Addressing Romance Vocatives Comparatively

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Recent cross-linguistic work on vocative expressions has coalesced around the idea of a Vo(cative)P, a projection higher than DP hosting vocative particles and nouns and paralleling the cartographic approach to the clause (see, for example, Stavrou 2013, Coene et al. 2019, Hill 2014, D'Alessandro & van Oostendorp 2016, Espinal 2013, Corr 2022, Slocum 2016). I will also adopt an articulated DP, though not one identified solely with vocatives. Instead, I build on the intuition that vocatives are 'smaller' than regular nominal expressions and argue that vocatives combine a second person feature in an upper DP with other possible components in a lower DP. This proposal can account for the surprising fact that several Romance languages admit definite articles in vocatives.

Many properties of vocatives are well known. First, vocatives always involve 2nd person (Szabolsci 1987), though not always expressed:

(1) a. Tú!   (Spanish)
    b. Usted!
     'You'!

(2) a. Toi!   (French)
    b. Vous!
     'You'!

(3) Eh vosaltres!   (Catalan; Espinal 2013)
   'Hey you!'

Second, vocatives cannot be arguments. In many languages, definite articles (e.g., Venetian, Central Catalan) or personal articles (Balearic Catalan) must accompany proper names in argument contexts but are prohibited in vocative contexts:

(4) a. *ła* Marìa   (Venetian; from Slocum 2016, 69)
    b. (*ła*) Marìa!
     'Maria (!)'

(5) a. *la* Maria   (Central Catalan)
    b. (**la*) Maria!
     'Maria(!)'

(6) a. *na* Maria   (Balearic Catalan)
    b. (**na*) Maria!
     'Maria(!)'

The point about proper names above, namely that they involve less structure when non-arguments, is further illustrated in the examples in (7). Here, the proper name is used in a predicative context, as confirmed by the fact that the Catalan personal article *en* is illicit (see Moro 2003):

(7) a. Me llaman Juan.   (Spanish)
    b. Em diuen (**en*) Joan.   (Catalan)
      me call.3PL Juan
     'They call me John.'

Third, vocatives often involve bare nouns, even in languages otherwise requiring articles:

(8) a. Chica!   (Spanish)
    b. Chicas!
     'Girl(s)!'

(9) a. Bambino!   (Italian)
    b. Bambini!
      'Kid(s)!'
(10) a. Noi!   (Catalan; Espinal 2013)
    b. Nois!
      'Boy(s)!'

To account for the vocative facts above, I will appeal to the articulated DP structure developed in Bernstein, Ordóñez, and Roca (2021) and the idea that D is the person head (Longobardi 2008, Bernstein 2008). The idea in Bernstein et al. is that a DP involves both an upper DP1 and a lower DP2, the upper DP1 corresponding to Ortmann's (2014) 'pragmatically unique' (discourse) contexts and the lower DP2 to 'semantically unique' (lexical) contexts (see compatible ideas in Zamparelli 1995; Martín & Hinzen 2014; Giusti & Iovino 2014):

(11) [$_{DP1}$ .... [$_{D1}$ .... [$_{DP2}$ .... [$_{D2}$ .... [$_{NP}$ N]]]]]

Two striking and relevant sources of support for (11) are that, a) several Romance languages (e.g., Balearic Catalan and varieties of Picard) display two different forms for definite articles, the distributions aligning with Ortmann's Uniqueness Hierarchy (see (12)); and b) regular definite articles may co-occur with personal articles in Balearic Catalan (see (13)).

(12) a. *es* ca, *sa* casa   vs.   *l'*Havana, *el* cel, *la* terra   (Balearic Catalan)
        'the dog', 'the house'   'Havana', 'the sky', 'the earth'
    b. *che* fu, *chele* porte   vs.   *l'*Italie, *le* pape, *le* lunne   (Boulogne Picard)
        'the fire', 'the door'   'Italy', 'the Pope', 'the moon'

(13) *es* conco *en* Toni   (Balearic Catalan)
      the.M uncle ART.M Toni
      'Uncle Toni'

Returning to the structure in (11), Bernstein et al. propose that the *s-* and *ch-* articles would correspond to D1 and the *l-* articles and personal articles to D2 (Boulogne Picard examples from Haigneré 1901).

French, Sardinian, and Romanian display definite articles in vocatives, the definite article indicated in italics in the following examples (Sardinian from Blasco Ferrer 1986: 94):

(14) *Les* enfants!   (French)
      'Children!"

(15) *Su* dotó!   (Campidanese Sardinian)
      Doctor!

(16) Professoru*le*!   (enclitic definite article)   (Romanian)
      'Professor!'

The articulated DP structure in (11) provides a context for the definite articles in (14)-(16), namely that they correspond to D2, with D1 reserved for the required 2nd person feature of vocatives:

(17) [$_{DP1}$ ...... [$_{D1}$ 2nd person [$_{DP2}$ .... [$_{D2}$ *les, su, -le* [$_{NP}$ N]]]]]

That the vocative definite article corresponds to D2 is supported by the fact that even the D2 *l*-article of Menorcan Catalan is permitted in vocatives, while the D1 *s-* article is barred:

(18) a. *S'avi!   (D1 definite article)   (Balearic Catalan)
    b. L'avi!   (D2 definite article)   (Menorcan Catalan)
        'Grandfather!'

The analysis also explains other curious Romanian data. Typically, the enclitic article is permitted not only with nouns, but also with adjectives (adjectives merged higher than nouns), consistent with prior analyses of N- or A-to-D raising (e.g., Dobrovie-Sorin 1987). In vocative expressions, however, only the noun may appear with the enclitic article, consistent with adjunction to the lower D1.