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Indefinite determiners in informal Italian: A preliminary analysis

Abstract: This paper presents the results of a pilot study on the distribution of indefinite determiners in contexts with narrow scope interpretation in current informal Italian. It individuates the available forms and presents their diatopic distribution. The research is based on data collected through an online questionnaire designed to detect optionality. The results show that in narrow scope indefinite contexts, i.e. negative statements, both the zero determiner and the definite article are widespread throughout the country. The partitive determiner is only found in episodic sentences and is limited to restricted geographic areas. In all contexts and areas, a large degree of optionality is found. In some context and area, however, it is possible to identify one form more prominent than the others. This can be related to the context, which may favour some specialized meaning of one specific form, e.g. saliency and small quantity, or to diatopic variation due to language contact with the dialect, as shown by comparing present-day informal Italian with the dialectal data reported in *AIS* and analysed in Cardinaletti and Giusti (2018).

Keywords: Indefinite determiners, informal Italian, regional Italian, narrow scope, optionality

1 Introduction¹

Italian has different forms to express indefiniteness, such as bare nouns (Delfitto and Schrotten 1991; Longobardi 1994), the so-called partitive article parallel to French *du, des* (Chierchia 1998; Zamparelli 2008; Cardinaletti and Giusti 2016), as well as an indefinite use of the definite article that has only been acknowledged in descriptive literature (Rohlf's 1968: 119; Renzi 1997:163).

A preliminary study by Cardinaletti and Giusti (2018) based on three *AIS* maps (Jaberg & Jud 1928–1940) accessed through NavigAIS (Tisato 2009) shows that these forms were present in Italo-Romance varieties at the beginning of last century, with an interesting diatopic distribution. The definite article is the prevalent form to express narrow scope indefiniteness in the vast majority of the Italian territory, while bare nouns and partitive articles are geographically more restricted. Cardinaletti and Giusti also observe that when more than one form is attested in the same geographic area, there is one unmarked form, while the other(s) specialize(s) for either saliency or small quantity interpretation.

In this paper, we extend this analysis to present-day informal Italian; namely, the (spoken) variety of Italian used in informal situations. We address the questions of what forms are possible, whether they have a different diatopic distribution, whether they display a semantic specialization similar to the one found in the dialects, and whether they are freely interchangeable. We do this on the basis of a preliminary analysis of the results of an online questionnaire designed for this purpose. We then compare the collected data with the dialectal data provided by the *AIS* maps, to check whether there is a correlation between present-day informal Italian and the dialectal substratum recorded at the beginning of last century.

This study deals with a number of issues that are at the same time relevant to formal and general linguistics. First of all, it provides an overview of the use of the definite article in indefinite contexts, a phenomenon that is not very well studied across Romance languages.

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Second, it collects data to detect the level of optionality among the possible forms, a methodology that is not generally adopted in data collection. It does so by searching for optionality in the informal register, which is less influenced by normative rules. Third, it allows us to depict the areal distribution of innovative forms of Italian with respect to determinerless Latin; that is the definite article in indefinite contexts and the partitive article. Finally, it compares variation detected in present-day Italian with the dialectal data documented at the beginning of the century, thereby allowing to observe possible substratal influence.

The paper is organized as follows. In the rest of Section 1, we present the possible forms of indefinite determiners in Italian, we review the main results of Cardinaletti and Giusti's (2018) study of the *AIS* data and spell out the research questions arising from the dialectal study. In Section 2, we describe the questionnaire in detail and present the properties tested in the first six items, which are the focus of this paper. The six items present contexts of narrow scope, which is the core case of indefiniteness. In Section 3, we present the quantitative results. For each item, we provide the total occurrences of each determiner and whether such occurrences were given as one-choice or in competition with one or more forms. We also provide synoptic tables for the occurrence of each determiner across contexts and geographic areas. In Section 4, we discuss the data analysing the variation observed in contexts and geographic areas, also addressing the optionality issue. In Section 5, we draw the conclusions.

1.1 The expression of indefiniteness in Italian

In modern Italian, we observe at least six possibilities for plural count nouns, as listed in (1)–(2), all of which mean ‘I would like to find an indefinite quantity of (female) friends’. In (1a) we find the quantifier *alcuni* ‘some’, in (1b) the pseudo-partitive construction *un po’ di* ‘a bit of’, and in (1c) the cardinal *due* ‘two’, which does not necessarily convey a proper cardinal meaning. In (2), we observe three indefinite determiners: the *zero determiner* (henceforth, ZERO), the *definite article* used for indefinite meaning (henceforth, ART), and the so-called *partitive determiner*, which has the same morphology as the preposition *di* ‘of’ incorporating a definite article (henceforth, *di*+ART):

- (1) a. *Vorrei comprare alcuni fiori.*
I.would.like to.buy some flowers
- b. *Vorrei comprare un po’ di fiori.*
I.would.like to.buy a bit of flowers
- c. *Vorrei comprare due fiori.*
I.would.like to.buy two flowers
‘I would like to buy some flowers.’
- (2) a. *Vorrei comprare fiori.*
I.would.like to.buy flowers
- b. *Vorrei comprare i fiori.*
I.would.like to.buy the flowers
- c. *Vorrei comprare dei fiori.*
I.would.like to.buy of.the flowers
‘I would like to buy flowers.’

Apart from the quantifier *alcuni* ‘some’ and the cardinal *due* ‘two’, the other four forms in (1)–(2) are also found with singular mass nouns, as in (3), which all mean ‘I would like to buy an indefinite quantity of wine’:

- (3) a. *Vorrei comprare un po’ di vino.*

- I.would.like to.buy a bit of wine
 b. *Vorrei comprare vino.*
 I.would.like to.buy wine
 c. *Vorrei comprare il vino.*
 I.would.like to.buy the wine
 d. *Vorrei comprare del vino.*
 I.would.like to.buy of.the wine
 ‘I would like to buy (some) wine.’

Two other possibilities are reported in the literature to express indefiniteness in Italo-Romance varieties with both mass singular and count plural nouns, namely bare *di* ‘of’ and *certo* ‘certain’. In Tuscan, bare *di* is reported to be present only if the nominal expression is modified by a prenominal adjective, like ‘good’ in (4). In the Northwest, bare *di* is possible more generally (5). The adjective *certo* appears in (6) with the function of an indefinite determiner in some parts of southern Italy (cf. also Ledgeway 2009):

- (4) a. *di buone patate*
 of good potatoes
 ‘good potatoes’
 b. *di buon vino*
 of good wine
 ‘good wine’
 (Rohlf s 1968: 117)
- (5) a. *sei fyse d’aqua*
 if.there was of water
 ‘If there was water’
 (Piedmontese; Berruto 1974: 57)
 b. *anda sarkà d viulatte*
 to-go to-pick di violets
 ‘to go and pick violets’
 (AIS 637, 153 Giaveno (Turin))
- (6) a. *s’era corcato mmiezo a ccerto fieno*
 self was lied in middle to certain hay
 ‘He was lying on hay.’
 (Neapolitan; Rohlf s 1968: 118)
 b. *certi kundi*
 certain stories
 ‘some stories’
 (Avezzano; Giammarco 1979: 141)

Bare *di* is not present in standard Italian, while *certo* conveys specialized readings such as ‘of a given type’ or ‘with specific reference’, which are most common with plural count nouns (7a), and can be found with both plural and mass in emphatic contexts (7b):

- (7) a. *Mangio solo certe patate / ?Bevo solo certo vino*
 I.eat only certain potatoes / I.drink only certain wine
 ‘I only eat certain types of potatoes.’ / ‘I only drink certain types of wine.’
 b. *Ci hanno servito certe patate! / Ci hanno servito certo vino!*
 us they.have served certain potatoes / us they.have served certain wine

‘They served us such potatoes!’ / ‘They served us such wine!’

Such richness of possible forms raises the question whether they are all available to all speakers of Italian and, if so, whether they are equivalent or convey different nuances of indefiniteness, as observed for *certo* above and as proposed for the other indefinite determiners in Italo-Romance varieties by Cardinaletti and Giusti (2018), to be reviewed in the next section.

1.2 A previous study on Italo-Romance varieties

There is no literature on how indefinite determiners distribute across Italo-Romance varieties or in regional Italian. In a preliminary study, Cardinaletti and Giusti (2018) address three issues related to this general question. First, they give a provisional account of optionality and semantic specialization of the three forms present in Italian, namely ZERO, ART, and *di*+ART (see (2)–(3b-d)). Then, they analyse a lesser studied central Italian dialect (Anconetano) that only displays two forms (ART and *di*+ART) and observe that, in this case, there is no overlap of meaning: one form (ART) is the unmarked narrow scope indefinite, the other form (*di*+ART) only has a wide scope, small quantity interpretation. Finally, they provide a detailed survey of the indefinite determiners appearing in three AIS maps (consulted online in Tisato [2009]) which can be taken to represent the dialectal variation found at the beginning of the last century. Two maps have an indefinite mass noun (map 1037 [‘if there was water’] and map 1343 [‘go to the cellar to take wine’]), one has an indefinite plural noun (map 636 [‘to look for violets’]). The three maps only present narrow scope interpretation. The detailed analysis of the maps suggested the following observations.

The maps display four forms, namely ZERO, ART, bare *di*, and *di*+ART. *Certo* does not appear in the maps with the function of indefinite determiner. Other forms such as ‘a couple of, a bit of’ or the like are sporadic. The distribution of the four forms in the Italian territory at beginning of last century displays strong tendencies. Some areas have a preference for one form: the extreme North, especially the Grigioni area in Switzerland, and the extreme South, namely southern Calabria, southern Apulia and Sicily, only display ZERO; the extreme West, namely Val d’Aosta and western Piedmont at the border with France, only displays bare *di*; in Emilia–Romagna, *di*+ART is predominant; the Centre–South from southern Tuscany – Marche – Umbria – Lazio down to northern Calabria and northern Apulia only displays ART.

In other areas, there are two, sometimes three possible forms. This raises the question of whether these forms are the result of pure optionality or whether each form is associated with a different interpretation. Given that each map displays consistent preferences for one form or the other, Cardinaletti and Giusti (2018) propose that the most common form throughout the three maps in given areas is to be taken as the unmarked form for each area, the other form(s) is/are claimed to convey a specialized meaning. They propose that the item visualized in AIS map 1037 (‘if there was water’) most probably induces a core existential indefinite interpretation; the item visualized in AIS map 1343 (‘go to the cellar to take wine’) induces saliency interpretation of the object *wine*, as wine is the typical product to be stored in a cellar; the item visualized in AIS map 636 (‘to look for violets’) induces small quantity interpretation of the object *violette*, as violets are usually collected in small bunches. This is supported by the fact that AIS map 1037 presents a more consistent distribution of a given form in each area, while the other two maps display a higher degree of variation in given areas, as well as in individual points across the maps.

Where ART is not the unmarked form (that is, everywhere except the central-southern regions), it conveys a salient referent interpretation. Where *di*+ART is not the unmarked form (that is, everywhere except Emilia Romagna), it conveys a small quantity interpretation. The contexts provided by the three AIS maps are however all compatible with the unmarked meaning as well as with either specialized meaning. The variation found at given points in the AIS maps

is therefore compatible with an analysis that complies with general economy principles and assumes that there is no true optionality, but different forms are specialized for different meanings.

Finally, Cardinaletti and Giusti (2018) note that even in areas where only one form is given by *AIS*, there may be other available forms that are found in discourse contexts not represented in the *AIS* maps. This is the case of Anconetano *di*+ART, which can only appear in wide scope contexts. This is unsurprising as there are no *AIS* maps reporting indefinite determiners in wide scope contexts.

This state of affairs can be analysed along the lines of Bartoli's (1925) *Lateral Areas*, according to which innovations spread from the centre towards the periphery of a given area, losing their effectiveness while reaching the borders. In our case, the ancient form, perpetuating the Latin lack of article in all nominal expressions, is ZERO. ZERO proves to be resilient in indefinite expressions at the borders of the Italo-Romance area (the extreme North, and the extreme South), while the new formation (ART) has spread in the Centre as the "prototypical" article even in indefinite expressions. Bare *di* is a Gallo-Romance innovation, only present in the extreme Northwest, at the border with France from which it has spread. Interestingly, *di*+ART is found in an area spreading in the West–East direction, at the crossroad with the North–South direction of the spreading of ART.

1.3 Research questions

Cardinaletti and Giusti's (2018) observations are based on a limited set of data. The dialectal data taken from *AIS* only provide indefinites with narrow scope interpretation; only very rarely do they report optionality even if it was supposedly present. They represent the situation at the beginning of last century. This situation has certainly changed considerably in contact with Italian, which is nowadays the L1 of the greatest majority of speakers (cf. ISTAT 2012). Furthermore, Cardinaletti and Giusti's (2018) analysis of present-day informal Italian and Anconetano is based on native judgments of the authors and few other speakers, as is typical of generative grammarians, and does not represent possible regional variation, which is supposedly present.

In these respects, a number of issues arise:

- i. Has the use of indefinite determiners in Italo-Romance changed in the last century, especially considering the increasingly stronger dominance of Italian?
- ii. If so, to what extent and in what directions with respect to possible forms and their possible interpretation?
- iii. Is there variation among regional varieties of informal Italian in the possible forms of indefinite determiners and their interpretation?
- iv. If so, does such variation reflect the original properties reported by *AIS* and discussed by Cardinaletti and Giusti (2018)?

To our knowledge, these issues have never been addressed up to now.

The first two questions could only be answered through a thorough search on local dialects. This will be the object of a large project of data collection, which is at its very initial stage. The form and distribution of indefinite determiners in modern Italo-Romance varieties will therefore not be touched upon in this paper.

To start answering the last two questions, an online questionnaire was designed to detect the distribution and the optional use in informal Italian of the five indefinite determiners mentioned in Section 1.1; namely, ZERO, ART, bare *di*, *di*+ART, *certo*. The different items of the questionnaire permit to have an overview of the distribution of indefinite determiners according to the traits individuated by Cardinaletti and Giusti (2018):

- (8) a. mass singular vs. plural count distinction;
b. type of sentence (different tense, aspect, polarity);
c. specialization of meaning (saliency, small quantity);
d. scope taking properties of the indefinite object (narrow, wide).

For space reasons, we limit our discussion here to six items of the questionnaire which only allow narrow scope interpretation. We therefore do not expect differences between singular mass and plural count nouns due to scope properties, but only related to the other traits (type of sentence and specialization of meaning).

2 The questionnaire

The questionnaire was administered online in the third week of a MOOC (massive online open course) entitled *La grammatica che migliora la vita* ('The grammar that improves life'), designed and conducted by Giuliana Giusti and run in November–December 2016.

The MOOC was offered as a free extension course with the aim to disseminate basic notions of linguistics to the general public in order to enhance language awareness on multilingualism, including the dialect / national language diglossia and the variety of registers (formal/informal, spoken/written). The ultimate goal of the MOOC was to encourage an inclusive and open-minded perspective on language use and language identity in speakers of L1 and L2 Italian in Italy and abroad.

The MOOC is made of four units, one per week, each including 5–7 short videos for about 60 minutes per week, a forum for general discussion, some readings, and a questionnaire. Week 1 deals with language, languages, and multilingualism. Week 2 presents the sounds of language vs. the writing system with particular reference to Italian as compared to major European languages (English, French, and German). Week 3 discusses descriptive vs. normative grammar, with special attention to some well-known normative rules of Italian related to psych-verbs. Week 4 presents Italo-Romance varieties. All videos encourage a descriptive approach to languages, including local dialects and heritage languages and enhancing an open attitude to substandard, informal, or colloquial uses. None of the videos available to the participants addresses the data collected through the questionnaires. All videos, instructions, and questionnaires are in standard Italian.

The participants were not selected as the course was open to self-enrolment. The questionnaires were filled in on a voluntary basis at the end of each week. Participants completing at least 70% of the total activities would receive a statement of participation with no official value in terms of academic credits. There was no reward for the completion of the tasks, apart from intellectual pleasure.

The questionnaire of the first unit regards the linguistic profile of the participants, their town of origin and of residence, age, gender, the language(s) and varieties they speak as L1 and L2, the language(s) or varieties used with family, friends, and at work. This allows us to keep control of the diatopic variability as well as sociolinguistic variables. The questionnaire of the second unit regards the controversial area of psych-verbs in Italian, which are targeted by normative grammar.² This has trained the participants in judging grammatical sentences with an

² Normative grammar prohibits doubling of the indirect object experiencer in *A me mi piace* (lit. to me cl.1p.sg.dat it.likes, 'I like'). Doubling of an indirect object is optional in Italian. Thus, *A me piace* (lit. to me it.likes) is grammatical, and banning the doubling construction results in suppressing one possibility available to the language. What is ongoing is an across-the-board ban on clitic doubling. Many speakers are biased against sequences such as *a me mi* irrespective of whether *a me* is an indirect object (as above) or a prepositional accusative, as in *A me mi hanno convinto* (lit. to me [they] CL.1SG.ACC have persuaded 'They persuaded me'). Note that doubling is mandatory for dislocated object DPs: *Maria l'hanno convinta* (lit. Maria [they] CL.3SG.ACC have persuaded, 'They

open attitude towards language variation, free from normative influence. The questionnaire of the third unit addresses different types of indefiniteness. In the fourth and last unit, the participants were asked to provide a text in their dialect or L1 different from Italian and to translate it first into Italian, then into a foreign language (English or other at preference). Notably, only at this point the dialect has been the object of collected data, while the other two questionnaires concentrated on informal Italian.

At the beginning of the second and third questionnaire, participants were informed of the goals of the activity (namely, collect judgements and data of informal Italian). Despite the written form, the formulation of the questions made it clear that the sentences to be judged were instances of spoken language.³ At all points it was emphasized that there was no correct answer and more than one possibility could be chosen. The participants were always asked to indicate all the possible choices and not the most appropriate one, in order to detect optionality.

At the end of each questionnaire, participants were asked to give permission to use the data for future research. They were informed that at all stages of the analysis, the data would be used anonymously.

2.1 The questionnaire on the expression of indefiniteness

The questionnaire on indefiniteness is made of 25 items organized as follows:

- 9 multiple choice items with indefinite direct objects (singular mass vs. count plural), with different tense / aspect / polarity, in different pragmatic contexts.
- 2 substitution tasks, i.e., open questions asking to substitute a singular mass noun with a plural count noun.
- 6 open comments on possible differences in interpretation, in case more than one possible choice has been provided.
- 4 multiple choice items for pragmatically coherent sentences, in which the participant is asked to judge coherence of statements with a follow-up causative clause.
- 3 open questions on the linguistic attitude of the participant (confidence on their judgments, their normative / descriptive attitude, their personal appreciation of the experience of completing the task).
- 1 consensus item

The questionnaire presents the items in a fixed order and does not include fillers. This makes the questionnaire as short and accessible as possible, allowing the participants to ‘warm up’ with the shorter / simpler sentences and avoiding the risk that they would get tired towards the end, when the tasks are more complex. At a first screening, the results do not display any priming effect, as we observe different answers in subsequent items by individual informants. However, a more precise calculation of this is needed, something which we postpone to future work.

In this paper, we analyse the following six items of the initial part of the questionnaire. Items (i)–(iv) are negative statements. This assures narrow scope interpretation of the object, which is the core interpretation of indefinites (opposed to the interpretations arising in subject

persuaded Mary’), but it has become a sanctioned option for dislocated prepositional accusative pronouns, leading to a null object pronoun, especially in the case of psych-verbs such as *convincere* (‘persuade’): *A me hanno convinto* (lit. to me [they] persuaded, ‘They persuaded me’).

Participants were first asked whether they used or heard other speakers using doubling with dative and prepositional accusative pronouns, training them to reflect on normative grammar and actual use. Only later, through video lessons, they were informed about linguistic notions such as dislocation, clitic doubling, prepositional accusative, prepositional dative, and how these phenomena occur in standard Italian (including the literary tradition) and other Romance languages.

³ All questions are formulated as ‘How would you say / How would one say in such and such situation’, as is the case of items (i)–(vi) reported in section 2.1 below.

position and in non-negative contexts, e.g., specific, D-linked⁴, etc.). We compare mass nouns in (i) and (iii) with plural count nouns in (ii) and (iv) in order to check whether they behave in the same fashion, as usually assumed in the literature. The items on mass nouns (i), (iii) are multiple choice questions. The items on count nouns are substitution tasks (ii), (iv):⁵

- 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 I.eat meat
 - b. *Non mangio la carne.*
not I.eat the meat
 - c. *Non mangio di carne.*
not I.eat of meat
 - d. *Non mangio della carne.*
not I.eat of.the meat
 - e. *Non mangio certa carne.*
not I.eat certain meat
'I don't eat meat.'

- ii. Ora sostituisci *carne* con *patate*.
[Now replace *meat* with *potatoes*.]

- iii. Nella tua varietà di italiano parlato, un astemio direbbe:
[In your variety of spoken Italian, a teetotaller would say:]
 - a. *Non bevo vino.*
not I.drink wine
 - b. *Non bevo il vino.*
not I.drink the wine
 - c. *Non bevo di vino.*
not I.drink of wine
 - d. *Non bevo del vino.*
not I.drink of.the wine
 - e. *Non bevo certo vino.*
not I.drink certain wine
'I don't drink wine.'

- iv. Ora sostituisci *vino* con *superalcolici*:
[Now replace *wine* with *spirits*]

Items (v) and (vi) allow us to contrast negative sentences with non-negative episodic sentences in the past. Since we are focussing on narrow scope indefinites, we are only using mass nouns here in order to isolate narrow scope interpretation from the wide scope interpretation which is more easily available with plural count nouns (cf. Cardinaletti and Giusti 2016):

- v. Nella tua varietà di italiano parlato, raccontando la cena a casa di amici fatta ieri si direbbe:

⁴ For the notion of D-linking cf. Pesetsky (1987). According to Pesetsky (2000:16), a D-linked element is “supposed to be drawn from a set of individuals previously introduced into the discourse, or [...] part of the ‘common ground’ shared by speaker and hearer.”

⁵ The items were formulated in such a way as to make clear that the questionnaire was searching for informal Italian and not for dialectal data. We used the notion of “italiano parlato” (‘spoken Italian’) to refer to the informal variety.

[In your spoken Italian variety, while telling about the dinner party at friends' yesterday, one would say:]

- a. *Abbiamo mangiato carne.*
we.have eaten meat
- b. *Abbiamo mangiato la carne.*
we.have eaten the meat
- c. *Abbiamo mangiato di carne.*
we.have eaten of meat
- d. *Abbiamo mangiato della carne.*
we.have eaten of.the meat
- e. *Abbiamo mangiato certa carne.*
we.have eaten certain meat
'We ate meat.'

- vi. Nella tua varietà di italiano parlato, raccontando la cena a casa di amici fatta ieri si direbbe:

[In your spoken Italian variety, while telling about the dinner party at friends' yesterday, one would say:]

- a. *Abbiamo bevuto vino.*
we.have drunk wine
- b. *Abbiamo bevuto il vino.*
we.have drunk the wine
- c. *Abbiamo bevuto di vino.*
we.have drunk of wine
- d. *Abbiamo bevuto del vino.*
we.have drunk of.the wine
- e. *Abbiamo bevuto certo vino.*
we.have drunk certain wine
'We drank wine.'

2.2 Participants

The questionnaire was taken by 92 participants out of the 540 enrolled in the MOOC. Ten of them were not L1 Italian and have been discarded for the purposes of the present research. The remaining 82 participants all declared to have native competence of Italian. Slightly more than half (47) declared Italian as their dominant language; another large group (30) declared to have Italian as L1 but to be competent in the dialect of the town of origin or in other dialects; only few (5) declared to use the dialect of the town of origin as L1, still having full competence of Italian. This variable appears to be evenly distributed in the whole sample.⁶ The age groups are also rather balanced: 18–30 (20 participants); 30–40 (15 participants); 40–50 (26 participants); 50–60 (19 participants); >60 (2 participants).

All participants were asked to describe their linguistic profile (see above the introduction to this section) resulting in the following distribution across the regions of Italy. In only two cases, the towns of origin and residence did not coincide; these two participants are counted here according to the variety of informal Italian they declared to speak, which corresponds to the town of origin:

⁶ As already observed, our participants were recruited through an on-line disseminative course. This automatically excludes people that do not have access to a computer and/or people who are not interested in life-long education. For this reason, in our sample we have no representation of L1-dialect speakers, unlike what is found in the ISTAT 2012 pool.

- Northwest (11): Piedmont (4), Lombardy (6), Liguria (1)
- Northeast (21): Veneto (19), Friuli Venezia Giulia (2)
- Emilia Romagna (6)
- Centre (10): Toscana (2), Marche (2), Lazio (6)
- South (20): Abruzzo (4), Campania (4), Puglia (8), Calabria (4)
- Sardinia (5)
- Sicily (9)

The sample is admittedly not optimally balanced as regards the areal distribution of the participants. This is due to the fact that enrolment to the MOOC and completion of each questionnaire was voluntary. It does however provide a perspective on the whole country.

In order to have groups with some quantitative relevance, we aggregated the participants in geographical macro-areas, which roughly correspond to Cardinaletti and Giusti's (2018) findings on the *AIS* maps. The results we obtained confirm the separation of Emilia Romagna from the rest of northern Italian and of the two islands from the other areas of the South. The Centre is heterogeneous with respect to the traditional classification of Italo-Romance varieties, as pointed out by a reviewer. This is because it includes Tuscany, which is usually considered as separate from the "area mediana", and the Marches⁷, part of which are in the "area perimediana" (cf. Loporcaro and Paciaroni 2016). However, the data we obtained characterize it as the buffer area between Emilia-Romagna and the South, thereby contributing to obtain a coherent representation of the diatopic distribution of indefinite determiners.

2.3 Types of answers

As the questionnaire allowed multiple selections, we first coded the results for the number of choices (1–5) of each participant.

Out of 490 answers, we find 209 one-choice answers (42%), 219 two-choice answers (45%), 54 three-choice answers (11%), 8 four-choice answers (2%). (Multiple choice answers are thus 281 [57%] in total).⁸ No item in the questionnaire received a five-choice answer.

The one-choice and the two-choice answers are basically restricted to ZERO and ART, and few occurrences of *di*+ART in items (v)–(vi). *Certo* occurs most of the time in three/four-choice answers. Three/four-choice answers are almost absent in items (i)–(iv) and are found more often in items (v)–(vi).

If we consider the rate of selection of each of the five forms irrespectively of whether they appear as one or multiple choice answers, ZERO and ART are the most frequent forms. Their overall occurrence is 410 and 307, respectively. Bare *di* appears in one isolated case, as 1 out of 4 possibilities, and was used in a sentence provided in the Sicilian dialect; this occurrence was not counted (see fn. 6). *Di*+ART occurs 92 times and *certo* 28 times. Note that the fact that ZERO and ART are chosen in the highest percentages is not to be attributed to them being the first and the second possible choices in the list. In fact, *di*+ART and *certo*, the fourth and fifth possible choices in the list, were selected much more frequently than bare *di*, the third in the list, which was never chosen.

In Section 3, we present the different distribution of the participants' choices in the six items of the questionnaire analysed here.

⁷ Note that the two only speakers from the Marches are both from the province of Ancona, which is the most "central" area of the region in the sense that it shares most features with the dialects of the "area mediana".

⁸ One informant from the South did not provide any answer in the items (ii) and (iv), where he was asked to write some text instead of simply choosing among the given options. For this reason, the total number of answers is not $82 \times 6 = 492$.

3 The collected data

The data collected in items (i)–(vi) presented in Section 2.2 above involve two types of singular mass nouns and two types of plural count nouns in the scope of negation in sentences in the present tense and the same singular mass nouns in episodic sentences in the past tense. First, we present each item giving the overall occurrence of the determiners (this calculates all the preferences for each item, irrespective of whether the informant has indicated it as the only option or a possible alternative between two or among more options). Then, we specify how the determiners distribute across the typology of answers (from one-choice to three/four-choice answers). For each issue, we present the diatopic distribution as well as the general picture across the country.

Note that in the tables below, the percentage of occurrence of each determiner is calculated out of the number of participants in each areal group. This is crucial for comparison in a situation, like ours, in which we could not hire the same number of informants for each area.

3.1 Mass nouns in negative contexts

3.1.1 ‘I don’t eat meat’

In the answers to this item, two forms are dominant: ZERO (84%) and ART (69%). *Di*+ART and *certo* only occur twice each.⁹ As regards the diatopic distribution, ZERO and ART both reach 100% in Emilia Romagna. ZERO is preferred over ART in the Northeast (95% vs. 66%), Sardinia (80% vs. 40%), and Sicily (88% vs. 44%). As for the rest of the country, the two forms occur at roughly the same rate. The data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Overall occurrences of the four determiners in item (i)

Regional areas	Number of participants	Total ZERO	Total ART	Total <i>di</i> +ART	Total <i>certo</i>
Northwest	11	9 (81%)	8 (72%)	0	0
Northeast	21	19 (90%)	14 (66%)	0	1 (4%)
Emilia Romagna	6	6 (100%)	6 (100%)	1 (16%)	0
Centre	10	9 (90%)	8 (80%)	0	0
South	20	14 (70%)	15 (75%)	1 (5%)	0
Sardinia	5	4 (80%)	2 (40%)	0	0
Sicily	9	8 (88%)	4 (44%)	0	1 (11%)
Total	82	69 (84%)	57 (69%)	2 (2%)	2 (2%)

Table 2 presents how the forms distribute across the different typology of answers. In one-choice answers, ZERO is more frequent than ART (30% vs. 14%). This is most evident in

⁹ Throughout this section, we refer to this determiner in its masculine form *certo*, disregarding number and gender concord with feminine singular *certa carne* ‘certain meat’, masculine singular *certo vino* ‘certain wine’, feminine plural *certe patate* ‘certain potatoes’, and masculine plural *certi superalcolici* ‘certain spirits’.

Sardinia (60% vs. 20%), Sicily (55% vs. 11%), and the Northeast (33% vs. 4%). It is interesting to observe that Emilia-Romagna does not display any one-choice answer. Half of the informants (50%) give ZERO or ART as the only possible alternatives in two-choice answers. One informant in the Northeast gives the two-choice alternative “ZERO or *certo*”. There are only three three-choice answers: one in Emilia-Romagna and one in the South (Calabria) with ZERO, ART, or *di+ART*, and one in Sicily with ZERO, ART, or *certo*.

Table 2: Occurrences of the four determiners in different types of answers in item (i)

Regional areas	Number of participants	1-choice ZERO	1-choice ART	2-choice ZERO or ART	2/3/4-choices
Northwest	11	3 (27%)	2 (18%)	6 (54%)	0
Northeast	21	7 (33%)	1 (4%)	12 (57%)	1 ART/ <i>certo</i> (4%)
Emilia Romagna	6	0	0	5 (83%)	1 ZERO/ART/ <i>di+ART</i> (16%)
Centre	10	2 (20%)	1 (10%)	7 (70%)	0
South	20	5 (25%)	6 (30%)	8 (40%)	1 ZERO/ART/ <i>di+ART</i> (5%)
Sardinia	5	3 (60%)	1 (20%)	1 (20%)	0
Sicily	9	5 (55%)	1 (11%)	2 (22%)	1 ZERO/ART/ <i>certo</i> (11%)
Total	82	25 (30%)	12 (14%)	41 (50%)	4 (4%)

Tables 1 and 2 show that ZERO is present all over the country. In most areas, it is fairly equivalent to ART, with the exception of Sardinia and Sicily, where ZERO is chosen most often in one-choice answers. In this item, ART is less present than ZERO in one-choice answers all over the country, except in the South.

3.1.2 ‘I don’t drink wine’

As above, the two most widely attested forms are ZERO (93%) and ART (59%). *Di+ART* and *certo* are again residual (3 and 1 occurrences, respectively).

As regards the diatopic distribution, ZERO and ART both reach 100% in Emilia Romagna as above. ZERO is more clearly preferred than ART in the same areas as above: the Northeast (100% vs. 38%), Sardinia (100% vs. 60%), and Sicily (100% vs. 33%), as well as in the Northwest (90% vs. 63%). As for the rest of the country, the two forms occur at roughly the same rate, also as above. The data are provided in Table 3.

Table 3: Overall occurrences of the four determiners in item (iii)

Regional areas	Number of participants	Total ZERO	Total ART	Total <i>di+ART</i>	Total <i>certo</i>
Northwest	11	10 (90%)	7 (63%)	1 (9%)	0
Northeast	21	21 (100%)	8 (38%)	0	0
Emilia Romagna	6	6 (100%)	6 (100%)	1 (16%)	0

Centre	10	10 (100%)	9 (90%)	0	0
South	20	16 (80%)	13 (65%)	1 (5%)	0
Sardinia	5	5 (100%)	3 (60%)	0	1 (20%)
Sicily	9	9 (100%)	3 (33%)	0	0
Total	82	77 (93%)	49 (59%)	3 (3%)	1 (1%)

Table 4 presents how the forms distribute across the different typology of answers. As in Table 2 above, in one-choice answers, ZERO is much more frequent than ART (40% vs. 3%). This holds all over the country except in the South, where ART persists as one-choice (15%). Two-choice answers with the “ZERO or ART” alternative are selected by half of the informants (51%), as above. Two informants, one in the Northwest and one in the South, give the two-choice alternative “ART or *di*+ART”, reported in the 2/3/4-choices column. There are only two three-choice answers: one in Emilia-Romagna with ZERO, ART, or *di*+ART, and one in Sardinia with ZERO, ART, or *certo*.

Table 4: Occurrences of the four determiners in different types of answers in item (iii)

Regional areas	Number of participants	1-choice ZERO	1-choice ART	2-choice ZERO or ART	2/3/4-choices
Northwest	11	4 (36%)	0	6 (54%)	1 ART/ <i>di</i> +ART (9%)
Northeast	21	13 (61%)	0	8 (38%)	0
Emilia Romagna	6	0	0	5 (83%)	1 ZERO/ART/ <i>di</i> +ART (16%)
Centre	10	1 (10%)	0	9 (90%)	0
South	20	7 (35%)	3 (15%)	9 (45%)	1 ART/ <i>di</i> +ART (5%)
Sardinia	5	2 (40%)	0	2 (40%)	1 ZERO/ART/ <i>certo</i> (20%)
Sicily	9	6 (66%)	0	3 (33%)	0
Total	82	33 (40%)	3 (3%)	42 (51%)	4 (4%)

3.1.3 Interim summary

The two mass nouns *meat* and *wine* in the object position of a predicate in a negative sentence in the present tense display the following properties.

- In both cases, half of the informants allow two forms: ZERO and ART.
- In both cases, ZERO is predominant over ART in one-choice answers.
- With *wine*, ART is almost residual in one-choice answers (3%).
- The South confirms a higher occurrence of ART with respect to the other areas.
- In both items, *di*+ART and *certo* only appear sporadically.

3.2 Plural count nouns in negative contexts

These two items are the result of open question tasks. Participants were asked to provide new sentences substituting *potatoes* for *meat* (cf. item [ii]) and *spirits* for *wine* (cf. item [iv]). As said in fn. 4 above, one participant from the South missed to fill in these two items.

3.2.1 ‘I don’t eat potatoes’

As above, the two most frequent forms are ZERO (81%) and ART (92%). But their rate is reversed, with ART slightly predominant over ZERO. *Di+ART* appears 3 times, as with mass nouns above, while *certo* is slightly more frequent in that it appears 10 times.¹⁰

Table 5: Overall occurrences of the four determiners in item (ii)

Regional areas	Number of participants	Total ZERO	Total ART	Total <i>di+ART</i>	Total <i>certo</i>
Northwest	11	9 (81%)	11 (100%)	0	2 (18%)
Northeast	21	19 (90%)	20 (95%)	1 (4%)	3 (14%)
Emilia Romagna	6	6 (100%)	6 (100%)	1 (16%)	0
Centre	10	6 (60%)	10 (100%)	0	0
South	19	15 (78%)	17 (89%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)
Sardinia	5	4 (80%)	3 (60%)	0	2 (40%)
Sicily	9	7 (77%)	8 (88%)	0	2 (22%)
Total	81	66 (81%)	75 (92%)	3 (3%)	10 (12%)

As regards how these forms distribute across the different typology of answers, Table 6 shows that one-choice answers are much less frequent than with mass nouns (24% vs. *carne* 37% and *vino* 43%). Furthermore, differently from mass nouns, ART is more often selected than ZERO (ART 17% vs. ZERO 7%), as opposed to *carne* (ART 12% vs. ZERO 25%) and *vino* (ART 3% vs. ZERO 40%). This holds all over the country, except Sardinia, where the situation looks apparently reversed (but this may be due to the rather limited number of informants). Two-choice answers with the ZERO/ART alternative are selected by 60% of the informants. There are no other two-choice answers with different alternatives. The percentage of three/four-choice answers is much higher than with mass nouns (14% vs. *carne* 3% and *vino* 2%). It is also notable that four-choice answers appear in this item for the first time.¹¹

¹⁰ One speaker from Sicily also chose bare *di* as an alternative to ZERO, ART and *certo* in a sentence he provided in the dialect (i). We ignore this case, as it is given in the dialect, while we are analysing the regional variation in informal Italian:

(i) *Un manciu ri patati*
 [I] not eat of potatoes
 ‘I do not eat potatoes.’

¹¹ For reasons of simplicity, in Tables 6, 8, 10 and 12, we have collapsed all the answers displaying a high degree of optionality under the column “2/3/4-choice answers” without distinguishing among the actual combinations chosen by individual participants. Thus for example, in Table 6 we find under 2/3/4-choice answers, 4

Table 6: Occurrences of the four determiners in different types of answers in item (ii)

Regional areas	Number of participants	1-choice ZERO	1-choice ART	2-choice ZERO or ART	2/3/4-choices
Northwest	11	0	2 (18%)	7 (63%)	2 ZERO/ART/ <i>certo</i> (18%)
Northeast	21	1 (4%)	1 (4%)	15 (71%)	4 ZERO/ART/ <i>di</i> +ART/ <i>certo</i> (19%)
Emilia Romagna	6	0	0	5 (83%)	1 ZERO/ART/ <i>di</i> +ART (16%)
Centre	10	0	4 (40%)	6 (60%)	0
South	19	2 (10%)	4 (21%)	12 (63%)	1 ZERO/ART/ <i>di</i> +ART/ <i>certo</i> (5%)
Sardinia	5	2 (40%)	1 (20%)	0	2 ZERO/ART/ <i>certo</i> (40%)
Sicily	9	1 (11%)	2 (22%)	4 (44%)	2 ZERO/ART/ <i>di</i> / <i>certo</i> (22%)
Total	81	6 (7%)	14 (17%)	49 (60%)	12 (14%)

3.2.2 ‘I don’t drink spirits’

Table 7 shows that, as with mass nouns and *potatoes* above, the two most frequent forms are ZERO and ART. However, differently from *potatoes* and more similarly to mass nouns, ZERO prevails (96%) over ART (56%). *Di*+ART appears 3 times, as with mass nouns above. *Certo* appears 7 times, less than with *potatoes*, but more than with mass nouns.

Table 7: Overall occurrences of the four determiners in item (iv)

Regional areas	Number of participants	Total ZERO	Total ART	Total <i>di</i> +ART	Total <i>certo</i>
Northwest	11	11 (100%)	5 (45%)	0	2 (18%)
Northeast	21	21 (100%)	13 (61%)	1 (4%)	3 (14%)
Emilia Romagna	6	6 (100%)	4 (66%)	1 (16%)	0
Centre	10	9 (90%)	8 (80%)	0	0
South	19	18 (94%)	9 (47%)	0	0
Sardinia	5	5 (100%)	3 (60%)	0	2 (40%)
Sicily	9	8 (88%)	4 (44%)	1 (11%)	0
Total	81	78 (96%)	46 (56%)	3 (3%)	7 (8%)

ZERO/ART/*di*+ART/*certo*. This summarizes one participant choosing ART/*certo*; two participants choosing zero/ART/*certo*, and one choosing ZERO/ART/*di*+ART. This is represented in Table 5 with only 3 *certo* and 1 *di*+ART.

Table 8 shows that the distribution of one-choice answers is similar to the mass noun *wine* and different from the count noun *potatoes*: ZERO is much more frequent than ART (41% vs. 3%) and is preferred all over the country, where ART only appears sporadically as one-choice answer in the Centre, in the South, and in Sicily (1 occurrence each). Two-choice answers are given by 41% of informants with ZERO and ART as alternatives. Furthermore, 12% of the informants provide three/four-choice answers, all including ZERO, ART, *di+ART*, or *certo*.

Table 8: Occurrences of the four determiners in different types of answers in item (iv)

Regional areas	Number of participants	1-choice ZERO	1-choice ART	2-choice ZERO or ART	2/3/4-choices
Northwest	11	5 (45%)	0	4 (36%)	2 ZERO/ART/ <i>certo</i> (18%)
Northeast	21	8 (38%)	0	9 (42%)	4 ZERO/ART/ <i>di+ART/certo</i> (19%)
Emilia Romagna	6	2 (33%)	0	3 (50%)	1 ZERO/ART/ <i>di+ART</i> (16%)
Centre	10	2 (20%)	1 (10%)	7 (70%)	0
South	19	10 (52%)	1 (5%)	8 (42%)	0
Sardinia	5	2 (40%)	0	1 (20%)	2 ZERO/ART/ <i>certo</i> (40%)
Sicily	9	5 (55%)	1 (11%)	2 (22%)	1 ZERO/ART/ <i>di+ART</i> (11%)
Total	81	34 (41%)	3 (3%)	34 (41%)	10 (12%)

3.2.3 Interim summary

The two plural nouns *potatoes* and *spirits* differ from one another with respect to the distribution of ART, which is much higher with the former than with the latter (92% vs. 56%). They, however, share a rather high number of multiple choice alternatives (14% and 12%, respectively), including some occurrences of *certo*, which makes them different from mass nouns (4%)

3.3 Mass nouns in episodic sentences in the past

3.3.1 'We ate meat'

In this item, as Table 9 shows, three forms reach rather high percentages: ZERO (80%), ART (53%), and *di+ART* (45%). *Certo* is chosen only twice in the Northwest. As for the diatopic distribution, note that *di+ART* is much more present in the North and the Centre. ZERO is clearly predominant in the Northeast and in Sicily, likewise what we have observed with *meat* in the negative context (cf. Section 3.1.1).

Table 9: Overall occurrences of the four determiners in item (v)

Regional areas	Number of participants	Total ZERO	Total ART	Total <i>di</i> +ART	Total <i>certo</i>
Northwest	11	9 (81%)	7 (63%)	7 (63%)	0
Northeast	21	19 (90%)	6 (38%)	15 (71%)	2 (9%)
Emilia Romagna	6	5 (83%)	4 (66%)	4 (66%)	0
Centre	10	8 (80%)	8 (80%)	6 (60%)	0
South	20	13 (65%)	10 (50%)	3 (15%)	0
Sardinia	5	4 (80%)	4 (80%)	0	0
Sicily	9	8 (88%)	4 (44%)	2 (22%)	0
Total	82	66 (80%)	43 (53%)	37 (45%)	2 (2%)

Parallel to *meat* in negative contexts, ZERO is the preferred form (28%) in one-choice answers, while ART is chosen fewer times (9%), except in the South where it reaches 25%. ZERO is more strongly preferred in Sicily as one-choice answer (55%). ART is mostly chosen in alternative with other forms, except in the South. Unlike negative contexts, *di*+ART appears in one-choice answers in the North and in Emilia Romagna. In two-choice answers, there are many more alternatives than above: in addition to the combination “ZERO or ART” seen earlier, we find 13% of “ZERO or *di*+ART”, and 6% of “ART or *di*+ART”. 21% of the informants choose “ZERO, ART or *di*+ART” as multiple alternative forms. The data are provided in table 10.

Table 10: Occurrences of the four determiners in different types of answers in item (v)

Regional areas	Num. of part.	1-ch. ZERO	1-ch. ART	1-ch. <i>di</i> +ART	2-ch. ZERO or ART	2-ch. ZERO or <i>di</i> +ART	2-ch. ART or <i>di</i> +ART	3/4-choices
Northwest	11	2 (18%)	1 (9%)	1 (9%)	1 (9%)	1 (9%)	0	5 ZERO/ART/ <i>di</i> +ART (45%)
Northeast	21	4 (19%)	0	1 (4%)	2 (9%)	9 (42%)	1 (4%)	4 ZERO/ART/ <i>di</i> +ART/ <i>certo</i> (19%)
Emilia Romagna	6	1 (16%)	0	1 (16%)	1 (16%)	0	0	3 ZERO/ART/ <i>di</i> +ART (50%)
Centre	10	1 (10%)	0	0	3 (30%)	1 (10%)	2 (20%)	3 ZERO/ART/ <i>di</i> +ART (30%)
South	20	9 (45%)	5 (25%)	1 (5%)	3 (15%)	0	1 (5%)	1 ZERO/ART/ <i>di</i> +ART (5%)
Sardinia	5	1 (20%)	1 (20%)	0	3 (60%)	0	0	0
Sicily	9	5 (55%)	1 (11%)	0	1 (11%)	0	0	2 ZERO/ART/ <i>di</i> +ART (22%)
Total	82	23 (28%)	8 (9%)	4 (4%)	14 (17%)	11 (13%)	4 (6%)	18 (21%)

3.3.2 ‘We drank wine’

In this item, the three more frequent forms ZERO (68%), ART (45%), and *di*+ART (53%) distribute more evenly than in the other items, with ART less frequent than *di*+ART. *Certo* has the usual few occurrences dispersed throughout the Peninsula and not in the islands. As for the diatopic distribution, note that *di*+ART is more present than in other contexts in the North and Centre. ZERO is predominant in the Northeast and Sicily, similarly to what we have observed with negative sentences in the present in Section 3.2 and with *meat* in the episodic sentence in the past in Section 3.3.1. The data are provided in Table 11.

Table 11: Overall occurrences of the four determiners in item (vi)

Regional areas	Number of participants	Total ZERO	Total ART	Total <i>di</i> +ART	Total <i>certo</i>
Northwest	11	7 (63%)	6 (54%)	9 (81%)	1 (9%)
Northeast	21	14 (66%)	7 (33%)	14 (66%)	1 (4%)
Emilia Romagna	6	6 (100%)	3 (50%)	4 (66%)	1 (16%)
Centre	10	8 (80%)	8 (80%)	6 (60%)	2 (20%)
South	20	11 (55%)	9 (45%)	7 (35%)	1 (5%)
Sardinia	5	3 (60%)	2 (40%)	2 (40%)	0
Sicily	9	7 (77%)	2 (22%)	2 (22%)	0
Total	82	56 (68%)	37 (45%)	44 (53%)	6 (7%)

As shown in Table 12, as a single choice, ZERO is still the favourite form (24%), while ART is less preferred (10%). *Di*+ART appears as a single choice more abundantly than in the previous items (18%). There are many combinations of alternative forms (43%). In addition to the common two-choice answer “ZERO or ART” (10%), we also find “ZERO or *di*+ART” (10%), and “ART or *di*+ART” (2%), which together with three/four-choice answers (21%) make this context the one with the highest degree of variation and optionality.

Table 12: Occurrences of the four determiners in different types of answers in item (vi)

Regional areas	Num of part.	1-ch. ZERO	1-ch. ART	1-ch. <i>di</i> +ART	2-ch. ZERO or ART	2-ch. ZERO or <i>di</i> +ART	2-ch. ART or <i>di</i> +ART	3/4-choices
Northwest	11	1 (9%)	1 (9%)	3 (27%)	0	0	0	6 ZERO/ART/ <i>di</i> +ART/ <i>certo</i> (54%)
Northeast	21	4 (19%)	1 (4%)	6 (28%)	2 (9%)	4 (19%)	0	4 ZERO/ART/ <i>di</i> +ART/ <i>certo</i> (19%)
Emilia Romagna	6	1 (16%)	0	0	1 (16%)	2 (33%)	0	2 ZERO/ART/ <i>di</i> +ART/ <i>certo</i> (33%)
Centre	10	1 (10%)	1 (10%)	0	2 (20%)	1 (10%)	1 (10%)	4 ZERO/ART/ <i>di</i> +ART/ <i>certo</i> (40%)
South	20	6 (30%)	4 (20%)	4 (20%)	3 (15%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	1 ZERO/ART/ <i>di</i> +ART (5%)

Sardinia	5	1 (20%)	1 (20%)	1 (20%)	1 (20%)	1 (20%)	0	0
Sicily	9	6 (66%)	1 (11%)	1 (11%)	0	0	0	1 ZERO/ART/ <i>di</i> +ART (11%)
Total	82	20 (24%)	9 (10%)	15 (18%)	9 (10%)	9 (10%)	2 (2%)	18 (21%)

3.3.3 Interim summary

In episodic sentences in the past, we find many more occurrences of *di*+ART and slightly less occurrences of ZERO and ART than in negative sentences in the present tense (3.1.3). Notably, *di*+ART appears in one-choice and two-choice answers, unlike what we found in negative sentences. However, as in negative sentences, ZERO is predominant over both ART and *di*+ART in one-choice answers and in overall occurrences. With ‘wine’, *di*+ART is more frequent than with ‘meat’ both in overall occurrences and in one-choice answers.

3.4 Summary of data

To better grasp the distribution of each form throughout contexts and areas, we summarize the overall occurrences of the four determiners in Tables 13-16, each giving a synopsis of the behaviour of each determiner. In Tables 13 and 14, it is evident that ZERO and ART are present everywhere. Table 15 shows that *di*+ART is basically limited to episodic sentences in the past and appears mostly in the North and the Centre, while Table 16 shows that *certo* is limited to few occurrences, which mostly appear in the North and in Sardinia.

Table 13: Occurrences of ZERO across contexts and geographic areas

ZERO	<i>Non mangio carne</i>	<i>Non bevo vino</i>	<i>Non mangio patate</i>	<i>Non bevo i superalcolici</i>	<i>Abbiamo mangiato carne</i>	<i>Abbiamo bevuto vino</i>	Total
Northwest	81%	90%	81%	100%	81%	63%	83%
Northeast	90%	100%	90%	100%	90%	66%	89%
Em. Rom.	100%	100%	100%	100%	83%	100%	97%
Centre	90%	100%	60%	90%	80%	80%	83%
South	70%	80%	78%	94%	65%	55%	74%
Sardinia	80%	100%	80%	100%	80%	60%	83%
Sicily	88%	100%	77%	88%	88%	77%	86%
Total	84%	93%	81%	96%	80%	68%	84%

Table 14: Occurrences of ART across contexts and geographic areas

ART	<i>Non mangio la carne</i>	<i>Non bevo il vino</i>	<i>Non mangio le patate</i>	<i>Non bevo i superalcolici</i>	<i>Abbiamo mangiato la carne</i>	<i>Abbiamo bevuto il vino</i>	Total
Northwest	72%	63%	100%	45%	63%	54%	66%
Northeast	66%	38%	95%	61%	38%	33%	55%
Em. Rom.	100%	100%	100%	66%	66%	50%	80%
Centre	80%	90%	100%	80%	80%	80%	85%
South	75%	65%	89%	47%	50%	45%	62%
Sardinia	40%	60%	60%	60%	80%	40%	57%
Sicily	44%	33%	88%	44%	44%	22%	46%
Total	69%	59%	92%	56%	53%	45%	62%

Table 15: Occurrences of *di+ART* across contexts and geographic areas

<i>di+ART</i>	<i>Non mangio della carne</i>	<i>Non bevo del vino</i>	<i>Non mangio delle patate</i>	<i>Non bevo dei superalcolici</i>	<i>Abbiamo mangiato della carne</i>	<i>Abbiamo bevuto del vino</i>	Total
Northwest	0%	9%	0%	0%	63%	81%	26%
Northeast	0%	0%	4%	4%	71%	66%	24%
Em. Rom.	16%	16%	16%	16%	66%	66%	33%
Centre	0%	0%	0%	0%	60%	60%	20%
South	5%	5%	5%	0%	15%	35%	11%
Sardinia	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	40%	7%
Sicily	0%	0%	0%	11%	22%	22%	9%
Total	2%	3%	3%	3%	45%	53%	18%

Table 16: Occurrences of *certo* across contexts and geographic areas

<i>Certo</i>	<i>Non mangio certa carne</i>	<i>Non bevo certo vino</i>	<i>Non mangio certe patate</i>	<i>Non bevo certi superalcolici</i>	<i>Abbiamo mangiato certa carne</i>	<i>Abbiamo bevuto certo vino</i>	Total
Northwest	0%	0%	18%	18%	0%	9%	8%
Northeast	4%	0%	14%	14%	9%	4%	8%
Em. Rom.	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	16%	3%
Centre	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	3%
South	0%	0%	5%	0%	0%	5%	2%
Sardinia	0%	20%	40%	40%	0%	0%	13%
Sicily	11%	0%	22%	0%	0%	0%	5%
Total	2%	1%	12%	8%	2%	7%	5%

4 Discussion

In this section, we analyse the overall occurrences of the four forms presented in Section 3, comparing the six different contexts and highlighting how the features listed in (8a-c) above interact with the occurrence of the determiners across contexts, in given geographical areas, and with respect to the optionality issue. Since we have a limited number of informants, especially as regards some areas, we can only formulate tentative hypotheses, which need to find confirmation in a larger survey planned for future work.

4.1 The distribution of indefinite forms across contexts

The mass singular vs. plural count distinction, which in the items discussed here can only be checked in negative sentences in the present, does not have great impact on the choice among the different determiner forms.

- ZERO is prevalent with both mass singular and plural count nouns.
- ART is also very common with both. This is clear comparing *wine* and *spirits* in negative sentences. *Meat* and *potatoes* apparently behave differently from one another, but this may be due to reasons related to saliency.¹²

¹² The higher occurrence of ART with *potatoes*, which makes it different from the other three negative contexts (cf. Table 14), can be attributed to the fact that *potatoes* are interpreted as a possible choice among vegetables. In other words, the context may translate into *Among vegetables, I do not eat potatoes*. This makes the hyponym *potatoes*

- *Di+ART* has the same occurrence with mass singular and plural count nouns.
- *Certo* is more frequent with plural count nouns. This is expected if the type of meaning conveyed by *certo* arises more easily with plural count nouns, as noted in (7) above.

The comparison between negative sentences in the present tense vs. episodic sentences in the past displays some differences:

- We find a much larger occurrence of *di+ART* in episodic sentences as opposed to its quasi total lack in negative sentences. This can be reduced to the small quantity interpretation that is more readily available in episodic sentences, especially with ‘wine’ (which is drunk in small quantity).
- ZERO and ART are possible in both contexts with the higher occurrence of ZERO, as is generally the case in all contexts.
- *Certo* is very rare in both contexts. It appears to be slightly preferred in episodic sentences in the past, but only with ‘wine’. This can be reduced to the specialization of *certo* as referring to types, as mentioned in (7) above, and to the fact that types of wine are contextually more relevant to cultural discourse than types of meat.

4.2 The diatopic distribution of indefinite forms compared to *AIS*

While the *AIS* maps only present ZERO, ART, bare *di*, and *di+ART* and do not attest *certo*, our data of present-day informal Italian present some occurrences of *certo* and do not display any bare *di* (although two informants come from the province of Turin, where the three *AIS* maps reported a consistent use of bare *di*). As for the lack of bare *di* in our data, two hypotheses can be formulated: either this form has never entered informal Italian, or the low number of speakers from the Northwest has not allowed this form to emerge in our questionnaire.

If we compare the diatopic distribution of the determiner forms in present-day informal Italian and the *AIS* maps, we observe a different picture.

- As shown in Table 13, ZERO is the unmarked form in all indefinite contexts and all over the country. Its distribution is thus much wider in present-day informal Italian than what is represented in the Italo-Romance varieties depicted in the three *AIS* maps. It should however be observed that in our contemporary Italian data, ZERO appears in higher percentages in those areas where it appears to be the unmarked form in the last-century dialects, namely the Northeast and Sicily.
- As shown in Table 14, ART has gained ground with respect to the situation attested in *AIS*; in present-day informal Italian, it is widespread all over the country, although it is chosen less frequently than ZERO. Interestingly, ART is still a prominent form in the (Centre-) South, where it was reported to be the only form in *AIS*.
- As shown in Table 15, *di+ART* does not have an unmarked indefinite meaning in present-day informal Italian, not even in Emilia Romagna, where it is reported to be the unmarked form in the *AIS* maps. According to our data, in the informal Italian variety of Emilia Romagna, ZERO and ART are the most frequent forms, in apparent free variation; *di+ART* is however attested more than in other areas in all contexts. This singles out Emilia Romagna from the rest of Italy, where *di+ART* is present in considerable percentages only in episodic sentences, especially in the North and the Centre, less so in the South and the islands.
- Table 16 cannot be directly compared to *AIS* data, since *certo* does not appear in the three relevant maps. However, the fact that it appears to be evenly distributed across the country, only as one of more choices, lets us infer that neither in the dialects, nor in

salient due to the implicit presence of the hypernym *vegetables* in the context. The same salient reading is less available in the other contexts of the questionnaire, because *meat* and *wine/spirits* are hypernyms as objects of *eat* and *drink*, respectively.

present-day informal Italian, *certo* can be used as the unmarked indefinite determiner.

4.3 The optionality issue

The *AIS* maps only sporadically report more than one form at given points of the map but can be taken to witness optionality in given areas, in the sense that variation is found in neighbouring points. When variation regards the same area in the three *AIS* maps, Cardinaletti and Giusti (2018) reduce it to different nuances of indefinite meaning, claiming that at least in the Italo-Romance varieties of last century, no true optionality was attested.

Note that the objective of *AIS* was not to search for optionality in the expression of syntactic forms such as the indefinite determiners, while our questionnaire of informal Italian is especially designed for this, always reminding the participants to tick all of the acceptable choices.

The large occurrence of ZERO and ART in the same contexts and in the same areas suggests optionality between the two forms, with a preference for ZERO, especially in the Northeast and in Sicily (cf. Tables 13 and 14). A second piece of evidence supporting the hypothesis of optionality between ZERO and ART is the fact that in more than half of the answers (281, 57%), participants chose more than one form. This holds of all areas, except Sicily, where the one-choice answers outnumber the two- or three/four-choice answers in most items.

In some cases, however, specialization of meaning can be said to be at work in the choice between more than one possible forms, which is more apparent in episodic sentences in the past. As observed in Section 4.1, our Italian data confirm the tendencies observed in the *AIS* maps by Cardinaletti and Giusti (2018); namely, ZERO is associated with the core indefinite meaning, ART with saliency, and *di*+ART with small quantity. This is also confirmed by a first analysis of speakers' comments on their judgements about item (v), the episodic sentence in the past "Yesterday, for dinner we ate meat". Among the speakers who have provided more than one choice (47), 10 (spread over the country) claim to find no difference in interpretation, the other 37 observe that while ZERO expresses "general" indefiniteness, the definite article expresses saliency of the meat with respect to the dinner context (its expected presence in the menu, or a particular type of meat, ecc.), *di*+ART implies that the meat is not the only food served for dinner, while *certo* emphasizes the quality of the meat.

5 Conclusions

In this paper, we have provided a preliminary analysis of the occurrences of the different indefinite determiners available in present-day informal Italian by inspecting their occurrences in two different indefinite contexts (negative sentences in the present tense and episodic sentences in the past tense) and their diatopic distribution across geographical areas. The data have been collected through a pilot online questionnaire, which had the property of asking the participants to indicate all the forms they considered possible in given contexts, in order to detect optionality. Despite the limited number of participants from some geographical areas, some tendencies can be clearly identified.

Both ZERO and ART are widespread in indefinite contexts throughout the country and a high rate of optionality must be recognised. This is confirmed by the fact that participants provided two-choice answers in more than half of the cases.

In some contexts and some areas, however, one form is more prominent than the other. This can either be due to the semantics of the context, which may favour some specialized meaning (ART can be associated with a saliency meaning, *di*+ART conveys a small quantity meaning), or to diatopic variation due to language contact with the dialects.

The comparison with the dialectal data provided by *AIS* maps 1037, 1343, and 636 and

analysed by Cardinaletti and Giusti (2018) shows that the modern informal variety of Italian displays diatopic tendencies that are related to the dialectal substratum.

Future work will be aimed to extend the analysis to the other items of the questionnaire, which present telic and atelic episodic contexts, as well as wide vs narrow scope interpretation, to check whether the optionality detected in the first six items is confirmed.

Furthermore, an on-going research aimed at including a larger number of participants in the collection of data is expected to provide a more balanced sample of speakers across geographical areas, a finer grained representation of the diatopic distribution, and a clearer picture of the specialization of meaning vs true optionality.

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