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Grammaticalization in progress in Old French: Indefinite articles

Cross-linguistically, indefinite articles tend to emerge later than definite articles. The grammaticalization process that will lead to the indefinite articles *un* and *du/des* of Modern French is still in a very early stage in Old French. *Uns* is indeed still close to its source meaning, the numeral value, both in its quantitative dimension of uniqueness marker ('only one') and in its qualitative dimension of identity marker ('one and the same'). It has nevertheless acquired a textual role in Old French, which attests its shift towards the status of article: on the one hand, in line with the quantitative numeral meaning, it delimits an entity and introduces it as a new prominent discourse referent; on the other hand, according to its qualitative numeral meaning, it introduces a new type or a new category. As to the partitive, it is claimed that it has not reached the status of article in Old French, but has an intermediate status, between preposition and determiner. This hypothesis offers an account for the low frequency of the partitive, for its hybrid syntactic properties and for its specific meaning of indefinite extraction from a concrete and contextually definite partition set. From a methodological viewpoint, this study illustrates that a synchronic analysis gains by being combined with a diachronic perspective: a more comprehensive account of the exact meaning and the specific conditions of uses of *uns* and of the partitive in Old French can be offered if the analysis is based upon a correct definition of the source expression, evaluates its evolutionary stage with respect to this source and fits into an overall picture of the grammaticalization path towards the status to full-fledged article.

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1. Introduction

Grammars of Old French mention the existence of three articles: the definite article, originating from the Latin distal demonstrative *ille*, the indefinite article, which derives from the Latin unity numeral *unus*, and the so-called partitive article, resulting from a contraction of the preposition *de* and the definite article¹. Although the three forms constitutive of the paradigm of

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¹ Cf. Foulet (1916/1998: 45-83), Price (1971: 115-120), Ménard (1973: 26-30), Moignet (1976: 100-111), Joly (2004: 43-44). On the contrary, Revol (2005:192) argues against giving the status of article to the contracted form "*de* + definite article" and analyzes *de* as a preposition.

articles in Modern French are already attested in Old French, they do not have the same extension as their Modern French counterparts, as can be seen from the following table:

TABLE 1: Comparison of the relative frequency of the articles in translation of Cicero's *De Inventione* and of the anonymous *Rhetorica ad Herennium* into Old French and into Modern French (Carlier & Goyens 1998).

Article	Old French	Modern French
<i>le / les</i>	50,4%	65,4%
<i>un(s)</i>	3,2%	12%
<i>du / des (de)</i>	0%	4,2%
Zero marking	46,4%	18,4%

The above table offers a comparison of the relative frequency of the articles in an Old French translation and in a Modern French translation of the same Latin source². The figures show that the definite article is already frequent in Old French and that its extension from Old French to Modern French is relatively modest: it increases with a factor of only 1.3. As to the indefinite article *un(s)*, its evolution is more spectacular: it quadruples in frequency. Finally, there are no clear instances of the partitive article in this Late Old French corpus.

The evolution of the relative frequency of use of the three articles, from Old French to Modern French, offers at least a rudimentary measure to evaluate their degree of grammaticalization in Old French, since frequency increase is one of the striking features of grammaticalization (Bybee 2003: 602). The definite article, already emerging in Late Latin (*cf. inter alii* Selig 1992, Vincent 1997, Bauer 2007, Carlier & De Mulder 2010), has reached a certain degree of maturity. The indefinite article *un(s)*, however, seems still in an embryonic stage. As to the partitive, the question has to be raised whether the status of article is already reached.

In this chapter, the focus will be on the two articles that express in Modern French indefiniteness, viz. singular (*un*) and non-singular (*du / des*). On the basis of synchronic facts, we will specify their stage of grammaticalization in Old French. In this way, the use of the articles in Old French is not described in a static perspective, but is rather conceived as a stage in the dynamic process of the construction of a new grammatical paradigm.

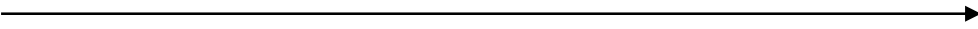
2. *Uns* in Old French: which stage of evolution?

From a typological perspective, the shift from the unity numeral towards the indefinite singular article is conceived as a widespread or even universal grammaticalization process (Givón 1981, Heine 1997). According to Heine (1997), the following stages can be distinguished: starting from its source meaning, *i.e.* the numeral 'one', the emergent article moves on successively to the stages of presentation marker, indefinite-specific marker and indefinite-nonspecific marker, before reaching the ultimate stage of a generalized article:

² The Old French translation was written by Jean d'Antioche in 1282, the Modern French translation is by Henri Bornecque. The percentages, taken from Goyens (1994: 224), are based on the comparison of the first 2500 NP in the Old French translation with their equivalents in the Modern French translation. Contrary to most of the medieval translations, this translation is fairly faithful to the source text. Moreover, the figures in the table take into account only the comparable sequences.

FIGURE 1: FROM UNITY NUMERAL TO ARTICLE, according to Heine (1997)

I **II** **III** **IV** **V**
 Numeral > Presentative > Specific > Non-specific > Generalized article



Heine (1997: 71-74) moreover adds that the desemantization goes along with a contextual expansion:

- i. The article does not originally occur within the scope of negation, modality and interrogation, known as non-specific contexts. It will spread to these contexts only at stage **IV**. This extension of its conditions of use goes on at stage **V**, where it appears also in generic contexts.
- ii. In the early stages, the use of the article is confined to singular count nouns, whereas in stage **V** it is extended to plural count nouns and to uncount nouns.
- iii. The indefinite article derived from the unity numeral can even undergo a neutralization of its opposition with the definite article. This is the case when it extends to generic use, since the meaning differences between (1a), (1b) and (1c) are subtle.

(1) English (Hawkins 1978: 214, quoted by Heine 1997: 70)

- a. *A lion is a noble beast.*
- b. *The lion is a noble beast.*
- c. *Lions are noble beasts.*

The low frequency of *uns* in the Old French translation of *De Inventione* (cf. Table 1), which has also been observed in non translated texts by Foulet (1916/1998:60), suggests that *uns* is still in an early stage of grammaticalization. It has indeed been argued by Carlier (2001) and by Herslund (2004) that *uns* in Old French is still close to its source meaning of unity numeral. Evidence is provided by translations of the Latin unity numeral *unus*: although *un* in Modern French is still ambiguous between article use and unity numeral, the modern translator has to systematically use contextual devices like the discontinuous restriction operator *ne ...que* ('only') in (2c) in order to activate the numeral value. As is shown in (2b), the Old French translator felt no need to do so, because the numeral value is still dominant.

- (2) a. *una=ne pecunia fuerit* (Cicero, *De Inventione* II, 64)
 one NOM.SG.F=Q sum.NOM.SG be-PFCT;FUT.3SG
- b. *Fu ele une pecune ?* (transl. J. d'Antioche, LI [1282])
 be-PST.3PL she one/a.SG sum?
 'Has there been **one sum**?'
- c. *N' y a-t-il eu qu' une somme ?* » (transl. Bornecque)
 RESTR LOC have-PFCT.3SG RESTR one/a.SG.F sum
 'Has there been only one sum?'

The non-reinforced translations of the Latin unity numeral disappear during the period of Middle French (Carlier 2001), when the article emancipates itself from the unity numeral value.

Although *uns* still had a strong numeral value in Old French, it also developed article uses. In its role as a presentative marker (stage II in Figure 1), it introduces a new discourse referent (Foulet 1916/1998: 56, Joly 2004: 34), which can be taken up again in the subsequent context.

- (3) *Atant i vint un-s paien-s, Valdabrun-s.*
 then LOC come-PST.3SG a-NOM.SG pagan-NOM.SG Valdabrun- NOM.SG.

Icil en vaît al rei Marsiliun
 DEM.DIST.M.SG go-PRST.3SG to-the-REG.M.SG King-REG.SG Marsiliun
 ‘In haste there came **a pagan** Valdabrun. He went to King Marsiliun.
 (*La chanson de Roland*, 617-618 [1100])

Its use is however not systematic for specific indefinite reference (stage III) (cf. Buridant 2000: 79; Carlier 2001, *contra* Price 1971:118)

(4) Si ele a enfanté, aveuque **home** habita.
 If she have-PRST.3SG give-birth-PST.PTCP, with man.REG.SG live-PST.3SG
 ‘If she has given birth, she has been living with **a man**’
 (transl. J. d’Antioche, XXVII [1282])

More surprisingly, *uns* in Old French is compatible with referential values that are associated with advanced stages of grammaticalization according to the grammaticalization path of Heine (1997). Indeed, *uns* is sporadically attested within the scope of modality, yielding a non-specific interpretation (stage IV).

(5) Se il y eust **un chat** qui s’ en fuist
 If it-EXPL.SBJ LOC have-PST.3SG a-REG.M.SG cat-SG who REFL INCHOAT flee-PST.3SG
 de l’ost des Crestiens, ne peust il mie eschaper que li Sarrasin ne le preissent
 from the camp of-the Christians, not can-PST.3SG he NEG escape that the Saracens caught him.
 ‘If there were **a. cat** fleeing from the camp of the Christians, it couldn’t escape without being caught by the Saracens.’ (*Chronique d’Ernoul* 23, 51 [1231])

It occurs also in predicate position (Buridant 2000: 112) and in the complement of a comparison (Marchello-Nizia 2006).

(6) Sire, je sui **unn-e essillie**
 ‘Sir-NOM.SG I am **an-F;SG exile**.’
 (*Roman de Thèbes*, 2318 [1150])

(7) A la mort vai cum **uns anels**
 To the-F.SG death-SG go-PRST;3SG like a-NOM;M;SG lamb-NOM;M;SG
 ‘he (= Christ) goes to death like **a lamb**’ (*Passion de Clermont*, 156 [950])

The following example shows that the Old French *uns* is even compatible with a generic interpretation (stage V).

(8) **Uns faibles hons** porte la some par us et par accoutumance
 A-NOM.M.SG frail NOM.M.SG man-NOM.M.SG bear-PRST.3SG the-F.SG burden by custom and by habit
 qu’uns autre de greignor puissance ne porte-r-oi-t pour nule rien.
 that an other of greater strength no bear-FUT-IMP-F-3SG for no thing.
 ‘**A frail man** carries the burden out of habit that another man, of greater strength, wouldn’t carry on any account.’ (Chr. De Troyes, *Yvain* 3582 [1180])

Moreover, *uns* is not restricted to singular count nouns (stage V). There exists a plural form of *uns* (Woledge 1956, Guillaume 1969, Herslund 2004), mostly used to evoke pairs (e.g. *unes eles* ‘a pair of wings’) or entities composed of identical elements which are inseparable physically (e.g. *unes denz* ‘teeth’, *unes montaignes* ‘a chain of mountains’) or functionally (*unes armes* ‘weapon equipment’). Secondly, *uns* is also compatible with noncount nouns, not only with mass nouns (7) but also with abstract nouns (8) (Heinz 1982).

(9) le vaissel [...] est tailliez a cisel d’ **un marbre fin blanc et bis et si bel** que tels ne fu depuis le temps Abel.
 the receptacle is carved with chisel from a marble fine, white and greyish and so beautiful ...
 ‘the receptacle [...] is carved with a chisel out from (litt. **a**) **fine, white and greyish marble** so beautiful that

there was no such [marble] since Abel's time.' (Guillaume de Machaut, *Le jugement dou roy de Behaigne*[1340])

- (10) Je l' amoie d'**une amour** *si tres pure* qu'onques vers li ne pensay fausseté.
 I her-ACC.F.SG love-IMPF.1SG of a.F.SG love-SG so very pure-SG that never towards her not think-IMPF.1SG falsity.
 'I loved her with **such a pure love** that I never had any deceitful thought towards her.'
 (Guillaume de Machaut, *La loange des dames* [1377])

If we accept that *uns*, given its low frequency, is still in an early stage of the grammaticalization process in Old French, it seems difficult to accommodate the observed facts (examples 5 to 10) with the grammaticalization path proposed by Heine (1997). A new model of development of the article has to be envisaged and the meaning of the unity numeral as the starting point of this evolution has to be redefined.

In its numeral meaning, *uns* is a marker of unity both in a quantitative and a qualitative dimension. In its quantitative meaning, *uns* indicates the uniqueness of the referent, whereas in its qualitative meaning, it marks identity. These two meanings can be highlighted by *seul* ('only') and by *meisme* ('same').

- (11) **Un** *seul filz* a de sa moullier
 One-RÉG.M.SG single son have-PRST.3SG of his wife. (*Roman de Thèbes* [1150])
 'He had one single son of his wife'
- (12) avrons ambedui **un-e-s meïsmes armes** et couverture-s **d'une maniere**
 have-FUT.1PL both one-F-PL same-PL weapons-PL and blanket-PL of one-F.SG same sort.
 'Both of us will have the same arms and saddle blankets of the same type.' (*Mort le Roi Artu*, 12 [1230])

By pragmatic inference, a textual role is grafted on to this numeral meaning: *uns* in Old French acquires the function of marking the discourse status of the evoked entity and presents it as new or unidentified for the hearer / reader. When this textual role becomes a conventionalized part of the meaning of *uns*, the article status is reached³.

- In its **quantitative** meaning, *uns* used as article introduces a new entity and gives it the status of prominent discourse referent. It is however not strictly limited to indefinite specific reference, e.g.:

- (6) Atant I vint **un-s païen-s**, Valdabrun.
 then LOC come-PST.3SG **a-NOM.SG pagan-NOM.SG** Valdabrun-NOM.SG
Icil en vait al rei Marsiliun
 DEM.DIST.M.SG go-prst.3sg to-the-REG.M.SG King-REG.SG Marsiliun
 'In haste there came **a pagan** Valdabrun. He went to King Marsiliun.
 (*La chanson de Roland*, 617-618 [1100])

It can occur for non-specific reference: as is illustrated by (5), the presence of the article is required when there is an anaphoric expression in the subsequent context.

- (5) Se il y eust **un chat** qui s' en fuist
 If it-EXPL.SBJ LOC have-PST.3SG **a-REG.M.SG cat-S** who REFL INCHOAT flee-PST.3SG
 de l'ost des Crestiens, ne peust il mie eschaper que li Sarrasin ne le preissent
 from the camp of-the Christians, not can-PST.3SG he NEG escape that the Saracens caught him.

³ The early grammaticalization stage of *uns* involves thus pragmatic strengthening rather than semantic bleaching (Cf. Hopper & Traugott 2003: 94). On the notion of pragmatic inference and its reanalysis as a semantic meaning, see the "Semantic Change Model" presented by Traugott & Dasher (2002: 34)

‘If there were *a. cat*_i fleeing from the camp of the Christians, it_i couldn’t escape without being caught by the Saracens.’ (*Chronique d’Ernoul* 23, 51 [1231])

On the contrary, even in the case of specific indefinite reference, *uns* can be lacking when the referent is unimportant and is not mentioned again in the subsequent context, as is exemplified by (4).

(4) Si ele a enfanté, aveuque *home* habita.
 If she have-PRST.3SG give-birth-PST.PTCP with man.REG.SG live-PST.3SG
 ‘If she has given birth, she has been living with *a man*’ (transl. J. d’Antioche, XXVII [1282])

- As a marker of **qualitative** identity, *uns* used as an article introduces a new type or new category (13). It occurs with some frequency in the more elaborate form of *une maniere de* (‘a sort of / a type of’) (Buridant 2000: 116) (14). The newly introduced category is often followed by an explicit denomination (13/14).

(13) assemblé ot la *un-e-s gens barbarien-s*,
 gather-PST PTCP have;PST.3SG LOC a-FEM.PL people-PL barbaric-PL
Nommez furent Tyberiens
 call-PST PTCP.PL be;PST.3PL Tiberians-PL
 ‘He had assembled there *barbarian people*. They were called Tiberians.’
 (Christine de Pizan, *Le livre de la mutacion de fortune* [1400])

(14) y envoioit gens qui portoient *une maniere de pain-s*
 there send-PST.3SG people who carry-PST.3PL a-F.SG manner of bread-PL
que l’en appelle bequis, pour ce que il sont cuis par .II. foiz.
 that one call-PRST.3SG biscuits-PL, ...
 ‘he sent people who were carrying *a sort of bread*-PL that is called “biscuits” because they are baked twice’ (Joinville, *Histoire de saint Louis* [1305])

If we accept, on the basis of the low frequency of *uns* in Old French, that the grammaticalization from unity numeral to article is still at an early stage, the more abstract uses of *uns* in predicate position (6), in the complement of a comparison (7) and even with a generic interpretation (8) cannot be considered as instances of an advanced stage of the grammaticalization process. Rather, they are linked to the article use deriving from its **qualitative** meaning: in this sense, *uns* introduces a new category and can be used to affirm that the referent evoked in the sentence is a member of the category or has at least the salient characteristics of the category.

3. The partitive in Old French: which stage of evolution?

In Modern French, indefinite non-singular reference is expressed by the so-called ‘partitive’ article (15a), composed of *de* (meaning ‘from’ > ‘of’) contracted onto the definite article. Cross-linguistically, the existence of an article for indefinite non singular reference is an exceptional feature: as a general rule, even languages that have an article for the indefinite singular leave the indefinite non-singular unmarked (e.g. English (15c)). This is also the case in Old French (15b):

- (21) *Seignors, du vin de quoi il burent avez oï*
 Lord-REG.PL of-the wine-REG.SG of which-N they drink-PST-3PL have-PST-2PL heard- PST.PTCP.
 ‘Lords, you heard about the wine of which they drank?’ (Béroul, *Tristran & Iseut*, v. 2133-2135)

On the other hand, the partitive constituent has the status of a direct object with respect to the verb, which means that *de* is no longer a preposition with respect to the verb. Evidence can be found in causative constructions. As has been pointed out by Damourette & Pichon (1911-34), Kayne (1975) and Martineau (1992), in the French causative “*faire* + infinitive” construction, the subject of the embedded infinitive is normally assigned the accusative case (22). However, if the infinitive has a direct object, the subject of the infinitive conveys the dative case or is expressed as a PP introduced by *à* ‘to’ (23), because in French one verb cannot assign accusative case to different constituents. When the infinitive has an oblique or prepositional object, the subject of the infinitive is nevertheless normally assigned the accusative case (24)⁵.

- (22) **Infinitive - Direct Object → Subject : ACCUSATIVE**

Il est biaux enfes, bien me plaît. Alez, si le faites mengier.
 him-ACC.M.SG make-IMP.2PL eat-INF

‘He is a nice boy, I like him, make him [ACCUSATIVE] eat’ (*Miracle de saint Jehan Crisothomes* [1340])

- (23) **Infinitive + Direct Object → Subject : DATIVE or PP introduced by à (‘to’)**

les gentilz houmes preuz et biaux
 the-REG.M.PL noble-REG.M.PL man- REG.M.PL brave- REG.M.PL and handsome-REG.M.PL

fet mengier a chiens, a oisiaux!
 make-PRST.3SG eat-INF to dog-REG. PL, to bird-REG.PL

‘He makes dogs and birds[DATIVE] eat noble, brave, and handsome men’ (*Roman de Thèbes* [1150], v. 10097-10098)

- (24) **Infinitive + Prepositional object → Subject : ACCUSATIVE**

Pompée [...] le fait parler des princes de l’aurore.
 Pompeius him-ACC.M.SG make-PRST.3SG speak-INF of-the princes of the dawn.

‘Pompeius makes him[ACCUSATIVE] tell about the princes of the dawn’ (G. de Breboeuf, *Les Guerres civiles de César et de Pompée* [1655])

When the infinitive has a partitive object, its subject is assigned the dative case (26), in the same way as for a direct object ((25) and (23)). Hence, in relationship to the verb, *de* does not behave like a preposition.

- (25) *Car un bevrage leur fait boire.*
 because a-REG.M.SG beverage-REG.SG them-DATIVE.PL make- PRST.3SG drink-INF
 ‘Because he makes them [DATIVE] drink **a beverage**.’
 (Gautier de Coinci, *Miracles de Notre-Dame*, Ed. V.F. Koenig, vol. 1, p.159)

- (26) *Boire li fait ... del bevrage qui a tel force ...*
 Drink-INF him- DATIVE.SG make-PRST.3SG of-the beverage-REG.SG that has such strength
 ‘He makes him[DATIVE] drink (some) **of the beverage** that has such strength.’
 (Gautier de Coinci, *Miracles de Notre-Dame*, Ed. V.F. Koenig, vol. 3, p. 412)

These empirical facts allow us to define the exact status of the partitive *de*. As pointed out by Lehmann (2002:67), a full preposition is a two-sided relator. It establishes a relationship with an external element, for instance the verb, but also with the nominal complement it governs. *De* as a constitutive element of the medieval partitive is one-sided relator and has an intermediate status, between preposition and determiner: it behaves no longer as a preposition with respect to the

⁵ As pointed out by an anonymous reviewer, there is some fluctuation as to the case marking of the subject of the infinitive in causative constructions. For a detailed discussion, cf. Pearce (1990).

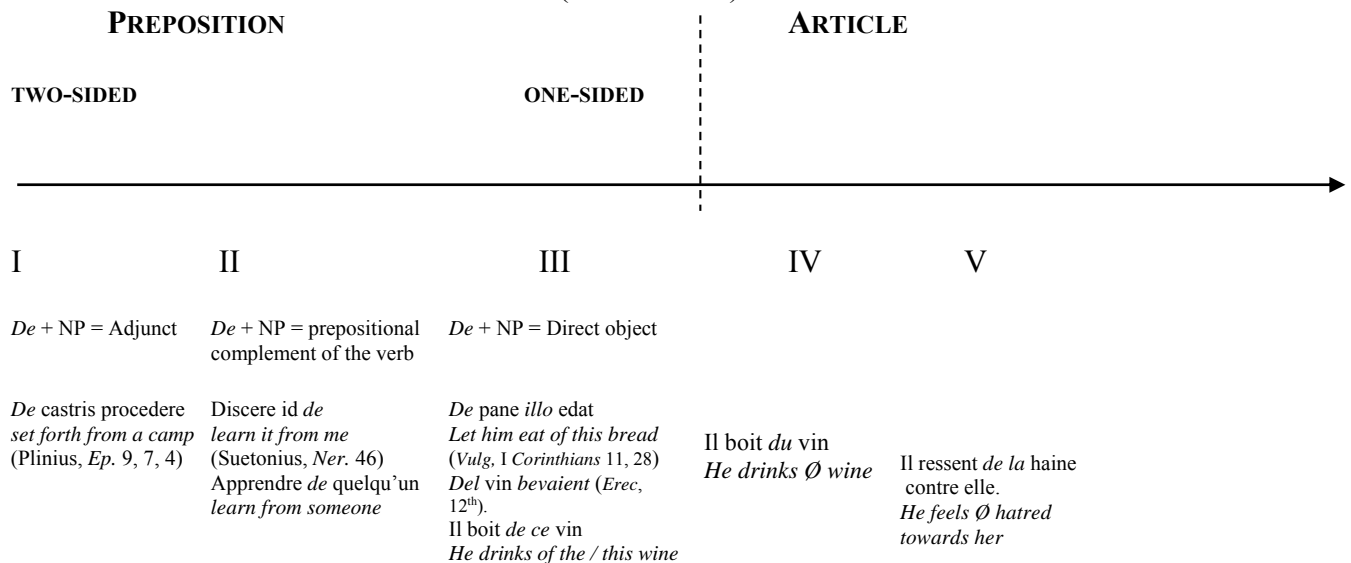
verb (see example 26), but it is still a preposition with respect to the NP it governs (see example 21).

Its prepositional status with respect to the NP has a semantic correlate: *de* indicates that the referent of the NP is not wholly affected by the verbal action but only partially⁶. The very specific interpretation of the medieval partitive, described above, is a result of this semantic dimension of *de*: the medieval partitive presupposes a contextually determined set and operates a partition within this set. It also explains the distributional constraints:

- i. The Old French partitive is restricted to nouns referring to a concrete referent, but does not occur with abstract nouns (see examples (16) to (18)).
- ii. It occurs mostly in combination with verbs involving an object affected in terms of movement or modification of physical properties and is thus more likely to be used with verbs like *boire* ‘drink’ rather than *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 (19) and (20)).

On the grammaticalization chain from the preposition *de*, denoting a spatial movement of 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) towards the full-fledged indefinite non-singular article, the medieval partitive corresponds to stage III, *i.e.* the preliminary stage to the status of article.

FIGURE 2: FROM PREPOSITION TO ARTICLE (Carlier 2007)



The partitive corresponding to stage III has a rather low frequency in Old French texts of the 12th century and it is not even a new feature of Old French. It is already attested in the Late Latin popularizing texts of the 4th and 5th century written in Gaul, in particular by Christian authors (Väänänen 1981, cf. example in figure 2). Moreover, the occasional use of a case or adposition meaning ‘from’ for the periphrastic expression of the partitive is in fact not cross-linguistically uncommon, but has been identified as a universally available syntactic construction to be used by any language (Harris & Campbell 2000: 54-56). The partitive has, however, received a lot of

⁶ Cf. the description of the genitive case in Russian (Timberlake 1977, Paykin & Van Peteghem 2002, Fischer 2004), in Homeric Greek (Humbert 1960) and of the partitive case in Finnish (Sands and Campbell 2001)

attention from historians of the French language because it is the precursor of a newly created article. The very beginnings of this article use of the partitive, corresponding to stage IV in figure 2, are already found in Old French dramatic texts, reproducing a language of conversation and probably adopting a more informal register (Foulet 1916/1998: 83) and they become less uncommon in the 13th century. Consider the following example:

(27) *Ha ! biaux dous fiex, seés vous cois, ou vous arés des eviaus.*
 Ha ! handsome sweet son, seat-IMP.2PL you-PL quiet, or you-PL have-FUT.2PL of-the-REG.SG.M hits-REG.PL
 ‘Ha ! Dear sweet son, keep quiet, or you will take hits’ (Adam de la Halle, *Jeu de la Feuillée*, 396-397 [1276],
 quoted by Foulet 1916/1998)

In the example (27) above, *de* is no longer a one-sided preposition but an element of the article. From a semantic viewpoint, the partitive does not operate a partition upon a presupposed contextually determined set, but marks indefiniteness. At the same period, the partitive remains exceptional in formal registers. For instance, Jean d’Antioche’s translation of theoretical work on rhetoric, quoted above (footnote 2), which is written in the late 13th century, contains no clear instance of the partitive. The partitive does not attain a significant level of frequency until Middle French. The frequency of the partitive in the written tradition rises sharply in the 15th century, thereby attesting to its establishment as the so-called ‘partitive’ article⁷. In the initial period, it is still restricted to concrete reference (stage IV of figure 2), but it extends to abstract nouns during the 17th century (stage V of figure 2). This evolution is not entirely accomplished in Modern French: in a prepositional group, the abstract noun is often used without an article, whereas the use of the partitive article is rather systematic in combination with concrete mass nouns, as is shown by the following figures.

(28) Relative frequency of the partitive in the *Frantext* corpus (1900-2010)

a.	<i>avec amour</i> : 99,2 %	<i>avec de l’amour</i> : 0,8 %
	with love	with of-the.SG love
b.	<i>avec lait</i> : 2 %	<i>avec du lait</i> : 98 %
	with milk	with of-the.M.SG milk

4. Concluding remarks

It is well-known that from a typological viewpoint the grammatical category of the articles is not universal. According to Dryer (1989), only one third of the languages of the world have at least one article, mostly the definite article. Moreover, only 8 % of them have both a definite and an indefinite article at their disposal. Originating from a mother language without articles, French goes even further in this evolution and has created a paradigm of articles with three distinct etymological sources: the distal demonstrative, the unity numeral and a contraction of the spatial preposition *de*, meaning ‘removal’, and the definite article. The early Old French texts already contain the three forms that will constitute the paradigm of articles in Modern French. This chapter has been devoted to the two articles marking indefiniteness in Modern French, the article derived from the unity numeral and the so-called ‘partitive’ article.

The conditions of use and the meaning of the indefinite article *uns* and of the partitive in Old French have extensively been studied in a synchronic perspective. From a methodological viewpoint, this study illustrates how a synchronic analysis gains by being combined with a diachronic perspective, evaluating the stage of evolution with respect to the etymological source.

⁷ Quantitative data are provided in Carlier (2007 : § 3.2).

An analysis based upon a correct definition of the source meaning, which takes into account the mechanisms at work in the grammaticalization process and locates the stage of evolution in an overall picture of the grammaticalization path towards the status of full-fledged article, can refine our understanding of the meaning of *uns* and of the partitive in Old French and contribute to a better account of the specific conditions in which they are used or avoided. Frequency and frequency increase proved to be a reliable measure for evaluating the stage of grammaticalization.

As far as *uns* is concerned, its low frequency in Old French with respect to Modern French points to an early stage of grammaticalization. As evidenced by the translations of the Latin unity numeral, it seems still strongly associated to its numeral value, both in its quantitative dimension of uniqueness marker ('only one') and in its qualitative dimension of identity marker ('one and the same'). By pragmatic strengthening, *uns* has nevertheless acquired the textual role of marking the evoked entity as new for the hearer / reader. As this textual role becomes part of the meaning of *uns*, the article status is reached. On the one hand, in line with its quantitative numeral meaning, *uns* has the ability of introducing a new discourse referent. On the other hand, in accordance with its qualitative numeral meaning, *uns* can introduce a new category and/or identify an entity as a member of this category. The more abstract uses of *uns* in nominal predicates, in comparisons and even for generic meaning, are in line with this qualitative numeral meaning and do not reveal, as is suggested by the evolutionary model of Heine (1997), an advanced stage of grammaticalization. On the contrary, the strong discourse-pragmatic motivation of the article use of *uns* confirms that it is still in an early stage of the grammaticalization process.

As to the partitive, with respect to the often debated question of its grammatical category, preposition or article, it is claimed in this study that it has in Old French an intermediate status, between preposition and article, and that it has not reached the status of article. This analysis accounts for its very low frequency, for its hybrid syntactic properties, and for its very specific meaning of partition within a concrete and contextually determined set. As has been pointed out by Harris & Campbell (1995), the occasional use of a genitive or a periphrastic construction using an adposition meaning 'from' for the expression of the partitive is as such cross-linguistically a rather widespread phenomenon. However, what is specific about the Old French partitive is that it grammaticalized into an article. The first attestations of this newly created article occur in Old French sources closer to the oral register, but the article use of the partitive attains a significant level of frequency only in Middle French.

The evolution of *un(s)* and *du/des* from Old French to Modern French is conditioned by the process of further integration within the paradigm or 'paradigmatization' (Lehmann 2002: § 4.2). The feature of indefiniteness, creating a binary opposition with the definite article *le*, is foregrounded. Other features characteristic of *uns* and the partitive in Old French that do not contribute to binary paradigmatic oppositions are reoriented or eliminated. As to *un*, the value of unity numeral fades away from Middle French on and evolves towards the grammatical feature of singular number. For the partitive, which refers in Old French to an indefinite quantity taken from a concrete and contextually defined partition set, the notion of partition set disappears during the period of Middle French, but the feature of indefinite and, hence, non singular quantity remains. This leads to a tightly integrated paradigm, structured in terms of two main

parameters, (in)definiteness and number, with only a very restricted place for zero determination, at least in combination with common nouns.

The importance given in this study to the respective source meanings of *uns* and of the partitive can seem self-evident because they correspond in Old French to early stages of the grammaticalization process. However, even when an expression reaches an advanced stage of grammaticalization and seems fully integrated in a paradigm, it can still convey traces of earlier meanings, which are reflected in constraints on use or meaning (Traugott & Hopper 2003: 96). For instance, as has been shown by the frequency rates in (28), in a prepositional group, the Modern French partitive article is still often lacking in combination with abstract nouns whereas its use is nearly systematic with concrete nouns. This can be understood as a phenomenon of “persistence” (Hopper 1991): for the forerunner of the partitive article, the concrete character of the partition set was an absolute distributional constraint.

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