

Indefinite articles at Phonology/ Morphosyntax interface in Mississippi French creole language

This talk analyses indefiniteness in a variety of French spoken in Delisle, Mississippi, the MGCF = *Mississippi Gulf Coast French* (see Moreton 2001). This language was spoken by a colonial survival of Canadian and French settlers arrived after 1700, half century before Acadians settled in Louisiana.

The francophone enclave with the dominant English-speaking culture survived into the twentieth century. The aim of our talk is to discuss the indefiniteness (Mass/Count distinction) and the plural marking used in this underrepresented variety of French spoken in Mississippi.

Our data come from Moreton (2001) and from Moreton's sound archive database (which has been unreleased until now). In addition, field-data have been gathered by one of the two authors, who is a native speaker of the MGCF language.

We analyze the status of the indefinite plurality in cognition and in grammar at Phonology/Syntax interface (Feigenson, Dehaene, and Spelke 2004), looking at the role of indefinite determiners, included the so-called 'partitive' article, combined with count, mass, indefinite nouns. We focus on the status and condition of consonantal *liaison* [-z] agglutinated to N in indefinite Pl ('des' [de zwazo] 'some birds'), but also in the singular ([ẽ zwazo] 'a bird'), willing to establish the phonological and morphological structure of nominals.

We argue that MGCF has a grammaticalized system of articles with a striking indefinite / Mass vs. Count system involving phono-morphological properties. This system is noninflectional, but still operative, with fake-Count coerced into indefinite denotation within DPs.

We assume a DP layered structure for partitive/indefinite constructions, in which *de* is a functional head in the SpecDP structure [DP *de* [D 0]]. It seems that the consonantal liaison [z] does not contribute anymore to the morphosyntactic indefiniteness inside the MGCF DPs (see SG N [ẽ zwazo] 'a bird'), even if this is a reminiscent lexical object that referred to the phonological and morphological shape of the indefinite. However, this initial [z] still contributes to the singular count identity of Ns as opposed to Mass identity in V_ initial Ns, thus Count and Mass nouns are still distinguished on phono-morphological grounds.

Unlike French *du/des* (e.g. [dy sel] 'du sel/some salt', [de pòm] 'des pommes/some apples'), in Mississippi language we find *de* as a marker of indefiniteness in the plural (masculine and feminine), an articleless preposition in the form of a bare 'de'.

In MGCF the indefinite plural determiner *de* 'some', in the meaning of 'more than one N', is also combined with count nouns (see Moreton 2001: 101), see (1):

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|-----|--|---|
| (1) | de 'some' + N | [DP <i>de</i> [D 0]] |
| | <u>de</u> kôfõ | 'some pigs' |
| | œs a kutym fer <u>de</u> furno | 'they used to build <u>some</u> kilns' |
| | œs a kutym fer <u>de</u> furno | |
| | Pr3SG Aux3SG NSG Inf Part NSG → MassSG (from count SG) | |
| | i apre ʃte <u>de</u> kaju o ʃa | 'he's throwing <u>some</u> rocks at the cat' |
| | | 'il est en train de lancer des petits cailloux au chat' |

With prenominal adjectives, 'de' is bare as in French (2):

de bon patat dus 'good sweet potatoes/de bonnes patates douces'

A hypothetical plural [z] is sometimes agglutinated at the onset, suggesting an incorrect segmentation of *de* + Art (Indef Pl 'des'), see [de zwazo] in (3):

- | | | |
|-----|---|-----------------------------------|
| (3) | Lexicalized Liaison before #V_ | |
| | <u>de</u> fwa oes tir <u>de</u> zwazo | 'sometimes they shoot some birds' |
| | | 'des fois ils tirent des oiseaux' |
| | <u>de</u> fwa oes tir <u>de</u> zwazo | |
| | des foisAdv Pr3SG Pres3SG INDEF N (PL Ø) | |

However, this initial agglutinated consonant [z] in [zwazo] is not anymore an Indef plural marker, since it does not come straightforward from *de* + Def(Art), as in French [des wazo] some birds, rather [z] is lexicalized on N independent on the D° plurality, as we can see from the singular form [ẽ zwazo], see (4), where [z] in onset position is a result of an early stage of a consonantal *liaison* before a vocalic onset:

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|-----|---|------------------------------|
| (4) | Lexicalized Liaison in singular N and in plural N | |
| | ẽ zwazo a <u>de</u> , <u>de</u> zel | 'a bird has, uh, some wings' |
| | a bird some wings | |

In (4) [zwazo] is singular: [ẽ zwazo] = French [ẽn _wazo] ‘a bird’. This also happens with ‘wings’, ailes [el] in French ‘des ailes’ [dez ɛl] and in MGCF [de zel].

The plural indefinite determiner phonological configuration originally contains an indefinite floating object [z] C₂ V₂:

C ₁	V ₁	C ₂	V ₂	Unfixed [z]
d		z		

UR Indefinite CV-Delition before Vocalic Onset

C ₁	V ₁	C ₂ —V ₂	+	C ₃	V ₃	C ₄	V ₄
d	e			z	[wa]	z	o

Still in V_ initial Ns, the lexicalized onset C₃ = [z] is the indefinite spell-out of the MGCF DP in plurals and the spell-out of a countability feature as opposed to Mass in the singular ([d lo] ‘some water’). This implies that there is not a strict modularity between the syntax and the phonological component.

Furthermore, not every count N is marked by an inflectional plural: de kofo ‘some hogs’, de kabri ‘some goats’, de vaf ‘some cows’, de muto ‘some sheep’....

Therefore, in MGCF, nominal plurality is not enough to distinguish count vs. indefinite or mass DPs, since MGCF has poor number inflection. It sometimes borrows plural markers from English: [me ptiz] ‘mes petits/mes grandchildren’. Indefiniteness looks independent on number inflectional marking.

The same indefinite pluralization applies to nominal borrowed from English: [de kho:] ‘some cows’.

The Mass determiner is ‘d’ followed by a set of vowels {œ, y, i, e}: [dy ri] ‘some rice’, [di syk] ‘some sugar’, [de bœr] ‘du beurre/some butter’, [dy kaj] ‘du cottage cheese’ etc.

As in a Count singular [ẽ zwazo] with incorporated [z], we assume in [d lo] ‘some water’ two levels of partitivity [DP *de* [D l]] (in a layered DP), along with a bare D [DP *de* [D 0]] ([de bœr]).

The affixal consonant opposition in the singular onset position [z/l] still distinguishes the count singular ([zwazo] ‘a bird’) from a Mass N ([lo] ‘water’). These originally floating [z] and the lexical Mass [l] previously located higher in the layered DPs become segments inherently specified as Ns and maintain a phonomorphological Mass/Count exponent to be considered in the decompositional analysis of indefiniteness. This suggests that in MGCF Ns are unspecified at the beginning for number marking and must refer to different functional heads in DPs (violating modularity between syntax and phonology) in order to implement the Mass/Count distinction. The lexicalized *liaison* behaves as quantity markers word-initial and indicates that a features relevant for the Mass/Count distinction are also built in the lexicon.

The indefinite bare *de* reminds us of some regional Gallo-Romance languages articleless *de*, that occurs for instance in Franco-Provençal and in some varieties of Occitan. Therefore, we will also illustrate phonological, morphological and lexical cues, to consider if this minoritized language in Mississippi, originated from Canadian and French settlers shortly after 1700, can be brought back to some regional Gallo-Romance languages other than only French. MGCF fixed a language that would have then been preserved, being transferred from France to the United States in the 17th century.

References

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