predicate, provided the resulting V+NID composition denotes a characterizing property of the subject. Thus, the theory developed in this section not only accounts for the indefinite, existential interpretation of NIDs but also captures the characterizing nature of the entire VP. The next section presents further empirical evidence in support of this proposal.

#### 5.4.2 *Supporting arguments*

I have proposed that NIDs arise from two crucial components: (i) the kind-denotation associated with the DP and (ii) the application of DKP. A key advantage of this account is that it compositionally derives the intended NID interpretation from the denotation of the DP and its interaction with the verbal predicate. However, further empirical evidence can be brought to support this analysis. In the following discussion, I present two main arguments: one based on the narrow scope behavior of NIDs and the other on their restrictions on modification.

##### 5.4.2.1 Argument 1: scope behavior

The first argument providing support for the proposal relates to a behavior that characterizes NIDs and distinguishes them from canonical definites. Specifically, it has been noted that, unlike default definites, which are referential expressions interpreted as constants, and thus always computed outside the scope of logical operators, Italian NIDs can only license narrow scope readings. This behavior was observed in Section 5.1 in relation to negation, universal quantifiers, and the protasis of counterfactual conditionals. Let us consider the following examples, adapted from (4), (5), and (11a), respectively.

- (60) L'hotel non ha la piscina.  
 the-hotel not have.PRES.3SG the pool  
 'The hotel doesn't have {<sup>#</sup>the / (any)} pool(s).'
- (61) Fabio indossa la cravatta ogni domenica.  
 Fabio wear.PRES3SG the tie every Sunday  
 'Fabio wears {<sup>#</sup>the / (a)} tie(s) every Sunday.'
- (62) Se Maria avesse la macchina, viaggerebbe per  
 if Maria have.SUBJ.3SG the car, travel.COND.3SG for  
 tutta Europa.  
 all Europe  
 'If Maria had {<sup>#</sup>the / (a)} car(s), she would travel all around Europe.'
- (adapted from Kupisch & Koops 2007: 190, (2a))

These examples are only compatible with a narrow scope of the definite description below negation (60), a universal quantifier (61), and a conditional (62). A wide scope reading would correspond to the infelicitous interpretation in which, respectively, the hotel does not have the unique salient pool in context, Fabio wears the same tie every Sunday, and Maria have the uniquely identifiable car.

In this regard, it is important to note that this obligatory narrow scope behavior of NIDs is precisely what an analysis based on DKP would predict. The DKP operation applies locally (Chierchia 1998b; Zamparelli 2002; Dayal 2004, 2013): it is a covert type shifting mechanism that inserts local existential quantification over the instantiations of a kind to repair a type mismatch between the requirements of the predicate and the denotation of its argument. This implies that the existential quantifier introduced by DKP is necessarily inserted within the VP-level. Consequently, the resulting existentially quantified nominal expression can only take narrow scope below other scope-bearing operators in the sentence, which, by definition, take scope above the VP domain.

Let us examine how this process unfolds with negation. The first step can be represented as in (63b), which illustrates the semantic derivation of the negated VP *non avere la piscina* in (63a), where the object is a NID.



(63)a. Non avere *la piscina...*

not have.INF the pool

‘Not having any pool...’

b.  $\#(\neg \text{HAVE}(\iota^k.piscina(x^k))) \Rightarrow (\text{via DKP}) \neg \exists x^o.piscina(x^o) \wedge \text{HAVE}(x^o)$

When the HAVE-predicate combines with the kind-denoting NID, DKP is triggered, introducing existential quantification locally. Negation then applies to the entire VP, scoping above the existentially quantified internal argument, thus deriving the narrow scope behavior of NIDs.

This negated VP, subsequently combines with the external argument to characterize it, yielding the negated statement in (60), repeated below as (64a). The complete semantic derivation for this example is provided in (64b)

(64)a. L’hotel non ha *la piscina.*

the-hotel not have.PRES.3SG the pool

‘The hotel doesn’t have {<sup>#</sup>the/(any)} pool(s).’

b.  $\lambda e \lambda w \iota x \exists y [avere(e, w) \wedge \exists w' [C(w')][\neg \exists e' [\mathbf{depend}(e, w, e', w') \wedge \mathbf{have}(e', w') \wedge \mathbf{havee}(e') = y : piscina(y) \wedge \mathbf{haver}(e', w') = x : hotel(x) \wedge \mathbf{Char}(x, e', w')]]]$

This semantic representation states that the situation denoted in the world of evaluation  $w$  depends on the existence, in some actual world  $w'$ , of a HAVE-relation between the subject *l’hotel* and the object *la piscina*. Crucially, however, the existence of this relation is negated. I argue that it is precisely the absence of this possession relation that characterizes the subject, as captured by  $\mathbf{Char}(x, e', w')$ .

In sum, a DKP-analysis effectively captures the obligatory narrow scope behavior of NIDs, providing further support to the analysis developed in this chapter. Next section presents a second empirical argument.

#### 5.4.2.1 Argument 2: taxonomic modification

The second argument in favor of the proposal outlined in this chapter concerns modification. It is important to highlight that an analysis based on DKP predicts that NIDs should only allow for modifiers that apply at a kind-level denotation, as the DKP operation requires kind denotation to apply and derive an existential reading. This prediction is borne

out, as NIDs appear to be exclusively compatible with taxonomic modifiers, which yield modified nominals that denote a (well-established) sub-kind (see also Kupisch & Koops 2007; and Ippolito 2017 on this specific point).<sup>103</sup> In other words, NIDs can only combine with taxonomic modifiers, such as relational adjectives (McNally & Boleda 2004) or PP complements that further specify the kind denoted by the numberless nominal. In contrast, when non-taxonomic modification, which apply at the object-level denotation, the NID reading becomes unavailable, and the only interpretative possibility associated with the relevant definite description becomes the canonical definite reading. This behavior is attested in the following contrast.

- (65)a. Quando ho incontrato Mario, era così abbronzato che gli  
 when AUX meet.PTCP Mario be.IPFV.3SG so tanned that CL  
 ho chiesto se si era comprato *la casa al mare*.  
 AUX ask.PTCP if CL AUX buy.PTCP the house at.the sea  
 ‘When I met Mario, he was so tanned that I asked him whether he bought himself  
 {the / (a)} beach house(s).’

[Adapted from Ippolito 2017, (30b)]

- b. Quando ho incontrato Mario, era così abbronzato che gli ho  
 when AUX meet.PTCP Mario be.IPFV.3SG so tanned that CL AUX  
 chiesto se si era comprato *la casa di mio zio*  
 ask.PTCP if CL AUX buy.PTCP the house of my uncle  
 ‘When I met Mario, he was so tanned that I asked him whether he bought himself  
 my uncle’s house.’ (but not ‘...a house of my uncle’)

The example in (65a), unlike (65b), allows a NID interpretation of the modified definite DP *la casa al mare*, as having bought a house at the beach can be seen as a characterizing property of Mario, which, in turn, makes it possible for him to be tanned. Crucially, this

<sup>103</sup> The same behavior is observed with Spanish and Catalan NBNs, which only admit modification denoting sub-kinds (Espinal 2010), as shown in the following examples. This restriction results from the kind-property denotation associated with NBNs.

(i) Per a aquest espectacle necessitareu *faldilla llarga / escocesa / de quadres*.  
 for to this show need.FUT.3PL skirt long kilt of squares  
 ‘For this show you will need a long skirt / a kilt / a plaid skirt.’

(Espinal 2010: 988, ex. (8))

The NBN *faldilla* in (i) is compatible with the above modifiers since the resulting complex nominal expression denotes a property of sub-kinds.

characterizing environment makes the use of a NID possible. However, to explain the contrast between in (65), I argue that an existential reading of the complex nominal expression in object position of the verb *comprare* ‘to buy’ is only possible for *la casa al mare* in (65a) because it denotes a well-established (sub-)kind of houses. Consequently, DKP is allowed to target this sub-kind denotation and derive the existential meaning associated with NIDs. Conversely, *la casa di mio zio* in (65b) involves a possessive pronoun that refers to the first person, which prevents the DP from denoting a sub-kind interpretation. As a result, DKP cannot apply to any kind denotation, providing an explanation for the unavailability of the relevant existential interpretation and the consequent presence of the default definite reading.

This behavior is not coincidental, being in fact rather robust, as the following contrasts further attest.

- (66)a. La stanza ha la portafinestra.  
the room have.PRES.3SG the French door  
‘The room has (a) French door(s).’
- b. La stanza ha la finestra verde.  
the room have.PRES.3SG the window green  
‘The room has the green window.’ (but not ‘... (a) green window(s).’)
- (67)a. In estate, Luca indossa la camicia { hawaiana / a  
in summer Luca wear.PRES.3SG the shirt Hawaiian at  
maniche corte} .  
sleeves short  
‘In summer, Luca wears (a) short-sleeved shirt(s).’
- b. In estate, Luca indossa la camicia che ha comprato  
in summer Luca wear.PRES.3SG the shirt that AUX buy.PTCP  
alle Hawaii.  
at.the Hawaii.  
‘In summer, Luca wears the shirt he bought at the Hawaii.’ (but not ‘... (a) shirt(s) he bought at the Hawaii.’)

The same explanation for the contrast in (65) applies to (66) and (67). In (66a) the compound *portafinestra* denotes a well-established sub-kind of windows. Therefore, the existential reading of NIDs can be manufactured –via DKP– out of this taxonomic denotation.

The same happens with *la camicia hawaiana* / *la camicia a maniche corte* in (67a), which, in Italian, can be argued to denote well-established kind of shirts, namely those with short sleeves. Hence, DKP can apply at this sub-kind denotation and derive the desired existential interpretation.<sup>104</sup> Conversely, the modified nominal expressions in (66b) *la finestra verde* and (67b) *la camicia che ha comprato alle Hawaii* do not denote well-established sub-kinds at any stage of their derivation. Consequently, there is no principled way to derive the existential reading from a non-kind-denoting DP through DKP, thus explaining the unavailability of NIDs with these expressions.

In this section, I have shown that a DKP-based analysis not only accounts for the narrow scope behavior of NIDs but also effectively explains their restrictions on modification, which are limited to kind-level modifiers. The proposal outlined here predicts that the availability of the existential reading correlates with the presence of a (sub-)kind denotation, thereby explaining why NIDs are unavailable when a modified definite DP lacks a taxonomic interpretation. These observations provide further empirical support for the analysis defended in this thesis. Having established the adequate analytical approach to NIDs, the next section will compare this proposal to other, seemingly related, constructions.

## 5.5 Comparing alternative strategies

This section evaluates two closely related proposals in contrast to the approach outlined in this chapter. Specifically, I will examine Krifka et al.'s (1995) notion of Representative Object Interpretations (ROIs) and Zamparelli's (2002) analysis of Italian IDs.

### 5.5.1 Krifka et al.'s (1995) ROIs

Krifka et al. (1995) define ROIs as a special interpretation associated with morphologically singular, kind-denoting definite descriptions.<sup>105</sup> Specifically, they discuss examples like the following.

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<sup>104</sup> I predict that the availability of an existential reading for *la camicia hawaiana* should vary among Italian speakers, depending on the degree to which the kind denotation of this DP is accessible to them. For speakers who perceive *la camicia hawaiana* as a well-established sub-kind of shirts, the NID interpretation is expected to be more readily available than for those who do not regard this kind as well-established.

<sup>105</sup> See Gerards (2020) and Gerards and Stark (2020) for the claim that ROIs are also available with plural count (and mass) nouns in Old Spanish, Old Portuguese, and Francoprovençal. Additionally, see Oosterhof (2008) for ROIs in Dutch and related cross-linguistic differences.

(68) In Alaska we filmed *the Grizzly*.

(Krifka et al. 1995: 78, (128f))

According to Krifka et al. (1995: 83), the ROI interpretation of the DP *the Grizzly* arises when the object described in the situation is relevant only as a representative of its entire kind. In such cases, the property of the object, which acts as a representative of the kind, is projected onto the kind itself. This interpretative shift generally occurs within what the authors call a *kind-oriented mode of talk*, in which nominal expressions that are ambiguous between an object- and a kind-level reading are interpreted at the kind level, even when selected by predicates requiring object-level arguments.

The parallel between ROIs and NIDs is evident: both involve nominal expressions that can receive either an object- or a kind-level interpretation. However, significant differences distinguish the two phenomena. First, it is important to notice that the meaning shift associated with ROIs is generally assumed to be a pragmatic effect, whereas the existential interpretation of NIDs is currently assumed to be derived by the semantic operation of DKP. To the best of my knowledge, in fact, no formal characterization has been proposed for this construction, making a theoretically informed comparison with NIDs challenging.

Furthermore, a fundamental difference between ROIs and NIDs lies in their primary denotation. Krifka et al. (1995) argue that ROIs emerge when an object is relevant as a representative of its kind, implying that the primary interpretation of ROIs is object-level, from which the kind reading is projected. Under the framework developed in this chapter, an object-level denotation requires a morphological Number specification (or, alternatively, a Number projection) to instantiate a realization relation. In contrast, NIDs, lacking such specification, directly denote (definite) kinds.

In close relation, ROIs and NIDs differ also with respect to the predicate with which they combine. Notice that ROIs receive a kind interpretation when they combine with s-level predicates, such as *film* in (68). On the other hand, NIDs receive an object-level reading only when they combine with HAVE-predicates, which correspond to a subset of i-level predicates.

An additional, perhaps more persuasive contrast concerns the interaction of ROIs and NIDs with negation. As discussed earlier, NIDs obligatorily license narrow scope readings resulting from the application of DKP. This behavior correlates with their lack of existence presupposition, which contrasts with canonical definite descriptions, where

existence presupposition projects and survives under negation. Now, consider the negated counterpart of our initial ROI example below.

(69) In Alaska we didn't film *the Grizzly*.

Even if (69) is interpreted as describing a situation where the subjects did not film *any* instantiation of the kind Grizzly, it still presupposes the existence of grizzlies in Alaska. This follows naturally if ROIs are structurally and semantically equivalent to default definite description in their primary, non-derived interpretations. Therefore, unlike NIDs, which lack existence presuppositions, ROIs retain the default semantic and pragmatic properties of definites: uniqueness, familiarity, and, especially, existence presupposition.

A final distinction between the two constructions concerns their cross-linguistic distribution. NIDs have been shown to be unique to Italian, whereas ROIs, being a pragmatic phenomenon, are attested in many languages (see Oosterhof 2008; Pellettier 2010; Gerards 2020, among others).

Overall, the evidence presented in this section supports a clear distinction between NIDs, which are grammatically-driven interpretations specific to Italian, and ROIs, a primarily pragmatic phenomenon that occurs cross-linguistically. The next subsection examines a second related phenomenon, namely IDs, particularly under the theory developed by Zamparelli (2002).

### 5.5.2 Zamparelli (2002)

It is now pertinent to draw our attention to the proposal advanced by Zamparelli (2002) for existentially interpreted plural (and mass) definite descriptions (i.e., the phenomenon I have referred to as IDs in the previous chapter). Recall that Zamparelli (2002) also derives the existential reading of plural and mass IDs from their kind reading through DKP. Nevertheless, it is important to note that his proposal diverges from mine in at least two crucial respects.

First, Zamparelli's (2002) approach is exclusively concerned with plural IDs. These nominal expressions are marked with plural, which, given the assumptions outlined in the previous section, necessarily incorporate a Number specification in their morphosyntactic composition. Consequently, given their specification for plural, these nominal expressions are predicted to be incompatible with a number-neutral interpretation and only

license non-atomicity entailments. This prediction is borne out, as already observed with respect to the indefinite plural expressions in example (10), repeated below for convenience.

- (70) Hanno raccolto  $\{\emptyset / \textit{dei} / \textit{i}_{indef}\}$  *pomodori*.  
 AUX pick.PTCP  $\emptyset$  di+ART ART tomatoes  
 ‘They picked tomatoes.’
- a. Una cassa di Pachino e una di San Marzano.  
 a trunk of Pachino and one of San Marzano  
 ‘A trunk of Pachino tomatoes and one of San Marzano tomatoes.’
- b. #Un Pachino.  
 a Pachino

As shown in (70), Italian IDs, along with BNs and *di*+ART nominals, are only felicitous in situations that entail the existence of a plurality of individuals satisfying the property denoted by the noun. For instance, the ID *i<sub>indef</sub> pomodori* is only compatible with a continuation in which a plurality of tomatoes was harvested, as in (70a), but not with the continuation in (70b), which involves the presence of a singular referent. In light of this difference, it is safe to conclude that IDs and NIDs represent distinct phenomena, and that Zamparelli’s (2002) analysis of plural IDs cannot be straightforwardly extended to cover NIDs, which are number-neutral by definition.

This difference in morphological and semantic Number brings us to a second crucial distinction between Zamparelli’s (2002) proposal and the one presented in this chapter, which is especially related to the respective ontological assumptions. Following Borik and Espinal (2015), I have assumed that genuine kind denotation in languages like Spanish and Italian involves a numberless DP projection that denotes an intensional integral entity without internal structure. In contrast, Zamparelli (2002), following Chierchia (1998b), assumes that kind denotation with Romance plural definites corresponds to a modalized version of the canonical definite interpretation. This reading is derived by adding the intensional component  $\wedge$  to the  $\iota$  operator, as illustrated in the following example, where a plural definite in Italian combines with a k-level predicate.

- (71)a. *I cani sono diffusi.*  
           the dogs be.PRES.3PL widespread  
           ‘Dogs are widespread.’  
       b.  $\text{widespread}(\hat{\iota}\text{dogs})$

(Chierchia 1998a: 392, (91))

As the formula in (71b) indicates, the generic definite description refers to the (intensionalized) maximal sum of individual satisfying the property denoted by the noun. This interpretation arises from the sequential application of  $\iota$  and  $\hat{\phantom{x}}$  to the plural noun. This semantic composition corresponds to the highest level of the join-semilattice structure assumed for the domain of reference of pluralities (Link 1983; Landman 1989a, 1989b). This interpretation contrasts with the one I assumed in this chapter for kind denotation, which treats kinds as integral intensional entities that do not correspond to join-semilattices.

Overall, the two proposals –the one put forward in this chapter and Zamparelli’s (2002) account– address different phenomena associated with different uses of the Italian definite article, namely NIDs and IDs. While NIDs are number-neutral, IDs are specified for plural number. Moreover, these two theories rest on fundamentally different conceptualizations of kind denotation. In view of these differences, I conclude that it is convenient to maintain a clear distinction between the two. Having now fully developed the analytical portion of this chapter, we are in a position to examine the cross-linguistic variation in the strategies Romance languages employ to express number-neutral nominal expressions.

## 5.6 Approaching the cross-linguistic diversity

This section aims to provide a plausible answer to our third research question, which concerns the cross-linguistic variation in number-neutral readings observed in Section 5.1. Specifically, I seek to clarify the pattern emerging from the examples in (11) in Italian, French, Spanish, and Catalan, repeated below for reference.



- (72)a. Se Maria avesse {una / la / \*Ø} macchina, viaggierebbe per  
 if Maria have.SUBJ.3SG a the Ø car, travel.COND.3SG for  
 tutta Europa. *Italian*  
 all Europe
- b. Si Maria avait {une / #la / \*Ø} voiture, elle voyagerait à  
 if Maria have.SUBJ.3SG a the Ø car she travel.COND.3SG at  
 travers tout l'Europe. *French*  
 across all the=Europe  
 'If Marie had a car, she would travel all over Europe.'
- c. Si María tuviese {un / #el / Ø} coche, viajaría por toda  
 if María have.SUBJ.3SG a the Ø car travel.COND.3SG for all  
 Europa. *Spanish*  
 Europe  
 'If Marie had a car, she would travel all over Europe.'
- d. Si la Maria tingués {un / #el / Ø} cotxe, viatjaria per tot  
 if the Maria have.SUBJ.3SG a the Ø car travel.COND.3SG for all  
 Europa. *Catalan*  
 Europe  
 'If Marie had a car, she would travel all around Europe.'

These examples reveal a three-way distinction among the Romance languages under scrutiny in this thesis: (i) Italian, which licenses NIDs; (ii) Spanish and Catalan (as well as Romanian and Portuguese), which use NBNs instead; and (iii) French (along with English), which does not appear to possess comparable strategies. In light of this pattern, I specifically address two fundamental questions: (i) is there a principled reason for the absence of number-neutral constructions in French and English in environments where Italian, Catalan, and Spanish allow this interpretation? And (ii) Why do the latter languages, which do allow number-neutral interpretations, employ different morphosyntactic strategies to convey this reading?

### 5.6.1 *English and French*

In addressing the first question, I have shown that Italian, as well as Catalan and Spanish, license number-neutral nominal expressions in specific environments, namely

in the object position of HAVE-predicates that establish a possessive relation denoting a characterizing property of the external argument. In contrast, French and English do not appear to display equivalent constructions in the same environments, as shown in (72).

Nonetheless, it is relevant to observe that English does allow morphologically singular bare count nouns (e.g., *John is in prison*). These nominal expressions are relatively unconstrained in their distribution, as they can occur as external and internal arguments of the main verb and as complements of prepositions (Stvan 1998, 2007, 2009; Carlson 2003). Intriguingly, however, a number-neutral interpretation appears to be available exclusively when the bare noun occurs in the complement position of verbs or prepositions. Consider, for instance, the following example.

- (73) Children ruined their health in ghastly sweatshops instead of attending *school*...
- a. which can be *a difficult place* to attend.
  - b. which can be *difficult places* to attend.

(Stvan 2009: 327, (26b))

As the continuations in (73a) and (73b) illustrate, the complex predicate *attending school*, denoting an activity, is compatible with situations involving the presence of one or more individual schools. In fact, Stvan (2009) argues that when morphologically singular BNs occur in the complement positions of verbs and prepositions, they function similarly to semantically incorporated nominals, suggesting that they form part of a larger complex predicate. This incorporation makes their number-neutrality expected (Borik & Gehrke 2015).

However, it is important to notice that these complex predicates clearly do not fall within the class of HAVE-predicates that establish possession relations, as analyzed in this chapter. In fact, in contexts that do involve a possession relation, English appears to adopt a different, yet productive, strategy to convey an interpretation comparable to NIDs in Italian and NBNs in Spanish and Catalan (Espinal *p.c.*). Consider the following list of examples.

- (74) *Car-sharing; flat-sharing; screen-sharing*.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Another potential example, which closely aligns with Italian *indossare/portare la cravatta* (lit. ‘wear the tie’) and Catalan *portar corbata* (lit. ‘wear tie’) is the adjectival compound *tie-wearing* (Tubau *p.c.*).

These morphological compounds arguably represent the closest English equivalents to Italian NIDs and Spanish and Catalan NBNs. Notably, although the verb *to share* is not strictly classified as a HAVE-predicate, it nonetheless denotes a possessive relation between one or more sharers and one or more shared objects (e.g., a car, a flat, or a screen).

This assumption is further confirmed by the fact that the English compounds formed around the verb *to share* in (74) systematically correspond to a NID in Italian, and a NBN in Catalan and Spanish, as shown in (75).

- (75)a. Condividere {#(la) *macchina* / #(l')*appartamento* / #(lo) *schermo*} *Italian*  
       b. Compartir {*cotxe* / *pis* / *pantalla*} *Catalan*  
       ‘{*Car-* / *flat-* / *screen-*}sharing.’

These examples lead to two preliminary conclusions. First, the observed pattern suggests that the productivity of NIDs and NBNs constructions, initially restricted to HAVE-predicates, may extend to related contexts. The verb *to share* serves as an illustrative case, as it does not belong to this class of predicates but still encodes a possession relation.

Second, the examples in (74) indicate that English predominantly relies on productive lexical compounding strategies in these environments. This alternative strategy may explain why English lacks NIDs and NBNs altogether—at least as defined in this chapter. Furthermore, there is reason to believe that French follows a pattern similar to that of English. For instance, the compound *car-sharing* in (74) naturally translates into French as the compound *covoiturage*.

However, French does not appear to be as productive as English in this respect. An additional explanation for the absence of NBNs and NIDs in French may be related to the grammaticalized status of its determiner system. The determiner system of French is generally considered the most advanced in the grammaticalization process among Romance languages, as it displays a strong tendency to overtly realize determiners in all argumental positions (Carlier et al. 2011; Carlier & Lamiroy 2018). This tendency aligns with grammaticalization processes, which typically promote the explicit marking of functional categories. Additionally, French requires Number to be overtly instantiated on the determiner rather than on the noun (Bouchard 2002; see also Chapter 3). Since determiners are obligatory in virtually all argumental positions and must be specified for Number in French, the interplay of these factors may account for the absence of number-neutral nominal expressions—whether NIDs or NBNs—this language.

While further research is necessary, linking the absence of NIDs and NBNs to the productivity of lexical compounding strategies –most notably in English and, to a lesser extent, in French– and to the advanced grammaticalization of the determiner system in French, offers a plausible explanation for one dimension of the complex cross-linguistic patterns examined in this chapter. The discussion now turns to the second dimension of this variation: the contrast between Italian, on the one hand, and Spanish and Catalan, on the other.

### 5.6.2 *Italian vs Spanish and Catalan*

Let us now turn to the more subtle morphological differences between Italian, as compared to Spanish and Catalan. The crucial distinction lies in the presence of an overt definite determiner merged with a NBNs, which is found in Italian but absent in the latter two languages.

From a strictly morphological perspective, there is no apparent reason why Italian should not exhibit argumental NBNs, given that they are the most productive strategy for conveying a number-neutral interpretation in Catalan, Spanish, Romanian, and Portuguese. Indeed, NBNs do occur in Italian –albeit in a limited set of contexts– not only in the exceptional cases noted in Section 5.2., but also in predicate positions, especially in combination with role nouns (Zamparelli 2008b), as illustrated in (76). This phenomenon is most likely a remnant of Latin, which permitted singular BNs across all syntactic contexts.

- (76) Gianni è {professore / avvocato / studente}.  
 Gianni be.PRES.3SG professor lawyer student  
 ‘Gianni is #(a) {professor / lawyer / student}.’

Two possible hypotheses may account for the absence of NBNs in Italian. First, while the French determiner system is considered the most advanced in grammaticalization, Italian appears to occupy an intermediate position within the Romance continuum (Carlier et al. 2011; Carlier & Lamiroy 2018). This claim, which requires further investigation, is based on the observation that French consistently requires the presence of definite and indefinite determiners, thereby disallowing plural and mass BNs as well as NBNs. Spanish and Catalan, in contrast, represent the most conservative systems, allowing plural and mass BNs

in internal argument positions and making productive use of NBNs. Italian, meanwhile, still permits plural and mass BNs, though their use competes with plural and mass IDs (as argued in Chapter 4), whereas NBNs are largely residual, with NIDs serving as the primary alternative to convey number-neutrality.

At the same time, the definite article itself has been argued to be the most grammaticalized determiner form in Romance (Kupisch & Koops 2007). This claim is supported by the observation –examined in detail throughout this thesis– that the Italian definite article readily associates with indefinite interpretations. Specifically, Kupisch and Koops (2007) conducted a comparative analysis of Italian and French based on a spoken corpus study on child-directed speech (collected from CHILDES) and a questionnaire. Their corpus study revealed that the definite article appeared in 82% of instances of nominal expressions in Italian, compared to only 41% in French. Moreover, the results of their questionnaire, based on a preference task, were even more revealing: Italian participants preferred the definite article in contexts favoring an indefinite interpretation in 55% of cases, whereas French speakers did so in only 7% of cases.

The substantially broader use of the Italian definite article – extending even to indefinite contexts– compared to French aligns with grammaticalization processes. As lexical items grammaticalize, they often undergo semantic bleaching, losing their original meaning while expanding their grammatical functions (Lehmann 2015; Hopper & Traugott 2003; Bybee 2007, 2010; among others). Since the Italian definite article was found to occur more frequently and in a wider range of semantic contexts, including indefinite environments, Kupisch and Koops (2007) conclude that this form is more grammaticalized than its French counterpart.

In light of this discussion, one might argue that the Italian determiner system is undergoing a transition: from a system where BNs –whether plural, mass, or morphologically singular– are productive (as in Spanish and Catalan) to a system in which arguments require overt determination (as in French). Moreover, the definite article *per se* can be seen as a highly grammaticalized and semantically bleached form. The concurrence of these two factors may thus account for why Italian employs the definite article in contexts where Spanish and Catalan use NBNs.

It is important to note this perspective is essentially in line with the hypothesis proposed by Giusti (2002, 2015) and Cardinaletti and Giusti (2015, 2016, 2018, 2020), who contend that the definite article corresponds merely to gender, number, and case features

with no substantial semantic import, as discussed in preceding chapters. However, I believe there are independent arguments against this view.

As presented in this dissertation, there is significant evidence supporting the claim that the definite article unambiguously contributes its canonical semantics, corresponding to the *iota* operator. This holds true even in constructions that convey an indefinite interpretation, such as *di*+ART nominals (Chapter 3) and IDs (Chapter 4). More importantly, as the discussion in the current chapter has made evident, the *iota* operator is indispensable for deriving the denotation of definite kinds associated with NIDs, which subsequently receive their existential interpretations through DKP. As a result, I oppose the view that the definite article is semantically vacuous and aim to offer a more principled explanation for the availability of NIDs in Italian.

As discussed extensively throughout this thesis, Italian (and Italo-Romance) possess a rich, complex, and unique determiner system within Romance languages. This system is characterized by the presence of numerous indefinite forms, especially with plural and mass nouns, including BNs, *di*+ART constructions, IDs, and even bare *di* in certain varieties.

Let us now make three further reasonable assumptions. First, I assume that the Italian determiner system is indeed transitioning towards a system that increasingly requires overt realization of determiners, possibly as a result of grammaticalization, as implicitly suggested by Carlier et al. (2011) and Carlier and Lamiroy (2018), or as a consequence of the influence of underlying dialectal varieties, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Second, I assume, in line with the rest of the dissertation and previous literature (e.g., Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016, 2018, 2020; Espinal & Cyrino 2022a, 2022b), that the various plural (and mass) indefinite forms in Italian represent different realizations at Spell-Out of the same syntactic DP structure, as represented again below.

- (77)a.  $[_D DE [_D [iPLURALIZER:PL] [_{D_{def}} [n]]]]$  - *plural count indefinites*  
 b.  $[_D DE [_D D_{def} [n]]]$  - *mass nouns indefinites*

Third, I assume that type-shifting mechanisms, such as DKP, are universally governed by The Blocking Principle (Partee 1987; Kratzer 1995; Chierchia 1998b; Dayal 2004). Specifically, The Blocking Principle regulates and blocks the application of covert type shifts (e.g., DKP) when other lexical (e.g., the singular indefinite article), overt, or at least syntactically driven type shifts (like those in (77), triggered by the presence of the

indefinite operator DE in the structure of plural or mass indefinite forms) are available in a language. In Italian, The Blocking Principle would rank the application of an existential type-shift to indefinite nominal expressions as follows.

(78) *The Blocking Principle and the existential type-shift in Italian*

- a'. The singular indefinite article *un(o)* (overt/lexical  $\exists$  with singular Ns)
- a".  $\emptyset$  / *di*+ART / bare *di* / IDs (lexical/syntactically driven  $\exists$  with plural and mass Ns)
- b. DKP (covert / last-resort  $\exists$  with number-neutral Ns)

As discussed earlier, none of the available overt, lexical, or syntactically driven type-shifts are compatible with a number-neutral interpretation. The singular indefinite article, being marked for singular, is only compatible with atomicity entailments, whereas those corresponding to (77), being marked for plural, only accommodate non-atomicity entailments.

Thus, given the alleged tendency to overtly express determiners with argumental nominal expressions in Italian discussed in earlier paragraphs, and the ranking of the existential type-shift represented in (78), I conclude that NIDs, which arise from the application of the covert type-shift of DKP, are used in Italian because they become the only available solution in contexts requiring a number-neutral interpretation. In other words, all Italian indefinite forms, with the exception of NIDs, are incompatible with the object position of HAVE-predicates that denote a characterizing property of their subjects. Consequently, it is expected that Italian uses NIDs, as they are the only form Italian has to denote *definite kinds*, from which a number-neutral can be derived.

## 5.7 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have examined Italian NIDs, a peculiar indefinite and number-neutral interpretation associated with morphologically singular definite descriptions, exclusively found in Italian within Romance. Specifically, this chapter has addressed three fundamental research questions: (i) what grammatical factors license NIDs in Italian? (ii) How is the NID interpretation compositionally derived? And (iii) how can cross-linguistic variation be accounted for?

In response to question (i), I have argued, drawing on the work on Spanish and Catalan NBNs of Espinal (2010) and Espinal and McNally (2007, 2011), that NIDs are

exclusively licensed in the object position of HAVE-predicates expressing a HAVE-relation, provided the resulting V+NID combination denotes a characterizing property of the external argument. This restriction accounts for the interpretative differences with respect to other morphologically singular definite descriptions found in other contexts, which can only license their default definite interpretation.

Regarding question (ii), I have proposed a novel compositional analysis of NIDs, which specifically considers how the meaning of the DP is built and how it combines with the HAVE-predicate that selects for it. To explain number neutrality, I have argued that NIDs do not involve any morphosyntactic specification of Number (or alternatively, no Number projection). Thus, their structure corresponds to the denotation of definite kinds (Borik & Espinal 2015), which trigger the application of the covert type shift operation of DKP when combining with the HAVE-predicate. This analysis provides a compositional account for the narrow scope existential interpretation associated with NIDs and their restrictions on taxonomic modification.

Finally, in addressing question (iii), I have formulated a plausible hypothesis to explain the presence of NIDs in Italian. On the one hand, I have suggested that English and French, which appear to lack NIDs and NBNs altogether, may rely on different productive strategies, such as lexical composition, to convey similar meanings. On the other hand, I have attributed the use of NIDs in Italian, instead of NBNs as in Spanish and Catalan, to the interplay of two factors: the rich and varied status of the determiner system in Italian, likely resulting from grammaticalization and the influence of the underlying dialects, alongside general grammatical principles, such as The Blocking Principle, which regulates the application of type-shifting mechanisms such as DKP.



## 6. Representative interpretations of plural definites

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the analytical part of the present dissertation. However, it diverges from the general focus of the preceding chapters in at least two crucial respects. First, whereas the previous chapters primarily examined indefinite interpretations associated with the definite article, this chapter investigates a fundamentally definite, albeit non-canonical, interpretation typically available with plural definite DPs. Second, unlike the indefinite expressions discussed thus far, which are uniquely attested in Italian, the construction analyzed in this chapter is cross-linguistically available. As the discussion unfolds, the rationale for including this construction within the broader scope of the present dissertation will become evident.

This chapter explores a relatively understudied interpretative possibility generally associated with plural definite descriptions, which I will refer to as a *representative interpretation* (henceforth, RI). This term is adopted from von Koss Torkildsen's (2002), who, to the best of my knowledge, is the only scholar that has paid sufficient attention to this phenomenon.<sup>107</sup> More concretely, the discussion will focus on examples such as the Italian sentences in (1).

- (1) a. *Gli antichi romani* hanno costruito questo ponte.  
the ancient Romans AUX build.PTCP this bridge  
'#(The) ancient Romans built this bridge.'

[Translated and adapted from von Koss Torkildsen 2002: 2, (1.1)]

- b. *Gli americani* hanno creato la bomba atomica.  
the Americans AUX create.PTCP the bomb atomic  
'#(The) Americans developed the atomic bomb.'
- c. *I soldati* avvistarono un carrarmato.  
the soldiers spot.PERF a tank  
'#(The) soldiers spotted a tank.'

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<sup>107</sup> For an analysis of so-called *representative uses of plural BNs* in English, however, see Dayal (2013). See also Krifka et al. (1995) for the related notion of *Representative Object Interpretation* (ROI), which was discussed in preceding chapters and will be considered in greater detail in comparison to RIs in Section 6.2.4

- d. *Gli studenti hanno bloccato le porte durante lo sciopero.*  
 the students AUX block.PTCP the doors during the strike  
 ‘#(The) students blocked the doors during the strike.’

Given the broad scope of this dissertation, the investigation of the interpretation of the above plural definite subjects is motivated by two crucial factors. First, these plural definite descriptions appear to allow an interpretation that diverges from the one usually associated with plural definite DPs.

- (2) *Gli antichi romani hanno costruito questo ponte.*  
 a. #All the (salient) ancient Romans built this bridge.  
 b. ≠ (Some) ancient Romans built this bridge.

Although this thesis aligns with standard views on plural reference (e.g., Sharvy 1980; Link 1983), and assumes that the basic meaning of plural definites is the maximal one, under a RI, a sentence like (1a), repeated as (2), does not seem to be interpreted as referring to the maximal sum of individuals.<sup>108</sup> As a result, the plural definite subject in (2) does not seem to satisfy any maximality requirements, as illustrated in (2a), contrary to what is generally expected from canonical plural definite DPs (Strawson 1950; Hawkins 1974, 1978; Sharvy 1980; Link 1983; Lyons 1999; among many others).

The apparent lack of maximality requirements observed with RIs closely parallels the behavior of Italian IDs discussed in Chapter 4, and repeated below.

- (3) *Giacomo ha mangiato le<sub>indef</sub> patate.*  
 Giacomo AUX eat.PTCP the potatoes  
 ‘Giacomo ate (#the) potatoes.’

In (3), the plural definite description *le patate* does not refer to the contextually maximal sum of potatoes either. Instead, it denotes an undefined quantity of potatoes, yielding a reading parallel to that of existentially interpreted plural BNs. This non-maximal reading closely resembles that of RIs, as discussed above. The structural and interpretative

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<sup>108</sup> Importantly, this does not mean that the sentence in (2) cannot get the default maximal interpretation. Imagine, for instance, a context with only three salient Romans, then (2) would most easily describe the situation where all three contextually salient Romans were involved in the event of building this bridge.

parallels between these two phenomena constitute one of the key motivations for including RIs in the present thesis.

Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that the plural definite descriptions in (1) and (2) do not convey a pure existential reading, as shown in (2b). Therefore, their interpretation also diverges from that of plain indefinites like plural BNs in English and Romance, and, crucially, Italian IDs. This difference in interpretation becomes particularly evident when considering negation and presuppositionality. Recall that the existential reading plural BNs in English is traditionally assumed to be derived from the kind reading by means of Chierchia's (1998b) Derived Kind Predication (DKP). This is shown again in (4).

(4) a. *Dogs* didn't bark

b.  $\neg \text{bark} (\cap \text{dogs}) = \text{DKP} \Rightarrow \neg \exists x [\cup \cap \text{dogs}(x) \wedge \text{bark}(x)]$

(Adapted from Dayal 2004: 399, (10))

Notably, the BN serves as a direct argument of the verb and the existential quantification introduced by DKP can only take narrow scope below negation. This analysis captures the narrow scope behavior of existential BNs in English, as long as their lack of existence presupposition.

Similarly, as argued throughout this dissertation, the indefinite interpretation associated with Italian BNs and IDs results from the presence of an indefinite operator DE adjoined to a definite description, as represented again below.

(5) a.  $[_D \text{ DE } [_D \text{ [iPLURALIZER:PL] } [_{D_{\text{def}}} \text{ [ } n \text{ ]}]]]$

- *plural count indefinites*

b.  $[_D \text{ DE } [_D \text{ } D_{\text{def}} \text{ [ } n \text{ ]}]]]$

- *mass indefinites*

The semantic output of these structures is a property-type expression, which is assumed to receive its existential force from an adapted version of VP-level existential closure. As a result, a narrow scope reading is predicted, given that existential quantification can only be inserted within the VP.

The narrow scope behavior of these nominal expressions with respect to negation contrasts with that of definite descriptions exhibiting a RI (e.g., those exemplified in (1)). Consider the following example.

- (6) *Gli antichi romani non hanno costruito questo ponte.*  
 the ancient Romans not AUX build.PTCP this bridge  
 ‘#(The) ancient Romans built this bridge.’

Although (6) describes a situation in which no Roman built this bridge, the sentence presupposes the existence of individuals satisfying the property denoted by the noun *romani*.<sup>109</sup> This existence presupposition projects and survives negation, making a narrow scope interpretation below the negative marker infelicitous for RIs.

The behavior of RIs leads to two preliminary observations. First, RIs appear to semantically function as genuine definite descriptions, as indicated by the fact that, on a par with canonical definites, they presuppose the existence of their referents. Second, they are however interpretatively distinct from both the maximal reading of definite descriptions (2a), and the existential reading of indefinite expressions in (2b).

Since RIs do not align with the interpretation of canonical maximal definites, it should also be observed that, in the rare occasions in which these constructions are mentioned in the literature, they are generally analyzed alongside so-called *non-maximal definites* (henceforth, NMs, Brisson 1998, 2003; but see especially Schwarzschild 1996; Lasnik 1999; Magri 2014; Križ 2016, 2019; Križ & Spector 2021; Bar-Lev 2021).

For the time being, I propose the following working interpretation for RIs.

- (7) *Gli antichi romani hanno costruito questo ponte.*  
 a. The ancient Romans (i.e., a representative group of them) built this bridge

In view of the preliminary reading proposed in (7a), a first pre-theoretical definition of what constitutes a RI, along with a clear diagnostic for identifying cases of representativity can be advanced. First, I define *representativity* as the use of a plural definite description to refer to a singular group of individuals.<sup>110</sup> Crucially, this group may either

<sup>109</sup> As will be discussed in greater detail below, RIs, on a par with other plural definites, give rise to so-called homogeneity effects when they interact with negation (Križ 1996; Magri 2014; Križ 2016; Bar-Lev 2021).

<sup>110</sup> The case of mass nouns is more nuanced. Intuitively, examples resembling those containing a representatively interpreted plural definite DP seem possible:

(i) a. *La lava ha distrutto il villaggio.*  
 the lava AUX destroy.PTCP the village  
 ‘The lava destroyed the village.’

correspond to the maximal sum of individuals denoted by the description or represent only a subset of them. This variability, I argue, primarily depends on the speaker's knowledge and the relevance of this information within the conversation. This preliminary definition will be formalized in Section 6.3. Therefore, the primary aim of this chapter is to argue that RIs, unlike canonical definites, denote singular atomic entities (i.e., *representative* groups).

With this initial definition in mind, let us provide a useful diagnostic for identifying representativity. This diagnostic distinguishes RIs from (non-)maximal interpretations of definite descriptions by focusing on the explicit mention of exceptions. Canonical definites (including NMs), are categorically infelicitous when the exception they initially permit are made explicit, as shown in the following English examples.

- (8) a. *The townspeople* are asleep. NM  
 [due to Kroch 1975, cited in Brisson 1998: 34, (15) and Lasersohn 1999: 522, (3)]  
 b. #*Although the townspeople* are asleep, *most of them* are awake. NM  
 (Lasersohn 1999: 523, (6))

The example in (8a) contains a non-maximal definite in subject position. Therefore, the sentence can be true even if not literally every single towns person is asleep, especially in cases involving a great number of individuals in the extension of the noun. Despite this flexibility, however, NMs become infelicitous when exceptions are explicitly mentioned, as shown in (8b). Importantly, this restriction does not apply to RIs, which can easily

- b. *La candeggina* mi ha macchiato la maglietta.  
the bleach me AUX stain.PTCP the t-shirt  
'The bleach dyed my t-shirt.'

Sentence (ia) is true even in a situation where only a small portion of the salient amount of lava in the context of utterance was the cause of the destruction of the village. Likewise, (ib) is true even if just a single drop of bleach dyed my t-shirt. Such parallel behavior is expected if we assume the same ontological domain of reference for mass nouns and plurals, as it is commonly accepted in the literature (Link 1983, 1987; Landman 1989a,b; among others). Both plurals and mass terms have a cumulative reference (Quine 1960; Krifka 1989) and they are organized as join-semilattices that follow a part-of relation (Link 1983). Nevertheless, plurals make up *atomic* join-semilattices whose bottom line is composed by atoms (i.e., individual entities). Mass nouns, on the other hand, denote amounts of matter, but not sums of individuals. Hence, they are non-atomic – at least in their linguistic representation (Link 1983; Doetjes 2011) – and their extensions can be argued to correspond to a semilattice without the bottom line. Due to this ontological difference, and since the literature on (non-)maximality and representativity has mostly focused on plural definite descriptions, we will keep the present discussion to plurals and leave examples containing mass nouns aside.

coexist with explicit exceptions, as illustrated in the English example in (9), adapted from (1b).

- (9) a. *The Americans* developed the atomic bomb. RI  
b. *The Americans* developed the atomic bomb in July 1945, but *most Americans* did not know of the invention until a bomb was dropped at Hiroshima.<sup>111</sup> RI  
(Adapted from von Koss Torkildsen 2002: 71, (5.26))

This contrast, first observed by von Koss Torkildsen (2002), but not given sufficient theoretical relevance, is in fact crucial, as it provides an initial adequate tool for distinguishing (non-)maximal definites from representative ones. In Section 6.3, I will introduce two additional, more reliable tests to further differentiate RIs.

With this initial picture in mind, this chapter addresses three main research questions: (i) what grammatical factors contribute to the representative interpretation? (ii) How can the RI be formally derived? And (iii) Are there compelling reasons to treat NMs and RIs separately?

As for (i), I show that RIs can occur with virtually all plural definite descriptions in combination with stage- and individual-level predicates, provided the main predication can be attributed to a group of individuals. Regarding (ii), I argue that sentences containing RIs incorporate a (c)overt representativity operator, which I label REP, adjoined to a definite description. At the level of semantic representation, REP takes as its argument a maximal sum of individuals, corresponding to the denotation of the definite description to which it adjoins, and it returns either a maximal or non-maximal singular (sub-)group. I also propose that this representative group must be relativized to the speaker's contextual epistemic state. This analysis explains why RIs, unlike other plural definites, are incompatible with (quantificational) distributivity (de Vries 2015, 2017) and (grammatical) reciprocity (Palmieri et al. 2019). Finally, in addressing question (iii), I provide significant empirical arguments that appear to tell apart RIs from NMs.

The chapter is organized as follows. Section 6.2 presents some descriptive generalizations about RIs, concerning especially their cross-linguistic availability (Section 6.2.1),

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<sup>111</sup> We intentionally used the construction *most Americans* and not the pronominal anaphora *most of them* to avoid unnecessary complications. Nevertheless, the judgments appear to be solidly the same also in the case of the anaphora (i.e., its occurrence would not cancel representativity or lead to an infelicitous interpretation).

the contribution of the nominal and the verbal constituents (Section 6.2.2), and the role of the speaker (Section 6.2.3). Moreover, Section 6.2.4 also compares RIs with other apparently related phenomena. Section 6.3 forms the core analytical portion of the chapter. In section 6.3.1, I formalize the proposal, which hinges on an operator REP, syntactically adjoined to a plural definite DP. Semantically, REP maps a maximal sum of individuals onto a singular group, relativized to the speaker's epistemic stance. Section 6.3.2 introduces a distinction between two types of distributivity, which is essential for the unfolding of the supporting arguments discussed in section 6.3.3. These arguments focus on the behavior of RIs with respect to quantificational distributivity (Section 6.3.3.1) and grammatical reciprocity (Section 6.3.3.2). Section 6.4 compares RIs to NMs, emphasizing various significant differences between the two. Finally, Section 6.5 concludes the chapter.

## 6.2 Descriptive generalizations

This section aims to offer a first descriptive approach to RIs. Section 6.2.1 shows that RIs are available both in languages with and without lexical determiners, and that it even appears to have an overt morphological correlate in some others. Section 6.2.2. examines the role played by the DP and the predicate in licensing RIs. Finally, Section 6.2.3 addresses the dependency of RIs from the speaker's epistemic world.

### 6.2.1 *A cross-linguistic phenomenon*

The first aspect that is important to mention concerns the cross-linguistic availability of RIs. In contrast to the indefinite forms examined so far in this thesis, which are unique to Italian, RIs appear to display a wider cross-linguistic distribution. For instance, bon Koss Torkildsen (2002: 6) claims that RIs are found in those languages that display definite determiners; that is, in languages that lexicalize definiteness. Given that the proposal that will be developed in this chapter maintains that representative interpretations are built on the presence of an *iota* operator in their logical representation, it is expected that this reading should be accessible in languages that lexicalize this function—especially in those languages that possess definite determiners. The cross-linguistic availability of RIs is indeed attested in the following original examples in Catalan (10a), Spanish (10b), and English (10c), corresponding to the initial examples (1a), (1b), and (1c) in Italian. Crucially, the representative interpretation is preserved in all three cases.

- (10)a. *Els romans van construir aquest pont.* *Catalan*  
 the Romans AUX build.INF this bridge  
 ‘The Romans built this bridge.’ (see (1a))
- b. *Los americanos desarrollaron la bomba atómica* *Spanish*  
 the Americans develop.PERF.3pl the bomb atomic  
 ‘The Americans developed the atomic bomb.’ (see (1b))
- c. *The soldiers spotted a tank.* (see (1c)) *English*

However, I refrain from adopting a categorical stance similar to that of von Koss Torkildsen, as there is no compelling reason why the same interpretation should not be available in determinerless languages.<sup>112</sup> This is likely due to the fact that such languages are traditionally assumed to resort to an *iota* type-shift covertly (Partee 1987; Dayal 2004, among others), or to incorporate a null functional-like determiner projection within the structure of their argumental nominal expression. A functional projection, for instance, has been postulated to host *actualizers* (Padučeva 1985), a cover term encompassing various expressions of different syntactic types, including numerals, demonstratives, and pronominal elements (see also the discussion in Borik & Espinal 2019, 2020).

The following Russian examples, therefore, appear to allow an interpretation closely resembling that observed in languages with overt definite determiners. However, it is important to note that Russian presents a more intricate scenario in this regard, as the same sentences generally allow also maximal and existential interpretations.

- (11)a. *Rimljane postroili ètot most.* *Russian*  
 Romans.NOM built.PERF.PL this.MASC.ACC bridge.ACC  
 ‘{The / some / a representative group of} Romans built this bridge.’
- b. *Amerikancy razrabotali atomnuju bombu.*  
 Americans.NOM developed.PERF.PL atomic.FEM.SG.ACC bomb.ACC  
 ‘{The / some / a representative group of} Americans developed {an/the} atomic bomb.’

<sup>112</sup> I am grateful to Dària Serès (*p.c.*) for the Russian data and her helpful judgments and comments.



- c. *Soldaty*            *zametili*            *tank*.  
          soldiers.NOM   spotted.PERF.PL   tank.ACC  
          ‘{The / some / a representative group of} soldiers spotted {a/the} tank.’
- d. *Studenty*            *zablokirovali*            *dveri*.  
          students.NOM   blocked.PERF.PL   doors.ACC  
          ‘{The / some / a representative group of} students blocked (the) doors.’

As the English translations illustrate, the Russian sentences above, besides the maximal and existential interpretation traditionally associated with the plural nominal expressions in subject position (Geist 2010; Borik 2016), also allow a RI, whereby a representative (sub-)group of Romans, Americans, soldiers, or students, participated in the event denoted by their respective main predicate.

In addition to languages with and without determiners, it is worth noting that several languages appear to possess an overt morphological realization of the RI. A case in point is Standard Arabic, which features a dedicated feminine affix (-*at*) –sometimes referred to as *plurative*– used to form a *group* interpretation from either a singular or a plural term (Fassi Fehri 2018, 2022).<sup>113</sup>

More specifically, the plurative affix -*at* can be morphologically realized on the noun, the verb, or both (Fassi Fehri 2018: 10). The latter situation is illustrated in (12).

- (12) *l-qatal-at-u*            *xtaba?-at*.  
          the-killer-FEM-NOM   hid-FEM  
          ‘The killers (as a group) hid.’

(Fassi Fehri 2022: 134, (5))

As can be observed, the translation proposed by Fassi Fehri (2022) for the example in (12) closely mirrors the preliminary interpretation proposed for RIs above. Moreover, in line with the examples involving a RI discussed so far for Italian and other languages with determiners, the plurative affix tends to occur with nouns that denote cohesive and homogeneous groups of individuals who share stable, relevant properties, such as

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<sup>113</sup> There are other languages that display parallel plural constructions that in fact denote groups. Apart from other varieties of Arabic, such as Moroccan Arabic, which also display a plurative affix, another potential language possessing a marked strategy for the RI is Korean, whose ‘bare-formed’ plurals behave semantically as atomic individuals (Kwak 2003; Joh 2008).

professional, ethnic, or regional groups (Fassi Fehri 2018: 10-11). The parallel with RIs is particularly striking, as these, too, denote homogeneous groups of individuals with shared properties. Notably, the translations of our original examples systematically display the plurative suffix *-at* either on the noun, the verb, or both. In all these cases, the relevant representative-group interpretation is preserved.<sup>114</sup>

- (13) al-ʔamrīkijj-*āt*-u                      ʔawwar-na                      al-qanbal-a    al- ǧa-arjj-a.  
the-American.PL-FEM-NOM    developed-PL-FEM    bomb-ACC    atomic-ACC  
‘The Americans (as a group) developed the atomic bomb.’
- (14) al-dǧundijj-*āt*-u                      raʕʕad-na                      dabbābat-an.  
the-soldier.PL-FEM-NOM    spotted-FEM    tank.ACC  
‘The soldiers (as a group) spotted a tank.’ (see (1c))
- (15) ʔat- tʕalab-*at*-u                      ʔayla:q-*at*                      ʔabwa:b                      al-kulija  
the-student.PL-FEM-NOM    blocked-FEM    doors-PL-ACC    the-faculty-GEN  
‘The students (as a group) blocked the faculty’s doors.’ (see (1d))

The existence of languages that exhibit an overt morphological correlate of RIs provides further indirect evidence for the theoretical proposal advanced in this chapter.

In light of the cross-linguistic stability of the RI, which appears to be available in languages with and without determiners, and given that the existing literature primarily focuses on English examples, the remainder of this chapter –unlike the rest of the thesis– will center exclusively on English data. Nevertheless, I argue that the same generalizations and theoretical analysis extend to Italian and the other languages considered in this section.

### 6.2.2 *The locus of representativity*

This section investigates the grammatical source of the representative reading, considering both the nominal constituent and the main predicate. The emerging generalization is that RIs can potentially arise with all plural definite descriptions in combination with both stage- and individual-level predicates (Carlson 1977), provided that two main conditions are met: (i) the extension of the nominal expression and the nature of the event denoted

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<sup>114</sup> I am grateful to Tala Nazzal and Walid Irhaymi (*p.c.*) for their judgments and their help with the translations into Standard Arabic.

by the VP facilitate the tolerance for exceptions; and (ii) the event denoted by the main predicate allows a group reading for the definite argument.

Before proceeding, a clarification is necessary. Given that group terms denote collections of individuals, it is important to emphasize that the second condition does not imply that RIs are exclusively licensed by predicates that allow for collective interpretations, thereby excluding inherently distributive predicates. Consider the following examples.

- |                                                       |                    |
|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| (16)a. <i>The soldiers</i> spotted a tank. (See (1c)) | RI                 |
| b. <i>The soldiers</i> wore a helmet.                 | #RI <sup>115</sup> |

(16a) shows that a RI can occur with an inherently distributive predicate like *to spot*, which can only combine with subjects that denote individuals. Notably, this sentence is true only as long as at least one individual soldier spotted a tank, as this event cannot be attributed to a whole group: the event of spotting a tank can only be performed by individuals, but not by collections. However, the action of a single soldier appears to be sufficient for this action to be projected onto the whole group.

By contrast, (16b) requires that (almost) all contextually salient soldiers participated in the event, thereby precluding a RI. This contrast illustrates that the second requirement for the licensing of RIs –namely, the possibility of a group reading of the subject– is orthogonal to the distinction between distributive and collective predicates. Both examples in (16) involve inherently distributive predicates, yet only (16a) allows a RI of the subject. I set this issue aside for the time being, as it will be revisited in greater detail in Section 6.3.1.

Let us examine the source of the RI by considering the nominal constituent. It is important to notice that RIs appear to be possible with plural definite DPs, but categorically unavailable with definite descriptions involving singular count nouns. Crucially, a singular definite DP triggers the default strong reading associated with the  $\iota$  function.

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<sup>115</sup> Given the subtle nature of these judgments, I will use # as a typographic convention throughout the rest of this chapter to indicate the unavailability of the representative interpretation.

Thus, the following sentences refer to the unique, salient Roman (17a) and to the unique, salient soldier (17b) in the context of utterance.<sup>116</sup>

- (17)a. *The Roman* built this bridge. #RI  
       b. *The soldier* spotted a tank. #RI

The unavailability of the RI with singular count noun is expected: the RI requires the presence of various individuals in the extension of the noun to form a cohesive group and eventually license exceptions.

Furthermore, although the debate around (non-)maximal and representative definites mostly revolves around definite descriptions occurring in subject position, plural definite direct objects seem to allow for representative readings as well. Consider the following example.

- (18) The soldier spotted *the enemies*. RI

The sentence in (18) can be uttered when the contextually unique soldier spotted just a small sub-group of all the enemies salient in context, thereby licensing the relevant representative reading of the object. One may argue that *the enemies* would also allow for a collective interpretation. In this case the sentence would describe a situation where the soldier spotted *the entire* collection of individual enemies with no exceptions. This reading is distinct from the RI, which, by definition, tolerates the presence of (many) exceptions. Be that as it may, throughout the rest of this chapter I will adhere to the literature and only discuss representative interpretations of plural definite subjects.

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<sup>116</sup> Singular proper names may give rise to a phenomenon that has often been associated with representativity and non-maximality. As noted by Landman (2000), the following example holds true even if Al Capone did not pull the trigger himself.

(i) *Al Capone* killed his rivals. (Landman 2000: 167, ex. (38b))

This example bears a resemblance to a representative example like that in (ii). In both cases, as Landman (2000: 167) points out, a general property of the agents is projected onto the truth of the sentence, even if the agent(s) do not perform the action denoted by the predicate.

(ii) *The gangsters* killed their rivals. (Landman 2000: 167, ex (38a))

However, despite the obvious similarities, the two cases in (i) and (ii) seem to correspond to opposite situations. In the case of (i), the property of a whole group (i.e., Al Capone's subordinates) is projected onto a single person (i.e., Al Capone himself). In the case of (ii), in contrast, the property of a potentially singular individual (e.g., if a single gangster carried out the killings, (ii) would still be true) is projected onto the whole group of gangsters.

Turning now to the role played by the VP in deriving RIs, let us take a look at the following contrast.

- |                                            |     |
|--------------------------------------------|-----|
| (19)a. <i>The soldiers</i> spotted a tank. | RI  |
| b. <i>The soldiers</i> ate a sandwich.     | #RI |

In an out of the blue context, (19a) readily allows for a representative reading of its plural subject *the soldiers*, whereas (19b) can only get the default maximal interpretation –or even a non-maximal one under the right pragmatic premises– whereby (nearly) all the contextually salient soldiers ate a different sandwich. This contrast reveals that information about how the event denoted by the predicate is usually carried out in the real world is needed to account for the fact that (16a) allows for a RI, while (16b) does not. For a sentence like (16a) to be true, it is sufficient that only one soldier spotted a tank; while it is necessary that the great majority of soldiers ate a sandwich for (16b) to be true.

Moreover, it is important to draw attention to the predicate types that can influence the availability of RIs. The example involving RIs discussed thus far featured a s-level predicate, which appear to easily license representativity. What about other predicate types? Let us consider first (20), which features an i-level predicate.

- |                                                                 |    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| (20) <i>The ancient Greeks</i> knew mathematics. <sup>117</sup> | RI |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----|

Intuitively, the sentence in (20) allows for a RI of its subject, as the sentence can be true even if only a small minority of Greeks had mathematical knowledge.<sup>118</sup> To check this

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<sup>117</sup> I am grateful to Jon Ander Mendia (*p.c.*) for bringing this example to my attention.

<sup>118</sup> As discussed at length in this thesis, it is a well attested fact that plural definites do not represent the default strategy English has to express genericity. Plural BNs are usually used in these environments instead (Carlson 1977; Chierchia 1998b, among many others). However, it is interesting to note that Acton (2019) discusses contrasts like the following, which mostly involve generic or characterizing sentences.

- (i) a. **The Americans** love cars.  
       b. **Americans** love cars.

(Acton 2019: 37, (1))

In his corpus study, Acton did not only find that speakers of American English used the (plural) definite article in generic environments, but also that such use was accompanied by what the author calls a “distancing effect”. In other words, Acton (2019: 37-38) argues that using the definite article to “talk about [...] members of a group of individuals tends to depict that group as a monolith of which the speaker is not a member”. This claim was also supported by the finding that the percentage of occurrences of *the* with the term *Americans* in the corpus was 10.1%, whereas for *Russians* was 93.8% (Acton 2019: 48). Such findings fit well in the proposal that will be developed in Section 6.3, namely that a speaker uttering a representative *The Romans*, *the soldiers*, *the Americans* etc. (as opposed to a bare plural, at least in English), is probably

intuition, let us apply the diagnostic introduced in the previous section concerning the possibility of explicitly mentioning exceptions. The prediction is that if the interpretation of the subject in (20) aligns with a RI, then, it should be compatible with the explicit presence of exceptions. This prediction seems to be borne out, as illustrated in (21).

- (21) (We can say that) *the ancient Greeks* knew mathematics, even though most citizens of course didn't.

The example in (21) is perfectly acceptable, even though it explicitly states that most Greeks did not possess any mathematical knowledge. Given this compatibility, it can be concluded that RIs arise with i-level predicates as well.

Let us consider k-level predicate next. Take, for instance, the example in (22).

- (22) *The Romans* were widespread in Europe during the 1<sup>st</sup> century. #RI

The example in (22) does not describe a situation in which only a representative subgroup of all the Romans was widespread in Europe during the 1<sup>st</sup> century (while perhaps other Romans were not). Instead, this sentence amounts to a generalization about Romans, stating that all of them were widespread in Europe during the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Therefore, the definite DP *the Romans* in subject position refers to the maximal sum of instantiations of the kind Roman, as is typical with generic plural definites (Borik & Espinal 2015). As discussed at length in this dissertation, this interpretation is triggered by the k-level predicate and is derived by intensionalizing the *iota* function as a maximizing operator (Borik & Espinal 2015; cf. Chierchia 1998b; Dayal 2004). Therefore, example (22) points to the conclusion that RIs are fundamentally distinct from generic plural definites, even though the latter also tolerate exceptions (Pellettier 2010: 7-8).

Additionally, it is also relevant to observe that RIs are excluded from purely extensional predicate like *die*, as illustrate in (23).

- (23) *The soldiers* died. #RI

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not a Roman, a soldier, or an American and sees such groups as “separate monoliths”. Nevertheless, note that in the same environments (namely generic/characterizing contexts), Romance languages are forced to use a plural definite to get a generic interpretation. In addition, Romance bare nouns are not allowed as unmodified preverbal subjects (Suñer 1982; Longobardi 1994; among many others).

By virtue of the purely extensional nature of the predicate *to die*, (23) can only allow for the default maximal interpretation according to which all the contextually salient soldiers died. The lack of representativity with purely extensional predicates closely aligns RIs with group NPs, which are infelicitous with the same types of predicates (Barker 1992). This incompatibility is illustrated in (24).

(24) *The committee* died.

(Barker 1992: 72, (9c))

As argued by Barker (1992: 72), this sentence does not allow for a purely extensional interpretation, according to which all the members of the committee died. Instead, the example in (24) only allows for an anthropomorphic interpretation, in which dissolving a committee is compared metaphorically to the death of a living creature. Importantly, the incompatibility of RIs and group terms with purely extensional predicates is expected if both nominal expressions denote singular atomic entities whose internal structure is inaccessible to grammar, as extensional predicates require access to such individuals.

In summary, in this subsection it has been shown that RIs are possible with both plural and mass nouns, and with both s- and i-level predicates. Crucial to derive the RI is that the exact number or identity of the individuals involved in the event denoted by the predicate becomes irrelevant, provided that they form part of a cohesive and representative group. The next section will argue that the key factor that license RIs relates to their relativization to the speaker's world knowledge.

### 6.2.3 *Relativizing RIs*

The licensing of RIs appears to be heavily dependent on the speaker's epistemic perspective, which is subject to interpretation extracted from context. Let us explore this component in more detail through some illustrative examples.

(25) **Context:** *John is a professor and knows that three of his students – Mary, Sully, and Jane – are secretly planning something to prevent the exam they are expected to take. The next day, he arrives at the faculty and finds the door blocked. Angrily, he exclaims:*

- a. *The students* blocked the door!

In this scenario, where only three students are contextually salient, the most natural interpretation of (21a) is the maximal one, in which all three students are involved in the event denoted by the main predicate.<sup>119</sup> Now consider (26).

(26) **Context:** *John is a professor preparing an exam for his class of 60 students. The next day, he arrives at the faculty and finds the door blocked. Although he doesn't know who did it, he might have some suspicions. Angrily, he exclaims:*

- a. *The students* blocked the door!

In this context, (26) readily licenses a RI, according to which a representative sub-group of all John's students participated in the event of blocking the door. This is because John knows the door is blocked, but he is unsure of who did it. Since an exam was scheduled for that day, he infers that the culprits are likely some of its students. Despite the likelihood that only a minority of students participated in the event, (26a) is still true in that context.

The availability of a RI in this scenario thus results from the interaction of two factors: (i) the members of the class are numerous enough for exceptions to become irrelevant; and (ii) John is uncertain about the precise identities of the students involved. Consequently, John may decide to opt for a representative interpretation of *the students* either because he is ignorant about the specific individuals who participated in the event, because their exact number is irrelevant to the conversation, or even because he wishes to withhold this information from others.

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<sup>119</sup> For simplicity, I am not addressing the non-maximal interpretation here. However, consider a context in which four individuals are involved instead of three, with Mark as another potential subversive student. In this case, (25a) could still be true even if Mark did not actively participate in blocking the door.



Therefore, RIs make an existential claim and convey that the speaker does not know which individuals make this claim true.<sup>120</sup> In other words, a speaker using a definite description with a RI conveys ignorance about the specific individuals involved, but assumes they form a cohesive group. As a result, the speaker does not refer to individual students *per se* but rather to a collection (i.e., a singular group). This distinction sheds light on the differences between representative definites and epistemic definites. Consider the following contrast.

- (27)a. *The students* blocked the door.  
       b. *Some students* blocked the door.

Indefinites like those in (27b) are also assumed to indicate a high degree of speaker's ignorance (Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito 2010, 2013; Aloni & Port 2014; among others). This ignorance must be relativized with respect to the speaker's epistemic state. However, while (27b) refers to a(n unknown) quantity of *individuals* satisfying the property *students*, (27a) refers to a *group* of individuals, with the representativeness of such group being contextually and subjectively determined. Therefore, the proposal to be developed in Section 6.3 must account for this relativized component with respect to the speaker's epistemic stance. Before outlining the analysis, however, it may prove helpful to compare RIs with other apparently related phenomena.

#### 6.2.4 *Related phenomena*

This section briefly compares RIs with similar constructions. One such case is the *Representative Object Interpretation* (ROI), as defined in Krifka et al. (1995) and introduced in previous chapters. To facilitate the discussion, consider again the following examples.

- (28)a. In Alaska, we filmed *the Grizzly*.

(Krifka et al. 1995: 78, (128f))

- b. *The rat* reached Australia in 1770.

(Adapted from Krifka et al. 1995: 12, (28a))

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<sup>120</sup> This epistemic ignorance can be captured by assuming that either the speaker cannot identify the individuals that satisfy the existential claim in a contextually relevant way (e.g., Aloni & Port 2014) or that these individuals vary across the speaker's epistemic or doxastic alternatives (e.g., Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito 2010). The analysis developed in this chapter aligns more closely with the former account.

Recall that Krifka et al. (1995: 83) argue that ROIs arise when the object described in the situation is relevant only as a representative of its entire kind. In such cases the property of a singular individual, which functions as a representative of the kind, is projected onto the whole kind. This usually occurs within what the authors define as a *kind-oriented mode of talk*, where nominal expressions that are ambiguous between a kind reading and an object reading are typically interpreted at the kind level even if they are arguments of a s-level predicate.

Although a thorough comparison between ROIs and RIs falls outside the scope of this chapter, this section highlights some potential differences that seem to set apart the two phenomena. First, it is important to note that with ROIs it is a unique individual that acts as a representative for the whole kind, whereas with RIs it is a group that must be considered representative. Additionally, RIs refer to groups of individuals corresponding to a (small) subset of the extension denoted by the descriptive content of the noun, whereas ROIs refer to whole kinds, instantiated by means of a single object entity. In light of these initial differences, it appears evident that ROIs behave more similarly to singular proper names, as discussed in footnote 116. In both cases –i.e., ROIs and singular proper names – the property of a whole group is projected onto a singular individual. In the case of RIs, on the other hand, it is the property of a potentially unique individual that is projected onto a group. As a final difference, notice that ROIs are generally built around morphologically singular count nouns.<sup>121</sup> RIs, in contrast, have been shown to be only possible with plural definite descriptions, as a singular count noun triggers the default unique interpretation of the definite description.

As a last thought, one may suggest a comparison with rhetorical synecdoches, such as the one reported in the following example.

(29) *Rome* built this bridge.

It has been observed that, in general, singular proper names allow the property of one singular individual to be projected onto a plurality, whereas with RIs the property of a plurality is projected onto a singular group. However, the sentence in (29) implies that *Rome* represents its individual citizens, who are the ones that factually built the bridge.

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<sup>121</sup> See, however, Gerards (2020) and Gerards and Stark (2022) for possible ROIs in combination with plural count nouns in Old Spanish, Old Portuguese and Francoprovençal.

In this sense, then, (25) parallels RIs, as both rely on using a part of a group to represent the whole.

Nonetheless, this parallelism appears to be coincidental: it is difficult to find adequate proper names that refer to the same groups of individuals denoted by productive plural definite descriptions like *the soldiers* or *the students*, which readily allow RIs. Furthermore, (29) seems less natural than *The Romans built this bridge*, especially when considering Romance languages. The Italian translation of (29), for instance, sounds awkward: *#Roma ha costruito questo ponte*. Given the differences between RIs, ROIs, and synecdoches discussed in this section, it seems more convenient to treat these three constructions as separate phenomena.

To sum up, Section 6.2 has discussed several descriptive generalizations about RIs. First, it has been observed that RIs represent a cross-linguistically stable interpretative possibility mostly associated with plural count nouns, available both in languages with and without articles. In languages with articles, in particular, RIs are systematically found in combination with definite DPs. Additionally, it has also been noted that some languages like Standard Arabic appear to possess a morphological correlate of representativity. Moreover, it has been observed that RIs emerge from a combination of different factors. For instance, they can occur with both s- and i-level predicates and their meaning must be relativized with respect to the speaker's access to contextual information. Lastly, RIs have been compared to apparently related constructions, such as ROIs and synecdoches, which nonetheless exhibit relevant differences.

### 6.3 The analysis

This section outlines a novel formal analysis of RIs, which is intended to capture the observations presented so far. Specifically, the formalization of representativity that will be developed in this section aims at accounting for the fact that RIs are interpreted as referring to a (sub-)group of the maximal sum of individuals that satisfy the property denoted by the noun. As discussed, the identity and maximality of this group must be relativized according to the speaker's knowledge extracted from context. In other words, the RI arises from two main components: (i) the denotation of the DP itself; and (ii) the speaker's access to contextual information. The analysis of RIs must therefore reflect the interaction between these two components.

### 6.3.1 Deriving RIs

To account for the representative reading, I postulate that sentences containing a RI involve the presence of a (c)overt representativity operator, which I label REP. Concretely, I propose that this operator is syntactically adjoined to a (definite) DP and modifies its default interpretation at the level of semantic representation.

Following Partee (1987), in this dissertation I have assumed that the definite article unambiguously lexicalizes the type-shifting operator  $\iota$ , not only in Italian, but in all languages that possess this lexical item. Semantically,  $\iota$  is a function that turns property-type expressions (i.e., the denotation of common nouns) into entity-type expressions (i.e., the denotation of definite DPs). Below, I report again the traditionally assumed semantics for *iota* and the (maximalized) plural definite article.

$$(30)a. \iota: P \rightarrow \iota x[P(x)]$$

(Partee 1987: 362, figure 1)

$$b. \llbracket the \rrbracket = \lambda P: \exists x \forall y [\text{MAX}(P)(y) \leftrightarrow x = y]. \iota x. \text{MAX}(P)(x)$$

$$c. \text{MAX}(P) = \lambda x. P(x) \ \& \ \neg \exists y [P(y) \ \& \ x < y]$$

(Heim 2011: 998, (6))

Under this formalization, the  $\iota$ -operator is a partial function from noun extensions to individuals, which yields the unique element of a singleton set, or the maximal element when applied to a plurality (Sharvy 1980; Link 1983). Following the discussion in the preceding sections, REP must correspond to a function that applies to the default maximal semantics associated with plural definite descriptions (generated by the  $\iota$  function) to yield a coerced meaning: the output refers to a (maximal or non-maximal) representative group.

Moreover, recall that the identity and maximality of this representative group are relativized to the speaker's knowledge of the contextual setting. To formalize this requirement, I first follow Heim and Kratzer (1998) and adopt a semantic interpretation function relativized to a contextual assignment function  $g$ . To model the speaker's knowledge, I build on Giannakidou and Mari (2017) and define  $M_s$  as the modal base relativized to a speaker or judge  $s$  (Lasnik 2005; Stephenson 2007):

(31)  $M_s = \lambda w'.w'$  is compatible with what is known by the speaker  $s$  in  $w_0$

[Adapted from Giannakidou & Mari 2017: 100, (45)]

Under (31), the speaker's knowledge is relativized to possible worlds  $w'$ , with  $w_0$  representing the world of evaluation.

With this in mind, I propose the following denotation for the postulated operator REP.

(32)  $\llbracket \text{REP} \rrbracket^{M_s, g_c : \mathfrak{U}. \text{MAX}[P(x)]} \rightarrow \uparrow_{\{\text{MAX}; \text{NON-MAX}\}}[\mathfrak{U}[P(x)]]^{M_s, g_c}$  in  $w_0$

The formula in (32), inspired by Partee's (1987) type-shifting operators, states that REP takes a maximal individual  $x$ , with a specific variable assignment determined by the context, represented as  $c$ , and maps it onto a representative (maximal or non-maximal) group entity, according to the speaker's modal base in the world of evaluation. A caveat about this formula is in order. In particular, notice that the postulated derivation for the REP operator incorporates Link's (1984) and Landman's (1989a, 1998b) group-forming operator  $\uparrow$ , which is a function that maps pure sums onto impure atoms (i.e., groups). More specifically,  $\uparrow$  is assumed to map every pure sum onto a distinct group, preventing two different sums being mapped onto the same group. This implies that  $\uparrow$  is a purely extensional operator, forming groups without allowing exceptions in their denotation.

However, our REP operator must accommodate exceptions, as a representative interpretation may involve only a sub-portion of individuals in the noun's extension, as discussed in previous sections. To account for this, the formulation in (32) specifies that REP maps a maximal plural individual onto a group satisfying the descriptive content of the noun, provided that the output refers to a maximal or non-maximal group satisfying the property of the noun. This requirement allows for a flexible interpretation of RIs, relativized to the speaker's contextual knowledge, such that the denoted group need not include all the individuals in the maximal sum; or such that different groups can be derived from the same description.

This flexibility is necessary to capture two defining properties of RIs. On the one hand, it explains why RIs tolerantly accommodate the presence of exceptions. On the other hand, it accounts for cases such as (33).

(33) *The Romans* built this bridge and that road.

RI

In (33), the subject *the Romans* allows for a RI, whereby only a small group of individuals belonging to the Roman population was involved in the building events. Crucially, the sentence remains true even if the individuals factually building the bridge and the road are distinct, depending on the speaker's epistemic knowledge and assignment function in the world of evaluation. This possibility arises because a speaker who utters this sentence likely lacks specific knowledge about the identity and number of individuals participating in the two events, yet recognizes that they belong to a cohesive group of Romans. This, I argue, is precisely the condition that licenses the use of a RI.

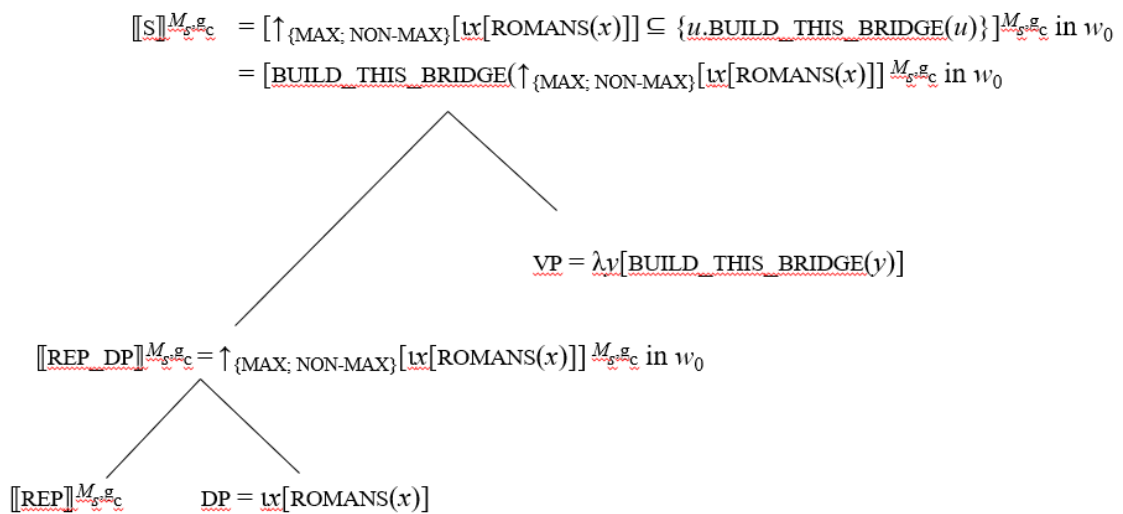
By permitting exceptions and partial group formation, REP ensures that the resulting group can be either maximal or non-maximal, effectively capturing the speaker's epistemic ignorance regarding the individuals involved in the event. In other words, it is this modalized evaluation, relativized to the speaker's epistemic state, that accounts for the flexibility inherent in REP –a component altogether absent in Link's (1984) and Landman's (1989a, 1989b)  $\uparrow$  operator.

Going back to the formalization of representativity, the complete derivation of the English version of our initial example (1a), repeated as (34), is outlined in (35).

(34) *The Romans* built this bridge.

RI

(35)



According to this formalization, a sentence like *The Romans built this bridge* denotes an event of building this bridge which has a representative group (maximal or non-maximal) of Romans as the AGENT. This sentence is true *iff*, within the speaker's epistemic world, there is at least one individual of the group that is included in the set of individuals involved in the event of building this bridge.

Let us now examine more closely the truth conditions of another example, (1c), translated into English as (36) for convenience:

- (36) *The soldiers* spotted a tank. RI
- a.  $\exists x \text{TANK}(x) \wedge \text{SPOT}(\uparrow_{\{\text{MAX}, \text{NON-MAX}\}}[\text{ty}[\text{SOLDIERS}(y)]], x)^{M_s, g_c} \text{ in } w_0$
- b.  ${}^{\#}\forall x \subset \uparrow_{\{\text{MAX}, \text{NON-MAX}\}}[\text{tx}[\text{SOLDIERS}(x)]] \rightarrow \exists y \text{TANK}(y) \wedge \text{SPOT}(x, y)$

Under the relevant representative interpretation of *the soldiers*, the example in (36) only allows for the reading represented in (36a), whereby there is only one tank and the representative group of soldiers spotted such tank. In contrast, the reading in (36b) describes the situation in which each individual belonging to the representative group of soldiers spots a different tank. Remarkably, such interpretation, corresponding to a distributive reading, is not available for the representatively interpreted subject *the soldiers*.

The remainder of this section will provide further support for the theoretical proposal outlined in this section, delving also into an explanation for the systematic unavailability of (Q-)distributive readings for RIs, as illustrated in (36b). Therefore, before proceeding it is necessary to clarify some theoretical concepts related to distributivity, which will become essential for presenting our empirical arguments. This is the aim of the following section.

### 6.3.2 Q- and P-distributivity

To address the lack of a distributive interpretation for (36), I adopt Winter's (2000) and de Vries' (2015, 2017) view of distributivity, which distinguishes between Q-distributivity and P-distributivity. Q-distributivity stands for *quantificational distributivity*. It indicates cases where a distributive interpretation for a sentence containing a plural subject results from the presence of quantificational mechanisms at the level of semantic representation, whether explicit (such as the lexical quantifier *each*), or implicit (e.g., a covert distributive operator like Link's 1987 D-operator). P-distributivity, on the other hand,

stands for *predicate distributivity*. It indicates cases of lexical distributivity where a distributive interpretation arises from the distributive inferences associated with the lexical semantics of an inherently distributive predicate such as *smile* in *the students smiled* (pretty much as in Scha 1981).

This dichotomy is crucial to account for the behavior of plural definite DPs in combination with so-called *mixed predicates* (Winter 2002).<sup>122</sup> These predicates display an ambiguous behavior when combined with indefinite expressions (Brisson 1998; de Vries 2015, 2017 for clarifications on this aspect). Consider the following example.

(37) *The children* ate a sandwich.

- a. There is a sandwich, and the children together ate that sandwich.
- b. For each child *x*, *x* ate a sandwich.

This example is compatible with both paraphrases in (37a) and (37b). In other words, the sentence is true under two interpretations: one in which there is only one sandwich, and the children collectively ate that sandwich; and another in which each child ate a different sandwich. These readings are assumed to arise from different scope positions of the definite description *the children* at the level of semantic representation. Specifically, under the collective reading, the plural definite is assumed to be interpreted below the scope of the indefinite DP *a sandwich*, whereas under the distributive reading, the definite appears to take scope over the indefinite. The availability of these two interpretations reveals that, at least in some contexts, plural definite DPs can in fact enter scope relations with the existential operator (*cf.* Carlson's 1977 notion of *scopelessness*).

Therefore, following de Vries (2015, 2017), I assume that, to obtain the distributive reading (i.e., when the subject takes scope over the object), the mixed predicate –under its distributive interpretation– necessarily introduces a distributive operator (e.g., Link's 1987 D-operator) at LF. This distributive operator, triggered by the predicate, provides the definite description with the quantificational force necessary to take scope over the indefinite. The collective reading, in contrast, ensues from direct predication of the verb over the whole collection of individuals denoted by the plural definite DP. Both readings can be represented as below.

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<sup>122</sup> Mixed predicates are those predicates that are neither inherently collective nor inherently distributive, making them potentially compatible with both collective and distributive interpretations.



(38) *The children ate a sandwich.*

a.  $((\text{EAT})(\text{A\_SANDWICH}))(\text{THE\_CHILDREN}) = \exists x \text{SANDWICH}(x) \wedge \text{EAT}([\iota y \text{CHILD}(y)], x)$   
*collective reading*

b.  $(\text{D}(\text{EAT})(\text{A\_SANDWICH}))(\text{THE\_CHILDREN}) = \forall x \subset \iota x \text{CHILD}(x) \rightarrow \exists y \text{SANDWICH}(y) \wedge \text{EAT}(x, y)^{123}$   
*distributive reading*

In the distributive case in (38b), the D-operator introduces a covert universal quantifier in the semantic derivation, which quantifies over the plural definite subject and distributes the predicate down to each individual making up the extension of the plural definite DP. This, therefore, corresponds to a case of Q-distributivity (de Vries 2017), as it results from the presence of a distributive operator introducing universal quantification at LF.

Compelling evidence for the necessity of postulating the existence of Q-distributivity comes from the behavior of group terms in similar environments. Consider, for instance, the following example.

(39) *The class ate a pizza.*

a.  $\exists x \text{PIZZA}(x) \wedge \text{EAT}([\iota y \text{CLASS}(y)], x)$   
b.  $\# \forall x \subset \iota x \text{CLASS}(x) \rightarrow \exists y \text{PIZZA}(y) \wedge \text{EAT}(x, y)$

Sentence (39), containing the group noun *class*, is typically compatible only with the reading represented in (39a), which denotes a situation where a single pizza is collectively eaten by the members of the group *class*. In contrast, the distributive reading in (39b) is generally ruled out.<sup>124</sup> The absence of a distributive reading for (39) follows straightforwardly from the assumptions outlined above. To derive the distributive reading, the singular definite description *the class* would need to be interpreted above the existential *a pizza*. Consequently, it would have to be quantified over by the covert universal quantifier introduced by the distributive operator contributed by the mixed predicate at LF.

<sup>123</sup> To keep formulas simpler but effective, throughout the rest of this chapter I will omit the left side of the equations. The reader should bear in mind, however, that whenever the plural definite DP is represented with the universal quantifier and not the  $\iota$ -operator alone, a D-operator is introduced by the predicate at LF, as in (38b).

<sup>124</sup> The situation is certainly more complex, as there are cases in which group terms display an ambiguous behavior when cooccurring with mixed predicates and indefinite expressions. For the purposes of this discussion, I will assume that group nouns only license collective interpretations in these scenarios. For a more fine-grained analysis, however, see de Vries (2015).

Crucially, this is not possible with group NPs, as they denote singular atomic entities whose internal structure is inaccessible to grammar. Since the universal distributive quantifier, by definition, can only quantify over pluralities, it cannot apply to a group term.

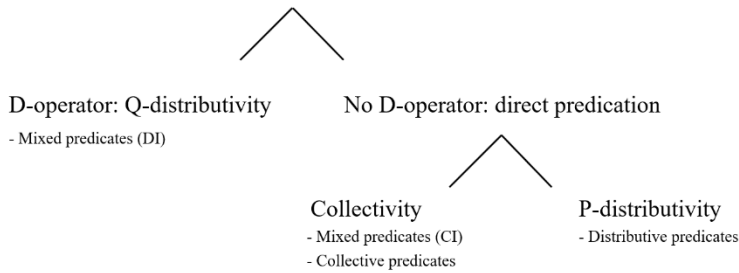
Despite this incompatibility, it is important to note that distributive readings are not *a priori* excluded with nouns that denote groups. Consider, for instance, (40).

(40) *The class* is smiling.

This sentence is true only if all the contextually salient child members of the class are smiling. This interpretation corresponds to a distributive reading. Nonetheless, this distributive reading does not necessitate the postulation of a covert universal quantifier, as it follows from the distributive inferences associated with the lexical semantics of a purely distributive predicate like *to smile*. This predicate entails that the main verb predicates over the sum of individuals that constitute *the class*. Since this reading arises independently of a distributive operator and follows from the lexical semantics of the predicate, it exemplifies a clear case of P-distributivity.

To account for the full range of interpretations discussed so far, as well as the unavailability of Q-distributive readings with group terms, I align with de Vries (2015, 2017), Winter (2000), and Champollion (2010), and adopt a decision tree along the lines of the one shown below.

(41)



[Adapted from de Vries 2017: 178, (7a)]

As shown in (41), I assume that whenever a sentence containing a plural or group NP in subject position is uttered, two logical possibilities arise. First, if the main predicate introduces a covert D-operator, the sentence constitutes an instance of Q-distributivity. This scenario typically arises with a mixed predicate with a distributive reading (e.g., *The children ate a sandwich* under its distributive interpretation, marked as *DI* above). Second, if no D-operator is present at LF, two further possibilities arise. On one hand, the absence of a D-operator can lead to can have a case of collective predication, either with a mixed predicate interpreted collectively (e.g., *The children ate a sandwich* under the collective interpretation, marked as *CI*), or with an inherently collective predicate such as *gather* in *The children gathered*. Otherwise, this results in P-distributivity, as with inherently distributive predicates like *laugh* / *smile* in *The children* / *the class laughed* / *smiled*.

In essence, a bipartite notion of distributivity, encompassing both P- and Q-distributivity, is necessary to capture the data discussed. P-distributivity represents lexical distributivity, where distributive interpretations arise from the lexical semantics of inherently distributive predicates. Conversely, Q-distributivity involves a distributive operator introducing a (c)over universal quantifier at LF. This notion explains the distributive readings in examples like (37) and it accounts for the unavailability of the same interpretations with group nouns, as in (38). With this framework in mind, de Vries' and Winter's insights can be applied to RIs to show that these readings behave similarly to group terms while differing from canonical plural definites.

### 6.3.3 Arguments for group denotation

This section provides empirical support for the proposal that RIs denote singular group terms due to the presence of the REP operator in their structure and derivation. Specifically, I present two primary arguments, which address the behavior of RIs with respect to Q-distributivity and grammatical reciprocity.

#### 6.3.3.1 Argument 1: lack of Q-distributivity

Von Koss Torkildsen (2002: 109) notes that RIs tend to scope below indefinite expressions. This observation has been confirmed by our example (36) *The soldiers spotted a tank*, which is only compatible with a reading in which the indefinite *a tank* is interpreted over the plural definite description. This behavior is expected and follows naturally from the formal analysis outlined in Section 6.3.1. Crucially, the behavior of RIs closely aligns with that of group NPs, and contrasts with that of canonical (and non-maximal) plural definites (e.g., *The children ate a sandwich* in (37b)). Let us see this parallelism in greater detail in the following examples:

- |      |                                                                                                                                                               |          |
|------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| (42) | <i>The soldiers spotted a tank.</i>                                                                                                                           | RI       |
| a.   | $\exists x \text{TANK}(x) \wedge \text{SPOT}(\uparrow_{\{\text{MAX}, \text{NON-MAX}\}}[\text{ly}[\text{SOLDIERS}(y)]], x)^{M_s, g_c} \text{ in } w_0$         |          |
| b.   | $\# \forall x \subset \uparrow_{\{\text{MAX}, \text{NON-MAX}\}}[\text{lx}[\text{SOLDIERS}(x)]] \rightarrow \exists y \text{TANK}(y) \wedge \text{SPOT}(x, y)$ |          |
| (43) | <i>The army spotted a tank.</i>                                                                                                                               | Group NP |
| a.   | $\exists x \text{TANK}(x) \wedge \text{SPOT}([\text{lyARMY}(y)], x)$                                                                                          |          |
| b.   | $\# \forall x \subset \text{lxARMY}(x) \rightarrow \exists y \text{TANK}(y) \wedge \text{SPOT}(x, y)$                                                         |          |

In both cases, Q-distributive readings are ruled out, as neither sentence can describe a scenario where each individual in the representative group of soldiers (or the army) spots a different tank. Crucially, this supports the view that RIs denote singular atomic entities, namely representative groups, as defended in this chapter. As such, they cannot be quantified over by the universal D-operator introduced by the predicate and cannot get the quantificational force necessary to take scope over the existential quantifier.

This pattern is not coincidental and holds for i-level predicate licensing RIs as well.

(44) *The ancient Greeks* knew a theorem. RI

- a.  $\exists x \text{THEOREM}(x) \wedge \text{KNOW}(\uparrow_{\{\text{MAX}, \text{NON-MAX}\}}[\lambda y[\text{GREEKS}(y)]], x)^{M_{s^g c}} \text{ in } w_0$
- b.  $\# \forall x \subset \wedge \uparrow_{\{\text{MAX}, \text{NON-MAX}\}}[\lambda x[\text{GREEKS}(x)]] \rightarrow \exists y \text{THEOREM}(y) \wedge \text{KNOW}(x, y)$

The sentence in (44) expresses the generalization according to which the ancient Greeks, as a representative group, knew a single theorem. This reading is derived by direct predication of the verb over the whole representative group. Crucially, an interpretation where each ancient Greek knew a distinct theorem, corresponding to a case of Q-distributivity, is unavailable for the same sentence. This follows from the impossibility for the D-operator to distribute the predicate down to each individual making up the representative group of the ancient Greeks.

Furthermore, it is important to notice that the parallelism between RIs and group terms is further confirmed by other Q-distributivity tests. For instance, de Vries (2015, 2017) observes that a sentence like (45), containing a plural definite subject, is ambiguous between the two interpretations in (45a) and (45b).

- (45) *The cows* won fewer prizes at the fair than the pig.
- a. The cows together won fewer prizes than the pig.
  - b. For every cow  $x$ ,  $x$  won fewer prizes than the pig.

(de Vries 2017: 181, (16))

Imagine a context with three salient cows and one pig. In this scenario, the sentence in (45) is true if the cows collectively won more prizes than the pig. Following the decision tree in (45), this reading corresponds to an instance of direct predication of *won fewer prizes than the pig* over the plural definite description *the cows*. However, (45) is also true in a context where each cow won fewer prizes than the pig. Importantly, to obtain this inference, the plural definite DP must scope over the quantifier *fewer prizes than the pig*. This scope pattern indicates the necessity of postulating a covert distributive universal quantifier at LF, which would provide the plural definite with the required quantificational force for this scope position. The presence of a covert quantificational mechanism for the distributive interpretation is confirmed by the unavailability of the same reading with a group NP.

- (46) *The trio of cows* won fewer prizes at the fair than the pig. Group NP
- a. The cows together won fewer prizes than the pig.
  - b. #For each cow  $x$ ,  $x$  won fewer prizes than the pig.
- (de Vries 2017: 186, (30))

As attested by the paraphrases, the sentence in (46) is only compatible with a collective interpretation. This is expected, as such interpretation is a case of direct predication over the whole trio of cows. The distributive reading, on the other hand, can only be derived by means of a universal quantifier introduced by the D-operator, explaining why this is not a possible interpretation for (46), which contains a group NP.

As predicted by the account put forth in this chapter, RIs pattern like group NPs and differently from canonical definites also in this scenario. This parallel behavior is observed with both s- and i-level predicates, as shown in (47) and (48), respectively.

- (47) *The Romans* built fewer / more bridges than Calatrava. RI
- a. A representative group of Romans built fewer / more bridges than Calatrava.
  - b. #For each Roman  $x$  belonging to the representative group of the Romans,  $x$  built fewer / more bridges than Calatrava.
- (48) *The Romans* knew fewer / more scientific areas than Aristotle.
- a. A representative group of Romans knew fewer / more scientific areas than Aristotle.
  - b. #For each Roman  $x$  belonging to the representative group of the Romans,  $x$  knew fewer / more scientific areas than Aristotle.

Under the relevant RI, sentence (47), can only describe a situation in which the representative group of Romans collectively built fewer or more bridges than Calatrava, which is derived by direct predication of *built fewer / more bridges than Calatrava* over the group denoted by the subject. To obtain the unavailable reading in (47b), in contrast, the predicate should be distributed down to the individuals composing the representative group of Romans. This, however, can only be achieved by means of a covert universal D-operator at LF, a possibility that is ruled out with RIs, since quantifiers, by definition, cannot quantify over singular atomic entities.

The same reasoning applies to (48), which contains the complex i-level predicate *knew fewer / more scientific areas than Aristotle*. Also in this case, the only possible

interpretation is the collective reading in (48a), whereas the Q-distributive interpretation is unavailable, as expected.

Additionally, similar entailment patterns arise with disjunctions (de Vries 2017). This is shown in the following example.

(49) *The semanticists* are walking or cycling.

- a. The semanticists are walking or the semanticists are cycling.
- b. For every semanticist  $x$ ,  $x$  is walking or  $x$  is cycling.

(de Vries 2017: 181, (15))

The sentence in (49) involves a canonical plural definite description in subject position cooccurring with disjunction. Also in this case, the sentence is ambiguous between a collective and a distributive interpretation. Under the collective reading in (49a), each disjunct predicates over *the semanticists* as a whole collection. The inference in (49b), on the other hand, is an instance of Q-distributivity, as it can only be obtained if the disjunction applies to each singular individual included in the plurality –a reading that requires the presence of covert quantification over singular individual semanticists.

The presence of a covert quantificational mechanism, as expected, is incompatible with group-denoting NPs, as shown below.

(50) *The group of semanticists* is walking or cycling.

- a. The semanticists are walking or the semanticists are cycling.
- b. <sup>#</sup>For every semanticist  $x$ ,  $x$  is walking or  $x$  is cycling.

(de Vries 2017: 186, (30))

While in the first reading the disjunction applies to the whole group of semanticists (i.e., it is a case of direct predication), the distributive interpretation involves quantification over individuals and is therefore unavailable with a group NP.

The proposal developed in this chapter predicts RIs to behave once more like group NPs and differently from canonical plural definites. This prediction is borne out, as attested in the following sentence.

- (51) *The soldiers* spotted a tank or a helicopter. RI
- a. The representative group of soldiers spotted a tank or the representative group of soldiers spotted a helicopter.
  - b. <sup>#</sup>For every soldier *x* belonging to the representative group of soldiers, *x* spotted a tank or *x* spotted a helicopter.

The example in (52), containing a RI in subject position, only licenses the collective reading in (52a), while is incompatible with the Q-distributive interpretation in (52b).

In summary, the proposal outlined in this chapter provides a principled explanation for the unavailability of Q-distributive readings with RIs. Building on de Vries (2015, 2017), I have argued that Q-distributive readings arise when plural definite descriptions are quantified over by a universal quantifier introduced by the D-operator associated with the main predicate. This covert quantifier cannot apply to groups (i.e., singular atomic entities), supporting a group denotation for RIs. As it has been shown, RIs, like group terms, lack Q-distributive interpretations. Next section will show that a similar analysis explains the unavailability of RIs with grammatical reciprocals.

#### 6.3.3.2 Argument 2: lack of grammatical reciprocity

This section builds on another observation made by von Koss Torkildsen (2002: 108–109) who points out that RIs appear to be unavailable with the (grammatical) reciprocal *each other*. This incompatibility is illustrated in the following contrast.

- (52)a. *The delegates* greeted the president. RI
- b. *The delegates* greeted each other. #RI

While the example in (52a) can describe a scenario where only a representative (sub-)group of all the contextually salient delegates greeted the president, the same interpretation is unavailable for (52b). Instead, this sentence can only license a (non-)maximal interpretation, whereby (nearly) all salient individual delegates greeted each other, an interpretation that only tolerates the presence of minor exceptions.

The same contrast is replicated again with i-level predicates, as illustrated below.

- (53)a. *The ancient Greeks* knew mathematics. (see (20)) RI
- b. *The ancient Greeks* knew each other. #RI



This contrast shows that while a RI is available with i-level predicates, as in (53a), the presence of the reciprocal *each other* blocks this interpretation, as this sentence is only compatible with a generalization about ancient Greeks, stating that (nearly) all of them knew each other.

Given the incompatibility between RIs and reciprocals like *each other*, it is important to note that group NPs have been found to exhibit similar restrictions. In particular, it is widely observed that most varieties of English – namely those that only license singular agreement with group terms – consider the occurrence of group expressions ungrammatical with (grammatical) reciprocals (Barker 1992; de Vries 2015; Palmieri et al. 2019). This incompatibility is attested in the following contrast.

- (54)a. *The committee* greeted the president.  
 b. \**The committee* greeted each other.

In view of the proposal fleshed out in this chapter, a principled explanation for the parallel behavior of RIs and group terms with respect to grammatical reciprocals like *each other* can be offered. In particular, it should be noticed that *each other* is typically analyzed as the overt realization of a reciprocity operator REC (e.g., Dalrymple et al. 1998). This reciprocity operator is assumed to be associated with *grammatical reciprocity*, rather than *lexical reciprocity* (Winter 2018; Palmieri et al. 2019). This distinction parallels the dichotomy between P- and Q-distributivity. Specifically, lexical reciprocity, on a par with P-distributivity, arises from the reciprocal inferences associated with the lexical semantics of an inherently reciprocal predicate like *to hug* or *to meet*. Grammatical reciprocity, on the other hand, is similar to Q-distributivity, as it results from the presence of a (c)overt grammatical operator (e.g., *each other* or the REC-operator) with a (nearly) universal force, which introduces universal quantification at the level of semantic representation and distributes the predicate down to each individual within a plurality. Consequently, grammatical reciprocals require the presence of a plurality, over which they can adequately quantify.

The existence of a distinction between lexical and grammatical reciprocity, along the lines of P-/Q-distributivity, is confirmed by contrasts like the following.

- (55)a. *The boys* have hugged / met.  
 b. *The boys* have punished / met.

(56)a. *The committee* has hugged / met.

b. \**The committee* has punished / thanked each other.

(Palmieri et al. 2019, (15)–(16))

The above sentences contain reciprocal expressions. However, only the plural definite description *the boys* in (55) is compatible with both lexical (55a) and grammatical (55b) reciprocity, whereas the group term *the committee* only accepts the former, as shown in (56a), whereas the latter is considered ungrammatical (56b).

This pattern is easily accounted for in view of the assumptions adopted in this section. Specifically, the reciprocal inferences associated with (a) version of the above examples stems from the lexical semantics of an inherently predicate like *hugged* / *met*. Consequently, these predicates are compatible with both plural and group terms, as they predicate directly over their respective subjects, without resorting to any quantificational mechanism. In contrast, the (b) versions feature the grammatical reciprocal *each other*. This item introduces a REC-operator with universal force at LF, which quantifies over the extension of a plurality (Heim et al. 1991; Palmieri et al. 2019).<sup>125</sup> Since quantification over sums of individuals is incompatible with singular group terms, *each other* becomes ungrammatical in the English example in (57b). Crucially, the fact that the REC-operator introduces universal quantification at LF, not only explains why *each other* is unavailable with group NPs, but also its incompatibility with RIs, which denote singular groups with an internal structure that is not accessible to grammar.

Overall, the incompatibility of RIs with grammatical reciprocals supports the view that RIs denote group entities. Parallel to the D-operator, the REC-operator introduces universal quantification over individuals at LF. This universal quantification cannot apply to singular group terms, including those obtained as the output of REP, as they involve an internal structure that is inaccessible to grammatical operators.

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<sup>125</sup> Palmieri et al. (2019) offer a semantic account of grammatical reciprocals and propose the following denotation for the REC-operator:

(i)  $\text{REC} = \lambda R_{\langle e(e\langle et \rangle)\rangle}. \lambda x_{\langle e \rangle}. \forall y_e \in x. \forall z_e \in x. y \neq z \rightarrow \exists e.R(e, y, z)$

(Palmieri et al. (2019), (23))

This formula posits that the REC-operator maps any trinary relation *R* between entities and pairs of atoms to the unitary predicate that holds of the sums *x* such that every member of *x* is in the relation *R* to any other member of *x* in a given event. Crucial to the proposal is that *x* must denote a plurality, as the REC-operator needs access to every member of this sum. For a more detailed discussion of the properties of this operator and its relation with plural and singular terms, see Palmieri et al. (2019).

Thus far, this chapter has addressed two of the three research questions outlined in the introduction, namely (i) what grammatical factors license the representative interpretation? And (ii) how can the RI be formally derived? Regarding the first question, I argued that RIs mainly arise with plural nouns, which are Spelled-Out as definite descriptions in languages that lexicalize definiteness. Moreover, they are compatible with both s- and i-level predicates but not with k-level ones, and they rely primarily on the epistemic stance of the speaker.

As for (ii), I have argued that DPs associated with a RI are interpreted as group-denoting terms. To account for this group denotation, I have argued that RIs arise from a representativity operator REP adjoined to a definite DP. This operator takes a maximal sum of individuals (i.e., the denotation of the definite description it adjoins to) as its input and returns a representative group as its output, whose identity and maximality must be relativized to the speaker's modal base. This coercion of meaning explains the parallel incompatibility of RIs and group NPs with respect to quantificational distributivity and grammatical reciprocity. With the theoretical framework developed in this chapter in place, next section addresses the final research question of this chapter: (iii) Are there compelling reasons to treat NMs and RIs separately?

#### 6.4 Moving further: the limits between representativity and non-maximality

Throughout this chapter, a spectre has haunted our discussion: the possibility of a non-maximal (NM) interpretation for plural definite descriptions. Non-maximality is a recurring theme in the literature on pluralities and appears to be closely related to representativity, as both cases tolerate exceptions in their extension. As a matter of fact, RIs have often gone unrecognized in the literature, as they are generally equated with NMs. To delve into a comparison between the two interpretations, let us take a closer look at two prototypical examples of NM definites in the literature.

- (57) *The townspeople* are asleep. NM  
 (due to Kroch 1975, cited in Brisson 1998:34, (15) and Lasersohn 1999:522. (3))
- (58) *The children* ate a sandwich. NM  
 (Brisson 1998: 34, (17))

The plural definite subjects of the above sentences are generally referred to as NM definites because they are compatible with scenarios in which not literally every contextually salient townsperson is asleep, nor did literally all the children eat a sandwich. In other words, NMs tolerate minor exceptions: they remain true even if some salient individuals are not involved in the event denoted by the main predicate. Given the similarities with RIs, a brief review of previous approaches to non-maximality is warranted in order to compare the two phenomena.

#### 6.4.1 *Previous approaches to non-maximality*

This section offers a brief overview of the main trends of analysis of non-maximality. Although previous accounts either implement non-maximality in the semantics of a distributive operator (e.g., Schwarzschild 1993, 1996; Brisson 2003) or attribute it to direct predication (e.g., Landman 1989a; Winter 2002), the most accepted view treats non-maximality as a more general case of pragmatic tolerance (Lasnik 1999; Križ 2016, 2019; Bar-Lev 2021; but see Magri 2014 for a different stance).<sup>126</sup>

The most fine-grained pragmatic picture emerges from the works by Križ (2016) and Bar-Lev (2021). Put in a nutshell, these authors defend that the default reading of plural definites corresponds to the maximal interpretation. However, for Križ, a sentence like *The students smiled* is true when all the students smiled, false when none of them did, and neither true nor false in between the two cases. The latter situations are called *extension gaps*. Under this view, non-maximality arises as a conversational implicature (specifically, a quality implicature), governed by the pragmatic principle of Sufficient Truth, which states that exceptions are tolerated if they are irrelevant to the conversational goal. In this theory, non-maximality arises if the sentence allows extension gaps, since the worlds within the gaps (i.e., the situations they denote) can be considered irrelevant with respect to the conversational issue.

According to Bar-Lev, on the other hand, the basic meaning of a sentence like *The students smiled* is still the maximal interpretation, but an eventual NM reading arises as the output of an existential pluralization operator (the  $\exists$ -pl operator), which is assumed to be obligatorily present at the level of semantic representation whenever a predication

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<sup>126</sup> Simplifying, and in striking contrast to traditional analyses of plural definites (i.e., Hawkins 1978; Sharvy 1980; Link 1983), Magri (2014) argues that the basic semantics of a plural definite DP is the non-maximal –even existential– interpretation, which might be strengthened to the traditional maximal, universal reading via implicature calculation.

is applied to a plurality. Put it simply, this operator is postulated to be able to existentially quantify over subparts of the plurality under the right pragmatic premises.

A common feature of Križ and Bar-Lev theories is that they both point to the behavior of plural definite DPs in negated sentences to explain non-maximality. Plural definite descriptions give rise to so-called *homogeneity effects* when they cooccur with negation (Schwarzchild 1994; Krifka 1996; Magri 2014; Križ 2016; Bar-Lev 2021, among others), as shown below.

(59)a. *The students* smiled.

(i) = *(Nearly) all* the students smiled.

(ii)  $\neq$  *Some* of the students smiled.

b. *The students* didn't smile.

(i)  $\neq$  *Not all* the students smiled.

(ii) = *None* of the students smiled.

The contrast in (59) shows that sentences containing plural definite DPs do not have complementary truth conditions with their negated counterparts. The sentence in (59a) is true if (almost) all the kids smiled, while its negation, (59b), is true if none of them did, but not if *not all* the students smiled, which would correspond to the complementary truth conditions of (59a). This unavailable reading would be expected if negation simply took scope above whatever mechanism assigns universal quantification over *the students*. Given this behavior, Križ observes that only sentences that allow homogeneity have extension gaps, which make exceptions tolerable.

Similarly, Bar-Lev argues that homogeneous sentences involve the existence of a set of alternatives in which the sentence can be still considered true. Under this assumption, NM readings are predicted to arise, under the right pragmatic circumstances, from exhaustification over different alternative sets (see Bar-Lev 2021: 1072ff).

With these premises in mind, the next section explores the relationship between non-maximality and representativity.

## 6.4.2 *Non-maximality and representativity*

### 6.4.2.1 Similarities

This section highlights some similarities between NMs and RIs. Let us begin by focusing on their respective tolerance for exceptions. As discussed, both interpretations associated

with plural definite descriptions can describe scenarios where not all individuals in the extension of the noun are involved in the event denoted by the main predicate. For Križ (2016), a sentence containing a RI like *The Romans built this bridge* necessarily tolerates exceptions because it presents extension gaps, where the involvement of the individuals in the event is not universal. Extensions gaps denote situations where the sentence is neither true nor false, but which might be close enough to the truth for practical purposes. It is important to note, however, that Križ's theory does not adequately address the group-denotating interpretation of plural DPs found with RIs.

Bar-Lev's account of non-maximality, on the other hand, involves an  $\exists$ -pl operator, which is assumed to be introduced obligatorily in cases of plural predication at LF. This operator is allowed to quantify only over subparts of a plurality (given the adequate pragmatic circumstances). Crucially, however, sentences containing RIs, unlike NMs, do not involve predications over pluralities, as these nominal expressions denote singular atomic descriptions. As a result, the behavior of RIs as group terms is unexpected under this account.<sup>127</sup>

A second similarity between NMs and RIs concerns their behavior under negation, particularly their shared propensity to display homogeneity effects when paired with a negative marker. Consider the following examples.

- (60)a. *The Romans* built this bridge. RI
- (i) = *A representative (sub)group* of the Romans built this bridge.
  - (ii)  $\neq$  *Some* of the Romans built this bridge.
- b. *The Romans* didn't build this bridge.
- (i)  $\neq$  *A representative (sub)group* of the Romans didn't build this bridge.
  - (ii) = *None* of the Romans built this bridge.

The negated sentence in (60b) does not yield the expected complementary truth conditions of (60a): it can only convey the interpretation that none of the Romans built this bridge. This interpretation is expected in Križ and Bar-Lev's accounts, where this kind of behavior aligns with the mechanisms that produce non-maximal readings: for Križ, only homogeneous sentences present extension gaps, which make the presence of exceptions

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<sup>127</sup> Notice that by the same reasoning, Bar-Lev's account would not predict the possibility of a non-maximal reading with canonical group terms. However, a sentence like *the class smiled* allows for exceptions, although it mandatorily involves direct predication over a singular atomic term.

tolerable; for Bar-Lev, only homogeneous constructions involve set of alternatives, which allow the  $\exists$ -pl operator to quantify over subparts of the plurality.

Therefore, if we are to consider RIs and NMs as distinct phenomena, as implicitly assumed in this chapter, this apparently behavior requires an alternative explanation. The theory proposed in this chapter suggests that the key to understanding this similarity lies in the interaction between the operator REP and the negative operator. The REP operator is syntactically adjoined to a definite DP and takes it as its argument. Therefore, REP operates locally, and only affects the nominal domain it modifies. As for negation, the standard view holds that, in order to negate an event, the negative marker must c-command the existential quantifier that binds the event variable (assumed to be located in  $\nu$ P) or the tense variable (sitting in TP) (see, for instance, Acquaviva 1995, 1997; Zeijlstra 2004, 2008).

Following the standard view, then, (60b) can be represented as (61).

$$(61) \quad \llbracket (60b) \rrbracket^{M_s, g_c} : \neg \exists e [\text{BUILD\_THIS\_BRIDGE}(e) \wedge \text{AGENT}(e) = \uparrow_{\{MAX, NON-MAX\}} [\iota x [\text{ROMANS}(x)]]]^{M_s, g_c} \text{ in } w_0$$

This formal representation captures the interpretation that the event of a representative (sub)group of Romans building the bridge is negated. Crucially, the nominal constituent (comprising REP) remains *in situ*, and negation takes scope over the event, ensuring the desired narrow scope interpretation of the representative nominal below the negative marker.

The last parallel between NMs and RIs concerns their respective interaction with the universal quantifier *all*. As observed, a NM interpretation disappears when *all* is inserted. Consequently, a sentence like *All the townspeople are asleep* does not tolerate any exceptions and is true only when literally all the townspeople are asleep. According to Križ's approach, sentences with *all* cannot have extension gaps because *all* requires that the sentence is true if every individual is involved in the event and false otherwise. Hence, homogeneity, assumed to be the source of non-maximality, cannot arise in such cases. Similarly, in Bar-Lev theory, universally quantified sentences do not imply set of alternatives, thus preventing the  $\exists$ -pl operator from quantifying over sub-pluralities.

Intriguingly, RIs, like NMs, are also incompatible with *all*. For instance, the sentence *all the soldiers spotted a tank* is inconsistent with the interpretation that the representative

(sub)group of soldiers spotted a tank. Instead, the universal quantifier demands that every individual in the extension must be involved in the event.

Additional evidence for the unavailability of RIs with *all* comes from Q-distributivity tests. As (62) shows, a sentence with *all*, licenses the Q-distributive interpretation in (62b), a reading that is incompatible with a RI.

- (62) *All the soldiers* spotted a tank. #RI
- a. There is a tank  $x$ , and all the soldiers spotted  $x$
  - b. For all the soldiers  $x$ , there is a tank  $y$  such that  $x$  spotted  $y$ .

The compatibility of the above sentence with a Q-distributive reading shows that a universally quantified plural DP does not involve the REP-operator, which would yield a group-denoting expression.

Therefore, although both non-maximality and representativity disappear with the universal quantifier *all*, I suspect that there is a more principled reason for the latter incompatibility, which follows naturally from the account fleshed out in this paper. RIs denote singular atomic group entities, making them incompatible with a quantifier like *all*, which necessarily operates over pluralities.

Notice, in this respect, that a parallel emerges again with a group term like *the class*. As shown in the contrast below, group NPs can cooccur with the quantifier *whole* to convey a maximal interpretation, while they are incompatible with *all*. This is shown in the following contrast.

- (63)a. *The whole class* smiled. Group reading
- b. *#All the class* smiled.

In summary, this section has highlighted three significant superficial similarities between RIs and NMs: both allow exceptions in their extensions, both show homogeneous behavior with respect to negation, and both are incompatible with the universal quantifier *all*. These similarities are consistent with a unified treatment of RIs and NMs (e.g., Križ 2016 and Bar-Lev 2021). However, this section has pointed out that previous accounts of non-maximality do not capture the parallel behavior of RIs with group terms. Moreover, I have also argued that alternative explanations for the homogeneous behavior of this



construction under negation and its incompatibility with the universal quantifier *all* follow naturally from the analysis of RIs presented in this chapter.

#### 6.4.2.2 Differences

In this section, I explore some previously unnoticed differences between NMs and RIs. These differences, coupled with the analysis fleshed out above, further suggest that RIs and NMs should be considered as different phenomena.

A first fundamental difference between NMs and RIs concerns their tolerance for explicit exceptions. As noted above, NMs become contradictory when exceptions are explicitly mentioned. Consider again example (8b), repeated as (69).

- (64) #Although *the townspeople* are asleep, *most of them* are awake. NM  
(Lasersohn 1999: 523, (6))

This contradiction supports Lasersohn's (1999), Križ's (2016), and Bar-Lev's (2021) view that the truth conditions of NMs are close to universal quantification.

In strike contrast, RIs remain felicitous even when the exceptions are explicitly mentioned, as (9b), repeated as (65), shows.

- (65) *The Americans* developed the atomic bomb in July 1945, but *most Americans* did not know of the invention until a bomb was dropped at Hiroshima.  
(Adapted from von Koss Torkildsen 2002: 71, (5.26))

This tolerance for exceptions suggests that the RI is less rigid than the NM reading. I argue that this stems from the fact that, with RIs, unlike NMs, the burden of the relevance of the exceptions is mostly dependent on the speaker's epistemic state. In these cases, the speaker indicates a lack of specific knowledge about which individuals are involved in the event, focusing instead on the fact that they belong to a representative, homogeneous group. Thus, the relevance of exceptions is framed within the speaker's modal base, as the speaker's intent is to convey that some members of the group were involved, without needing to ensure that all (or even a majority) of them were. For the speaker, then, it is not relevant whether there are other individuals of the same group that do not participate in the event; what really matters is that the individuals denoted by the nominal expressions can be projected to a (maximal or non-maximal) group.

A second, more relevant difference between RIs and NMs comes from the arguments I presented in Section 6.3.3. RIs have been shown to pattern like singular group terms in all relevant respects. NMs, in contrast, behave like canonical plural definites and, therefore, can appear in scenarios that require the presence of mechanisms of (quasi-)universal quantification at LF, such as Q-distributivity and grammatical reciprocity. This difference cannot be accounted for if the two readings are treated as the same phenomenon, while they follow naturally from the presence of a representativity operator in the syntactic and semantic derivation of RIs.

In light of these differences, I conclude that NMs and RIs represent two distinct phenomena associated with plural definite descriptions, challenging previous analyses (e.g., Brisson 1998; Lasnik 1999; Križ 2016; and Bar-Lev 2021). Specifically, NMs refer to *plural* (non-maximal) sums of individuals in the extension of the noun, while RIs denote (representative) (sub)groups (i.e., *singular* atomic entities in the sense of Landman 1989a,b; and Barker 1992) relativized to the speaker's epistemic world. The use of an RI forces a reinterpretation of the nominal expression, which ends up denoting an atomic group. This distinction underscores the need for a separate semantic treatment for RIs and NMs, as defended in this chapter.

## 6.5 Conclusions

This chapter has investigated *representative interpretations* associated with plural definite descriptions. Unlike the constructions examined in previous chapters, RIs convey a non-maximal, but strictly definite interpretation of definite DPs. Moreover, these uses are not restricted to Italian, but they are also attested in other languages, both with and without articles.

More specifically, this chapter has addressed three main research questions: (i) what grammatical factors license the representative interpretation? (ii) How can the RI be formally derived? And (iii) are there any compelling reasons to treat NMs and RIs separately?

Regarding (i), I have shown that RIs are generally associated with plural nouns and surface as definite descriptions in languages with lexical determiners. I have also discussed potential languages that appear to possess a morphological correlate for representativity, specifically Standard Arabic. Moreover, I have observed that RIs are compatible with both s- and i-level predicates but disappear when cooccurring with k-level

predicates. Finally, I have also argued that RIs emerge as a consequence of the speaker's epistemic stance, whereby this interpretative strategy is used to express uncertainty about the identity or number of speakers involved in the event denoted by the main predicate.

As for (ii), I have proposed that plural definite DPs allowing for RIs function semantically as group-denoting terms. To account for this group denotation, I have outlined a novel analytical approach in which RIs result from a representativity operator REP adjoined to the definite DP. This operator takes as input a maximal sum of individuals (i.e., the denotation of the definite description it adjoins to) and returns a representative group as its output, whose identity and maximality must be relativized to the speaker's modal base. This meaning coercion explains the parallel incompatibility of RIs and group NPs with respect to quantificational distributivity and grammatical reciprocity.

Lastly, in addressing (iii) I have examined the apparent similarities between RIs and NMs, which have led scholars to implicitly assume a unified treatment of the two interpretations. However, I have argued that the similarities here discussed –related especially to the behavior of NMs and RIs with respect to negation and the universal quantifier *all*– can be fully accounted for within the analysis proposed in this chapter. Moreover, I have shown that crucial differences, specifically those concerning the explicit mention of exceptions and Q-distributivity, follow naturally from the present account but remain unexplained under a unified analysis of the two phenomena.

## 7 Concluding remarks

This thesis has examined the expression of (in)definiteness and (non-)maximality in Italian, particularly in comparison with other Romance languages such as Catalan, French, and Spanish. The study has primarily focused on form-meaning mismatches, where a definite determiner gives rise to an indefinite or non-maximal interpretation. By analyzing these mismatches, I have investigated how various grammatical and contextual factors shape the interpretation of these (in)definite determiners. In what follows, I restate the three general research questions that have guided this study, along with the main results that have emerged throughout the thesis.

### 7.1 Indefiniteness in Italian

The first research question, formulated in Chapter 1 and central to this dissertation, is repeated below.

**RQ1:** *How is indefiniteness formally expressed in Italian (as compared to other Romance languages)?*

This research question was formulated in view of the existence of a broad range of indefinite forms in Italian, which emerge either in combination with plural (and mass) nouns (i.e., BNs, *di*+ART nominals, and IDs), and with morphologically singular count nouns (i.e., NIDs). The relevant examples from Chapter 1 are repeated below.

- (1) Carlo ha raccolto pomodori.  
Carlo AUX pick.PTCP tomatoes
- (2) Carlo ha raccolto dei pomodori.  
Carlo AUX pick.PTCP di+ART tomatoes
- (3) Carlo ha raccolto i pomodori.  
Carlo AUX pick.PTCP the tomatoes  
'Carlo picked tomatoes'
- (4) Aldo indossa la cravatta.  
Aldo wear.PRES.3SG the tie  
'Aldo wears {the/a} tie.'

Additionally, this thesis has also examined a peculiar interpretation associated with plural definites –namely, a representative interpretation– which shares a non-maximal reading with indefinite expressions. This construction is repeated below.

- (5) *Gli antichi Romani hanno costruito questo ponte.*  
 the ancient Romans AUX build.PTCP this bridge  
 ‘The Romans built this bridge.’

Four content chapters (Chapters 3–6) have been specifically designed to address the formal derivation of the nominal expressions in examples ((2)–(4)) and the non-maximal reading associated with (5). Below, I summarize the main findings of each of these chapters.

Chapter 3 focused on the *di*+ART nominal form in (2), comparing it to Romance BNs (1) and their French equivalents, namely *des/du*-phrases. As observed in Chapter 2, *Di*+ART and BNs represent the two canonical strategies used in Italian for conveying indefiniteness with plural and mass nouns. Building on previous literature (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016ff; Espinal & Cyrino 2022a, 2022b), I have argued that these three indefinite forms –i.e., *di*+ART, BNs, and *des/du*-phrases– can be derived from the same unified syntactic structure. Given this unified treatment, I have explored the interpretative contrasts between *di*+ART and BNs, as well as between *di*+ART and *des/du*-phrase. First, I have argued that the differences between *di*+ART and BNs hinge on the ability of the former to introduce stable discourse referents at the level of logical representation, a property that BNs lack. This possibility also accounts for the specific readings available with *di*+ART nominals but absent in BNs, which arise from associating the indefinite determiner with a choice function capable of taking wide scope at LF. Crucially, this proposal explains why *di*+ART can establish scope relations with logical operators and be interpreted outside syntactic islands –an intriguing scope behavior that had not been previously documented.

Turning to the comparison between *di*+ART nominals and French *des*-phrases, I have shown that, while both serve as indefinite expressions, *di*+ART indefinites stand out in their specialization for the expression of specificity and strong indefiniteness. This specialization emerges as the result of their coexistence with a competing form, BNs, which is absent in French. Diachronically, this competition has hindered the progression of *di*+ART along the grammaticalization pathway, preventing it from undergoing the same

development as French *des*-phrases. Synchronically, rather than representing a case of direct syntactic competition, I have argued that the coexistence between *di*+ART and BNs is part of the mapping from syntax to exponence. Finally, I have argued that the telic interpretation and the “small quantity” reading associated with *di*+ART expressions (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016), but not with *des*-phrases, are not syntactically derived. Instead, they emerge as a pragmatic effect, driven by Gricean reasoning.

In Chapter 4, I have begun examining non-canonical indefinite forms in Italian, focusing on the indefinite definite (ID) construction illustrated in (3) above. Departing from previous analyses, I have argued, following Morosi and Espinal (2025), that Italian IDs (i) should not be assimilated to short weak definites; (ii) do not function as kind-denoting definite descriptions; and (iii) cannot be derived from the alleged primary kind denotation of plural indefinites. Instead, I have proposed that IDs convey a genuinely existential, non-maximal, and upward entailing interpretation, making them true indefinite expressions. To account for this existential reading, I have argued that the indefinite interpretation of definite plural and mass nouns arises only when IDs occur as internal arguments of predicates that denote incrementally homogeneous events. This proposal explains why IDs are considerably more productive in habitual and atelic environments, grammatical contexts that inherently encode incremental homogeneity.

Chapter 5 turned to another non-canonical indefinite expression of Italian, which involves morphologically singular definite descriptions that are unmarked for number, as illustrated in (4). I referred to this construction as *numberless indefinite definites* (NIDs). Drawing on previous analysis of numberless BNs in Spanish and Catalan (Espinal 2010; Espinal & McNally 2007, 2011) –the unmarked strategy for conveying similar readings in other Romance languages– I have argued that NIDs are licensed exclusively in the object position of HAVE-predicates that express a HAVE-relation, provided that the resulting VP complex denotes a characterizing property of the external argument. To formally account for their interpretation, I have developed a novel compositional analysis of NIDs, examining the internal structure of the DP and its interaction with the selecting HAVE-predicate. Specifically, I have argued that NIDs structurally lack morphosyntactic Number. Consequently, their structure corresponds to the denotation of definite kinds (Borik & Espinal 2015), which creates a conflict with the selectional requirements of the HAVE-predicate they combine with. I have proposed that this conflict is resolved through the application of the covert type shift operation of DKP, which derives the desired existential

interpretation of NIDs. Moreover, this analysis also accounts for their narrow scope behavior and their restrictions on taxonomic modification.

Finally, Chapter 6 explored the representative interpretation (RI) associated with the construction exemplified in (5). Unlike the indefinite forms examined in previous chapters, however, RIs correspond to a genuinely definite interpretation –albeit one that is non-maximal– which is usually associated with plural definite DPs in Italian. Moreover, this phenomenon is not unique to Italian but is attested across languages, including those without articles. I have illustrated that this phenomenon can even have a morphological correlate in languages such as Standard Arabic. To formally derive these constructions, I have argued, focusing on languages with overt determiners, that the plural definite descriptions that license RIs semantically function as group-denoting nominal expressions. To account for this group denotation, I have proposed that RIs arise due to the presence of a (covert) representativity operator REP, which adjoins to the plural definite DP. This operator takes as input a maximal sum of individuals (i.e., the denotation of the definite description) and returns a representative group as its output, whose identity and maximality must be relativized to the speaker’s modal base. This shift in meaning explains why RIs behave like group NPs with respect to quantificational distributivity and grammatical reciprocity, distinguishing them from canonical and non-maximal plural definite descriptions. Therefore, I have argued that representative and non-maximal readings represent two distinct interpretative possibilities associated with plural definites: while (non-)maximal definites refer to plural (non-maximal) sums of individuals in the extension of the noun, RIs denote (representative) groups (i.e., *singular* atomic entities).

Taken together, the findings emerging from these four analytical chapters provide a comprehensive formal account of the strategies Italian employs to express indefiniteness and non-maximality, which was the primary aim of this thesis. However, beyond these theoretical contributions, the presence multiple indefinite forms in Italian raises further important research questions, which I will address in the following sections.

## 7.2 Why only Italian?

The formal analysis of the Italian indefinite expressions examined throughout this thesis has laid the groundwork for addressing the second research question formulated in Chapter 1, repeated here for convenience.

**RQ2:** *Why does Italian exhibit such a proliferation of indefinite expressions?*

As demonstrated across the four analytical chapters, the answer to this question is complex and multifaceted. Italian features two canonical indefinite expressions with plural and mass nouns, which are not unique to the language but are also found cross-linguistically: BNs, which are possible also in Spanish and Catalan (as well as in Portuguese and Romanian), and *di*+ART, which has a morphosyntactic counterpart in French, albeit with considerable interpretative differences.

As is typical of languages exhibiting two indefinite forms, such as Spanish and Catalan –where both BNs and *un(o)s* are used to express indefiniteness– Italian distributes BNs and *di*+ART across the continuum of indefiniteness in a balanced manner. On the one hand, BNs, which are cross-linguistically restricted to weak indefiniteness, convey only non-specific, existential readings and consistently take the narrowest possible scope in the presence of logical operators. On the other hand, *di*+ART nominals tend to occupy the remaining portion of the continuum, favoring strong and specific indefinite readings, though non-specific interpretations are not categorically ruled out.

The presence of these two indefinite forms in Italian is therefore unsurprising, as comparable patterns are attested also in other Romance languages such as Spanish and Catalan. However, the existence of IDs and NIDs presents a more unexpected situation, one that requires additional explanatory factors. In particular, the grammaticalized status of the Italian determiner system and the influence of Italo-Romance varieties play a crucial role. As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, the interplay of these factors helps clarify the research question outlined above.

More concretely, in Chapter 4, I examined a small corpus of two northern Italo-Romance regional dialects and showed that IDs are more prevalent in the variety that makes a limited use of BNs. This distribution suggests that IDs emerge primarily in dialects where BNs are virtually absent, serving as a replacement strategy in varieties that lack explicit number morphology and therefore require number marking on the determiner. A language like French resolves this need with *des*-phrases, but this strategy is unavailable in the underlying dialects, where *di*+ART –likely due to the influence exerted by the national language– has already specialized for strong indefiniteness and thus cannot consistently cover weak, narrow scope readings. This use may then be transferred to Standard Italian as a result of the interaction between the grammar of Italian and that of its dialectal substratum.



This account not only provides a plausible explanation for the emergence of IDs in Italian and its dialects but also sheds light on a further question arising from RQ2: Why does this pattern appear only in Italian? The answer lies in the fact that, within the Romance family, only Italian possesses a dialectal substratum that is both rich and varied enough to exert a sustained influence on the grammar of the national language.

Having explained the presence of *di*+ART and IDs in Chapters 3 and 4, Chapter 5 shifted the focus to NIDs, an additional non-canonical strategy for conveying indefiniteness that is unique to Italian. The account proposed to explain the presence of this form in Italian is also worth summarizing. Specifically, I have presented reasons to believe that the determiner system of Italian is transitioning from a system where argumental BNs – whether plural, mass, or unmarked for number – are productive, as in Spanish and Catalan, to a system that increasingly requires an overt determiner to introduce nominal arguments, as in French. Nonetheless, in contexts compatible with a number-neutral interpretation of nominal expressions, such as the object position of HAVE-predicates expressing a characterizing HAVE-relation, Italian resorts to argumental definite kinds, which, in turn, trigger the covert DKP type shift. Crucially, type-shifting mechanisms are universally governed by the Blocking Principle (Chierchia 1998b, Dayal 2004), which predicts that NIDs should arise precisely in these contexts. This is because all other existential type shifts available in Italian, which would otherwise be ranked higher under the Blocking Principle, are incompatible with contexts requiring a number-neutral interpretation.

Finally, the representative reading examined in Chapter 6 does not compete with other strategies for expressing indefiniteness in Italian and therefore does not pose an empirical challenge to the research question discussed in this section. This form conveys a definite reading and is attested cross-linguistically. However, it diverges from canonical definite descriptions in that speakers use it when they are ignorant about the exact number and identity of the individuals involved in the event denoted by the main predicate but nevertheless conceptualize them as a well-established and monolithic group.

Overall, considering the interplay of different factors – such as the influence of Italo-Romance dialects, the status of the determiner system in Italian, and universal principles of grammar like the Blocking Principle – provides a plausible explanation for the existence of the multiple forms for the expression of indefiniteness and non-maximality analyzed in this chapter for Italian. This analysis not only offers an adequate answer to the second research question, but also clarifies why only Italian, among Romance languages,

exhibits such a rich array of strategies for the expression of indefiniteness. Next section addresses the final broad research question of this thesis.

### 7.3 The status of the definite article in Italian

The final research question outlined in Chapter 1, repeated below, has a broader empirical scope, focusing particularly on the status of the definite article in Italian.

**RQ3:** *What is the exact status of the definite article in Italian (as compared to Romance)?*

The existence of examples like (2), (3), and (4) illustrates that the definite article in Italian can convey an indefinite interpretation. Beyond the issue of the formal derivation of these constructions –analyzed in depth in the four analytical chapters– this phenomenon makes the Italian definite article a strong candidate for an expletive category. Specifically, expletive items have been defined as truth-conditionally neutral functional categories that introduce an identity function at the level of semantic representation (Tsiakmakis & Espinal 2022). Both the ID in (3) and the NID in (4) apparently meet this criterion. As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, IDs are truth-conditionally equivalent to Romance BNs, while NIDs share the same truth-conditions with Spanish and Catalan NBNs.

Upon closer inspection, however, it becomes evident that the definite article in IDs and NIDs does not constitute a case of syntactic or semantic expletiveness. The definite article in IDs is not a syntactic expletive because it does not fulfill any EPP-related or argumenthood restrictions. In other words, it is not syntactically obligatory and can be omitted, allowing a bare plural to appear instead, as shown in the examples in (1). As a matter of fact, under the framework implemented in this thesis, IDs and BNs correspond to different Spell-Out realizations of the same syntactic structure. IDs are not semantic expletives either. Unlike typical semantic expletives, they do not introduce redundant, expressive, or speech-act-related meaning. Additionally, they are not semantically dependent on a c-commanding definite expression. More importantly, however, unlike other cases of expletive definite articles, I argued that IDs do not introduce identity functions, but rather instantiate a *t*-operator at some point of their derivation, with this meaning later neutralized by the DE-operator.

Similarly, I argue that NIDs do not correspond to syntactic or semantic expletives either. Although their presence may be related to a syntactic requirement of the Italian determiner system –namely, its increasing tendency to introduce arguments with overt determiners, making them superficially similar to syntactic expletives– they are not semantically inert. On the contrary, as demonstrated in Chapter 5, the definite article in NIDs necessarily contributes an *iota* function, which is essential for obtaining the denotation of definite kinds. From this denotation, the existential reading of NIDs is derived through DKP. Therefore, unlike true expletive categories, NIDs cannot be said to merely introduce an identity function at the level of their logical representation.

Overall, the formal analyses of the indefinite interpretations associated with the Italian definite article presented in this thesis confirm that this determiner, like its counterpart in other Romance languages, unambiguously conveys its canonical definite semantics, which is associated with an *iota* operator. Consequently, the general conclusion regarding the status of the definite article in Italian aligns with the traditional semantic treatment of definite articles (e.g., Sharvy 1980; Partee 1987; Chierchia 1998b; Heim 2011) and challenges previous claims in the literature, such as those suggesting that the Italian definite article is a highly grammaticalized and semantically bleached form (e.g., Kupish and Koops 2007), or that it is entirely semantically vacuous, serving merely as the overt realization of morphological material, as proposed, for instance, in Giusti (2015) and Cardinaletti & Giusti (2016, 2018ff).

To conclude, this thesis has thoroughly examined the expression of (in)definiteness and (non-)maximality in Italian, focusing especially on the intricate interactions between (definite) forms and (indefinite) meanings in this language. This study has not only outlined the formal derivations of the various (in)definite and (non-)maximal forms in Italian (e.g., *di*+ART, IDs, NIDs, and RIs) and analyzed their distinct interpretative patterns, but it has also provided new insights into the emergence and distribution of these forms through comparisons with other Romance languages and the underlying dialectal varieties. Taken together, these new findings shed light into the complex dimensions of the expression of (in)definiteness in Italian, which Pinzin and Poletto (2022) aptly describe as an “indefinite maze”.



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