

## Definite article omissions in the heritage Italo-Romance varieties of New York City

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This contribution presents novel data from some heritage Italo-Romance varieties spoken in the New York area and seeks to give an account of the structural representations that may underlie the *differential* heritage grammar. We examine the interplay among different sources of linguistic input, and how these computations may result in formal representations of novel DP-structures which are not the result of direct transfer, but of an independent reorganization of the DP-internal requirements and constraints, which are *different* (rather than *incompletely* acquired; cf. Kupish & Rothman 2018) from those found in the baseline varieties in the input.

Our corpus (<https://microcontact.hum.uu.nl/#contributions>) includes a large wealth of diverse underexplored, non-standard heritage varieties from Italy in contact with English: Italo-Romance (Nònes Trentino, E. Abruzzese, Cilentano, Apulo-Barese, Sicilian) and Rhaeto-Romance (Friulian) varieties, as well varieties of (spoken) Italian, among which there is the NYC *koine*, an Italian-based contact variety used as the shared ‘community language’ (cf. Haller 1987 *et seq.*). In particular, the corpus consists of spontaneous speech elicited from 58 first- and second-generation speakers (G1: 32 vs G2: 26, respectively) during semi-guided interviews for control purposes within the *MicroContact* project (D’Alessandro 2015, 2018, 2021). The preliminary data collected reveal an incipient tendency to omit/not lexicalise overtly some core functional categories (Andriani & D’Alessandro 2022), among which definite articles, i.e. D-heads. Strikingly, such a tendency is detectable in most G2 speakers independently of the Italo-Romance variety they speak, but no G1 speaker shows attrition in their use of definite articles. G2 speakers, instead, produce ‘non-target’-like DP-structures by omitting definite articles (except for the opposite tendency in (5b)) in contexts such as:

- (1) Plural NPs in subject position: Ø<sub>D</sub>-NP<sub>[PL]</sub>  
*stanno a parlare Ø<sub>D</sub> llingue sue (=loro)... ma io non gapisco, Ø<sub>D</sub> italiani non vogliono capire... non vogliono praticare Ø<sub>D</sub> italiano adesso* [Barese (F, 65)]  
‘they’re all speaking their own languages... but I don’t get it, **Italians** do not want to understand... they don’t want to practice Italian now’
- (2) Singular bare NPs (± generic): Ø<sub>D</sub>-NP<sub>[SG]</sub>  
*i ai dudj (Ø<sub>D</sub>) credits, ma i na i ai Ø<sub>D</sub> diploma* [Friulian (M, 93)]  
‘I have all the credits, but I do not have **the diploma**(/certificate)’
- (3) Locative (and other) PPs: PP-Ø<sub>D</sub>-NP  
*Però, mó, se vai in-Ø<sub>D</sub> ristorante, pagano.* [Abruzzese (F, 47)]  
‘But, now, if you go **to the restaurant**, they do pay.’
- (4) Numerals (4a), Quantifiers (4b), and ‘-sective’ APs (same, other): Ø<sub>D</sub>-AP-NP/Q-Ø<sub>D</sub>-NP
  - a. *Ø<sub>D</sub> primma vota, jì avev’òtt’annə, Ø<sub>D</sub> primma votə ca so gghiutə* [Cilentano (F, 30)]  
‘(The) **first time** I was 8 years old, **the first time** I went (to Rimini to visit my cousins)’
  - b. *perché el l’ha fat el panetier tuta Ø<sub>D</sub> sua<sub>D</sub> vita in Italia* [Nònes (F, 71)]  
‘because he was a baker for **all his life** in Italy’
- (5) Possessives with common nouns (6a) vs kinship terms (6b): Ø<sub>D</sub>-Poss-NP vs D-Poss-NP
  - a. *prima stavan’i tagliani, come Ø<sub>D</sub> mia<sub>D</sub> compagna A.* [Barese (F, 42)]  
‘before there were Italians, like **my friend** A.’
  - b. *cə sta la famijja purə də mamm’e ppapà, e anche del mio marito* [Abruzzese (F, 47)]  
‘(In Abruzzo) there is also mum and dad’s family, as well as **my husband’s**’

Parts of the tendencies in (1)-(5) had already been highlighted in Haller’s (1987 *et seq.*) work on NYC Italian, as well as in Bettoni’s (1991: 377-378) work on Sydney Italian and Reinke’s

(2014) on Montreal Italian. While contact with English (or Italian) cannot be excluded for some structures, the general behaviour of the heritage DP cannot only be understood as the result of trivial transfer. Instead, our scrutiny of the data reveals some sort of ‘independence’ of the processes involved in building the internal structure of the heritage DP; in other words, the heritage DP-structure diverges from those in both baseline and dominant input grammars due to a *differential* ‘feature reassembly’ (Lardiere 2008) of D-related features, responsible for the (c)overt distribution of the definite article (cf. Longobardi 1994; Chierchia 1998; Alexiadou, Haegeman & Stavrou 2008; *i.a.*). We suggest that this (incipient) feature-reassembly process is holistic and taps into the many varieties and variation of syntactic options present in the input (for an Italo-Romance overview, see Cardinaletti & Giusti 2018), so that G2 learners create their own mental representation of DP-structure by assessing all the structural variation in the input against a principle of *relative economy on derivation*. This reassembly of features allows a broader range of structural options involving null Ds; nonetheless, the proliferation of null Ds creates interpretative ambiguity in semantics of the DP, which only overt modifiers or discourse-context can eliminate.

From a broader diachronic and typological perspective, definite articles are the product of grammaticalisation (for Romance, see Ledgeway 2012; *i.a.*) and are only present in roughly half of the world’s languages (308 on 620 surveyed languages on the WALS). Being heritage contexts the perfect circumstances for linguistic changes to become visible in synchrony (Kupisch & Polinsky 2022), what we observe in our G2 in NYC could be an incipient shift to a new parametric (re)setting in these contact varieties (provided that transmission continues), whereby D becomes lexicalized in less and less cases, rather than moving towards the overproduction of articles – expected if G2s avoid silent elements especially at the syntax-pragmatics interface, which leads to overgeneralising overt subject pronouns (cf. Sorace 2004). Moreover, according to the ‘Inertia Principle’ of Syntax (Longobardi 2001, building on Keenan’s work), syntactic change needs a morpho-phonological trigger (including “silence”) to happen. Evidently, silence, i.e. omission, is one of the cues these G2 speakers have started to gradually generalise in their grammars. This might possibly be linked to the changes in the encoding of NUMBER features in the nominal domain, as well as in the verbal domain (loss of subject-verb agreement on T, among others; cf. Andriani & D’Alessandro 2022).

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