

## A note on the so-called Romance partitive clitic *ne*

M. Teresa Espinal – Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona  
teresa.espinal@uab.cat

### 1 Introduction

It is widely claimed in the literature that the Romance clitic *en*, found in Catalan (Martí-Girbau 1995, 2010, and others), French (Kayne 1975, and others) and Italian (Cordin 1988, Giusti 1992, and others), is associated with a partitive case and/or a partitive meaning. The main justification for this claim appears to be the fact that *en* seems to correlate with the presence of objects, either dislocated complements, as in the Catalan and Italian examples in (1) and (3), or in situ complements, as in the French example in (2), always preceded by the so-called partitive preposition *de*.

- (1) a. De mitjons, *en* tinc molts.  
DE socks EN have many  
'I have many socks.'
- b. D'aigua, te'n portaré de seguida.  
DE.water you.EN bring immediately  
'I'll bring you water immediately.'  
(Martí-Girbau 1995: 252)

- (2) Elle a *des* soeurs. Elle *en* a.  
she has DE.PL sisters she EN have  
'She has sisters. She has some.'  
(Kayne 1975: 118)

- (3) *Di* sedie, *ne* abbiamo portate molte nel magazzino.  
DE chairs EN have brought many into.the store  
'We brought many chairs into the store.'  
(Benincà 1988: 165)

From a syntactic perspective *en* has been claimed to be associated with a partitive case, distinct from the accusative case of other clitic pronouns such as *els* 'them' and *la* 'it', illustrated in (4) only for Catalan.

- (4) a. *Els* mitjons, *els* tinc guardats al calaix.  
the socks them have stored in.the drawer  
'I keep the socks stored in the drawer.'
- b. *L'*aigua, te *la* portaré de seguida.  
the.water you it bring immediately  
'I'll bring you the water immediately.'

### 2 Main section

In syntactic terms, the partitive case has been postulated to emerge from a structure in which indefinite nominals are assigned a QP structure that selects a KP whose head is partitive. Thus, with special reference to Catalan, in Martí-Girbau (1995: 257) it is hypothesized that *de* is the

overt manifestation of a partitive case (head of K) and that the clitic *en*, also partitive, is the instantiation of the lowest NP, as represented in (5).

(5) [QP [KP [K *de*] [NumP [NP *en* ]]]]

Martí-Girbau (1995) also hypothesizes that the head *de* is the instantiation of K unless N moves to K; that is, *de* is overt when there is no N in complement position of Q. By contrast, the clitic *en* that corresponds to NP is claimed to move through specifiers on its way out of the QP; that is, the clitic *en* is related to a dislocated phrase which is part of a projection selected by a Q.

According to Kayne (1975: 118) the motivation for this supposed partitivity comes from the fact that in (2) and (6) the structures would take the form [NP Y' des soeurs] and [NP Y'' du vin], where “one might take Y' and Y'' to be elements like *une partie*”.

(6) *Du vin, j'en ai qui vient d'Amérique.*  
 DE wine I.EN have that comes of America  
 ‘I have some wine that comes from America.’  
 (Kayne 1975: 119, footnote 69)

However, it should be noted that, from a semantic perspective, *de* phrases and their clitic correlate *en* in the above examples do not express any part-whole relationship that appears to be characteristic of canonical partitives (“partitive nominal phrases have in their extension only *proper* subparts of the entity denoted by the NP object of the partitive *of*”, Barker 1998: 680). By contrast, in the above examples *de* phrases and the clitic *en* are the expression of indefiniteness (Carlier et al. 2013, Carlier & Lamiroy 2014, Espinal & Cyrino 2021; and others).<sup>1</sup> Therefore, in what remains I argue that the meaning of the Romance clitic *ne* is one that corresponds to a property-type anaphora (Espinal & McNally 2007, 2011, Ihsane 2008, Laca 2013), while the nominal it replaces denotes a property-type expression and the associated *de* phrase is an indefinite DP. The arguments come from Catalan.

The first argument shows that bare plurals are not complements of any null Q. Consider the contrast between (7a) and (7b).

(7) a. *Aquest escriptor a casa té molts diccionaris.*  
 this writer at home has many dictionaries  
 {*Els té, en té molts*} a la seva biblioteca.  
 them have EN have many in the his library  
 ‘This writer has many dictionaries at home. He {has them, has many} in his library.’

<sup>1</sup>There are other uses of the clitic *en* that are beyond the scope of this article: those that introduce an anaphoric relationship with an adjective introduced by *de* (i), those that introduce an anaphoric relationship with a verbal complement introduced by the preposition *de* (ii), and those that apparently introduce an anaphoric relationship with the DP complement of a partitive part-whole relationship introduced by *de* (iii).

(i) *De pobre, no n'és.*  
 DE poor not EN is  
 ‘(S)he is not poor.’

(ii) *No es recorda de res. No se'n recorda.*  
 not CL remember of anything not CL.EN remember  
 ‘(S)he does not remember anything. (S)he doesn't remember it.’

(iii) *Visitarà alguns dels malalts de COVID. En visitarà alguns.*  
 visit some of.the patients of COVID EN visit some  
 ‘(S)he will visit some of the COVID patients. (S)he will visit some of them.’

- b. Aquest escriptor a casa té diccionaris.  
 this writer at home has dictionaries  
 {\*Els té, en té} a la seva biblioteca.  
 them have EN have in the his library  
 ‘This writer has dictionaries at home. They are in his library.’

In (7a) an overt QP occurs in object position of the verb. The following sentence shows two possible forms of clitic resumption: either the accusative clitic *els* that resumes the whole QP or the clitic *en* that only resumes the indefinite complement of the Q *molts*, which remains overt in postverbal position. In (7b) it is shown that QP resumption by means of the accusative clitic *els* is impossible, while the NP anaphora *en* (a Pro-NP in Déchaine & Wiltschko’s 2002 terms) is the only available option.

The second argument comes from so-called bare singulars in object position of *have*-predicates (Espinal & McNally 2007, 2011). Consider the example in (8), the first sentence of which is taken from Espinal (2010: 999–1000).

- (8) a. Els ametllers tenen flor. En tenen des del February  
 the almond.trees have flower EN have from febrer.  
 ‘The almond trees have bloomed. They have had flower(s) since February.’  
 b. L’ametller té flor. En té des del febrer.  
 the almond tree has flower EN has from February  
 ‘The almond tree has bloomed. It has had flower(s) since February.’

These examples show that the meaning of the bare nominal *flor* ‘flower’ is not dependent on the number of the DP in subject position. Bare nominals in object position allow either a plural or a singular interpretation, but have neither a dependent plural reading nor a dependent singular reading. This is due to the fact that bare nominals denote properties of kinds, and therefore should not be assigned a NumP structure. In both examples the antecedent of the clitic *en* is the bare nominal unspecified for Number. As argued elsewhere (Espinal 2010, Borik & Espinal 2015, Cyrino & Espinal 2015), only when a NumP is present does the Realization operator corresponding to Number turn properties of kinds into properties of objects, in such a way that the nominal expression specified for singular number refers to singular atoms whereas the nominal expression specified for plural number refers to sums of atoms.

The third argument in support of the hypothesis that neither the clitic *en* nor the antecedent *de* phrase has a partitive meaning comes from examples of the sort illustrated in (9).

- (9) a. De vestit, només en porto els diumenges.  
 DE dress only EN wear the Sundays  
 ‘I only wear a dress on Sundays.’  
 b. De secadora, no en vull.  
 DE dryer not EN want  
 ‘I don’t want a dryer.’

Note that in these examples the antecedent of the clitic *en* is a bare nominal preceded by the *de* marker. Being the dislocated nominal unspecified for Number, as is characteristic of bare nominal objects in *have*-predicates, the clitic *en* can be claimed to convey not a partitive meaning but rather only an indefinite one. Catalan is interesting because it shows that, even in the case of left-dislocated bare nominal objects in *have*-predicates, a marker of indefiniteness (i.e., *de*) is required, with the corresponding indefinite clitic *en* affixed to the verb. Crucially, no subset-superset relationship is involved. Therefore, no partitivity should be postulated in

these examples for the Romance clitic *en* and its antecedent *de* phrase, and *de* is merely the instantiation of an abstract indefinite operator (Espinal & Cyrino 2021).

The fourth argument appears in (10). This sort of example is well-known in the literature for licensing both a *de dicto* and a *de re* reading for the indefinite QP expression (von Heusinger 2011). What I would like to point out is that, under a *de dicto* reading an anaphoric relationship is expected with a property-type anaphora such as the clitic *en* (10b), whereas under a *de re* reading the expected anaphoric relationship is established with an entity-type anaphora such as *la* ‘her’ (10c).

- (10) a. Busco una doctoranda que sàpiga grec.  
 Look for a PhD student that knows Greek  
 ‘I’m looking for a PhD student that speaks Greek.’
- b. *En* busco una per al nou projecte.  
 EN look for one for the new project  
 ‘I’m looking for one for the new project.’
- c. *La* t robaré al Departament de Filologia Clàssica.  
 her find at the department of philology classical  
 ‘I’ll find her at the Department of Classical Philology.’

### 3 Conclusion

In this brief article I have argued that the clitic *en* should not be associated with structural Number, should not be associated with the presence of quantification, and should not be assigned a partitive meaning. *En* is a property-type anaphora overtly associated with an indefinite nominal expression headed by *de*, an indefinite operator.

#### Author note

I am happy to contribute to this ‘surprise’ *Festschrift for Klaus von Heusinger*. I feel much obliged to him and to Georg Kaiser for having invited me to participate in the regular meetings of the NEREUS workshop, and for having shown that sharing linguistics is much more than just sharing data, corpora and analyses.

### References

- Barker, Chris. 1998. Partitives, double genitives, and anti-uniqueness. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 16(4). 679–717.
- Benincà, Paola. 1988. L’ordine degli elementi della frase e le costruzioni marcate. In Lorenzo Renzi (ed.), *Grande Grammatica Italiana di Consultazione*, 115–225. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Borik, Olga & M. Teresa Espinal. 2015. Reference to kinds and to other generic expressions in Spanish: Definiteness and number. *The Linguistic Review* 32(2). 167–225.
- Carlier, Anne. 2013. Grammaticalization in progress in Old French: Indefinite articles. In Deborah L. Arteaga (ed.), *Research on Old French: The state of the art*, 45–60. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Carlier, Anne & Béatrice Lamiroy. 2014. The grammaticalization of the prepositional partitive in Romance. In Silvia Luraghi & Tuomas Huomo (eds.), *Partitive cases and related categories*, 477–518. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Cordin, Patrizia. 1988. Il clitico *ne*. In Lorenzo Renzi (ed.), *Grande grammatica italiana di consultazione*, 633–641. Bologna: Il Mulino.

- Cyrino, Sonia & M. Teresa Espinal. 2015. Bare nominals in Brazilian Portuguese: More on the DP/NP analysis. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 33. 471–521.
- Déchaine, Rose-Marie & Martina Wiltschko. 2002. Decomposing pronouns. *Linguistic Inquiry* 33. 409–442.
- Espinal, M. Teresa. 2010. Bare nominals in Catalan and Spanish. Their structure and meaning. *Lingua* 120. 984–1009.
- Espinal, M. Teresa & Louise McNally. 2007. Bare singular nominals and incorporating verbs. In Georg Kaiser & Manuel Leonetti (eds.), *Proceedings of the III NEREUS International Workshop. Definiteness, specificity and animacy in Ibero-Romance Languages*. Arbeitspapier 122: 45–62. Universität Konstanz.
- Espinal, M. Teresa & Louise McNally. 2011. Bare nominals and incorporating verbs in Catalan and Spanish. *Journal of Linguistics* 47. 87–128.
- Espinal, M. Teresa & Sonia Cyrino. 2021. A syntactically-driven approach to indefiniteness, specificity and anti-specificity in Romance. *Journal of Linguistics*, First View, 1–36.
- Giusti, Giuliana. 1992. *La sintassi dei sintagma quantificati*. Ph.D. dissertation, Università di Venezia.
- von Heusinger, Klaus. 2011. Specificity. In Klaus von Heusinger, Claudia Maienborn & Paul Portner (eds.), *Semantics. An international handbook of natural language meaning*, vol. 2, 1025–1058. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Ihsane, Tabea. 2008. *The layered DP. Form and meaning of French indefinites*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Kayne, Richard S. 1975. *French syntax: The transformational cycle*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Laca, Brenda. 2013. Spanish bare plurals and topicalization. In Johannes Kabatek & Albert Wall (eds.), *New perspectives on bare noun phrases in Romance and beyond*, 95–120. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Martí-Girbau, Núria. 1995. *De* in Catalan elliptical nominals: A partitive case marker. *Catalan Working Papers in Linguistics* 4(2). 243–265.
- Martí-Girbau, Núria. 2010. *The syntax of partitives*. Ph.D. dissertation, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.