

From preposition to article

The grammaticalization of the French partitive*

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From Latin to French, an article took shape out of a preposition with a concrete spatial meaning. This paper highlights two crucial stages in the grammaticalization process leading from the preposition *de* to the so-called 'partitive' article: the Old French stage, which is the last prepositional stage of *de*, and the Middle French stage, where *de* is entering into the paradigm of articles. Two central issues are dealt with: (i) Why did French develop an article for indefinite non-singular reference, whereas most other languages endowed with an article system leave this type of reference unmarked? (ii) How can we, at the pre-article stage, account for the use of the preposition *de* in syntactic functions that are in principle incompatible with the use of a preposition? The study also reflects upon the theoretical postulate of gradualness of the grammaticalization process and raises the question of a possible correlation between a shift in morphosyntactic category and a discontinuity in evolution.

o. Introduction

Most languages in which an article system has developed share common properties as to the origin, the chronology and the conditions of use of their articles.

- i. Etymologically, the definite article originates from a weakened demonstrative whereas the indefinite article derives from the unity numeral 'one'.
- ii. From the chronological point of view, the definite article is the first to appear while the indefinite singular article develops later in time.
- iii. There is an asymmetry between definite and indefinite articles as to their conditions of use: there is normally no overt marking for indefinite non-singular reference.¹

Globally, these general tendencies also show up in French.

- i. The definite article *le* originates from the Latin demonstrative *ILLE*; the indefinite singular article *un* is derived from the Latin numeral *UNUS*.
- ii. The chronological order is also respected. In Old French, the use of the definite article *li* is already widespread, while the indefinite article *uns* is still in a primitive stage of development (Carlier 2001).

There is however an exotic feature in the French article system. Compare for instance the following English sentences with their French counterparts.

- (1) a. I see *a* cat.
b. Je vois *un* chat.
- (2) a. I see cats.
b. Je vois *des* chats.
- (3) a. I eat rice.
b. Je mange *du* riz.

Most languages have an article for the indefinite singular but leave the indefinite non-singular unmarked. In contrast, French has created a specific set of articles for this area, namely *du*, *de la*, *des*² for reasons that need to be investigated. These articles are labeled “partitive”. We summarize the comparison between the French article system and the general case, as exemplified by English or German, in Table 1.

Table 1. The comparison between the French article system and the general case

		Singular Count Nouns	Plural Count Nouns	Noncount Nouns
Definite	General	Weakened demonstrative	Weakened demonstrative	Weakened demonstrative
	French	Weakened demonstrative	Weakened demonstrative	Weakened demonstrative
Indefinite	General	Weakened unity numeral	Zero marking	Zero marking
	French	Weakened unity numeral	Partitive article	Partitive article

A second problem is raised by the etymology of the partitive article. Its origin can be traced to a contraction of the preposition *de* and the definite article. The preposition *de* has primitively a spatial meaning: it denotes a distancing from a source or an origin (e.g. *de digito anulum detraho* ‘I remove the ring from the finger’ Cato *R.R.* 157,6). In conjunction with the definite article, *de*

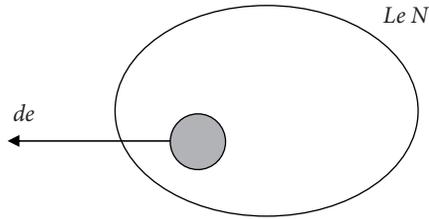


Figure 1. The partitive meaning of *de*

acquires the partitive sense of removal, i.e. extracting a part of the whole. As depicted in Figure 1, the notion of distancing from a source remains present in the partitive meaning.

This description of the origin of the partitive article leaves us with a syntactic enigma: how can we explain the appearance of the preposition *de* in a syntactic function that does not require or is even incompatible with the use of a preposition? Taking it for granted that in a sentence like (2b), the verb *voir* ('see') only accepts a direct or non-prepositional object, what can account for the insertion of the form with *de* ('of') there?

- (2) a. I see cats.
 b. Je vois *des* chats.
I see of-the cats

The first section of this paper will be devoted to the analysis of the precursor of the partitive article as it exists in Old French, and will in particular raise the question of the prepositional status of *de*, which is still under debate in current research. In the second section, we will describe the emergence of the partitive article, which essentially took place during the Middle French period, and we will try to trace back the specific reasons that led to its creation. This mutation from partitive construction to partitive article, which has to be understood in terms of divergence (Hopper 1991), is represented in Figure 2.³

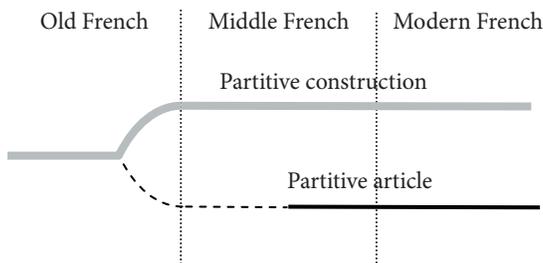


Figure 2. From the partitive construction to the partitive article

We will conclude with some general considerations on the nature of the grammaticalization process implied by this mutation and comment more specifically on its gradualness or abruptness.

1. Old French

According to Foulet (1965:69), Old French already has a full-fledged partitive article, with, however, a meaning different from that of the Modern French partitive article:

In the 12th century, the partitive always refers to an undetermined fraction of a well-determined quantity. [...] The 12th century lacks expressions such as *verser du vin*, *perdre du sang* in the sense they have today. *Verser du vin* meant [...] ‘pour (some) of that wine that you see there’; *perdre du sang* could only mean ‘shed (some) of his own or your own blood’. (Foulet 1965: 69–70, in our translation)

In every instance where an undetermined fraction of an undetermined quantity was concerned, the old language, as we know, had an adequate procedure: the partitive noun was used without article or any appendage. Only in those cases where the fraction was to be taken from a well-determined quantity was it imperative to use a different marking. (Foulet 1965: 72, in our translation)

Hence we observe the following correspondences:

- | | | | |
|----------------|-----------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| (4) | <i>He is drinking</i> | \emptyset | <i>wine</i> |
| Old French: | Il boit | \emptyset | <i>vin</i> |
| Modern French: | Il boit | <i>du</i> | <i>vin</i> |
| | | | |
| (5) | <i>He is drinking</i> | <i>(of the)</i> | <i>wine (of this bottle)</i> |
| Old French: | Il boit | <i>del</i> | <i>vin</i> |
| Modern French: | Il boit | <i>du</i> | <i>vin (de cette bouteille).</i> |

Most scholars today are less affirmative as to the status of the Old French partitive: some insert quotes to signal their doubts (partitive ‘article’), others claim that *de* in the Old French partitive is still a preposition. Whatever option is taken, the question remains. If *de* is (originally) a preposition, how can we explain its use? Is it possible to identify or to restore some element — nominal or verbal — that governs *de*?

As the question has been raised before, we will first examine the two major hypotheses that have been put forward: the Deleted Quantifier Hypothesis (§ 1.1), which was proposed for the first time by Lucien Foulet (1965 [1919, 1st

edition]), and the Prepositional Object Hypothesis (§ 1.2), which is inspired by work of Lucien Kupferman on Modern French. Finally, we will propose a third and new hypothesis for the Old French partitive⁴ (§ 1.3).

1.1 The Deleted Quantifier Hypothesis: (Quantifier) + *DE* + Definite NP

1.1.1 *The hypothesis*

In the framework of an overall study of 12th century French, based on a vast philological experience, Foulet formulates the hypothesis that the preposition *de* contained in the partitive article is linked to the presence of a quantifying adverb that was eliminated at a later stage.⁵ For the genesis of the partitive article, he proposes the following sequence of evolutionary stages:

Table 2. The different stages in the development of the partitive article according to Foulet (1965)

Stage	Pattern	Example	Literary translation	Meaning
I	Qnt + <i>de</i> + N	<i>Asez de vin</i>	Enough of wine cf. plenty of wine	Specified quantity taken from an unspecified quantity 'enough wine'
II	Qnt + <i>de</i> + Def. Art. + N ⁶	<i>Assez du vin</i>	Enough of-the wine cf. plenty of the wine	Specified quantity taken from a specified quantity 'enough of the wine'
III	Ø + <i>de</i> + Def. Art. + N (Old French)	<i>Del / dou / du vin</i>	of-the wine	Unspecified quantity taken from a specified quantity 'some of the wine'
IV	Ø + <i>de</i> + Def. Art. + N (Modern French)	<i>du vin</i>	of-the wine	Unspecified quantity taken from an unspecified quantity 'some wine'

These different evolutionary stages postulated by Foulet are illustrated by the following examples:

Stage I

- (6) Morgain la desloial qui encore i estoit, et avec lui *assez de gent* qui li fesoient compaignie en toutes sesons (*Mort le Roi Artu*, § 48, ed. J. Frappier, Genève: Droz, 1964)
Morgan the Faithless, who still lived there with a large number of people who kept her company at all seasons

Stage II

- (7) il estoit navrez moult durement et avoit assez perdu *del sanc* (*Mort le Roi Artu*, § 20)
He was very bad wounded and had lost a lot of-the blood ('a lot of his blood')

Stage III

- (8) [il] verse an la cope d'argent
del vin qui n'estoit pas troublez.
(Chrétien de Troyes, *Perceval*, 728–729, quoted from Foulet (1965))
he pours in the silver goblet of-the wine ('some of the wine') *that was not cloudy*

Stage IV

- (9) Il boit *du vin*.
He is drinking of-the wine ('some wine')

Assez (meaning 'enough' and, by understatement, 'quite a lot') was rather commonly used as a quantifier in Old French, initially without *de* and, from the 12th century on, with the linking element *de*.⁷ In this latter case, there are two possible patterns: "Qnt + *de* + N" or "Qnt + *de* + Definite Article + N". Contrary to the sequence suggested in Table 2, these two patterns do not represent successive stages in the evolution, but they coexisted in Old French, the former being much more frequent than the latter. They differ however in meaning: the pattern without the article corresponds to a partition within an unspecified quantity, while the pattern with the article has the meaning of a partition within a determined or specified quantity, exactly as in the equivalent pattern in English (*plenty of wine* versus *plenty of the wine*).

The crucial step in Foulet's argumentation is the transition between stage II, *assez del vin*, and stage III, *del vin*. Foulet describes this evolution as follows: "the adverb was discarded but *de* was maintained". He accounts for this step on the basis of the observation that the adverb *assez* has a neutral meaning, which consists in referring to an average quantity, neither little nor a lot. Therefore, not marking it at all does not provoke a change in the meaning of the sentence. Foulet invokes the following example:

- (10) Asez i ot *contes et rois*
Si ot *reines et contesses*. (Chrétien de Troyes, *Perceval*, 728–729, quoted from Foulet (1965))

Enough there were counts and kings and so were there queens and countesses

‘There were quite a lot of counts and kings and also queens and countesses’

In not making explicit the adverb, the author did not intend to convey that there were fewer queens and countesses than kings and counts.

But why is *de* kept when the adverb *asez* is omitted? To explain this second point, Foulet shows that the sequence “*de* + (Determiner +) Noun” had a certain autonomy with respect to the adverb of quantification: it could be separated from the adverb of quantification (7) and could even precede it (11/12).

(11) *De cers, de biches, de chevreus*

Ocist *asez* par le boschage. (Béroul, *Tristan & Iseut*, 1426–1427, Louvain: Peeters, 1999)

[*de* + N ... Qnt]

Of stags, of does, of roes, he kills a lot in the bushes

(12) *De l’erbe gete asez desor* (Béroul, *Tristan & Iseut*, 1633)

[*de* + Det. + N ... Qnt]

Of the grass he throws a lot on it

For the prepositional group to acquire complete autonomy, it is only a small step.

1.1.2 Evaluation of the hypothesis

Foulet’s Deleted Quantifier Hypothesis raises a number of questions.

- (i) Why does the partitive article contain a definite article in its internal make-up?
- (ii) How can we account for the interpretation of this definite article?
- (iii) How can we explain the distributional constraints of the medieval partitive?
- (i) *Why does the partitive article contain a definite article in its internal make-up?*

As is shown in Table 2, to denote a fraction of an unspecified whole, one did not use *assez del vin* but *assez de vin*, without definite article. If it is true that Quantifier Deletion occurred, why did this Quantifier Deletion not give rise to an indefinite article, denoting an unspecified quantity of an unspecified whole, of the form *de vin*, instead of *du vin*?⁸ The expression *de vin* did actually occur

in patterns not related to a quantifying expression, but it was marginal and never attained a significant frequency in comparison with *du vin*.⁹

(ii) *How can we account for the interpretation of this definite article?*

As mentioned before, *del vin* in Old French refers to ‘some of that wine there on the table’. In other words, the fraction must be taken from a contextually specified set. Why is this so? And by which mechanism has this restriction later been lifted such that *du vin* has eventually acquired the meaning we know in Modern French? Foulet does not provide an answer to these questions, but others did. Clédat (1901), and quite a few scholars after him, argue that the definite article originally had only a specific interpretation, and that it acquired a generic sense later. Consequently, the partitive in which this article intervenes as a constitutive element initially referred to a fraction of a specific set and could only later correspond to a fraction of the generic set.

That assumption is quite convincing at first sight, as it invokes a semantic evolution of the definite article that has been verified independently. It is however invalidated by a problem of relative chronology. The generic use of the definite article does indeed appear at a later stage than the specific use of that article, but the generic sense of the definite article did exist much earlier than the first traces of the use of “*de* + Definite Article” identified as partitive article. Why is the generic interpretation impossible when the definite article is combined with *de* such as in (13), while during the same period the generic interpretation of the definite article is possible without *de* (14)?

- (13) [il] verse an la cope d’argent
del vin qui n’estoit pas troublez.
 (Chrétien de Troyes, *Perceval*, 728–729, quoted by Foulet 1965: 69)
*He pours in the silver goblet of-the wine*_[SPECIFIC] *that was not cloudy.*

- (14) Ne me dist pas ma mere fable,
 Qui me dist que *li ange* estoient
 Les plus beles choses qui soient (Chrétien de Troyes, *Perceval*, 142–145,
 Paris: Flammarion, 1997)
*My mother didn’t tell me a tale when she said that the angels*_[GENERIC]
 (‘angels’) *are the most beautiful beings that exist.*

(iii) *How can we explain the distributional constraints of the medieval partitive?*

The Deleted Quantifier Hypothesis derives the partitive structure “*de* + Definite Article + N” from the quantifier construction “Qnt + *de* + Definite Article + N”. It thus predicts that the partitive structure should have the same contexts

of use as the quantifier construction. This prediction proves, however, to be wrong. In contrast to the quantifier construction, the partitive is subject to the following two distributional constraints.

- Foulet (1965) points out that the Old French partitive is used only as object of a very limited number of verbs, the most frequent of which are *boire* ('drink') and *manger* ('eat'), which have been labeled by Englebort (1996) as 'fragmentative verbs'.¹⁰ Quantifiers, on the other hand, are from the very beginning freely used in various syntactic positions, for instance in subject position (15–16).¹¹

(15) Plusurs des femmes del lignage,
C'est veritez, sens nez sunt nees
(Marie de France, *Bisclavret*, 312–3, quoted by Buridant 2000: 173)
Several of-the women of his lineage — *it's true* — *were born without nose*.

(16) molt de gent le sivoient (Robert de Clari, *Conquête de Constantinople*,
p. 1, Paris: Champion, 1924)
A lot of people followed him.

- Unlike quantifiers such as *plus* ('more') in (17), the partitive in Old and Middle French is never used with abstract nouns (Englebort 1996, Carlier 2004).

(17) En li avoit plus de pitié,
Plus de douceur, plus d'amistié
(Gautier de Coinci, *Miracles de Notre-Dame*, Ed. V.F. Koenig, vol. 4,
p. 537)
In her, there was more of pity, more of sweetness, more of friendship
(*'more pity, more sweetness, more friendship'*)

To sum up, the Deleted Quantifier Hypothesis, which postulates a deleted or implicit quantifier in order to justify the presence of *de*, cannot explain why the partitive article contains a definite article and why this definite article has necessarily a specific interpretation in the Old French partitive. It also fails to account for the distributional constraints of the medieval partitive. These distributional constraints, in particular those relative to the verbal context, will be the starting point of the second hypothesis, which we will call the Prepositional Object Hypothesis and which we develop below.

1.2 The Prepositional Object Hypothesis

1.2.1 *The hypothesis*

In the French grammatical tradition, transitive verbs are subdivided into three classes:

- direct transitive verbs, which take a direct object: e.g. *voir quelqu'un* ('see someone');
- indirect transitive verbs, which require a prepositional or "indirect" object, that is a complement introduced by a preposition, mostly *à* ('to') or *de* ('of'): e.g. *penser à quelque chose* ('think of something'), *se souvenir de quelque chose* ('remember something');
- ditransitive verbs, which take a direct and an indirect object or, in some cases, two indirect objects: e.g. *donner quelque chose à quelqu'un* ('give something to someone')

The term "indirect transitive verb" will be used to refer to verbs requiring a prepositional complement.

Kupferman (1976, 1994, 1998) has pointed out that in Modern French, the so-called "fragmentative" verbs, among which are *manger*, *boire*, *goûter*, *prendre* ('eat', 'drink', 'taste', 'take'), have peculiar syntactic properties with respect to the pronominalization of their object. For instance, as shown by the examples in the third column of Table 3, they allow not only the relative pronoun characteristic of a direct, non-prepositional object, but also the relative pronouns characteristic of an object introduced by the preposition *de* ('of'). Kupferman concludes from these facts that the Modern French sentence *Il a bu du vin* (cf. 4–5) is syntactically ambiguous: it can be analyzed as a direct object construction or as a prepositional object construction. As such, verbs like *boire* are considered by Kupferman as having two subcategorization frames: they can function as a direct transitive verb or as an indirect transitive verb, with its object introduced by the preposition *de*.

To this syntactic ambiguity also corresponds a semantic ambiguity:

- (4) DIRECT TRANSITIVE CONSTRUCTION according to Kupferman
Il boit *du vin*.
He is drinking \emptyset *wine*.
'He is drinking some wine'

Table 3. The object construction of *boire* 'drink' and its pronominal counterparts according to Kupferman (1976, 1994, 1998)

<i>Voir</i> 'see':	<i>Parler de</i> 'speak of/about':	<i>Boire</i> 'drink'
DIRECT TRANSITIVE VERB	INDIRECT TRANSITIVE VERB	
Il a vu de l'or.	Il parle de ses aventures.	Il a bu du vin.
<i>He saw gold.</i>	<i>He speaks of his adventures.</i>	<i>He drank wine</i>
L'or qu' il a vu	*Ses aventures qu' il parle	Le vin qu' il a bu
<i>The gold that he saw.</i>	<i>His adventures that he speaks</i>	<i>The wine that he drank.</i>
*L'or dont il a vu.	Ses aventures dont il parle	Le vin dont il a bu.
*L'or duquel il a vu.	Ses aventures desquelles il parle	Le vin duquel il a bu
<i>The gold of which he saw</i>	<i>His adventures of which he speaks</i>	<i>The wine of which he drank.</i>
* De quoi a-t-il vu?	De quoi parle-t-il?	De quoi a-t-il bu? ¹²
<i>Of what did he see?</i>	<i>Of what does he speak?</i>	<i>Of what did he drink?</i>
* De quel or a-t-il vu?	De quelles aventures parle-t-il?	De quel vin a-t-il bu?
<i>Of which gold did he see?</i>	<i>Of which adventures does he speak?</i>	<i>Of which wine did he drink?</i>
*Il a vu de quelque chose	Il parle de quelque chose	Il boit de quelque chose ¹²
<i>He saw of something</i>	<i>He speaks of something</i>	<i>He drinks of something</i>
*Il a vu de cela	Il parle de cela	Il boit de cela
<i>He saw of that</i>	<i>He speaks of that</i>	<i>He drinks of that</i>

(5) INDIRECT TRANSITIVE CONSTRUCTION according to Kupferman

Il boit **du vin** (de cette bouteille).

He is drinking (of the) wine (of this bottle).

'He is drinking some of the wine'

We will assume that the Old French partitive construction has survived in Modern French in the form of the construction identified by Kupferman as indirect transitive (*Il a bu du vin / Le vin dont il a bu*). This hypothesis is based on distributional and interpretational similarity between the two constructions (Carlier 2000).

(i) *Distributional similarity*

- The Old French partitive appears most readily in the object position of verbs belonging to the class that was identified by Kupferman as having a double subcategorization frame in Modern French, direct transitive and indirect transitive.¹³ Moreover, these verbs also allow two possible pronominalizations for their object in Old French: for instance, as illustrated by (20), they can select the relative pronoun *que*, used for direct objects (18), but also *dont* or *de quoi*, characteristic of a prepositional object introduced by the preposition *de* (19).

(18) *Voir* 'see': DIRECT TRANSITIVE VERB

Cil du chastel par couvoitise

saudront au plein, prendront la proie

que il verront par ceste herboie. (*Roman de Thèbes* [1150], 3388–3390, Paris: Champion, 1966)

Those of the castle, driven by covetousness, will rush forward to seize the booty that they will see in this meadow.

(19) *Parler de* 'speak of/about': INDIRECT TRANSITIVE VERB, WITH THE OBJECT INTRODUCED BY *DE*

D'iloc alat an Alsis la ciptét

Pur une imagine *dunt* il oït parler (*Vie de saint Alexis* [1050], 86–87, Genève: Droz, 1968)

From there he went to the town Alsis for a statue of-which he heard speak.

[...] les plus saiges errent aucunes fois très souvent; ou pour estre passionnéz aux matières *de quoi* l'on parle ou par amour ou par hayne ou pour vouloir dire l'opposite d'un autre. (Ph. de Commynes, *Mémoires*, 1 [1489], p. 102, Book II, Chap. 2)

It is very often the case that the wisest men are occasionally mistaken, because they are taken by passion for the matters of which is spoken or by love or by hatred or because they want to say the opposite of someone else.

(20) *Boire* ‘drink’

- a. [...] Comant Fenice Alis deçut,
Primes par la poison *qu’il but*,
Et puis par l’autre traïson. (Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligès*, 6687–6689,
Paris: Champion, 1957)
*... how Fénicé mystified Alis, first of all by the poison that he drank
and next by the other betrayal.*
- b. Seignors, du vin *de qoi il burent*
Avez oï, por qoi il furent
En si grant paine lonctens mis (Béroul, *Tristran & Iseut*, 2133–2135,
Peeters: Louvain, 1999)
*Lords, you heard about the wine of which they drank and by which
they were thrown for a long time in a state of such great sadness*

- Neither the Old French partitive nor the constituent identified by Kupferman as a prepositional object of verbs like *boire* can be used when the noun is abstract.

(ii) *Interpretational similarity*

Foulet (1965:69), quoted above (§ 1), emphasized the very particular meaning of the Old French partitive: it marks a partition that operates on a contextually specified set. The structure identified by Kupferman as indirect transitive exhibits exactly the same referential interpretation. In (21), where the presence of the relative pronoun *dont* (‘of-which’) indicates that we have the structure identified as indirect transitive by Kupferman, *du gâteau* refers necessarily to a piece of a well-defined cake.

- (21) J’ai mangé *du gâteau*, *dont* il a aussi mangé d’ailleurs. (Kupferman 1976: 50)
I ate of-the cake (‘a piece of the cake’), *of-which* he also ate

If we transpose the analysis of Kupferman to Old French, we could formulate the hypothesis that in Old French the so-called ‘fragmentative’ verbs like *boire* also have a double subcategorization frame, direct transitive (4) and indirect transitive (5), yet without the syntactic ambiguity observed in Modern French.

- (4) DIRECT TRANSITIVE CONSTRUCTION according to Kupferman
Old French: Il boit \emptyset *vin*.
Modern French: Il boit *du vin*.
He is drinking \emptyset wine.
- (5) INDIRECT TRANSITIVE CONSTRUCTION according to Kupferman
Old French: Il boit *del vin*.
Modern French: Il boit *du vin* (de cette bouteille).
He is drinking (of the) wine (of this bottle).

From this perspective, *de* in Old French would not be a part of an article or determiner but simply a preposition introducing a prepositional object.

1.2.2 Evaluation of the hypothesis

In comparison with the Deleted Quantifier Hypothesis, the strength of the Prepositional Object Hypothesis lies in the fact that it provides a straightforward syntactic explanation of the distributional constraints of the Old French partitive.

Actually, the object position of verbs like *boire* represents the statistically dominant context of use of the Old French partitive, but there are nevertheless sporadic occurrences in object position of verbs that do not have the properties listed by Kupferman (Table 3) and thus cannot be analyzed in terms of a prepositional object construction (22).

- (22) Encontré a *de son seignor* (Bérout, *Tristran & Iseut*, 1498, quoted by Tilander 1952)
Discovered has of his lord
'He discovered the tracks of his lord'

The partitive is sometimes even used in other syntactic positions, such as in the nominal predicate of a copular clause.

- (23) Blancandrins fut *des plus saives paiens* (*Chanson de Roland* [1100], 24, Paris: Bordas, 1971)
Blancandrin was of-the wisest heathens
'Blancandrin was amongst the wisest heathens'

Moreover, the parallelism between the so-called indirect transitive construction of verbs like *boire* and the indirect transitive verbs like *parler de* ('speak of') / *vivre de* ('live on') is not perfect. Verbs like *boire*, in the so-called indirect transitive construction, exhibit constraints on the referential interpretation of their object: the referential interpretation of the object presupposes

the existence of a contextually specified partition set. This is not true for indirect transitive verbs like *parler* or *vivre*. This difference is reflected by the following data:

- Contrary to what is claimed by Kupferman (1994) (cf. Table 3), the so-called indirect construction of verbs like *boire* is not freely compatible with interrogative pronouns or indefinite pronouns. As is also noted by Zribi-Hertz (forthcoming), the sentences (24b–c) are actually only marginally acceptable in a very particular situation: they presuppose a contextually specified partition set, which could be in this case a set of a bottle of wine, a bottle of port and a bottle of whisky on the table.¹⁴ No similar constraint exists for verbs like *parler de* in (25b–c).

- (24) a. Il a bu **du** **vin** (de cette bouteille).
He drank (of the) wine (of this bottle).
 b. ?**De quoi** a-t-il bu.
Of what did he drink?
 c. ?Il a bu **de quelque chose**.
He drank of something.

- (25) a. Il parle **de ses aventures**.
He speaks of his adventures
 b. **De quoi** parle-t-il?
Of what does he speak?
 c. Il a parlé **de quelque chose**.
He speaks of something.

- With verbs like *boire*, *de* is normally followed by a definite article or another determiner. The definite article has always a specific interpretation and contributes in this way to defining a contextually specified partition set. With verbs like *parler* or *vivre*, the definite article is often lacking and there is no contextually specified partition set. This is illustrated by the example (26).

- (26) tel sont li vergier que nos tuit
 i pourrions vivre de fruit. (*Roman de Thèbes* [1150], 6983–6984, Paris: Champion, 1966)
Such are the orchards that all of us could live of fruit there. ('live on fruit')

- Verbs like *boire* never accept *de* in combination with an abstract noun or an abstractly used noun, whereas verbs like *parler* or *vivre* do.¹⁵

- (27) N'est giens anfermetez mortal:
 l'en en a paines et dolors,
 mais longuement vit on d'amors. (*Eneas* [1155], 8510–12, Paris:
 Champion, 1929)
*It is not at all a mortal illness: one has pains and sorrows from it, but one
 lives long of love.* ('live on love')

On the basis of two possible pronominalizations of the object, the Prepositional Object Hypothesis postulates a double subcategorization frame for verbs such as *boire*: direct transitive and indirect transitive. However, the facts illustrated by (22) to (27) cast some doubts on the hypothesis of a double subcategorization frame for verbs like *boire*. Therefore, it is at this point necessary to seek independent syntactic evidence to either validate or reject the hypothesis.

1.2.2.1 *The causative construction "faire ('make') + Infinitive"*. Damourette & Pichon (1911–1933) and Kayne (1975) have shown that direct transitive and indirect transitive verbs, when embedded in a "faire + Infinitive" construction, differ as to the expression of their subject. For Modern French, the following observations can be made:

- a. When the embedded infinitive has no object, its subject is normally assigned ACCUSATIVE case.
- b. When the infinitive has a direct object, its subject must be assigned DATIVE case because in French one verb cannot assign accusative case to different constituents.¹⁶
- c. When the infinitive has a prepositional object, there is a strong tendency to assign to its subject the ACCUSATIVE case, since this case assignment does not result in a double accusative construction.

These regularities regarding the case assigned to the subject of the embedded infinitive are summarized and illustrated in Table 4.

The same regularities are also observed in Old and Middle French (Martineau 1992) and are illustrated by the examples (28), (29) and (30).

- (28) – **Direct Object: ACCUSATIVE**
 Il est biaux enfes, bien me plait.
 Alez, si le_[ACCUSATIVE] faites mengier (*Miracle de saint Jehan Crisothomes*
 [1340], in: *Miracles de Nostre Dame par personnages*, ed. G. Paris & U.
 Robert)
He is a nice boy, I like him, make him_[ACCUSATIVE] eat

Table 4. Case assignment to the subject of the infinitive in the causative construction with *faire*

- Direct Object:	<u>Jean</u> boit	<i>John drinks</i>
ACCUSATIVE	Je fais boire <u>Jean</u>	<i>I make John drink</i>
	Je <u>le</u> _[ACCUS] fais boire	<i>I make him</i> _[ACCUSATIVE] <i>drink</i>
+ Direct Object:	<u>Jean</u> boit le café.	<i>John drinks the coffee</i>
DATIVE	Je fais boire à <u>Jean</u> le café.	<i>I make John</i> (Lit.: to John) <i>drink the coffee</i>
	Je <u>lui</u> _[DATIVE] fais boire le café	<i>I make him</i> _[DATIVE] <i>drink the coffee</i>
+ Prepositional Object:	<u>Jean</u> parle de ses aventures.	<i>John speaks of his adventures</i>
ACCUSATIVE	Je fais parler <u>Jean</u> de ses aventures.	<i>I make John speak of his adventures</i>
	Je <u>le</u> _[ACCUS] fais parler de ses aventures	<i>I make him</i> _[ACCUS] <i>speak of his adventures</i>

(29) + Direct Object: DATIVE

les gentilz houmes preuz et biax _[Direct Object]
 fet mengier a chiens, a oisiaux _[DATIVE]! (*Roman de Thèbes* [1150], 10097–
 10098, Champion: Paris, 1968)
He makes eat to dogs, to birds _[DATIVE] *noble, brave and handsome*
men _[Direct Object]!

(30) + Prepositional object: ACCUSATIVE

ne les _[ACCUSATIVE] fault pestre que d'oiseaux vifs _[Prepositional Object] (Albert le
 Grand, *De Falconibus*, BNF, ms. fr. 1304)
You have to feed them _[ACCUSATIVE] *only of living birds* _[Prepositional Object] ('with
 living birds')

If we extrapolate the above mentioned regularities to verbs that have a double subcategorization frame, direct transitive and indirect transitive, we expect the subject to be assigned the DATIVE case in the direct transitive construction and the ACCUSATIVE case in the indirect transitive construction. The following examples, containing the verb *discuter* 'discuss' (*discuter un projet / discuter d'un projet*) show that this extrapolation is indeed correct.

(31) Il fait discuter les architectes _[ACCUSATIVE] de ce projet _[Prepositional Object] avant la réunion.

He makes discuss the architects _[ACCUSATIVE] *about this project* _[Prepositional Object] *before the meeting.*

- (32) Il fait discuter **ce projet**_[Direct Object] aux architectes_[DATIVE] avant la réunion.
*He makes discuss **this project**_[Direct Object] to the architects_[DATIVE] before the meeting.*

According to the Prepositional Object Hypothesis, verbs like *boire* also have a double subcategorization frame, direct transitive and indirect transitive, and, hence, should manifest the same ambivalence as to case assignment of their subject when they are embedded as an infinitive in the “*faire* + infinitive” construction. This is actually not the case. In Old French, there is no difference in case assignment between the direct transitive construction of *boire* (33) and its so-called “indirect” transitive construction (34): in both cases, the subject of the infinitive is assigned the DATIVE case.

- (33) Car **un bevrage** leur_[DATIVE] fait boire
 Qu’il destempre de vaine gloire,
 Dont toz les enyvre et enherbe.
 (Gautier de Coinci, *Miracles de Notre-Dame*, Ed. V.F. Koenig, vol. 1, p. 159)
Because he makes them_[DATIVE] drink a beverage that he mixes with idle glory and with which he makes them all drunk and intoxicates them.
- (34) Et dou saint bevrage li doinst.
 Cele qui est piteuse et tendre
 Boire li_[DATIVE] fait sanz plus atendre
Del bevrage qui a tel force
 Les malans, la royffe et l’escorce
 Chaoir li fait en un moment
 (Gautier de Coinci, *Miracles de Notre-Dame*, Ed. V.F. Koenig, vol. 3, p. 412)
*And he gives him of-the holy beverage, the one that is merciful and tender, he makes him_[DATIVE] drink, without waiting, **of-the beverage** that has such strength that it makes in one moment disappear the ulcers, the scabies and the crust.*

In the entire corpus that we examined, the presence of a partitive object never brought about ACCUSATIVE case assignment for the subject of the embedded infinitive in the “*faire* + infinitive” construction. Thus, the partitive constituent behaves like a direct object in the “*faire* + infinitive” construction. This is not only true for the partitive object in Old and Middle French, but also for its equivalent in Modern French.

- (35) Il a bien fallu lui_[DATIVE] faire goûter *de ce vin*, que je réservais pour me soutenir dans mes oraisons de nuit. (Mérimée P., *Théâtre de Clara Gazul: Le Ciel et l'enfer* [1857])
*I had to make him*_[DATIVE] *taste of this wine*, which I reserved to sustain myself during my nightly prayers.

As a consequence, the Prepositional Object Hypothesis cannot be valid.

This refutation raises an important question: can we still maintain that *de*, as it functions in the Old French partitive and in its equivalent in Modern French, is a preposition? Following Milner (1978), we will check the prepositional status of *de* by means of the 'A-over-A principle' in relation to the category PP.

1.2.2.2. *The 'A-over-A' principle in relation to the category PP.* According to the principle 'A-over-A', a PP can be extracted when it is a complement of a non-prepositional NP (36), but not when it is a complement of a NP included itself within a PP (37) (Kayne 1975: 114–115).¹⁷

- (36) a. J'ai lu quelques livres de Kafka.
I have read some books of Kafka
 b. C'est de Kafka que j'ai lu quelques livres.
It is of Kafka that I have read some books
 c. Kafka, dont j'ai lu quelques livres
Kafka, of which I have read some books
- (37) a. Je m'intéresse aux livres de Kafka.
I am interested in the books of Kafka
 b. *C'est de Kafka que je m'intéresse aux livres.
It is of Kafka that I am interested in the books
 c. *Kafka, dont je m'intéresse aux livres
Kafka, of which I am interested in the books

In Modern French, we have to distinguish between, on the one hand, the partitive construction, which is the direct continuation of the Old French partitive and which refers to a partition within a contextually specified set and, on the other hand, the article resulting from a mutation of the Old French partitive, which does not presuppose the existence of a contextually specified partition set. *De* of the partitive construction behaves as a preposition with respect to the extraction operation: the extraction of a PP contained within the partitive constituent is blocked (38b–c).

- (38) a. J'ai goûté *de la tarte de Marie.*
 I tasted *of-the cake of Mary* ('some of the cake')
- b. *C'est de Marie que j'ai goûté *de la tarte.*
 It is of Mary that I tasted *of-the cake*
- c. *Marie, dont j'ai goûté *de la tarte*
 Mary of-which I tasted of-the cake

De of the article, however, does not block the extraction of a PP, as shown in (39b–c), and, hence, cannot be analyzed as a preposition.

- (39) a. Nous mangeons souvent *des œufs de nos poules.*
 We often eat \emptyset *eggs of our chickens*
- b. C'est de nos poules que nous mangeons souvent *des œufs.*
 It is of our chickens that we often eat \emptyset *eggs*
- c. on courut à la fontaine qui estoit dans la grande place, dont on prit *de l'eau* pour jeter sur le visage de la Princesse, qui estoit à peine revenuë de son esvanoüissement (F. de Boisrobert, *Histoire indienne d'Alexandre et d'Orazie* [1629])
 They ran to the fountain, that was in the market place, of which they took *water* to sprinkle it on the face of the princess, who had hardly recovered from her loss of consciousness

It is impossible to give a direct proof that *de* of the Old French partitive behaves like a preposition with respect to the extraction operation because we cannot invoke grammaticality judgments for an earlier stage of the language. However, we have shown on the basis of the distributional similarity and interpretational similarity (§ 1.2.1) that the Old French partitive and the partitive construction of Modern French are identical in nature.

- (5) Old French: Il boit *del vin*
 Modern French: Il boit *du vin* (de cette bouteille).
 He is drinking (of the) wine (of this bottle)

In this perspective, it is plausible that *de* of the Old French partitive may have blocked the extraction of a PP, and in this respect behaves as a preposition.

1.2.2.3 Conclusion: the paradox. The analysis of the syntactic behavior of the Old French partitive constituent leads to a paradox: on the one hand, with respect to the “*faire* + infinitive” construction, the partitive object behaves like a direct or non-prepositional object; on the other hand, with respect to the extraction operation of a PP, the partitive constituent behaves like a prepositional phrase, and *de* has to be analyzed as a preposition.

A way out of this paradox that has recurrently been suggested (see for example Milner 1978) consists in postulating an implicit quantifier. In this perspective, *del vin* would be a PP embedded in a NP ($[_{NP}\emptyset [_{PP}de\ le\ vin]]$). This solution is compatible with the blocking of the extraction operation and with the case assignment to the subject of the infinitive in the “*faire* + infinitive” construction. However, this option is not open to us, because we have refuted the Deleted Quantifier Hypothesis in § 1.1.1.¹⁸ We therefore have to explore another track.

1.3 The One-Sided Preposition Hypothesis

1.3.1 *The hypothesis*

To resolve the paradox revealed above, it is necessary to analyze the relationship that can be established by a preposition into two subrelations: the relation between the constituent it heads (the PP) and an external element, for instance a verb, on the one hand, and the relation between the preposition and the NP it governs, on the other hand (Lehmann 1995: 75, Melis 2003). Among those two subrelations, the relation between the preposition and the NP it governs is, according to Lehmann (1995: 76), the stronger one and is therefore likely to be more stable.

This distinction between two subrelations allows us to formulate a new hypothesis for the nature of *de* in the Old French partitive.

- i. *De* is not plainly a preposition because it does not establish a syntactic or semantic relationship between the constituent it heads and an **external** element.
- ii. *De* assumes however the role of a preposition **with respect to the NP it governs**. Semantically, the operation marked by *de* on the nominal constituent is that of highlighting a part of a whole. For instance, in comparison with (40a), (40b) means that the contextually specified referent on which the verbal action is carried out is not wholly affected by the verbal action but only part of this referent.

- (40) a. Il a bu *le vin*.
 He drank the wine.
 b. Il a bu *del vin*.
 He drank of-the wine.

Thus, from both a syntactic and a semantic viewpoint, *de* is a preposition, albeit not a full preposition, because it is one-sided rather than two-sided.

1.3.2 Evidence from the partitive in Old French and its equivalent in Modern French

1.3.2.1 *The causative construction “faire (‘make’) + Infinitive”.* The first part of the hypothesis is based on the analysis of the “FAIRE + INFINITIVE” CONSTRUCTION. This analysis has shown that the partitive constituent behaves as a direct or non-prepositional constituent as far as its **external** relations are concerned.¹⁹ In this perspective, we can understand that the partitive *de* is not strictly limited to the object position of verbs that have the properties listed by Kupferman, but that it can also occur with other verbs like the verbal phrase *il y a* (‘there is’) (41) or the verb *voir* (‘see’) (42), and also in other syntactic positions, e.g. the nominal predicate of the copular clause in (23). It can even be preceded by another preposition without conflict (43).

- (41) Il trova .i. *ostel* en selve clere:
De sains moines i a de sa contree
 Qui por l’amor de Dieu bien l’ostelerent. (*Aïol* [1160], Eds J. Normand et G. Raynaud, p. 23)
He found a dwelling in a sparse forest: there were of holy monks from his land that lodged him for God’s sake.
- (42) J’ai vu *de tes enfants*. (Mod.Fr.)
I saw of your kids. (‘some of your kids’)
- (23) Blancandrins fut *des plus saives paiens* (*Chanson de Roland* [1100], 24, Paris: Bordas, 1971)
Blancandrin was of-the the wisest heathens (‘amongst the wisest heathens’)
- (43) mon cher André,
 je t’accuse réception de la bédide somme, arrivée ce matin, *avec de tes nouvelles*. (*Correspondance*, Valéry to Gide, April 1899)
My dear André, I acknowledge receipt of the money, arrived this morning, with of your news.

1.3.2.2 *The ‘A-over-A principle’ applied to the category PP.* The second part of the hypothesis is based on the observation that, by virtue of the ‘A-over-A’ principle, *de* blocks the EXTRACTION OF A PP. Hence it behaves, from a syntactic viewpoint, nevertheless as a preposition as far as the relations **within** its constituent are concerned.

1.3.2.3 *The referential interpretation of the partitive object.* The semantic dimension of *de*, as defined in the hypothesis (§ 1.3.1 (ii)), allows us to understand why *de* is normally followed by a definite article or a demonstrative or possessive determiner and why this definite article has always a specific rather than a generic interpretation. Indeed, it only makes sense to mark that the object is not affected entirely but only partially if this object is contextually specified.

Moreover, it explains why *de* is never used in combination with abstract nouns, unless the abstract noun is used with a concrete meaning, as is illustrated by (44).

- (44) Il a distribué *de ses richesses* à tous ses amis.
He distributed of his wealth [PLURAL NOUN] to all his friends.

1.3.2.4 *The distributional constraints relating to the verb.* As to the distributional constraint relating to the verbal context, our hypothesis suggests that it is not syntactic in nature but rather semantic. *De* marks that the object is not wholly involved in the verbal action, but only partially. This marking is only relevant if the object is affected by the verbal action, in terms of movement or by a modification of its physical properties. Therefore, *de* as a marker of partition is associated preferentially with the object position of verbs like *boire* ('drink') rather than with verbs like *voir* ('see'). In so far as the meaning of 'partial affectedness' can be relevant in the context, *de* can nevertheless be used marginally in combination with other verbs and even in other syntactic functions (see examples (41) to (43) and (23)).

1.3.3 *Historical evidence*

The hypothesis proposed above assigns to *de* the role of a preposition **within** its constituent but considers that it does not function as a preposition as far as the **external** relations of the partitive constituent are concerned. At first sight, this ambivalent solution can seem *ad hoc*. It is, however, corroborated by historical evidence relating to the genitive case in Latin and in other Indo-European languages.

Fundamentally, cases in Latin mark dependency relations, both syntactic and semantic, with another term. For instance, the genitive case marks dependency upon a noun and is thus an adnominal case. There is however a type of use that has been embarrassing to grammar specialists of all periods, because there is no noun to which the genitive can be linked.

- (45) Manus, mortarium bene lavato; farinam_[ACCUSATIVE] in mortarium indito; aquae_[GENITIVE] paulatim addito (Cato, *Agr.* 74, quoted by Serbat 1996: 364)
Wash well your hands and the mortar; put (some) wheat_[ACCUSATIVE] in the mortar; add little by little of the water_[GENITIVE]

As is pointed out by Serbat (1996), some eminent grammarians in the rationalist tradition, from Scaliger (1540) on, postulated for such cases the existence of a deleted nominal element, exactly as did Foulet for Old French (§ 1.1).

This use of a genitive case that is not directly related to a noun is rare in Latin. However, the pattern is very common in other Indo-European languages such as Slavonic, Old Germanic and, as noted by Humbert (1960), in Ancient Greek. In Ancient Greek, the object position of verbs meaning ‘drink’ etc. is also a privileged context of use (46), but, unlike in Latin, the partitive genitive is also used in other syntactic functions such as in subject position or in a locative (47) or instrumental function.

- (46) a. αἴματος_[GENITIVE] ὄφρα πίω [instead of: αἶμα_[ACCUSATIVE]] (Homer, *Odyssey* 11, 96)
so that I drink of the blood_[GENITIVE]
 b. ἐπεὶ πίνεν αἶμα κελαιόν_[ACCUSATIVE] (Homer, *Odyssey* 11, 98)
after having drunk the dark blood_[ACCUSATIVE]
- (47) λοεσσάμενος ποταμοῖο_[GENITIVE] [instead of: ἐν τῷ ποταμῷ_[DATIVE]] (Homer, *Iliad* 21, 560)
after taking a (little) bath in the river_[GENITIVE]

Especially in Homeric epics, this genitive is used in a flexible way instead of any of the other inflectional cases, as if it were a syntactic ‘joker’ (Meillet & Vendryes 1927: § 797, Serbat 1996). It has at first sight the flexibility of a ‘joker’ because, unlike all other inflectional cases, it does not create a relationship between the NP and some external element. At the same time, it is not really a joker because substitution is not indifferent: the partitive genitive marks an operation **within** its constituent, which consists in highlighting a part in contrast to the whole. Semantic evidence for this hypothesis is given by the examples where the partitive genitive alternates with another inflectional case. Humbert (1960:269–70) explains the difference between the two examples in (46) along this line: the first example, with the partitive genitive, relates the desire of Tiresias to drink some of the blood of the victims killed by Odysseus, whereas the second example, with the accusative, evokes the strength he draws from drinking the substance of blood.

As far as Latin is concerned, the tendency to make use of a partitive genitive instead of another case was already present during the preclassical period, and is mainly manifested in non-literary, technical texts, such as medical and culinary treatises (Väänänen 1981). It was repressed in the classical Latin period, privileging the marking of clear syntactic relations over the expression of subtle semantic distinctions. But the partitive construction surfaced again in Late Latin, not only in the form of the genitive case but also as a prepositional construction with *de*. Examples are legion in the popularizing texts of the 4th and 5th century written in Gaul, in particular by Christian authors.

- (48) Et sic *de pane illo* edat (*Vulgate*, I *Corinthians* 11, 28)
and so let him eat *of the/that bread*

A remarkable fact is noted by Väänänen (1981) on the basis of the inventory of all the occurrences of the prepositional partitive construction in the *Vulgate Bible*: in a language or language stage lacking a grammaticalized article, all but two occurrences consist of a noun preceded by a demonstrative or possessive determiner or followed by a relative clause or another modifier yielding the spatiotemporal location of the partition set denoted by the noun. Hence, we observe a similar alternation as in Old French *Il boit del vin / Il boit vin*: the partitive construction with preposition *de* can be used when there is a contextually specified partition set (49), whereas the accusative is normally used when there is no such partition set available (50).

- (49) nam et catelli edunt *de micis* quae cadunt de mensa dominorum suorum
(*Vulgata*, *Matthew* 15:27)
yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table
- (50) Ut comedatis *carnem*_[ACCUSATIVE] et bebatis *sanguinem*_[ACCUSATIVE] (*Vulgata*,
Ezekiel 39:17)
*that ye may eat flesh*_[ACCUSATIVE] *and drink blood*_[ACCUSATIVE]

2. Middle French

During the Middle French period, a new series of articles for non-singular indefinite reference is created on the basis of the partitive construction. We will first give a detailed account of the nature of the change, from partitive construction to indefinite non-singular article (§ 2.1). Since most languages endowed with an article system leave the indefinite non-singular unmarked,

we will next examine if the partitive article has to be considered as an exotic feature of French (§ 2.2).

2.1 From the partitive construction to the partitive article: Nature of the change

The development of a partitive article from the partitive construction is initiated inconspicuously from the 13th century on, but progresses rapidly during the period of Middle French, essentially during the 15th century. The partitive construction undergoes a remodeling with respect to its syntactic and semantic features in order to fulfill its new function as an article.

On the semantic side, this remodeling can be schematically represented as follows.

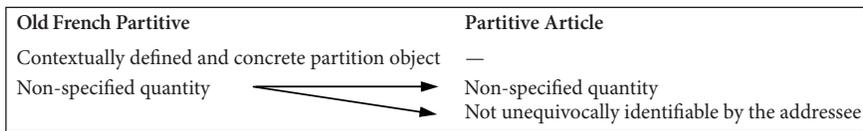


Figure 3. Meaning shift from Old French partitive to partitive article

The Old French partitive construction has a clear referential meaning.

- i. It presupposes a contextually specified partition set. For instance *Il boit del vin* ('He drinks of-the wine') presupposes that there is for example a bottle of wine on the table.
- ii. The partitive isolates within this partition set a non-specified quantity.

The partitive article, which develops during Middle French, has the following semantic properties.

- 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. 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.

In the framework of grammaticalization theory, this reshaping of the meaning of the Old French partitive can be captured in terms of the loss-and-gain model (Traugott 1982, Sweetser 1988): the most referential meaning component is disappearing (i) while a new property is added that is less referential and more discourse-oriented (iii).

The new property does not appear out of the blue. It originates from an implicature from the semantic property (ii) mentioned above: a non-specified quantity is necessarily non-uniquely identifiable to the hearer. According to the model of meaning shift proposed by Traugott & Dasher (2002) and Traugott (2003: 635), such an implicature becomes progressively more salient and conventionalized to eventually become a full semantic property.

The loss of the semantic feature of partition set is concomitant with a syntactic change, concerning category affiliation. *De* as part of the Old French partitive was still functioning as a preposition within its constituent, as is witnessed by its behavior with respect to the A-over-A principle (§ 1.2.2.2) and by its pronominal correspondences (§ 1.2.1., Table 3 and example (20b)). *De* loses this property when becoming part of the article.

The exact orientation of the above-mentioned meaning shift that accompanies the change from ancient partitive to partitive article (see Figure 3) is determined by the insertion of the newly created article into the paradigm of the articles.

- i. The notion of partition set disappears because it does not contribute to the differentiation of the partitive article with respect to the other articles already in place.
- ii. The notion of unspecified quantity is maintained because it allows the new article to enter in contrast with the article derived from the numeral 'one'.
- iii. The feature of indefiniteness develops in binary opposition with the definite article.

At a later stage, however, as semantic bleaching progresses, the notion of quantity (ii) will become less important. Consequently, the partitive article will extend its context of use to abstract nouns.

The different stages of the insertion of the partitive article into the paradigm of articles, from Middle French to Modern French, are represented graphically in Table 5. In this table, empty boxes represent zero determination; half-filled boxes signal alternation between an article and zero-marking; filled boxes indicate that article use is more or less obligatory.²⁰

By the process of semantic bleaching, the use of articles becomes increasingly obligatory at the expense of zero determination. The paradigm becomes tightly structured by a limited number of binary oppositions: definiteness versus indefiniteness and, with respect to number, singular versus plural or singular versus non-singular.

The development of the partitive article from the Old French partitive described above exhibits the features listed by Lehmann (1995) as defining the

Table 5. The evolution of the paradigm of the articles from Middle French to Modern French

14th CENTURY		Singular Count Nouns	Plural Count Nouns	Mass Nouns	Abstract Nouns
	Definite	Weakened demonstrative			
	Indefinite	Unity Num.			
15th–16th CENTURY		Singular Count Nouns	Plural Count Nouns	Mass Nouns	Abstract Nouns
	Definite	Weakened demonstrative			
	Indefinite	Unity Numeral	Partitive		
17th–18th CENTURY		Singular Count Nouns	Plural Count Nouns	Uncount Nouns	
	Definite	Weakened demonstrative			
	Indefinite	Unity Numeral	Partitive		

grammaticalization process along the paradigmatic axis: gradual desemantization, progressive paradigmaticization and increasing obligatoriness.²¹

Most languages endowed with an article system, even those that have a partitive construction, did not take the step to create an article for indefinite reference to a non-specified quantity. Hence the question: do we have to consider the partitive article as an exotic feature of French?

2.2 The partitive article: An exotic feature of the French language?

In order to give an accurate answer to this question, it is necessary to decompose it into two sub-questions:

- Are there other languages in which a partition marker is put into service for the expression of indefiniteness (§ 2.2.1.)?
- Does this conceptual shift from partition to indefiniteness commonly give rise to a full-fledged article, as is the case in French (§ 2.2.2.)?

2.2.1 *The conceptual shift from partition to indefiniteness*

The conceptual shift from partition to indefiniteness is not specific to French. In several Indo-European languages with case inflection, the genitive has a comparable use to the one observed for the Old French partitive. In some languages, amongst which Russian is the best described (Timberlake 1977, Paykin & Van Peteghem 2002), this partitive genitive undergoes a similar evolution so

as to mark indefiniteness and unspecified quantity, in contrast to the singular indefinite.

- (51) a. Ja kupila *vody*_[GENITIVE] / *jablok*_[GENITIVE]
*I bought water*_[GENITIVE] / *apples*_[GENITIVE]
 b. Ja kupila *vodu*_[ACCUSATIVE] / *jabloki*_[ACCUSATIVE]
*I bought the water*_[ACCUSATIVE] / *the apples*_[ACCUSATIVE]
 c. Ja kupila *jabloko*_[ACCUSATIVE]
*I bought an apple*_[ACCUSATIVE]
 (Paykin & Van Peteghem 2002)

The shift from partition to indefinite, quantitatively unspecified reference also exists in an unrelated language, namely Finnish. Finnish has a partitive case, which originates from a locative case meaning ‘from’ (Laakso 2001:196). In present-day Finnish, this partitive case is not linked to one specific syntactic position but it occurs in subject position, where it alternates with the nominative, as well as in object position, where it alternates with the accusative. According to Karlsson (1983:77), “the partitive expresses an indefinite, non-limited quantity”, whereas the nominative and the accusative express “a whole or a definite quantity” for subject and object respectively.²²

- (52) a. Pekka juo *olutta*_[PARTITIVE]
*Pekka drinks beer*_[PARTITIVE]
 b. Pekka juo *oluen*_[ACCUSATIVE]
*Pekka drinks a beer / the beer*_[ACCUSATIVE]
 (Karlsson 1983: 81)
- (53) a. Luin *kirjoja*_[PARTITIVE]
*I read books*_[PARTITIVE]
 b. Luin *kirjat*_[ACCUSATIVE]
*I read (all) the books*_[ACCUSATIVE]
 (Filip 1999:278)

The conceptual shift from partition, on the one hand, to indefiniteness and non-singular, on the other hand, is in itself not exceptional, but it is also attested in other languages. Characteristic for the French language is however that this shift generated a new article.²³ In the next paragraph, we will try to give a language-internal explanation of this evolution.

2.2.2 *The emergence of the partitive article in French: A language-internal explanation*

The development of the partitive article “*de* + Definite Article” out of the partitive structure during the period of Middle French has to be examined in the light of the shift in word order or constituent order. From Latin to the Romance languages, the shift from OV to VO progresses. French is, among the different Romance languages, the most consistent VO language and loses the last residues of OV order during the period of Middle French (Buridant 1987, 1993; Combettes 1988; Marchello-Nizia 1995). In accordance with the hypothesis of Greenberg (1963), Lehmann (1973) and Vennemann (1974),²⁴ Buridant (1987) observes that this evolution of the object–verb order is concomitant with an evolution within the NP: during the period of Middle French, the last nominal modifiers to the left of the noun move to the right of the noun.²⁵ The development of the partitive article seems to be correlated with this shift, since the first occurrences of the partitive article are more frequently encountered in the case of “N + modifier” than in the case of “modifier + N”, as is illustrated by the following contrast between two translations of the same Latin sequence.

- (54) a. pren *vif* *argent*
 Take quick silver (ADJECTIVE + N)
 (ms. National Library of France fr. 2003, 15th century)
- b. prenez *de l' argent vif*
 Take of the silver quick (PARTITIVE ARTICLE + N + ADJECTIVE)
 (ms. National Library of France fr. 25342, 15th century)

Additional evidence that the emergence of the partitive article is correlated with the shift in word order is offered by NPs where the nominal head is accompanied by a heavy nominal modifier, such as a relative clause or a PP. It has been noted by Hawkins (1983) that those modifiers are the first to move to the right of the noun. It is precisely in this case that the early partitive article is most frequently used (Carlier 2004).

This correlation between the emergence of the partitive article and the shift in word order can be clarified if we accept the hypothesis put forward by Geisler (1982: 53) postulating a link between the position of lexical modifiers and that of grammatical markers.²⁶ For the nominal domain, Geisler claims that in a consistent OV language, where lexical modifiers appear to the left of the noun, grammatical markers are located to the right of the noun and take the form of a bound morpheme, derivational or inflectional (55a). In the case of a shift from OV to VO, the lexical nominal modifiers move to the right of the

noun and the grammatical markers tend to move to the left of the noun, taking, at least initially, the form of free morphemes (55b).

- (55) a. Lex – N – Gramm (bound morphemes)
 b. Gramm (free morphemes) – N – Lex

More typological research is needed to assess the universal character of this hypothesis. Whether or not the positional shift of the grammatical morphemes is correlated with the positional shift of lexical modifiers, it is undeniable that the evolution of the French language has been characterized by a rather general tendency to replace bound grammatical morphemes to the right of the nominal or verbal head by free grammatical morphemes to the left. This typological evolution sets French apart not only from its Latin origin, but even from the other Romance languages. It has been observed by several researchers that an important step in this evolution is taken during the Middle French period.²⁷

As far as the nominal domain is concerned, the inflectional morphemes to the right of the noun have indeed progressively weakened during the evolution from Latin to French.²⁸

- Case inflection, as the marker of grammatical function, is progressively lost. This evolution is accomplished by the end of the Old French period.
- A second postnominal grammatical marker that is progressively lost is the plural ending. The weakening of the final *-s* as plural ending starts from the 13th century and is carried to its end in the 15th century.

At the same time, free morphemes develop at the left of the noun.

- The loss of the case inflection leads to an extensive use of prepositions, as well as to a functionalization of the constituent order. For instance, the loss of the genitive case inflection, which comes about already during the pre-Romance period, is compensated for by an extended use of the preposition *de* (Väänänen 1981).
- The loss of the plural marking goes along with an extension of the use of the articles, at the expense of zero determination. On the one hand, the existing articles, definite *le(s)* and singular indefinite *un* widen their conditions of use.²⁹ On the other hand, the need is felt to create a new article for the non-singular indefinite, in order to mark the distinction between singular noncount and plural count nouns e.g. *pain* ‘bread’ versus *pains* ‘breads’.³⁰

The partitive structure “*de* + Definite Article”, although not very frequent in Old French texts, happens to be a good candidate. From a semantic point of

view, it already conveys the feature of unspecified quantity, which allows it to enter in contrast with the article derived from the numeral 'one'. From a formal point of view, as it contains the definite article, it encodes the distinction between singular and plural. Moreover, as shown above (§2.1.), it is further remodeled with respect to its syntactic and semantic features in order to fulfill its new function as an article.

In conclusion, given the specific typological evolution of the French language, the correlation between partition, on the one hand, and indefiniteness and non singular, on the other hand, took the shape of a prenominal free morpheme marked with respect to (in)definiteness, to number (singular versus plural or singular versus non singular) and, in a lesser degree, to gender, that is to say an article.

3. The grammaticalization process: Gradual or abrupt?

3.1 From Latin to Modern French: A macroscopic viewpoint

The shift from the Old French partitive construction to the partitive article is a 'light' grammaticalization process. *De* combined with the definite article in the Old French partitive is already an atypical preposition with a fairly abstract meaning. In the Middle French period, it is put into service for the expression of even more abstract and highly grammaticalized features relating to the article system, i.e. (in)definiteness and number. This small step in the evolution is, however, embedded in a larger grammaticalization process, which can be followed, on the basis of a more or less continuous written tradition, from Latin to Modern French.

From a macroscopic viewpoint, it is clear that the change from preposition to article is gradual and that it is possible to distinguish different stages, which concatenate in a relationship of a linearly structured family resemblance, thus forming a "grammaticalization chain" (Heine 1993).

- (I) The first stage corresponds to the Latin preposition *de*, constructed with the ablative case, which had a concrete meaning of physical motion and is normally used to introduce a free adjunct. This preposition *de* belongs to a large paradigm, where it can alternate with *ex*, *ab* and even with zero.³¹
- (II) At the second stage, *de*, still a preposition, loses its concrete spatial meaning in order to express a syntactic relationship: it introduces a nuclear complement giving it the status of a prepositional object. Its paradigm reduces in

PREPOSITION		ARTICLE	
Two-sided		One-sided	
I	II	III	IV
<i>De castris procedere</i> <i>set forth from a camp</i> (Plinius, <i>Ep.</i> 9, 7, 4)	<i>Discere id de me</i> <i>learn it from me</i> (Suetonius, <i>Ner.</i> 46)	<i>De pane illo edat</i> <i>Let him eat of that</i> <i>bread</i> (<i>Vulg.</i> see ex. (48))	
	<i>Parler de quelque chose</i> <i>speak of something</i>	<i>Il boit del vin / de</i> <i>ce vin</i> <i>He drinks of the / this</i> <i>wine</i>	<i>Il boit du vin</i> <i>He drinks Ø wine</i>
			<i>Il ressent de la haine</i> <i>contre elle.</i> <i>He feels Ø hatred</i> <i>towards her</i>

Figure 4. The different stages of the grammaticalization process from preposition to article

size: the only other preposition in French that very often has this function is *à* (<Latin AD/AB).

- (III) The weakening of its prepositional status continues at the third stage, where *de* is even used to introduce a direct object, but continues to behave syntactically as a preposition within its constituent. From the semantic point of view, it signals that the concrete, contextually specified object is not wholly affected by the verbal action but only partially. The distributional restrictions as to the verbal context (mainly object position of verbs like *boire*) and as to the head noun (exclusion of abstract nouns) result from this meaning.
- (IV) The prepositional status is completely lost at stage IV, where *de* combined with the definite article is entering into a new paradigm, that of the articles. From the point of view of its meaning, this insertion into the paradigm of articles results in loss of meaning (the notion of a contextually specified partition object fades away) but also in enrichment (the notion of indefiniteness emerges). The loss of the prepositional status and the concomitant desemantization lead to an extension of the conditions of use. The partitive is still dominantly used in object position, but not only with verbs of the group *boire*, *manger*, etc. Moreover, the partitive also appears in other syntactic positions, including those introduced by a preposition.

As far as the object position is concerned, if we accept the hypothesis that the presence of an article is a sign of the independence of the object with respect to the verb, the transition from stage III to stage IV can be conceived as a progress in the marking of transitivity along two axes: affectedness and individuation (Hopper & Thompson 1980, Lazard 1994). At stage III, only highly individuated objects, definite or singular, are introduced by an article, whereas less individuated objects are not, unless they are highly affected. At stage IV, even objects that have a low degree of

individuation and affectedness are introduced by an article. Zero marking is however maintained when the object is an integral part of the verbal expression, because in this case there is no real transitivity.

- (v) The last stage consists in a further tightening of the paradigm of the articles. The use of the partitive article, which at the early stage is sensitive to the opposition between abstract and concrete nouns, will be extended to abstract nouns and this at the expense of zero determination. Moreover, the partitive article becomes more frequent in all syntactic positions and reduces also in this way the primitive domain of zero determination.

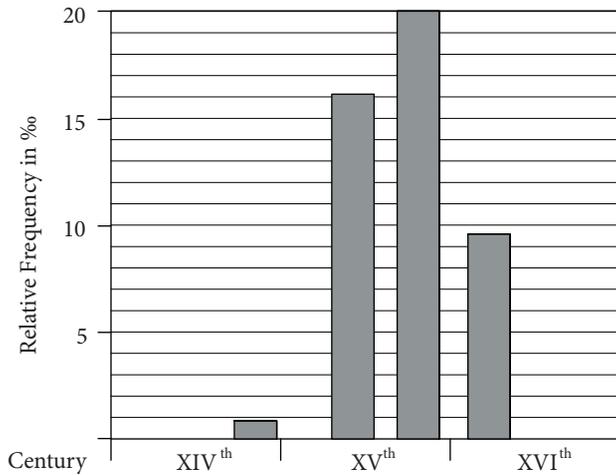
This grammaticalization chain has not only diachronic but also synchronic relevance: when a new stage appears, the older ones are not discarded but continue to exist, thus resulting in the coexistence of the different stages in synchrony (Hopper 1991). Indeed, in Modern French, *de* allows simultaneously the uses corresponding to the five successive stages in diachronic perspective, even if the use with a concrete spatial meaning is somehow more restricted in contemporary French: it is possible for nuclear adverbial complements, but because of the advanced process of semantic bleaching, it has become rather marginal for free adjuncts and *de* is replaced in this use by stronger prepositions (Frei 1929:72–73, Spang-Hanssen 1963:99–100). The persistence of the older stages when new ones appear makes change even more gradual.

3.2 From Old French to Middle French: A microscopic viewpoint

It is also possible to adopt a microscopic view and to analyze one transition in detail. In this perspective, we made a comparison between four French translations of the same Latin source, a treatise on falconry written by Albertus Magnus in the 13th century.³² From the point of view of their chronology, these four translations are distributed over a period crucial for the transition between stage III and stage IV, from preposition to article.

The most rudimentary way to evaluate the progress in grammaticalization consists in measuring the increase in the number of occurrences of the partitive or, as it is labeled by Bybee (2003), its “token frequency”. The evolution observed in our corpus is presented below in Figure 5.

Our corpus already exhibits a few occurrences of the partitive article in the translation of the end of the 14th Century. Other studies have reported that there are even some clear attested occurrences of the partitive article as early as the 13th Century in theater texts, close to oral speech. These have the role of what Harris & Campbell (1995:72) have called “exploratory expressions”,



Translation 1: End of the 14th century: 0.91‰

Translation 2: Middle of the 15th century: 16.04‰

Translation 3: Second half of the 15th century: 19.84‰

Translation 4: Beginning of the 16th century: 9.49‰

Figure 5. Relative frequency in ‰ of the partitive in four translations of *De Falconibus* (Albertus Magnus)³³

which means expressions produced by productive grammar that most often disappear after a while,³⁴ but that can in some cases be grammaticalized and are then retrospectively recognized as preludes to change. The token frequency rises drastically in the 15th Century. Afterwards there is stagnation.³⁵

This rapid increase in “token frequency” goes along with an expansion of the types of contexts in which the partitive can be used or, according to Bybee’s terminology, with an increase in “type frequency”. In the translation of the 14th century, the use of the partitive is restricted to the object position of verbs like *boire*, *manger*, *prendre* (‘drink’, ‘eat’, ‘take’). From the 15th century on, the partitive extends its use to the object position of other verbs and, more moderately, to other syntactic positions, including after a preposition.³⁶

This empirically observed dramatic increase in the rate of development of the partitive article leads us to reconsider the theoretical postulate of gradualness of the grammaticalization process. It is true that the overall evolution, from preposition to article, along the five stages described in Figure 4, is gradual. Moreover, the Old French partitive, corresponding to stage III, is already a transitional stage between preposition and determiner. Syntactically, *de* is at this stage an atypical preposition insofar as it still behaves as a preposition with

respect to the NP it governs but has lost the external relational function typical for a preposition. Semantically, *de* partakes already at stage III of the nature of a determiner since, combined with a definite object, it marks that the object is not affected by the verbal action in its entirety but only some unspecified part of this object and it has thus a quantifier function. Nevertheless, the sudden rise in frequency represented in the graph above points to a discontinuity in the transition between stage III and stage IV.

The conditions of use of the Old French partitive construction of stage III are quite restricted and so this form remained rare. As to stage IV, there is a period of trial before, but once the syntactic and semantic change is accepted, it extends very rapidly. This discontinuity is located precisely at the point where *de* ceases to be a preposition and enters into the paradigm of the articles. To this shift in morphosyntactic category also corresponds a clear-cut semantic distinction, with no intermediate shades: *Il boit del vin* at stage III implies a contextually specified partition set, a bottle of wine on the table for instance, while at stage IV, there is no such partition set.

The grammaticalization process leading to the creation of a partitive article is very different from the one that gives rise to the other articles. In the evolution from Latin to French, the paradigm of the articles is a newly created paradigm. In the beginning stage, some determiners, namely the demonstrative *ILLE*, in competition with *IPSE*, and the unity numeral *UNUS* can be optionally used to direct the addressee to access a discourse referent. Used in this function, however, these determiners do not lose their primitive meaning. On the contrary, the new discourse-oriented function develops within the limits assigned by the primitive meaning. *Un(s)* in Old French, for example, while becoming an article, does still keep its numeral meaning.³⁷ There is thus a long period of overlap between source meaning and target meaning, not in the sense of a coexistence of two discernible meanings (either x or y), but in the sense of a merging of the two meanings (both x and y).³⁸ This long merging stage is favored by the fact that the determiners developing article functions are not abandoning their original morphosyntactic category, since articles are also determiners. This merging situation slows down the development of the above-mentioned forms as articles and the building up of a paradigm of articles as such.

In the case of the development of the article “*de* + Definite Article” out of the partitive structure, corresponding to the transition from stage III to stage IV in Figure 4, there is no merging phase. Unlike with the other articles, the emergence of the partitive article presupposes a change of morphosyntactic

category, which is abrupt. Other factors can have favored a rapid emancipation of the article “*de* + Definite Article” from its partitive origin.

- The creation of a new article is not primarily motivated by an optional marking of the discourse status of the referent. There is a more fundamental and stringent grammatical reason. The plural marking of the noun is endangered by the weakening of the final *-s*, which is attested from the 13th century on and is already in an advanced stage in the 15th century. Purists desperately try to check the evolution and to reinstate the final *-s* until the beginning of the 17th century (Pope 1973: §§ 620–621). The development of the partitive article offers a solution to this urgent problem, which is moreover coherent with the typological evolution during the period of Middle French (§ 2.2.2). It allows uniform expression of number by a free morpheme in prenominal position, thus leading to a greater iconicity.
- At the moment when “*de* + Definite Article” is entering into the paradigm of articles, this paradigm is not emerging but is already tightly structured in terms of two fundamental oppositions: (in)definiteness and number. The target meaning that the newly created article will develop is in this way already determined by its structural position within the paradigm: it marks indefiniteness, by contrast with the definite article *le(s)*, and non-singular, by contrast with *un*.³⁹

The absence of a merging stage between stage III and stage IV (Figure 4) gives rise to a semantic and syntactic ambiguity, which proves to be quite stable. Native speakers of Modern French are still able to distinguish between the two different analyses, *de* as a preposition, on the one hand, and *de* as part of the article, on the other hand. Indeed, they will accept the sentences (39b–c) but reject (38b–c) as ungrammatical, according to the ‘A-over-A’ principle.

- (38) a. J’ai goûté *de la tarte de Marie.*
I tasted of-the cake of Mary
 (meaning: ‘some of the cake’)
- b. *C’est de Marie que j’ai goûté *de la tarte.*
It is of Mary that I tasted of-the cake
- c. *Marie, dont j’ai goûté *de la tarte*
Mary of-which I tasted of-the cake
- (39) a. Nous mangeons souvent *des œufs de nos poules.*
We often eat eggs of our chickens
- b. C’est de nos poules que nous mangeons souvent *des œufs.*
It is of our chickens that we often eat eggs

- c. Nos poules, dont nous mangeons souvent *des œufs*
Our chickens, of which we often eat eggs

So the syntactic ambiguity of *Il boit del vin* which emerged in the 14th or 15th Century still exists today. It is a fact that in Modern French, in order to be activated, the old partitive construction requires that the contextual binding of the partition set be stated explicitly. This can be achieved by the use of a demonstrative or a possessive determiner (43) or by the presence of a modifier such as the relative clause in (56) and (57).

- (43) Mon cher André,
 Je t'accuse réception de la bédide somme, arrivée ce matin, avec *de tes nouvelles*. (*Correspondance*, Valéry to Gide, April 1899)
My dear André, I acknowledge receipt of the money, arrived this morning, with of your news.
- (56) Il se mit d'ailleurs à manger *des prunes* que le père venait de monter de la cave. (Clavel B., *Celui qui voulait voir la mer*)
He began to eat of the prunes that the father had just brought up from the cellar.
- (57) Allez manger *de l'herbe* qui est là. (Alain-Fournier H., *Corresp.* [1909])
Go eat of the grass that is there.

The data here observed show that the overall evolution, from the stage of preposition, introducing a free adjunct and having a concrete spatial meaning, to the stage of article, is a very gradual process. Nevertheless, at least from a syntactic and a semantic viewpoint, there is abruptness in the transition from stage III to stage IV, where *de* ceases to be a preposition and enters into the paradigm of the articles. The change from stage III to stage IV is gradual in some other respects: from a sociolinguistic viewpoint, the new form is introduced earlier in less formal speech, for example theater texts, closer to oral speech, while erudite style is more reluctant to use it (cf. note 35); with respect to its distribution, the spread along linguistic context is gradual (Bennett 1981, Lichtenberk 1991, Hopper & Traugott 1993: 36).

This case study is an attempt to provide a more accurate view on what can be understood by gradualness of the grammaticalization process.⁴⁰ It would be useful to submit the postulate of gradualness to more experimental investigation in order to arrive at a better understanding of the factors that can influence the rate of the grammaticalization process. In particular, additional data-based research should determine whether a shift in membership from one morpho-syntactic category to another is necessarily abrupt at a certain point of the evo-

lution in the case of a non-inclusive relationship between the source category and the target category, as has been proposed by Lichtenberk (1991:38).

4. Conclusion

From Latin to French, an article took shape out of a preposition with a concrete spatial meaning. We have highlighted the two most interesting stages in this grammaticalization process.

- In the evolution from preposition to article, the partitive in Old French represents the last prepositional stage of *de*: from a syntactic viewpoint, *de* can be used to introduce a non-prepositional or direct object but it still behaves as a preposition with respect to the complement it governs; from a semantic viewpoint, *de* associated with the definite article or other determiner signals that this object is only partially affected by the verbal action and, in this way, it has already the function of a determiner.
- In Middle French, *de*, when followed by the definite article, becomes a true article and in this use ceases functioning as a preposition. The exact orientation of the meaning shift is conditioned by the integration into the paradigm of articles.

Cross-linguistically, the correlation between partition and indefinite reference to a non-singular, quantitatively unspecified entity is not exceptional but is also attested in some case-inflected languages. In French, this correlation took the shape of an article because of its specific typological tendency to mark grammatical oppositions by means of free morphemes at the left of the head.

This corpus-based study of the development of the French partitive article also offered us the occasion to reconsider the theoretical postulate of gradualness of the grammaticalization process. The overall evolution, from the preposition *de*, with the concrete spatial meaning of distancing from an origin, to the indefinite non-singular article, is indeed gradual, proceeding by very small steps. The dramatic increase of frequency of the use of the partitive in our diachronic corpus nevertheless points to a discontinuity at the point where *de* ceases functioning as a preposition and becomes an article. Is there a correlation between a shift in morpho-syntactic category — provided that the source category and the target category are in a non-inclusive relationship — and a discontinuity in the grammaticalization process? More empirical investigation should be carried out on other cases of grammaticalization to offer clarity on this issue.

Notes

* Several stages of this research have been presented at the University of Strasbourg 2, in Paris (Research Group “Diachronie du français”), at the University of Lille 3, at the University of Leuven and in Copenhagen (ICHL 2003). This paper has benefited from the questions and remarks of my audience on these different occasions. I am especially grateful to Liliane Haegeman, who read the pre-final draft of this paper, for her stylistic improvements and her valuable comments on terminology and theoretical background. I also thank the two anonymous reviewers of *Studies in Language* for their useful suggestions.

1. A quantitative study based on a sample of 31 languages with grammaticalized indefinite articles, mentioned by Heine (1997: 68), shows up 81 % of the sample using an indefinite article before singular count nouns and only 23 % and 10 % using an article respectively in combination with plural count nouns and with mass nouns.

2. Italian, a sister tongue of French, has a comparable article, without however the same extension. Marion Presslich (2000) has convincingly shown that the partitive evolved similarly in both languages during the Middle Ages, but that in the 16th century the evolution stopped in Italian, while in French the use of *du* and *des* progressively expanded.

3. The dotted line means that, at the initial stage, the partitive article is still alternating with zero marking.

4. Studies on the partitive case in Balto-Finnic (Campbell 1990) and on the genitive case in Russian (Paykin & Van Peteghem 2002) have suggested a parallelism with the French partitive article. Our approach is compatible with this line of analysis.

5. This analysis was adopted for the Modern French partitive article by Gross (1967) and Milner (1978), who postulate an unrealized or zero quantifier.

6. Occurrences with other determiners, demonstrative (i) or possessive, and with the indefinite article (ii) are also attested.

i. *Asez* i ad **de cele gent paienur** (*Chanson de Roland*, 2695, Paris: Bordas, 1971)

A lot there was of this heathen people

ii. Mes ainz but et manja *asez*

d'un fort vin et de .iii. pastez

que je me feisoie estoier (Chrétien de Troyes, *Perceval*, 3863, Paris: Flammarion, 1997)

But before he drank and ate quite a lot of a strong wine and of three pâtés that I reserved for myself

7. The new pattern, with *de*, does not immediately eliminate the older one, without *de*. The older pattern continues to be attested until the 15th century.

Car povres gens ont *assez* **maulx**. (F. Villon, *Testament* [1461], 1647, Genève: Droz, 1985)

because poor people have enough troubles.

8. This observation was also made by Bonnard (1978).

9. Cf. Carlier (2004) for a quantitative corpus study.
10. Englebort (1996) proposes a semantic definition of this verb class. We will not follow this track because, as will be shown in § 1.2.2, the Old French partitive is occasionally attested in combination with verbs and even prepositions that have no “fragmentative” meaning.
11. Conversely, there is at least one syntactic position in which the Old French partitive is attested while the quantifier construction is impossible, namely the nominal predicate of a copular clause (cf. *infra*, example (23)).
12. The acceptability judgments are those of Kupferman. For our own acceptability judgments, see § 1.2.2.
13. There are however sporadic occurrences in other contexts. See examples (22) and (23).
14. Due to this presupposition of a contextually specified partition set, the sentences (24b–c) are even less acceptable in the present tense.
15. The exclusion of abstract nouns is not due to selectional restrictions: even with verbs like *donner* (‘give’), which can have an abstract object (i) and which accept the partitive construction (ii), this partitive construction will never be used in Old French in combination with abstract nouns or abstractly used nouns.
- (i) S’Amors me *donne* ja *vigor*,
De rien que je voi n’ai paor. (Renaut de Beaujeu, *Bel Inconnu* [1214], page 96, 3125–3126, Paris: Champion, 1929)
If love gives me now strength, I’m afraid of nothing I see.
- (ii) *Done* moi *de la ceue* de ton destrier (*Aïol*, 2893, quoted by Buridant 2000)
Give me of the tail of your horse (‘Give me a piece of the tail of your horse’)
16. (b) and (c) do not reflect exceptionless rules, but rather strong tendencies. Exceptions are mentioned by Damourette & Pichon (1911–1933) and Sandfeld (1970). For some comments on these exceptions, see Kayne (1975: 210, n. 9), Rouveret & Vergnaud (1980:133) and Martineau (1992). A corpus analysis on the basis of *Frantext* reveals no exceptions to (c) for unaccusative verbs like *partir* (‘leave’), *venir* (‘come’), but shows that for other verbs, in particular for *croire à* (‘believe in’), *songer à*, *penser à* (‘think of’), usage is more hesitant when the subject of the embedded infinitive takes the form of a clitic. However, in any case, accusative case assignment remains significantly more frequent than the dative case.
17. The ‘A-over-A’ principle is due to Chomsky (1964). This principle has however been criticized. See Godard (1988: 48–51), who notes amongst others that the principle does not give the expected results when the prepositional head is followed by a sentential rather than a nominal complement. The principle is no longer maintained as a primitive of generative formalism. In the context of this study, we simply use the ‘A-over-A’ principle as a diagnostic device for the prepositional status of *de* when it is followed by a NP.
18. Milner’s Zero Quantifier Hypothesis is the synchronic version of Foulet’s diachronic Deleted Quantifier Hypothesis. The criticisms raised against the Deleted Quantifier Hypothesis also apply to the Zero Quantifier Hypothesis. In particular, the Zero Quantifier Hy-

pothesis does not account for the different distribution of the Old French partitive and the partitive quantifier construction “Qnt + *de* + Def. Art. + N”: unlike the Old French partitive construction, the partitive quantifier construction is not found preferentially occurring with verbs like *boire* ‘drink’ and *manger* ‘eat’ but occurs more freely in various syntactic positions, among them the subject position, though it is excluded in the nominal predicate of a copular clause (see (23) for an example of the Old French partitive in this syntactic position). It also differs from the Old French partitive in that it combines with abstract nouns.

En la moitié a el *assez de sa beauté* por estre dame ou d’un empire ou d’un roiaume
(J. Renart, *Le Roman de la Rose* [1228], éd. F. Lecoy, p. 26)

Lit.: In the half, she has enough of her beauty to be dame of an empire or a kingdom.

19. There is a parallelism with the “prepositional direct complement construction” introduced by *a* (‘to’) in Spanish and some other Romance languages and dialects. See Lazard (1994) and Pensado (1995).

20. This table sketches a somewhat simplified picture, since even in Modern French zero determination still exists in two cases: (i) when reference can be established independently of determination, pragmatically (for example when the referent of the noun is being addressed) or by the nature of the noun (in the case of proper nouns); (ii) when the noun is used without reference (e.g. *Il est docteur* / He is Ø doctor) or without autonomous reference (for example in the case of coordination between nouns: e.g. *Père et fils finirent par se détester* / Father and son ended up hating each other).

21. Along the syntagmatic axis, there is however no scope reduction and no change in syntagmatic variability since its position was already fixed in the Old French stage. For a critical comment on scope reduction as a criterion of grammaticalization, see Tabor & Traugott (1998).

22. Other interpretative differences, of aspectual nature, can be expressed by this case alternation (Filip 1999).

Vainö rakensi taloa _[PARTITIVE]
Vainö was building a/the house

Vainö rakensi talon _[ACCUSATIVE] (Karlsson 1983: 80)
Vainö built a/the house

Presidentti ampui lintua _[PARTITIVE]
The president shot at (and wounded) a/the bird

Presidentti ampui linnun _[ACCUSATIVE] (id., 1983: 80)
The president shot (and killed) a/ the bird

The accusative is used when the object is globally affected by the verbal process. The partitive is used when a non-defined part of the object is concerned. The same alternation exists between nominative and partitive for subjects of unaccusative verbs, which are fundamentally objects (Perlmutter 1978; Burzio 1986).

Torille tuli kansaa _[PARTITIVE]
People came to the market-place

Kansa _[NOMINATIVE] tuli torille (Karlsson 1983: 77)
The people came to the market-place

When used in the partitive, these subjects are put after the verb, which means in the position of the object, and there is no verbal agreement.

23. French is not the only language with a partitive article. Heine (1997: 77) reports that, besides Italian, there are also certain African languages in which an indefinite article exists

that is derived from the concept of partition. Yet, it is clear that partitive articles are cross-linguistically quite uncommon.

24. The validity of this hypothesis has been challenged by Dryer (1988, 1992). However, the French data are not in contradiction with the hypothesis.

25. Already exceptional in Old French, the order “Gen N” does no longer exist in Middle French. “Adj N” and “N Adj” are equally attested in the beginning of the Middle French period. During the 15th century, “N Adj” is becoming dominant. The adjectives that are maintained at the left of the noun undergo a grammaticalization process implying semantic bleaching: they quantify the extension of the noun (compare: *un homme simple* ‘a simple-minded man’ versus *un simple homme* ‘one man’) or its conceptual content (*un piètre amant* ‘a poor/ mediocre lover’) (Weinrich 1966). For a corpus study on this evolution, see Buridant (1987) and Carlier (2004).

26. Geisler (1982) uses the terms “lexemes” versus “morphemes”.

27. According to Buridant (2000: §648) and Böhme-Eckert (2004), all Romance languages innovate typologically with respect to Classical Latin by replacing synthetic (suffixal) expressions by analytic expressions for grammatical functions that imply a relation. This evolution affects for instance case markers and the comparative and the relative superlative of the adjective (e.g. Classical Latin *fortior*, Spanish *más forte*, Italian: *più forte*, French: *plus fort* ‘stronger’). French, however, undergoes during the period of Middle French a second typological evolution leading to an analytic expression of the non relational grammatical functions, such as gender and number in the nominal system and person in the verbal system (Latin/Spanish/Italian *canto*, French: *je chante* ‘I sing’). This second evolution accounts for the typological specificity of French within the family of the Romance languages.

28. The weakening of the inflectional endings is linked to general sound changes. For the sound change that leads to the deletion of the plural marker -s, see Pope (1973: §§ 173 & 613–624) and Fouché (1961: 663 ff).

29. The extension of the existing articles and the concomitant decline of zero determination have been studied quantitatively, on the basis of a comparison of successive translations of the same Latin source text, by Goyens (1994), Carlier & Goyens (1998) and Carlier (2001).

30. Italian also developed a partitive article, but did not lose its number inflection. Consequently, the partitive article does not have the same extension as in French, but it alternates largely with zero determination.

31. Originally, the Latin prepositions *de*, *ex* and *ab* have distinct meanings: *ex* ‘out of’, *ab* ‘away from’, expressing increasing distance with respect to a certain point without implying contact with that point, *de* ‘coming from (an origin)’. This distinction progressively fades out and in Vulgar Latin there seems to be free alternation. Witness the following three variants of the same bible verse:

De ligno quod est scientiae boni et mali non editis
A(b) ligno sciendi bonum et malum non manducabitis
Ex arbore diagnoscentiae boni et mali ne tangerent

'From the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat'

(Genesis 2: 17, *Vetus Latina*, Ed. Bonifatius Fischer (Beuron), Freiburg: Heider, 1951)

32. *De Falconibus* is part of a large encyclopedia written in Latin by Albertus Magnus in the 13th century. We compared four French translations of the chapter on the medical care of falcons. The four manuscripts of these translations are held at the French National Library under the following reference numbers: nouv. acq. fr. 18800, fr. 2003, fr. 25342, fr. 1304. A critical edition of these four translations is presented in Smets (2004). We thank her for having provided it for the present study.

33. These translations describe recipes for medicines and the method to administer them to falcons. Culinary texts favor the use of the partitive. Consequently, the observed frequency of use of the partitive in itself is not really representative for the language of the period. The evolution of the frequency of the partitive, however, is relevant for historical change, because the four translations are based on the same Latin source and, hence, are strictly comparable.

34. This is the case for the archaic construction in English *Eat of my food* (Harris & Campbell 1995) and for comparable constructions in Dutch and German, still in use up to the present day (e.g. Dutch *Hij heeft mij van zijn oude LPs getoond* 'He showed me of his old LPs').

35. There is even a frequency fall in the latest text, which is due to a difference of register: in the spirit of the incipient Renaissance, the sixteenth century's translation is closer to the Latin text and written in a more learned, less natural style. Some evidence is given in Carlier (2004).

36. Not only do the contextual factors external to the partitive NP have to be taken into account; the internal composition of the partitive NP also plays a role. In the above-mentioned corpus, a heavy modifier at the right of the head noun can trigger the partitive article from the 14th century on, whereas with a prenominal modifier the partitive is less frequently used until the end of the 15th century (Carlier 2004).

37. See Carlier (2001) for evidence based on translations from Latin to Old French.

38. This distinction between the two kinds of overlap stage in the grammaticalization process is made by Heine (1993: 52).

39. Old French had also the plural form *unes*, used mainly for a referent composed of identical parts (*unes denz* 'teeth'), but marginally also with a normal plural meaning. This form disappears in Middle French as a result of the loss of final -s, but it continues to exist in Spanish, a sister tongue of French. See Woledge (1956) and Carlier (2001:81–84) on this evolution.

40. Cf. the finely shaded view expressed by Traugott (2003: 629): "It is, however, incoherent to think of, for example, the reanalysis of a lexical verb as an auxiliary as a literally gradual process. Reanalysis (innovation), however small the steps by which it proceeds, is abrupt at each step. What is gradual is the typically slow accretion of properties that lead up to the reanalysis."

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