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The partitive article in Old Italian

Early stages in the grammaticalization of the Italian partitive article

Two different constructions of Old Italian have been connected to the Modern Italian partitive article: the construction formed by the preposition *di* followed by a noun without a definite article and the construction featuring the same preposition followed by the definite article and a noun. The latter construction shows the same formation as the partitive article in Modern Italian. In this paper we survey the function of the two constructions in Old Italian and show how they relate to the Modern Italian partitive article. In particular, we argue that the occurrence of the construction containing a noun without the definite article was limited to certain specific contexts, while the construction with the definite article, contrary to common assumptions, did not only occur within the partitive nominal construction, but also extended to the coding of indefiniteness, and could occur not only with direct objects but occasionally even with subjects. This distribution provides compelling evidence for the conclusion that the construction formed by *di* plus the definite article in Old Italian had already started undergoing grammaticalization in the direction of the Modern Italian partitive article.

1 Introduction

In Modern Italian, the partitive article, though routinely used by a large number of speakers, remains in a fuzzy area of the standard language, as witnessed by the fact that even scholarly descriptions often clash with data from actual usage. The reason for this may partly lie in its somewhat limited diatopic distribution, its relatively restricted use in the written register, and possibly in the fact that until at least the 1960s it has been stigmatized in part of the country as a non-standard feature deriving from French influence. With such a problematic synchronic situation, it is no wonder that historical descriptions often do not seem especially compelling. Such a scenario calls for a new assessment of the origin and the distribution of the partitive article in Old Italian, which we intend to present in this paper, by discussing the onset of the grammaticalization process that led to the emergence of the partitive article as it is used in Italian nowadays.

The paper is organized as follows. In Section 2 we provide a brief description of the use of the partitive article in Modern Italian based on a limited corpus study. As in other, better studied, Romance varieties, the Italian partitive article originated from partitive nominal constructions, or PNCs. The latter construction indicates an indefinite part extracted from a definite whole: as defined in Giusti & Sleeman (2021, this volume), partitive constructions “refer to the part-whole relation between an indefinite subset and a definite superset.”¹ Partitive articles, on the other hand, introduce “an indefinite nominal expression” (Giusti & Sleeman 2021, this volume). In other words, while PNCs presuppose a definite set, there is no such presupposition with partitive articles. In Section 3, we provide some historical background, and briefly show how the development started out from Late Latin PNCs attested in the New Testament. Section 4 focuses on some common assumptions concerning Old Italian, and then proceeds with the illustration of our study based on Old Italian texts, and discuss the methodology and the results concerning two constructions: *di* followed by a noun with the definite article and *di* followed by a noun without a definite article. In Section 5 we discuss the diatopic distribution of the data included in our corpus. Section 6 contains the conclusion.

2 The partitive article in Modern Italian

The Modern Italian partitive article is nowadays part of the article system. It functions as a partitive article with uncountable nouns, and as a plural indefinite with count nouns, as shown in (1) and (2) and summarized in Table 1.²

- (1) *A pranzo ho mangiato del formaggio.*
 at lunch eat:PRF.1SG PAR.ART.SG.M cheese(M):SG
 ‘I ate (some) cheese for lunch.’

¹ For a standard definition of partitive nominal constructions see also Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2001: 527), who defines PNCs as “noun phrases consisting of two nominals, one of which is a quantifier”, that “involve a presupposed set of items referred to by one of the nominals (‘that good tea’, ‘Mary’s books’); and the quantifier indicates a subset which is selected from it,” as in ‘a cup of that good tea’.

² The abbreviations in the glosses follow the Leipzig glossing rules when available, integrated by the additional abbreviations in Luraghi & Huumo (2014: vii–xi). With long quotations, we only glossed the part which is relevant for our discussion.

- (2) *Ieri sono venuti dei ragazzi*
 yesterday come:PRF.3PL PAR.ART.PL.M boy(M):PL.M
 ‘Some boys came yesterday.’

Table 1: Italian articles.

	singular count	mass	abstract	plural count
Definite	<i>mangio il panino</i>	<i>mangio il pane</i>	<i>ammiro il coraggio</i>	<i>mangio i panini</i>
Indefinite	<i>mangio un panino</i>			<i>mangio dei panini</i>
Partitive		<i>mangio del pane</i>	<i>ci vuole del coraggio</i>	

Table 1 shows the system of Italian articles based on Renzi (1991) and Grandi (2010). In Italian, contrary to French, the partitive article is not obligatory (on the differences between Italian and French see also Giusti (2021, this volume) and Carlier (2021, this volume)). In cases in which it is omitted, indefiniteness is expressed by the bare noun especially in the case of mass nouns as in (3), while plural count tend to occur with a quantifier such as *alcuni* as in (4), cf. Korzen (1996: ii).

- (3) *A pranzo ho mangiato formaggio.*
 at lunch eat:PRF.1SG cheese
 ‘I ate (some) cheese for lunch.’
- (4) *Ieri sono venuti alcuni ragazzi*
 yesterday come:PRF.3PL some.PL boy.PL
 ‘Some boys came yesterday.’

Moreover, being in free alternation with the bare noun and indefinite quantifiers, the partitive article is generally less widespread than the indefinite article.³

Luraghi (2017) carried out a corpus study based on a portion of the *Corpus e Lessico di Frequenza dell’Italiano Scritto* (CoLFIS) comprising 3,798,275 tokens from three sub-corpora, including newspapers (1.836.119 tokens from *Il Corriere Della Sera*, *Repubblica*, *La Stampa*), periodicals (1.306.653 tokens from 12 different thematic sections, e.g. sport, travel, general information, etc.) and books (655.503 from 13 different genres). She found 2,604 occurrences of the partitive article. A sample containing the first 1,447 occurrences yields the results shown in Table 2.

³ Due to the wide range of diatopic and diaphasic variation, in-depth descriptions of conditions on the alternation partitive pronoun/bare noun are not available. See the discussion in Stark (2006: 136–141).

Table 2: Distribution of partitive articles in Standard Italian.

	ABSTRACT DO	CONCRETE DO	SUBJECT	PREDICATE NOUN	PP/ADVERBIAL
PL. INDEF.	534	401	112	130	98
UNCOUNTABLE	83	57	25	–	7

Table 2 shows the distribution of partitive article in different syntactic functions. As one can see, the vast majority of occurrences function as direct object, and plural indefinite count nouns largely outnumber singular mass and abstract nouns.

Partitive subjects are mostly plural indefinites, and tend to occur with existential verbs or other intransitive verbs, as shown in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: Distribution of partitive subjects across verb types.

Verb type	137
existential predicates	58
intransitive (unaccuative)	39
passive	16
middle reflexive	13
transitive	7
unergative	4

Table 3 shows the distribution of partitive subjects across verb types in Modern Italian. As remarked above, partitive subjects often occur with existential predicates and other intransitives, passive or middle reflexives, but in a limited number of cases they can also occur with transitive and unergative verbs.

The preverbal position is infrequent for NPs with partitive articles, in particular with uncountable nouns. In Table 4 we show the results of a corpus (Albonico 2018) based on the sections of periodicals and daily newspapers in CoLFIS (3,142,772 tokens).

Table 4: Position of subjects with partitive articles.

	postverbal	preverbal	total
Plural indefinite subjects-introduced by <i>degli, dei, delle</i>	104	7	111
Uncountable indefinite subjects introduced by <i>del, dello, della</i>	15	0	15

Out of a total of 971 occurrences of NPs with partitive articles in different syntactic functions, Albonico (2018) found 126 subjects. Out of these total occurrences, as shown in Table 4, 111 contain plural indefinite nouns, placed in post-verbal position in the vast majority of cases (104/7). Occurrences with the singular forms of the partitive article introducing an uncountable NP were only 15, and none of these instances was in preverbal position. Notably, this distribution does not depend on a syntactic restriction, but rather on discourse factors, as indefinite referents are typically new, and tend to occur post-verbally. Subjects, in their turn, tend to refer to referents already introduced in discourse and identifiable both for the speaker and for the hearer, and are typically definite. Hence, indefinite subjects are per se infrequent. A random internet search shows that some occurrences are available, as in (5).

- (5) *Addirittura una volta è scoppiato, nel senso che **del liquido** è uscito fuori*
dal barattolo, bello alto e incredibilmente chiuso col coperchio.
 from+the jar
 ‘Once it even blew up, meaning that some liquid leaked out of the jar, which was quite big and closed with a lid.’

The Modern Italian partitive article features *di* followed by the definite article agreeing in gender and number with the nouns it determines, and formally corresponds to a structure already attested in Old Italian, as we will show in Section 4, see sentences (19) and (18). Notably, in this construction, the status of *di* is that of a morpheme which acquires its meaning in connection with the definite article: the whole construction, but not its sub-components, indicates indefiniteness.

Diachronically, the partitive article originated from PNCs, codifying the part-whole relation,⁴ as in English *I drank some of the wine from that bottle* (see Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2001 and below, example (11)). The Italian PNC, in its turn, combined the Late Latin partitive construction featuring the preposition *de* with the definite article, that did not exist in Latin (see Section 3). The newly created partitive article started out in direct object position, but soon spread to indefinite post-verbal subjects, as argued in Carlier & Lamiroy (2014: 506–514). The current distribution still reflects the diachronic development.

⁴ We follow the description of the steps in the diachronic development of partitive articles in the Romance languages in Carlier & Lamiroy (2014); for a more general perspective of the Romance developments in a typological framework see Luraghi & Kittilä (2014: 49–60).

Carlier (2007: 3) describes the transcategorization process by which at a certain moment in the history of French the partitive article split away from the PNC, following three steps (quoted from Carlier 2007: 26):

- i. The notion of partition set fades away.
- ii. The notion of a non-specified quantity remains.
- iii. The partitive article acquires the new property of marking indefiniteness.

Carlier further points out that “this new property is not determined by the real world properties of the referent, but it is discourse-oriented: it indicates to the hearer that the referent is not uniquely identifiable for him.”

The fact that the preposition *de* originally part of the PNC underwent transcategorization is indicated, among other things, by its distribution, which no longer matches the distribution of proper prepositions. As shown in Table 2, Modern Italian *di*, when occurring as sub-morpheme in the partitive article, can co-occur with other proper prepositions, and indeed it does so in a sizable number of the occurrences. In the corpus analyzed in Luraghi (2017), 105 occurrences out of 1,447 contain PPs and adverbials, as shown in Table 2. Out of these, 17 are adverbials of the type shown in (6).

- (6) *Sta li delle ore*
 stand.PRS.3SG there PAR hour.PL
 ‘S/he stands there for hours.’

PPs include the occurrences shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Occurrences of partitive articles with proper prepositions.

PREPOSITION	NUMBER OF OCCURRENCES
<i>con</i>	46
<i>a</i>	29
<i>per</i>	6
<i>su</i>	4
<i>in</i>	3

Notably, according to Renzi (1991: 378), the partitive article still has a limited usage with primary prepositions, as it cannot occur with *da* ‘from’, *in* ‘in’ and *di* ‘of’. Now, while it is true that one does not normally use ^{??}*di del* or *di dei* (but note that even in French one does not find **de du*), *in* does occur with the partitive article, as shown in Table 5. Even occurrences of *da* are available, and example (7) shows that the latter preposition occurred in this construction already in Manzoni’s *Promessi Sposi* (see further Luraghi & Kittilä 2014; Carlier & Lamiroy 2014).

- (7) *Il viandante che fosse incontrato da de'*
 the passerby who meet:SBJV.IMPF.PASS.3SG by PAR
contadini fuor della strada maestra
 peasants outside of+the road main
 'The passerby who should be encountered by some peasants outside the main road.' (Manzoni, *I promessi sposi*)

In spite of not being obligatory as its French counterparts, the Modern Italian partitive article is not subject to lexical restrictions. In particular, beside mass nouns it is also frequently used with abstract nouns, as in (8) and (9).⁵

- (8) *Fin quando la guerra verrà considerata un male*
 until when ART.SG war will.be considered an evil
avrà sempre del fascino.
 have.FUT.3SG always PAR fascination
 'As long as war is regarded as wicked, it will always have its fascination.'
- (9) *Qual è la ricetta per un matrimonio felice? Charlton: Ci vuole della tolleranza,*
 one.needs PAR tolerance
della comprensione, della flessibilità e un marito fantastico. Si dà il caso
 PAR understanding PAR flexibility and a husband fantastic
che io riunisca tutte queste qualità.
 (Interview with Charlton Eston, CoLFIS periodicals)
 'What is the recipe for a happy marriage? Charlton: You need PAR tolerance, PAR understanding, PAR flexibility, and a fantastic husband. It is the case that I have all these qualities.'

⁵ According to Stark (2007: 50), abstract nouns cannot occur with partitive articles in Modern Italian. She mentions as an ungrammatical structure the phrase *della pazienza*. A random internet search shows that even the noun *pazienza* can occur with the partitive article, as shown in the following example.

Ha avuto della pazienza Domenico Marciano nella
 have:PRF.3SG PAR patience Domenico Marciano in+the
ricerca e ha avuto molta perizia nella ricostruzione
 research and have:PRF.3SG much care in+the reconstruction
di 500 anni di relazioni
 of 500 years of relations

'Domenico Marciano has been patient in research and careful in the reconstruction of a 500 years' relation' (*Cinquecento anni di storia: le relazioni tra l'Italia e le Filippine*, by D. Marcianò, from P. Crupi's Introduction).

In example (8), the direct object is an abstract noun, *fascino*, and takes the partitive article. In (9) three abstract nouns *tolleranza*, *comprensione*, *flessibilità* feature the partitive article and are coordinated with an indefinite count noun *un marito*. They occur in a sentence with the impersonal verb *ci vuole* ‘one needs’.

The construction containing an NP with a partitive article in Modern Italian remains homophonous with another construction in which *di* retains its original status of preposition, and the same was also true in Old Italian. Let us consider the occurrences in (10). Here, the complex *del* ‘of the’ contains the preposition *di*, which indicates adnominal dependency, and the definite article *il*, both in the Modern Italian (10a) and in the Old Italian (10b) examples. Similarly, after a quantifying expression the preposition indicates dependency from the quantifier as in (11). In such cases, we find PNCs, in which a quantity is singled out from a pre-established whole. Again, the Modern Italian construction in (11a) matches the corresponding Old Italian one in (11b).

- (10) a. *La macchina del professore.*
 the car of+DEF.ART.SG.M professor
 ‘The professor’s car.’
- b. *non per amor del flore ma per amor*
 not for love of+DEF.ART.SG.M flower but for love
 del frutto;
 of+DEF.ART.SG.M fruit
 ‘Not for love of the flower but for love of the fruit.’
 (*Proverbia que dicitur*, XII u.q. venez.)⁶
- (11) a. *Ho invitato alcuni dei ragazzi.*
 invite:PRF.1SG some PAR boy:PL
 ‘I invited some of the boys.’
- b. *per sapere se alcuna delle parti è vera o falsa*
 for know if any of+DEF.ART.PL.F part is true or false
 ‘In order to know if any of the parts is true or false.’
 (Brunetto Latini, *Rettorica* 84.7)

The Modern Italian partitive article does not have the same distribution in all diatopic varieties of regional Italian: in particular, it is less used in Central and

⁶ For the regional origin of Old Italian texts we kept the abbreviations used in TLIO <http://tlio.oiv.cnr.it/TLIO/>.

Southern Italy than in the Northern part of the country.⁷ This skewed distribution, along with its possible omission in a large part of contexts, shows that the Modern Italian partitive article is not yet as fully grammaticalized as its French counterpart and, as we will argue in Section 5, reflects the distribution that the partitive article already showed at its onset in Old Italian.

3 Late Latin partitive constructions

The construction that gave rise to partitive articles in the Romance languages is a PNC already attested in Late Latin, which could be used as direct object, as shown in examples (12)–(14) from the New Testament. The data surveyed in this Section is discussed in Luraghi (2013).

- (12) *dicīt eis Iesus adferte de piscibus quos prendidistis nunc.*
 say:PRS.3SG 3.DAT.PL Jesus:NOM bring:IMPER.PRS.3PL from
 fish:ABL.PL REL.ACC.PL catch:PRF.2PL now
 ‘Jesus said to them, ‘Bring some of the fish that you have just caught!’
 (John 21.10)

- (13) *et misit ad agricolas in tempore servum ut ab agricolis acciperet de fructu vineae*
 and send:PF.3SG to peasant:ACC.PL in time:ABL servant:ACC for from
 peasant:ABL.PL collect:SBJV.IMPF.3SG from fruit:ABL vineyard:GEN
 ‘At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some
 of the fruit of the vineyard.’ (Mark 12.2)

- (14) *et ipse in nobis quoniam de Spiritu suo dedit nobis*
 and 3SG.NOM in 1PL.ABL because from spirit:ABL
 POSS.3SG.ABL give:PRF.3SG 1PL.DAT
 ‘[We know that we live in him] and he in us, because he has given us of
 his Spirit.’ (1 John 4.13)

⁷ See Cardinaletti & Giusti (2018) with data collected from AIS, and Cardinaletti & Giusti (2020), which contains the results from a survey carried out with questionnaires covering speakers from 15 of the 20 regions of Italy.

The type of PNC exemplified in (12)-(14) did not occur in Classical Latin. At that time PNCs consisted of genitive NPs, or of PPs with the preposition *ex* ‘out of’ (or, only occasionally, *de* ‘from’), always preceded by a quantifier or an indefinite pronoun, as shown in (15) and (16).⁸

- (15) *unus ex captivis, . . . , inquit*
 one.NOM out.of prisoner.ABL.PL say.prs.3sg
 ‘one of the prisoners said’ (Caes. *G.* 6.35.8)
- (16) *illa pars epistulae tuae minime*
 DEM.NOM.F part(F).NOM letter(F).GEN POSS.2SG.GEN.F minimally
fuit necessaria
 be.PRF.3SG necessary.NOM.F
 ‘That part of your letter was not at all necessary.’ (Cic. *Att.* 1.17.5)

In the New Testament, the partitive constructions introduced by *de* are not preceded by any quantifier, and they are always used in order to translate the Greek prepositions *ek* or *apó* (see Luraghi 2013).⁹

From examples (12)-(14) it appears that a variety of different types of noun could already occur referring to a specific whole in the Late Latin PNC: in (12) we find a plural count noun, while (13) contains a collective noun and (14) an abstract noun. These constructions always have a true partitive meaning, as the *de* phrase indicates a specified referent, a part of which is affected by the action described by the predicate; they do not have a possible indefinite interpretation, as grammaticalized partitives can have. This is also shown by the fact that they

⁸ The partitive use of the genitive well attested in several ancient and modern Indo-European languages (see Luraghi & Kittilä 2014 for an overview, Luraghi 2003: 61–62 and Conti & Luraghi 2014 on Ancient Greek, Dahl 2014 on Indo-Iranian languages, Paykin 2014 and Daniel 2014 on Russian among many others) was marginal in Latin, and the often quoted occurrence of the partitive genitive *aquae* in Cato shown below remains virtually isolated.

Farinam in mortarium indito; aquae paulatim addto
 flour:ACC in mortar:ACC pour:IMP.FUT.3SG water:GEN little.by.little add.IMP. 3SG
 ‘Pour flour in the mortar; add (some) water little by little’ (Cato, *Agr.* 74; see Väänänen 1981).

⁹ In Late Latin the genitive started being replaced by prepositional phrases with *de* plus ablative, leading to Romance prepositions including French *de* and Italian *di*. See Väänänen (1981a: 113–114, 1981b) and Gianollo (2012). That the Latin construction is not simply a calque of Greek is shown by the fact that it belongs to this wider process of replacement, and that it marks the onset of the development of partitive articles. These have no parallels in Greek, even though the genitive in partitive constructions was largely replaced by PPs with *apó* see Mertyris (2014).

appear always with particular types of determiners or modifiers that identify the specific referent: the relative clause *quos prendidistis nunc* ‘that you have just caught’ in (12), the genitive NP *vineae* ‘of the vineyard’ in (13), and the possessive *suo* ‘his’ in (14). As we will show in Section 4.3, this is also a feature of the Old Italian construction formed by *di* followed by a bare noun, in which, too, a determiner or a modifier typically occurs.

As has been observed by Kittilä & Luraghi (2014), *de piscibus* in (12) means ‘some of those specific fish that you have caught’, and could not possibly mean ‘some (indefinite) fish’, as Italian *dei pesci* or French *des poissons* normally mean. The use of the Latin preposition *de* in the Latin examples is connected with both constructions attested in Old Italian that will be surveyed in Section 4, that is, the one featuring *di* without the definite article (Section 4.3), and the one in which *di* combines with the definite article (Section 4.4). Crucially, however, it never has a possible indefinite reading. Only later, in some specific contexts and inside certain Romance varieties, did the preposition start merging with the definite article, undergo transcategorization as argued in Section 2, and eventually the whole construction shifted to an indefinite reading. We can then assume that there is continuity between the Late Latin partitive construction discussed here and the partitive construction with the definite article that starts to convey an indefinite meaning in Old Italian, to which we now turn.

4 The partitive article in Old Italian

In this Section, we discuss the data from Old Italian, and describe the construction that points to the emergence of the partitive article. We take as our starting point in Section 4.1 the description in Renzi (2010). After having described our methodology in Section 4.2, we discuss the occurrences in which *di* is followed by a bare noun functioning as direct object (Section 4.3), and then proceed to discussing occurrences that feature *di* combining with the definite article (Section 4.4).

4.1 The partitive article in Old Italian: Shared wisdom

According to Renzi (2010: 346), “In Old Italian the partitive article of Modern Italian instantiated in the type: *ho visto dei bambini* [I saw some children], *per la strada giocavano dei bambini* [some children were playing in the street] does not

exist . . . The partitive meaning is expressed by quantifiers (possibly not overtly realized) followed by *di* + NP,”¹⁰ as in example (17), also quoted by Renzi.

- (17) *Tesoro volgarizzato* vol. 4 libro 9: 381–382
dire dinanzi a loro di grandi parole e
 tell:INF in_front at 3PL.OBL of big:PL word:PL and
graziose
 pleasant:PL
 ‘Tell them (some) high-sounding and pleasant words.’

Renzi (2010) states further that “the combination of *di* + definite article . . . represents a definite set from which an indefinite quantity is extracted . . . Such phrases, differently from Modern Italian, occur always and only in direct object position.”¹¹ In other words, the combination *di* + definite article, according to Renzi, always only instantiates a PNC. As evidence for his claim, Renzi mentions example (18) (but see the discussion below); another occurrence is example (19).

- (18) Chiaro Davanzati, *Rime*, son. 89 v. 11; mid-13th century
Ma sempre si procaccia de l' onore.
 but always REFL seek:PRS.3SG of DEF.ART.SG.M honor
 ‘But he always seeks (some) honor.’

- (19) Ugucione da Lodi, *Libro XIII*, mid-13th century
Ela mançà del pomo qe li
 she eat: PST.3SG of+DEF.ART.SG.M apple REL 3SG.DAT
de' un serpente.
 give: PST.3SG a snake
 ‘She ate (some of) the apple that a snake gave her.’

According to Renzi (2010), within constructions such as (18) and (19), the partitive reading is available because a null quantifier occurs, on which the element introduced by *di* depends.

¹⁰ “In it. ant. non esiste l'articolo partitivo dell'it. mod. rappresentato dal tipo: *ho visto dei bambini, per la strada giocavano dei bambini* . . . Il senso della partitività è espresso da quantificatori (eventualmente non espressi) seguiti da *di* + SN.”

¹¹ “. . . la combinazione *di* + Art. def. . . rappresenta un insieme definito dal quale viene estratta una quantità indefinita . . . Questi sintagmi, diversamente che in it. mod., appaiono sempre e solo nella posizione di oggetto diretto.”

Leaving aside the assumption of a null quantifier, which necessarily depends on one's wider theoretical persuasions, Renzi's analysis holds for the phrase *del pomo* '(some) of the apple' in (19), in which the relative clause specifies the whole from which a part is taken, hence the interpretation as PNC. However, the same analysis appears to be much less compelling in the case of abstract nouns, as in (18), in which *de l'onore* '(some) honor' does not support the partition reading (see further Mula 2017: 470). Indeed, the phrase *de l'onore* does not seem to refer to a pre-established whole, and rather appears to have the same partitive/indefinite meaning as the corresponding Modern Italian *dell'onore* (*cerca di ottenere dell'onore/onore*).

In order to test Renzi's (2010) claims, which constitute the most recent description of Old Italian, in Sections 4.3 and 4.4 we consider both constructions, and discuss the data briefly surveyed in this Section, along with the data extracted through our own corpus research from the Old Italian OVI corpus. We thus intend to pinpoint the onset and earliest stages of the grammaticalization of the Italian partitive article.

4.2 Methodology and goals of the analysis

Our study is based on occurrences extracted from the most representative database of Early Italian: the OVI corpus. This resource has been developed by the Italian National Research Center (CNR). The corpus consists of 2335 texts prior to 1375, representing the whole collection of early Italian texts made accessible by the *Opera del Vocabolario Italiano* (Italian Dictionary Institution). The corpus is periodically updated and consisted of around 29.208.359 tokens when updated on 31 August 2020. It can be accessed at the link:

[http://gattoweb.ovi.cnr.it/\(S\(50yvze55udnhcw45bk4jqhq1\)\)/CatForm01.aspx](http://gattoweb.ovi.cnr.it/(S(50yvze55udnhcw45bk4jqhq1))/CatForm01.aspx) (last accessed on 25 April 2021).

The corpus can be searched by word forms, and only partially by lemmas. Thanks to this resource, we have been able to consider the very early phase of written Italian for what concerns the development of the partitive article, and also had the possibility of observing texts from different geographical areas.

Unfortunately, the lemma search could not be implemented for our type of query. Hence, we searched the corpus by forms, and looked for all occurrences of *di*, and for all occurrences consisting of *di* plus various possible forms of the definite article. Out of the occurrences resulting from this search, we selected only those in which *di* is used to introduce an argument of a verb, the direct object or the subject. In particular we kept distinct such constructions from constructions in which *di* indicates nominal dependency (notably, this latter function covers

most occurrences). The same operation was needed with the forms composed by *di* plus the definite article. We tried to gather a number of sentences large enough to examine in detail the distribution and the functions of the mentioned structures, so that, in spite of the yet infrequent occurrence of the construction, which was starting to emerge at the time of the texts we surveyed, we are able to base our considerations on a quantitative analysis.

We examined every different form in association to specific elements of the context; for example, looking for elements in object position, we selected only occurrences in which the construction appeared after a verb. In this way we reduced the number of contexts that we had to examine and were able to search the entire corpus. We selected in total 167 occurrences, that we summarize in Table 6. The percentage column indicates the percentage of constructions with definite article over the total, and the percentages in which *di* plus definite article can have an indefinite reading with specific types of noun and in the total occurrences with definite article.

Table 6: Occurrences of *di* introducing a verbal argument.

Total 167	No definite article	With definite article	%
	9 (7 with <i>fare</i>)	158	94.6
	Partitive	Possible indefinite	
Abstract nouns	10	8	44.4
Mass Nouns	75	23	25.5
Plural count	20	20	50
Possible subjects		2 (abstract)	
Total	105	53	33.5

It is worth noting that with this kind of search we have included also subjects located in postverbal position. Preverbal subjects introduced by *di* and the definite article were searched in a similar way, selecting only constructions in preverbal position. With the construction featuring *di* without the definite article, reducing the number of occurrences by selecting only those in postverbal position did not yield reliable results, because *di* could also be used to indicate dependency between two verbal forms. For this reason, we searched more specifically for the occurrences in which *di* was followed by a noun or by an adjective, including determiners and quantifiers.

After the extraction we proceeded to the analysis of the contexts we extracted with our search. We considered separately *di* when followed by a noun without a definite article and when combined with the definite article, in order to analyze the two different constructions based on Renzi's (2010) claims discussed in Section 4.1. More specifically we wanted to understand if the functions of the partitive article

of Modern Italian were, at least partially, already present in Old Italian and if the construction from which the modern partitive article originates (*di*+definite article) already conveyed at least occasionally the same indefinite meaning.

4.3 The construction *di* noun without a definite article

The construction formed by *di* followed by a noun that does not have a definite article is infrequent (9 out of 167 occurrences) and appears only in specific contexts, characterized by the occurrence of a given predicate or a specific noun phrase structure. In the sample we analyzed this construction frequently (4 out of 9 occurrences) co-occurs with a demonstrative such as *questo* ‘this’ or *quello* ‘that’ or with a quantifier, as shown in Section 4.3.1. We also found several (7 out of 9) occurrences with attributive modifiers and the verb *fare* ‘do, make’ that we discuss in Section 4.3.2.

The fact that in Old Italian the construction that contains *di* plus noun without a definite article was limited to particular collocational contexts, as we will argue, seems to rule out the possibility of continuity between this construction and the Modern Italian partitive article. The occasional similarity in the meaning of *di* in such constructions and the modern partitive article, highlighted by Renzi (2010), is not supported by our findings from the OVI corpus, as in most occurrences we found that the construction featuring *di* plus a noun without the definite article does not seem to be semantically equivalent to the Modern Italian partitive article. In addition, even its development seems to remain separate from the development of the partitive article.

4.3.1 Constructions in which *di* does not combine with the definite article

In most occurrences in which the noun that follows *di* does not have a definite article, the noun still takes a demonstrative or a quantifier. In the sentence in (20), the noun phrase in direct object position contains *di* followed by the proximal demonstrative *questi* ‘these’.

- (20) Pistole di Seneca, XIV m. (fior.): 51
Che abbiām noi a fare di questi bagni caldi, per
do:INF of DEM.PL bath:PL hot:PL for
diseccare, e sottigliare il corpo?
dry:INF and slim_up:INF DEF.ART.SG.M body:SG
‘Why should we take such hot baths, in order to dry and slim up our body?’

In passages such as (20), the occurrence of *di* entails a shift in the meaning of the demonstrative. The expression *di questi* means ‘of this kind’, and specifies an object that has particular properties and characteristics implied in the previous discourse or in the context. The construction with *di* and the distal demonstrative *quello* ‘that’ has a similar meaning. When the demonstrative occurs, the feature of indefiniteness does not concern the reference of the noun phrase: rather, it characterizes its type.

The same construction also occurs with plural NPs that contain a quantifier between *di* and the noun, as in (21).

- (21) Bind. d. Scelto (ed. Gozzi), a. 1322 (sen.): c. 530
E’ lo’ dice di molte belle
 1SG.NOM 3PL.OBL tell: PRS.3SG of many:PL.F beautiful:PL.F
parole.
 word(F):PL
 ‘He tells them many beautiful words.’

In example (21), the occurrence of *di* does not seem to be the trigger for an indefinite interpretation of the direct object. In Old Italian common verbs like *dire* ‘say’ or *fare* ‘do’ are attested both in this construction, and in the parallel construction that does not contain *di* (*dice molte belle parole*), without relevant changes in their meaning.

A demonstrative may also follow *di* with the generic noun *cose* ‘things’, as in (22).

- (22) Stat. fior., 1310/13: c. 44
E cotali che facessono di quelle cose...
 and DEM.PL REL do:SBJV.IMPF.3PL of DEM.PL.F thing(F):PL
 ‘And those who would do such things, ...’

In (22) the noun phrase in direct object position is indefinite and has a very vague reference, as indicated both by the generic noun *cose* ‘things’ and the expression *di quelle* ‘of such type’. This kind of construction can occasionally be linked to another element of the discourse or to some element from the wider external context. However, it is most often followed by a suspension of the discourse, as in (22), pointing to the difficulty of describing otherwise the referents involved in the situation. Notably, in Modern Standard Italian this construction still occurs with a generic meaning; an example is sentence (23), extracted through a random internet search.

- (23) *Ho 73 anni e mai ho visto*
 have:PRS.1SG 73 year:PL and never see:PRF.3SG
di queste cose.
 of DEM.PL.F thing(F):PL
 ‘I am 73 years old and I have never seen such things.’

Example (23) shows that the construction containing *di* followed by a noun preceded by a demonstrative is attested also in Modern Italian, with the same meaning as it already had in Old Italian, hence it cannot be taken as representing a stage in the grammaticalization of the partitive article.

4.3.2 The construction ‘fare di’

A similar construction features the verb *fare* ‘do, make’ followed by *di* and a plural bare noun, usually accompanied by an attribute. It generally co-occurs with the generic noun *cose* ‘things’, as in (22), but often without a demonstrative. An example is (24).

- (24) Brunetto Latini, *Rettorica*, c. 1260–61 (fior.) p. 32
Et nota che arditi sono di due maniere:
l’ una che pigliano a ffare di grandi
 DEF.ART.SG.F one:SG.F REL take:PRS.3SG to do:INF of great:PL.F
cose con provvedimento di ragione, e questi sono savi; . . .
 deed(F):PL
 ‘And pay attention to the fact that they are bold in two ways: in the first case they start doing (some) great deeds, reasoning about what they do, and those are wise.’

In example (24) the direct object exhibits an indefinite meaning similar to the meaning of the Modern Italian partitive article, but a comparison is hampered by the lexically restricted use of the Old Italian construction. Example (25) shows that other nouns are also attested within the same construction, even though in this specific case the expression seems to take an idiomatic meaning.

- (25) Bind. d. Scelto (ed. Gorra), a. 1322 (sen.): c.279
Che le fanno di gran beffe per loro dolci parole.
 REL 3PL.OBL make:PRS.3PL of big joke:PL
 ‘Who mock them much, because of their sweet words.’

In (25), the expression *fare di gran beffe* has the meaning ‘mock’, a meaning that remains in the Modern Italian idiom *farsi beffe*, which, notably, does not feature either *di* or the partitive article. Hence, even in the case of the construction with *fare*, one cannot assume continuity in the development toward the Modern Italian partitive article.¹²

4.4 The construction *di* plus definite article

The construction constituted by *di* plus the definite article already occurred in Old Italian, and, based on the data we extracted, was much more frequent than the construction without a definite article, as shown in Table 6, with 158 occurrences out of 167. According to Renzi (2010) this construction was restricted to the direct object position and always necessarily referred to an indefinite part extracted from a definite whole, that is, it only occurred within PNCs.

It is worth recalling that in Old Italian *di* combined with the definite article also introduced adnominal modifiers, as we have shown in example (10b). For this reason, the first step in our analysis consisted in identifying the occurrences in which the construction introduced a verbal argument and separating them from adnominal constructions. We then divided the sentences we found on the basis of the nature of the noun introduced by *di* plus definite article, and looked at the extent of their presence in the corpus, either with a partitive or with an indefinite meaning.

In our discussion of the data, we start with sentences in which the definite article is singular and occurs with abstract nouns (Section 4.4.1) and, to a larger

12 Another type of construction in which a verb argument is preceded by *di* in Old Italian occurs with verbs of hitting and fighting, also discussed in *LEI* s.v. Notably, such occurrences feature a different semantics, as shown in the following example.

<i>Se ti</i>	<i>piacesse</i>	<i>che tua mano none colpisse</i>	<i>di</i>
if 2SG.OBL	like:SBJV.IMPF.3SG	that your hand neither hit:SBJV.IMPF.3SG	of
<i>spada né lanciasse</i>	<i>dardo,</i>		
sword nor throw:SBJV.IMPF.3SG	arrow		

credo che tua rinomea no ne sarebbe né fratta né rotta . . .

‘Even if you wouldn’t like your hand to hit with a sword or throw arrows, I believe that your reputation wouldn’t get ruined for this.’ *Fatti di Cesare*, XIII ex. (sen.).

The function of the NP introduced by *di* is instrumental. Syntactically, this can be considered an argument of the verb or perhaps an adjunct, but it is certainly not a direct object, as are the occurrences in examples (20)–(25). The NP introduced by *di* indicates the means with which the action is performed, and does not entail any of the meanings connected with partitivity or indefiniteness.

extent, mass nouns (Section 4.4.2). We then discuss occurrences of *di* combining with the definite article with plural count nouns (Section 4.4.3). In all three groups, we did in fact find occurrences in which *di* plus definite article introduces a PNC, and actually indicates an indefinite part extracted from a definite whole. However, as we will argue, another type of occurrences also emerged from our data, in which an indefinite reading is likely. In such occurrences the ‘part of a whole’ reading does not fit in the context in which it appears, as no whole from which the indefinite part could be extracted seems to be identifiable.

Contrary to common assumptions, we also found a limited number of occurrences in which the construction *di* plus definite article functions as subject. We discuss them in Section 4.4.4.

4.4.1 Abstract nouns

In Old Italian, the construction featuring *di* followed by the singular definite article may occur with abstract nouns, even though the majority of the occurrences (98 out of 158) show concrete (mass) nouns. The partition meaning is occasionally available, as we show in Section 4.4.1.1. However, as we argue in Section 4.4.1.2, most frequently identifying the whole from which a quantity is extracted is difficult if not impossible.

4.4.1.1 Partitive reading

Example (26) contains a direct object introduced by *di* followed by the singular definite article and an abstract noun *allegrezza* ‘happiness’.

(26) Giovanni Colombini, a. 1367 (sen.): 49

<i>fa=</i>	<i>lla</i>	<i>sentire</i>	<i>dell’</i>
make:IMPER.PRS.2SG=	3SG.ACC.F	feel:INF	of+DEF.ART.SG.F
<i>allegrezza,</i>	<i>che ebbe</i>	<i>la</i>	<i>sua</i>
happiness(F):SG	REL have:PST.3SG	DEF.ART.SG.F	POSS.3SG.SG.F
<i>santissima</i>	<i>Madre.</i>		
holy:SUP.L.SG.F	mother(F):SG		
‘Let her feel some of the happiness that her holy mother felt.’			

In (26), the direct object *dell’allegrezza* is modified by means of a relative clause that supports the partitive meaning, specifying the whole from which the object is extracted, that is, “the (greater) happiness felt by her holy mother”. Hence, this occurrence must be taken as a PNC.

4.4.1.2 Possible indefinite reading

When an abstract noun appears within a construction formed by *di* plus definite article, an indefinite reading is available in 44.4% of the occurrences. Indeed, in occurrences such as (18), discussed in Section 4.1, it is difficult if not impossible to identify a pre-established whole from which the mentioned element is extracted, that is, a contextually defined partition set, and the same holds for (27), discussed below. In such occurrences, the meaning of the construction comes close to the indefiniteness meaning conveyed by the partitive article in Modern Italian.

- (27) Pistole di Seneca, XIV m. (fior.): 38.27

<i>Anticamente le</i>	<i>genti</i>	<i>andavano</i>	<i>cercando</i>
anciently	DEF.ART.PL.F	people:PL	go:IMPF.3PL
<i>dell'</i>	<i>amistà,</i>	<i>ora</i>	<i>cercano</i>
di+DEF.ART.SG.F	friendship(F):SG	now	look_for: PRS.3PL

guadagno.
profit:SG
'In ancient times people looked for (some) friendship, now they look for profit.'

In example (27), the direct object introduced by *di* and the definite article, *dell'amistà* 'friendship', is parallel to another object consisting of a bare noun *guadagno* 'profit'. Both objects are indefinite. Interestingly, both means are also used to express indefiniteness in Modern Italian, as we showed in Section 2. For what concerns the NP *dell'amistà*, it does not seem possible to find the reference and not even a hint to a pre-established definite whole: hence, the occurrence requires an indefinite, rather than a partitive reading. Another similar occurrence that also shows the parallelism between a bare noun and an abstract noun introduced by *di* and the definite article is (28).

- (28) Ottimo, Inf., a. 1334 (fior.)

<i>Potrebbe essere</i>	<i>in due modi:</i>	<i>l'uno</i>	<i>pervanagloria, (...);</i>	<i>l' altro</i>
it_could be	in two ways:	the one	for pride;	the other
<i>per guadagnare</i>	<i>della</i>	<i>lusinga, e</i>	<i>indirizzare</i>	<i>altri</i>
to earn	of+def.ART.SG.F	flattery and	address	others

a mal fine (...);
to bad end.
'It could be in two different ways: either for pride or to obtain some flattery and make other people end up badly.'

In (28) the abstract NP *della lusinga* 'some flattery' is parallel to the bare noun *vana-gloria* 'pride'; even in this situation a partitive reading does not fit with the context.

Comparing the situation described in (27) and (28) with example (18) quoted in Section 4, one can remark that the interpretation of the object is similar. In (18), the construction featuring *di* and the definite article also supports the same indefinite meaning of the corresponding construction in Modern Italian, that is, the partitive article. The Old Italian occurrences show the onset of the process that led the partitive construction with indefinite nouns to shift to an indefinite meaning, and the complex *di* plus definite article to undergo transcategorization and become a partitive article, as it is in Modern Italian.

4.4.2 Mass nouns

Mass nouns constitute the largest group of nouns that occur with *di* followed by the singular definite article. This construction in Old Italian may have two different meanings when occurring as direct object. In the first place, reference can be made to a well-defined whole from which a quantity is extracted and the presence of the *di* plus definite article is interpreted as mean of expression of the partition meaning. In other words, we may have PNCs, as we argue in Section 4.4.2.1. This first type of construction is more conservative and corresponds to an early stage of grammaticalization, as it reflects a similar use of the Latin PNC with *de* described in Section 3. With some other occurrences, on the other hand, no pre-established definite whole can be identified, and the reading is indefinite as in Modern Italian, as we show in Section 4.4.2.2. In both cases, verbs of transfer ('give') and consumption ('eat') are frequent.

4.4.2.1 Partitive reading

With mass nouns introduced by *di* plus definite article the partition reading is rather widespread in Old Italian (74.5 % of the occurrences). Examples (29) and (30) show reference to a definite whole that does not allow any doubt about the partition meaning expressed by the NP introduced by *di* plus definite article, hence its nature of PNC.

(29) Giordano da Pisa, Quar. fior., 1306 (pis./fior.): 52

<i>questo panno si perde', levandone tu un pelo,</i>				<i>e</i>	<i>egli intenderebbe</i>	
				and	he wish:COND.PRS.3SG	
<i>che sse</i>	<i>ne</i>	<i>perdesse</i>		<i>del</i>	<i>capitale</i>	
that REFL	PAR	get lost:SBJV.IMP.3SG		of+DEF.ART.SG.M	amount(M)	
<i>de'</i>	<i>denari</i>	<i>che</i>	<i>costò.</i>			
of+DEF.ART.PL	money:PL	REL	cost:PST.3SG			

'This tissue lost (value) because you took away a thread from it, and he wishes that (something) is subtracted from the amount of money that it was paid.'

(30) Fatti di Cesare, XIII ex. (sen.): Luc. L.3, c.9

et àvi uno arbolo che chi
 and have:PRS.3SG INDEF.ART.SG.M tree(M):SG REL who
mangia del frutto non può
 eat: PRS.3SG of+DEF.ART.SG.M fruit(M):SG NEG can:PRS.3SG
morire.
 die:INF
 ‘There is a tree – whoever eats (some of) its fruit cannot die.’

In example (29) the direct object *del capitale* is specified through the following noun phrase that refers to the whole amount of money that was paid, from which an indefinite part was subtracted. It is worth noting that the partition meaning is anticipated by the partitive particle *ne* that refers to the pre-existing whole amount of money.

In example (30) the pre-existing whole is anticipated, and functions as head of the relative clause that contains the partitive construction: “there is a (specific) tree”. Then, the main characteristic of the tree is specified. This characterization concerns a part of the whole, that is, “its fruit”, expressed by the direct object and introduced by *di* plus definite article. In this case, too, we have to do with a PNC, expressing the partition meaning. The indefinite quantity is indicated by the word *frutto* ‘fruit’ that, in this context, most likely does not refer to a single unit (a piece of fruit) but to all the fruit generated by the tree, conceptualized as a mass. It is important to note that, even if one takes *frutto* as referring to a single fruit of this specific tree, the mass reading is still available, as shown in (19), that we have already discussed in Section 4.1. In (19) the verb ‘eat’ takes as direct object the phrase *del pomo qe li de’ un serpente*, referring to an indefinite part/quantity of an apple that was given to her by a snake.

4.4.2.2 Possible indefinite reading

In 25.5% of the occurrences with mass nouns, the construction *di* plus definite article does not support an interpretation as PNC, but rather indicates indefiniteness, as does the Modern Italian partitive article. Examples (31) and (32) contain mass nouns in direct object position introduced by *del/della* that points toward a partitive/indefinite reading, as they refer to an indefinite quantity of a substance without reference to the whole from which this quantity is extracted.

- (31) Elucidario, XIV in. (mil.): L.1, 91

Tu vorisse ke fisse dado
 2SG.NOM want:SBJV.IMPF.2SG that give:SBJV.PSTPF.3SG
del pan se tu avise fame,
 PAR bread:SG if you be_hungry:SBJV.PSTPF.2SG
del vin on de l' aqua
 of+DEF.ART.SG.M wine:SG or PAR water:SG
se tu avisse sede e in cossi de le altre nesesitate.
 if 2SG.NOM be_thirsty:SBJV.PSTPF.2SG
 'You would want to be given bread if you're hungry, wine or water if you're thirsty, and similarly for other needs.'

- (32) *Quando fui desto innanzi la dimane,*
 when be: PST.1SG awake before DEF.ART.SG.F next_day
pianger senti' fra 'l sonno i
 cry:INF hear:PST.1SG in DEF.ART.SG.M sleep:SG DEF.ART.PL.M
miei figliuoli / ch'eran con meco, e dimandar
 POS:1SG.PL.M son(M):PL REL be:IMPF.3PL with me and ask_for:INF
del pane.
 PAR bread:SG
 'Before the dawn, I awoke and heard my sons, who were there with me, cry from their troubled sleep, asking for bread.'

As one can note from examples (31) and (32) *di* plus definite article constructions featuring mass nouns and supporting an indefinite reading often refer to food (*pane* 'bread') or drinks (*aqua* 'water', *vino* 'wine'). In such occurrences, the mass is mentioned with no possible reference to a pre-established whole; hence, one must assume that the reference is indefinite. In (31), the direct objects occur within a desiderative sentence and the reference is intensional (non-specific and non-referential). We find a similar situation in the following sentence (32), as no actual referent is indicated by the noun phrase *del pane* 'some bread': indeed, Ugolino, who's telling his story to Dante in this passage, was being starved to death in his cell with his children, and there was no food around that could constitute the pre-established whole presupposed by a PNC. As in (31), the reference is indefinite and non-specific, as the verb 'ask for' does not require having a specific referent as its direct object.

4.4.3 Plural count nouns

The construction formed by *di* plus definite article may introduce plural count nouns. Similar to the construction with abstract and mass nouns, in Old Italian this construction can have either a partitive meaning and instantiate the PNC, as we show in Section 4.4.3.1, or an indefinite meaning, as argued in Section 4.4.3.2. Remarkably, the partitive reading is as widespread as the indefinite reading (see Table 6). For what concerns the partitive reading, it appears that the reference to a specific set of elements that includes the direct object introduced by *di* plus definite article could be indicated with various linguistics means, such as, for example, the occurrence of a possessive element or the introduction of a restrictive relative clause with a specifying function.

4.4.3.1 Partitive reading

In (33) we show an occurrence that could only be interpreted as featuring a PNC in direct object position, introduced by the article *delle*.

- (33) Brunetto Latini, *Rettorica* 109.17, c. 1260–61 (fior.)
s' elli scampassero e pervenissero a porto che
elli offerrebboro delle loro cose
 they offer:COND.PRS.3PL of+DEF.ART.PL.F POSS.3PL belonging(F):PL
a quello deo che là fosse.
 to DEM.SG.M god(M):SG REL there be:SBJV.IMPF.3sg
 'If they were rescued and reached the shore, they would offer some of
 their belongings to the god they found there.'

In example (33) the direct object phrase, introduced by the construction *di* plus definite article, also contains the possessive adjective *loro* 'their'. This possessive element refers to a precise pre-existing whole, someone's belongings, from which some are said to be extracted. The possessive has the function of indicating reference to a pre-established whole: the set of elements possessed by/related to a certain person or group of persons. Such possessives occur in our sample in association to the PNC, not only with plural count nouns but also with mass nouns. Another linguistic means to obtain the reference to a whole consists of a relative clause as in (34).

- (34) Milione, XIV in. (tosco.)

Li due fratelli li donarono delle gioie
 the two brother:PL 3SG.DAT donate.PST.3PL of+DEF.ART.PL.F jewels(F)
ch' egli aveano in gran quantità, e Barca re
 that 3PL.NOM have: IMPF.3PL in big amount, and Barca king
le prese volentieri (...).
 3PL.F.OBL take:PST.3SG gladly
 'The two brothers gave him a part of the jewels that they possessed in
 large quantities, and Barca the king gladly took them (...).'

In (34), however, reference seems to be less specific than in (33); the NP in object position identifies a part of a referent, "their jewels", which is indicated through an indefinite expression concerning its quantity.

4.4.3.2 Possible indefinite reading

Example (35) shows that plural count nouns, within the construction formed by *di* combined with the definite article, could be read as indefinite, in cases in which a definite, pre-established whole is not identifiable and its existence cannot be assumed.

- (35) Fr. da Barberino, Regg., 1318–20 (tosco.)

Ancora, perché 'l marito volentieri / Mangiava le cipolle, / Sì ll' avvezzò
a voler di quelle, / Ché dandogli il denaio / Al tempo di ciriegie / O di
castangnie o fichi primaticci, /
Andava a conperar delle cipolle.
 go:IMPF.3SG to buy:INF PAR onion:PL
 'Because her husband liked onions, she got him used to eating onions so,
 that, when he gave her money, in the season of cherries or chestnuts or
 figs, she went to buy (some) onions.'

The occurrence of sentences such (35) shows that the indefinite reading was also available with plural count nouns already in Old Italian for the construction that we are discussing. In particular, in sentence (35) the noun that appears within the construction was already introduced by a definite NP *volentieri mangiava le cipolle*, with a generic meaning and non-referentially. The same noun is used again in direct object position, but this time to introduce a new indefinite referent, in the same way as one can use the plural of the partitive article in Modern Italian. Example (36) also contains a direct object that expresses an indefinite meaning.

(36) Stat. pis., a. 1327

Le persone di Villa di Chiesa sono povere persone
 the people of Villa di Chiesa are poor people
stenuti in Castello di Castro, dirrebbino delle cose
 kept in Castello di Castro dire:COND.PRS.3PL PAR thing.PL
et per povertà et per non stare non vere.
 and for poverty and to not stay not true:PL
 ‘The people from Villa di Chiesa are poor people and because of their
 poverty and in order to avoid to be imprisoned in Castello di Castro they
 would say false things.’

In the expression *dire delle cose* ‘tell some things’ that occurs in (36) the verb is followed by the generic noun *cose* that makes the indefinite expression even vaguer. This example is interesting if compared with constructions formed by the object introduced by *di* plus a bare noun. We have shown in (22) and (24) that the expression *fare di cose* was used in Old Tuscan with an indefinite meaning as well as *dire di cose*. The sentence in (36) shows that the expression with the definite article was also used in Old Tuscan with the same distribution; the two constructions were basically variants with the same indefinite meaning.

4.4.4 Possible subjects

Renzi (2010) claims that in Old Italian the construction featuring *di* followed by the definite article can only occur as direct object. This is certainly the more widespread situation but, in our sample, we also found a limited number of occurrences in which *di* plus definite article functions as subject, attesting that the construction can occasionally, even if rarely, occur in subject position too. The scarcity of examples is not surprising, since even in Modern Italian the appearance of the partitive article in subject position is much less frequent than in direct object position, as we showed in Section 2 (see Table 2).

Let us now consider examples (37) and (38).

(37) Ubertino del Bianco d’Arezzo, mid-13th century: 2/p. 237

No=l sai dire empio tanto né mortale,
 NEG=3SG.ACC know:IND.PRS.2SG say:INF bad:SG.M ADV NEG evil:SG.M
che del ben non vi sia,
 that:CNSV of+DEF.ART.SG.M good:SG NEG there be:SUBJV.PRS.3SG
 ‘You cannot say anything (about me) so bad and evil that does not contain
 something good (lit.: that there’s not some good).’

(38) Pietro da Bescapè, 1274 (lomb.):

El'è fata tenevre cum è fata la raxa; / No vol veder
 NEG want:PRS.3SG see:INF
del ben insir fora de caxa.
 of+DEF.ART.SG.M good:SG go_out:INF out of house:SG
 'She grew as hard as pitch, she doesn't want to see any goods get out of
 (her)home.'¹³

Both in (37) and in (38) the NP introduced by the *di* plus definite article occupies the subject position within a subordinate clause, and in both occurrences we find the same noun *ben*, which however has a different meaning in the first and in the second occurrence. Indeed, in (37) *ben* is an abstract noun, meaning 'something good' (as opposed to evil), while in (38) the same noun has the concrete meaning of 'goods', 'belongings'.

It is also worth noting that in (37) *del ben* is the subject of an existential clause, within a presentative construction, that is, the typical construction by means of which new referents are introduced into the discourse. This is also the type of context that favors the extension of partitive indefinites to subject position, as has been argued extensively with respect to the Finnish partitive (see e.g. Huumo 2003), and remains the most frequent type of clause for the occurrence of partitive subjects in Modern Italian, see Section 2, Table 2.

The occurrence of the construction *di* plus definite article in subject position with an indefinite reading attests to a somewhat advanced degree of grammaticalization at the time of the texts surveyed in our study.

5 Diatopic distribution of the constructions

We have already mentioned the fact that at the present time the indefinite partitive article in Italian has not reached the stage of obligatoriness as its Modern French counterpart, not only because it is almost always possible to omit it, but also because its use has a particular diatopic distribution. Speakers from the Northern part of the country tend to judge it as acceptable and to use this kind of article

¹³ It must be noted that *del ben* can be considered the object of *veder*; in any case, it also functions as subject of *insir*.

in every context, while speakers from Central and Southern Italy often replace it with quantifiers or use bare nouns.¹⁴

If we look at the diatopic distribution of the Old Italian texts surveyed in our study, we can observe that constructions introduced by the preposition *di* in direct object or subject position mostly occur in texts coming from Tuscany.¹⁵ This fact is not surprising because the documents from this area are the most consistent group of Old Italian material, stored in the OVI corpus. What is quite interesting, instead, is the presence, besides the Tuscan occurrences, of a significant number of examples from Northern Italian documents, in particular coming from Lombardy. Such occurrences attest to an early diatopic distribution of the constructions examined that is still reflected in Modern Italian.

Even more interesting is to take a closer look at the diatopic distribution of the two different constructions we examined, with or without the definite article combining with *di*. If we consider the construction formed by *di* and a noun without a definite article, possibly preceded by a modifier, it clearly emerges from our data that its occurrence is restricted to texts from Tuscany, and in particular to those coming from Florence and Siena. The use of this construction is therefore restricted not only for what concerns the linguistic context, but also geographically. The construction formed by *di* followed by the definite article has a different diatopic distribution, as occurrences are available from both Northern Italy and Tuscany. The remarkable fact in this distribution is that the Northern Italian occurrences of this latter construction typically show original and ‘advanced’ features: for the occurrences from this area the indefinite reading is frequently available, and the construction also occurs in subject position.

Some remarks concerning the distribution of the partitive article in Modern Italian dialects are in order here.¹⁶ In general, the distribution in the Italian

14 More precisely, the partitive article is most widespread among speakers from the North-Western regions of Italy (Piedmont, Liguria and Lombardy) and from Emilia Romagna, as shown in Cardinaletti & Giusti (2020).

15 The corpus includes all texts written before 1375 belonging to all Italian varieties, except Sardinian, Ladin and Friulan texts and texts written in non-Italian varieties, even if they have been written in Italy.

16 An explanation is in order here concerning the use of the terms ‘dialect’ and ‘regional Italian variety’. What is commonly referred to as ‘Italian dialects’ is not regional varieties of Italian: these are instead always indicated with the latter term. As remarked in Maiden & Parry (1997: 2) “The often used term ‘Italian dialects’ may create the false impression that the dialects are varieties of the standard Italian language. In fact, the Italian language represents the continuation of one of the dialects (a Florentine variety of Tuscan) which achieved na-

dialectal varieties reflects the distribution that we have already described for Standard Italian (and its regional varieties); however, in the Northwest of the country, especially in Turinese but partly also in other Piedmontese varieties (see Cerruti 2020), *di* occurs with bare nouns to express the same indefinite meaning of the Modern Italian partitive article, as shown in (39) and (40).

- (39) *Cata* *d* *carn!*
 buy:IMPER.2SG PAR meet
 ‘Buy some meet!’

- (40) *Cata* *d* *agolòt!*
 buy:IMPER.2SG PAR ravioli
 ‘Buy (some) ravioli!’

As we do not have texts in Old Italian from this part of the country in the OVI corpus, we cannot speculate on the connection between the Modern Piedmontese construction and the Old Italian one.¹⁷ One can however point out that the extent to which the construction containing *di* with a singular or plural bare noun in Modern Piedmontese can express indefiniteness appears to be wider than what we have observed in the Old Italian corpus, as it is not limited to specific verbs, or specific types of NPs (with determiners, quantifiers or attributive adjectives). Notably, the areas in which *di* indicates indefiniteness with bare nouns borders with Franco-Romance varieties, Provençal and Franco-Provençal, which also use *di* with bare nouns as partitive. Example (41) is usually considered Provençal (see Bonato 2004: 180; note also that this occurrence contains a negation, a context that favors the occurrence of the partitive in Franco-Romance).

tional and international prestige from the fourteenth century onwards as a literary language and later (principally in the twentieth century) as a spoken language.” As the authors argue, Italian dialects are “‘sisters’ of Italian, locally divergent developments of the Latin originally spoken in Italy.” In this framework, Standard Italian must be regarded as “the continuation of one of the dialects (a Florentine variety of Tuscan) which achieved national and international prestige.”

17 The reason for this is that the earliest texts from this area date back to a later time than the limit chosen in OVI for Old Italian, that is, 1375. Earlier texts, such as the *Sermoni Subalpini* quoted in example (41), are commonly considered as attestations of Provençal, a Gallo-Romance variety not included in OVI. For a different view on the language represented in this text, see Miola (2017).

- (41) *So compaignun no bevrà d'*
 POSS.3SG.SG.M comrade(M) NEG drink:FUT.3SG PA
aiva clara
 water(F):SG clear:SG.F
 'His comrade will not drink clear water.'
 (Sermoni subalpini, 12th/13th century, VIII, 156);

In Modern Tuscan varieties, too, *di* can occur with a partitive meaning with bare nouns, but in this function it is especially used in NPs that contain attributive adjectives, see Rohlf's (1968), Renzi (1997: 163–164), and largely reflects the use of *di* with bare nouns in Old Italian as we described in Section 4.3.

The distribution described above points toward a continuity between the Old Italian construction featuring *di* and the indefinite article, which can also be observed from the diatopic point of view, while the construction featuring *di* plus a noun without a definite article appears to also have been geographically restricted. The partitive article of Modern Italian appears to have originated out of the PNC with *di* plus definite article, and the onset of the shift of this construction toward the expression of indefiniteness had already started at the time of the texts in our corpus. The Old Italian construction *di* plus bare noun has not been replaced by the construction containing the definite article. Rather, it was a different construction, with specific collocational restrictions and typical of Old Tuscan, which has partly been carried on in the Modern Tuscan vernaculars.

6 Conclusion

In this paper, we discussed the early development of the Italian partitive article, which nowadays conveys an indefinite meaning and originated from PNCs. Our study shows that the indefinite meaning started to emerge quite early in Old Italian. Indefinite NPs preceded by *di* and the definite article already occurred in the 12th–13th century Italian, and the indefinite meaning seems to have gradually emerged by the 14th century. In the corpus we analyzed, the indefinite meaning appears to be available in about one third of the occurrences (33.5%, see Table 6).

Considering the construction containing *di* followed by the definite article in Old Italian, in Table 6 we were able to show that the indefinite reading is more easily available in some specific contexts, in particular with plural count nouns (50%) and with abstract nouns (44.4%), while it was less frequently available with mass nouns (25.5%). In the case of abstract nouns, the explanation for this can be found in a tendency of abstract nouns to lose the partition meaning and consequently

acquire an indefinite meaning more easily than concrete nouns. Indeed, abstract nouns do not easily occur in constructions in which reference is made to a part of a pre-established, identifiable whole, and occurrences that call for such an interpretation are infrequent in our corpus.

Most occurrences we analyzed as indicating indefiniteness show *di* plus definite article with direct object NPs, but we also found a limited number of occurrences in which the same construction appears with subjects, especially in presentative clauses.

Our corpus also showed that the construction featuring *di* without a definite article is infrequent (5.4% of the occurrences), and is not semantically equivalent to the Modern Italian partitive article and that its development remains separate from the development of the partitive article. The use of this structure is largely connected with certain characteristics of specific NPs and specific verbs, hence it is limited to some particular collocations.

Finally, based on the diatopic distribution of the two constructions examined, we argued that the use of the construction featuring *di* followed by a noun without the definite article was also geographically restricted. In our sample, indeed, this construction is limited to Tuscan texts, in particular those from Siena and Florence. The construction formed by *di* combined with the definite article has a wider diatopic distribution, as occurrences are available from both Northern Italy and Tuscany. Notably, in occurrences from Northern Italian texts the indefinite reading is more frequently available, and is even possible in subject position.

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