


# The non-partitivity of Catalan and Italian nominal *ne*\*

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## Abstract

In this review article we discuss the main arguments in support of the hypothesis that in Contemporary Catalan and Italian nominal *ne* is neither a prepositional clitic, nor a partitive clitic nor a quantitative clitic. While the item from which Romance *ne* originates (Latin *inde*) pronominalized PPs with locative meanings, similarly to what happens with *de*, following a grammaticalization cline, *ne* comes to pronominalize different layers of nominal structure, and in contemporary Romance also expresses non-specific indefiniteness. We maintain that, syntactically, whereas partitivity is characterized as being a birelational category that necessarily connects a subset to a maximal superset, the indefinite use of *ne* is not birelational in the same sense. We support the hypothesis that nominal *ne* is a property-type anaphora that resumes a non-specific weak indefinite nominal expression. We review a number of syntactic and semantic arguments in support of the non-partitivity of nominal *ne* in Catalan and Italian, from which we conclude that it is a pro-NP, unmarked for gender and number, whose antecedent cannot have a unique or maximal reference.

**Keywords:** partitivity; nominal *ne*; property-type anaphora; (in)definiteness; (in)specificity

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**Resum.** *La no partitivitat del nominal ne en català i en italià*

En aquest article de revisió discutim els principals arguments que donen suport a la hipòtesi que en català i italià contemporanis el *ne* nominal no és ni un clíctic preposicional, ni un clíctic partitiu ni un clíctic quantitatiu. Mentre que l'ítem d'on prové el *ne* romànic (llatí *inde*) pronominalitzava SPs amb significats locatius, de manera similar al que passa amb *de* seguint una cadena de gramaticalització, *ne* arriba a pronominalitzar diferents capes de l'estructura nominal, i en les llengües romàniques contemporànies també expressa indefinitud no específica. Mantenim que, sintàcticament, mentre que la partitivitat es caracteritza per ser una categoria birrelacional que necessàriament connecta un subconjunt amb un superconjunt maximal, l'ús indefinit de *ne* no és birrelacional en el mateix sentit. Donem suport a la hipòtesi que el *ne* nominal és una anàfora de propietats que reprèn una expressió nominal indefinida feble no específica. Revisem diversos arguments sintàctics i semàntics que donen suport a la no partitivitat del *ne* nominal en català i italià, a partir dels quals concloem que és un pro-SN, no marcat per a gènere ni nombre, l'antecedent del qual no pot tenir una referència única o màxima.

**Paraules clau:** partitivitat; *ne* nominal; anàfora de propietats; indefinitud; (no)especificitat

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## 1. Introduction

A common claim made in descriptive studies on Romance languages that have a clitic *ne*<sup>1</sup> in their pronominal system is that, among the various uses it has (such as the pronominal realization of the genitive complement of a noun, and of genitive and relative complements of certain predicates), *ne* is a partitive pronoun (among many others, Cordin 1988; Maiden & Robustelli 2007: 106-110 for Italian; Martí-Girbau 1995, 2010 for Catalan). The issue we want to address in this review article is whether a uniform treatment of *ne* as partitive is adequate for all cases in which it pronominalizes (part of) the nominal complement of a verb, as in (1)-(2), or whether it is necessary to distinguish between (1) and (2). In Romance, *ne* is a pronoun that quite often correlates with a nominal expression introduced by *de* / *di*, standardly conceived of as a preposition responsible for partitive case assignment in cases like (1). Furthermore, *ne* is a pronoun whose meaning may refer to an indefinite subset of a presupposed and discourse-accessible larger set, as in (2).

- (1) a. (*D' aquests llibres*), *n' he* llegit dos. / (*Di questi libri*), *ne ho*  
 DE these books NE.I.have read two DE these books NE.I.have  
 letto due.  
 read two

1. In this study *ne* is used as a cover form for all possible forms that this clitic has in Romance, for which see Badia (1947: 35).

b. *N'he llegit dos, (d' aquests llibres). / Ne ho letto due, (di NE.I.have read two DE these books NE I.have read two DE questi libri).*  
 these books  
 'Of those books, I read two.'

- (2) En Joan m'ha portat els llibres que em vas aconsellar. De D Joan me.he.has brought the books that me PAST recommend of moment, *n'he llegit dos.* / Gianni mi ha portato i libri che mi moment NE.I.have read two Gianni me has brought the books that me *hai consigliato.*  
 had recommended  
 Per ora *ne ho letto due.*  
 for now NE I.have read two  
 'Gianni brought me the books that you recommended to me. For the moment, I read two of them.'

Although diachronically *di / de* has a prepositional origin, synchronically in Romance it also appears to be the morphophonological instantiation of a determiner merely responsible for indefiniteness (Carlier 2007; Carlier & Lamiroy 2014 for Middle French; Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016 for Italian; Espinal & Cyrino 2022a, 2022b for contemporary Romance languages more generally) that does not necessarily presuppose a specific set of which an entity or a subset is part. As the examples in (3) show, in an *in situ* position this indefinite determiner can have no overt realization at Spell-Out.

- (3) He llegit *llibres* durant tot el dia. *N'he llegit /*  
 I.have read books during all the day NE.I.have read  
 Ho letto (*dei*) *libri* per tutto il giorno. *Ne ho letti.*  
 I.have read DE.D.PL books for whole the day NE I.have read  
 'I read books all day long. I read sm.'

Similarly, *ne* is not always a partitive marker. In some cases it contributes indefiniteness to the interpretation, in ways that differ from partitive constructions and that will be explored in this contribution. Therefore, in this paper we hold (following Cardinaletti & Giusti 2015, 2016; Espinal & Cyrino 2022a, 2022b; and Espinal & Giusti 2024) that *ne* is a clitic pronoun that may be anaphorically related to a nominal expression introduced by the determiner *de* (left- or right-dislocated), and that *ne* is a property-denoting indefinite clitic.

With this in mind, the paper is structured as follows: in Section 2 we review the various syntactic analyses that have been discussed for *ne* in the literature. In Section 3 we provide arguments in support of the non-partitivity of *ne* and its indefinite interpretation in certain contexts of use.

## 2. Previous syntactic claims

In this section we review the main hypotheses on the structural analysis of *ne*. Although our focus is on Catalan and Italian, our survey will necessarily include the discussion of French data, since they have proven to be crucial to the debate.

We are mainly interested in *ne* pronominalizing internal arguments of verbal predicates. However, in our overview, when appropriate, we will also consider other uses of *ne*, keeping in mind that *ne* can realize different syntactic objects.

Traditional descriptions of *ne* resort to distributional and semantic criteria. In both cases, a parallelism between *ne* and Catalan *de* / Italian *di* emerges. Theoretical analyses that explored this parallelism concluded that both *ne* and *de/di* are multifunctional and structurally ambiguous elements: in both cases, different syntactic structures receive the same surface realization. Current analyses of *ne* capitalize on decompositional approaches according to which the same overt morphology can realize different underlying structures. Already early analyses, such as Milner (1978), came to the conclusion that constituents pronominalized by *ne* are not uniform. A particularly articulated analysis is presented by Ihsane (2013), who concludes that French *en* can pronominalize different layers of syntactic structure, echoing proposals against the categorial uniformity of *ne* such as Cardinaletti and Giusti (1992).

### 2.1. *Ne is a prepositional clitic*

There is no doubt that, in certain cases, *ne* can pronominalize a prepositional phrase. This happens, for instance, in Italian with locative phrases (4), with prepositional complements of verbal (5) and adjectival (6) predicates, and with genitive complements of nouns when extracted out of the DP (7).<sup>2</sup>

- (4) Francesco è stato alla mostra. *Ne* è tornato entusiasta.  
 Francesco has been to.the exhibition NE is come.back enthusiastic  
 ‘Francesco went to the exhibition. He came back enthusiastic from it.’
- (5) Ho un problema urgente: te *ne* parlerò stasera.  
 I.have a problem urgent you NE talk this.evening  
 ‘I have an urgent problem. I’ll talk to you about it this evening.’  
 (Cordin 1988: 634, ex. (9))
- (6) Sono fiero della vostra vittoria. *Ne* sono fiero.  
 I.am proud of.the your victory NE I.am proud  
 ‘I am proud of your victory. I am proud of it.’

2. Substitution of a *di*-phrase with *ne* inside the DP is impossible, witness *la cravatta di mio marito* ‘my husband’s tie’ vs. \**la ne cravatta* ‘his tie’ (Tekavčić 1972: 577).

- (7) Ho visto i visi allegri degli spettatori. *Ne* ho visto i visi  
 I.have seen the faces cheerful of.the viewers NE have seen the faces  
 allegri.  
 cheerful  
 ‘I saw the viewers’ cheerful faces. I saw their cheerful faces.’

In reference grammars, Italian *ne* is often listed as an ‘adverbial particle’, together with *ci* ‘here’ and *vi* ‘there’, which share an adverbial origin (*ne* < Latin INDE; *ci* < ECCE HIC; *vi* < IBI) (cf. Tekavčić 1972: 577-578). Latin *inde* ‘thence, from there’ is a deictic-anaphoric locative adverb, which substitutes for locative prepositional phrases. An example is (8), where *inde* ‘thence’ contrasts with *huc* ‘here’.

- (8) Ille in balneas iturust: *inde* huc ueniet postea.  
 that in baths will.go thence here will.come afterwards  
 ‘He’s going to go to the baths, from there he’ll come here afterwards.’  
 (Plaut. *Asinaria*, 357)

In the Ibero-Romance area (Castilian Spanish and European Portuguese), *inde*’s descendants became extinct in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Badia 1947; Teysier 1981; Ribera 2022). Catalan sides with French and Italian in maintaining this element, despite the fact that, unlike French and Italian, it lacks a ‘partitive article’.

Thus, it is plausible to posit an origin of *ne* as a pro-PP. In fact, the preposition *de* and the adverb *inde* share an origin as expression of locative meaning that is reanalyzed as a more broadly relational one in ancient stages of Italian (Bentley 2004; Sornicola 2014, 2020) and Catalan (Badia 1947; Ribera 2022, forthcoming). Since the first Latin attestations, *inde*’s locative (ablative and elative) meaning is metaphorically extended to indicate a temporal relation (‘from that’ = ‘from that time’), a causal one (‘from that’ = ‘because of that’) and a more general relational value (‘from that’ = ‘connected to that’). This latter value is the origin of the so-called ‘partitive’ use, which, however, at no stage in Latin was prevalent or specialized. The examples in (9) and (10) are particularly interesting, because they show a clear difference between the Latin origin and the Romance continuations. In (9) Latin *inde* retains an elative value ‘from inside the vessel’, whereas in (10) Italian *ne* has an anaphoric relation with the complement ‘of wine’ of the pseudopartitive construction (‘a jar of’).

- (9) Cadus erat uini: *inde* impleui hirmeam.  
 jar was wine thence filled jug  
 ‘There was a jar of wine: from there I filled a/the jug.’  
 (Plaut. *Amphitruo*, 429)

- (10) C’era un orcio di vino: *ne* riempii un boccale.  
 there.was a jar DE wine NE filled a cup  
 ‘There was a jar of wine: I filled a cup with it.’

In Latin *inde* mostly expresses origin and is used anaphorically: (i) to replace a locative prepositional complement preceded by the preposition *de* and further ablative and elative prepositions; (ii) to replace a non-locative prepositional complement introduced by the preposition *de*, even referring to persons; (iii) to replace a nominal complement used ‘in a partitive sense’ (in our terms, denoting a subset); (iv) to replace an accusative complement preceded by a cardinal numeral, a quantitative expression or an indefinite determiner; and (v) to combine with specific motion verbs. Badia (1947) and Ribera (2022, forthcoming) show that the uses of *ne* in Old Catalan are largely a continuation of those already observed for its predecessor *inde* in Archaic and Pre-imperial Latin, and that in the course of time a process of pragmatic weakening from deictic reference into anaphoric reference and from the spatial domain to other more abstract domains is attested. Similarly, for early Italo-Romance varieties Bentley (2004) and Sornicola (2014) agree that the locative value remains prevalent and that the pronominalizing function with object and subject arguments develops slowly and co-exists with the locative value, as an extension to broadly relational uses that are not necessarily partitive. Thus, diachronic research supports the origin of *ne* as a prepositional clitic, while at no stage a specialization into the partitive function is observed.

In contemporary Catalan and Italian, *ne* pronominalizes PPs introduced by *des de/da* ‘from’, ‘by’ or *de/di*.<sup>3</sup> In the latter case, the issue for syntactic research is obviously to decide, for each case of occurrence, whether *de/di* is a ‘true’ preposition or, rather, a determiner,<sup>4</sup> and therefore to establish the syntactic status of *ne*, assuming that *ne* and *de/di* are two sides of the same coin.<sup>5</sup>

3. For the current overextension of Italian *ne* to verbal complements headed by *a* ‘to’ see Miola (2023).
4. As Milner (1978: 73-74) initially showed (see also Ihsane 2008: 131, 2013: 223), coordination between *de* phrases is only possible if they belong to the same type: “quantitative phrases” as complements of Q in (i), and partitive complements in (ii). Note that “quantitative phrases” cannot be coordinated with partitive complements (iii), hinting at a structural difference:
  - (i) J’ai reçu beaucoup de voisins et d’amis.  
I.have received many DE neighbors and DE.friends  
‘I have entertained many neighbors and friends.’
  - (ii) J’ai reçu beaucoup de mes voisins et de mes amis.  
I.have received many of my neighbors and of my friends  
‘I have entertained many of my neighbours and of my friends.’
  - (iii) \*J’ai reçu beaucoup de mes voisins et d’amis.  
I.have received many of my neighbors and DE.friends
 (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2006: 31, ex. (26))
5. With a special reference to French, see also Carlier (2007) and Carlier and Lamiroy (2014), and references therein, for the hypothesis that a grammaticalization process took place from a Latin preposition *de* to the so-called ‘partitive’ indefinite article *de-*. The output of this grammaticalization process is twofold: desemanticization (from a spatial meaning evolving towards a more abstract meaning neither spatial nor temporal, denoting property-denotation and possession) and syntactic evolution (from a full-fledged preposition introducing adverbial complements and capable of case marking, to an ‘empty’ preposition which introduces the argument of a verb or the complement of a noun). In the case of French this process starts already in the 13<sup>th</sup> c and is fully developed in the 15<sup>th</sup> c, and it is characterized by the fact that the notion of ‘partition’ fades away, the notion of

For Kayne (1975: 105-114), the French clitics *y* and *en* are pro-PPs, since they can pronominalize locative phrases and prepositional complements, besides complements of quantificational expressions. According to Kayne (1975: 107-108), the pro-PP nature of *y* and *en* accounts for the fact that, differently from accusative and dative clitics (which are argued to be NPs), *y* and *ne* are invariant with respect to number and gender. In Kayne's (1975) analysis, *de* is always present when the complement of a quantitative expression can be pronominalized by *en*, so that e.g. *deux soeurs* is *deux de soeurs* at an abstract level of representation, with subsequent deletion of *de*, which only surfaces when the phrase is detached, i.e. dislocated, as in (11).

(11) Il *en* a deux, *de soeurs*.

He NE has two DE sisters

'He has two sisters.'

(Kayne 1975: 110, ex. (152))

Note that the deletion of *de*, foreseen in this derivation, appears to be particularly problematic, since there are no parallels with other cases in which a preposition is deleted.

## 2.2. *Ne* is a partitive clitic

When the PP pronominalized by *ne* is a partitive complement, due to the fact that it denotes a maximal set from which a subset is assumed to be extracted, *ne* has been treated as a partitive clitic, as in (12).

(12) Sono venuti molti *degli invitati*. *Ne* sono venuti molti.

are come many of.the invited NE are come many

'Many of the invited (people) have come. Many have come.'

(Cordin 1988: 636, ex. (24))

Here *ne* is an anaphoric element that has been claimed to resume a definite partitive discourse antecedent (*degli invitati* 'of the invited [people]').<sup>6</sup> However, note that the following examples show that *ne* does not resume a partitive antecedent (*dei tuoi libri*) but an indefinite nominal expression.

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non-specified quantity remains, and the so-called 'partitive' article acquires the new property of marking indefiniteness (Carlier 2007: 26). For the development of the 'partitive' article in Old Italian see Luraghi and Albonico (2021).

6. Likewise, according to Baunaz (2011: 191-193), French *en* can be the clitic pronominal equivalent of a *de*-PP in an overt partitive structure (i.e., with a definite partitive complement, e.g. with *un + des*-PP, *plusieurs + des*-PP); in these cases, *en*-cliticization has been claimed to involve PP-extraction. See also Ihsane (2013: 244-245).

- (13) a. Gianni ha letto due romanzi dei tuoi libri.  
Gianni has read two novels of.the your books  
'Gianni has read two novels of your books.'
- b. \**Dei tuoi libri*, Gianni *ne* ha letto due *romanzi*.  
of.the your books Gianni NE has read two novels
- c. *Dei tuoi libri*, Gianni ha letto due *romanzi*.  
of.the your books Gianni has read two novels
- d. *Dei tuoi libri*, Gianni *ne* ha letto due.  
of.the your books Gianni NE has read two

An issue complicating the discussion is the ambiguity of the term 'partitivity', which is used for different notions in the relevant literature. Various recent studies (among which those collected in Falco & Zamparelli (eds.) 2019; Ihsane & Stark (eds.) 2020; Ihsane (ed.) 2021; Sleeman & Giusti (eds.) 2021; Pinzin & Poletto (eds.) 2022; Luraghi & Sleeman (eds.) 2023) have highlighted how the term has not been used in a consistent way in the literature, referring to structurally distinct linguistic entities (partitive constructions, partitive case, and indefinite nominal phrases) that share the ingredient of expressing indefinite quantities and that are often diachronically related. For *ne*, in Section 2.1 we already discussed the lack of diachronic evidence supporting a partitive origin; at the same time, we observed how its general relational meaning may lead to partitive interpretations already in Latin.

Partitivity proper, in our understanding, refers to a situation in which an indefinite (specific or non-specific) subset is picked out of a larger definite set (Barker 1998; Giusti & Sleeman 2001), as in (12). A partitive construction involves two independent referential functions (von Stechow 2002: 262): reference to a discourse-given (definite) set and reference to a choice out of this set.

However, in some cases, the term 'partitivity' is used in the literature as a synonym of Pesetsky's (1987) D-linking, and applied to all situations in which an expression refers to a subset of a discourse-given or presupposed set. Under this understanding, partitivity in a broader sense may also occur in a covert form (Enç 1991), when the superset is not explicitly mentioned but its existence is entailed, or when the superset is recoverable from the larger discourse. In this use, 'partitive' is sometimes treated as equivalent to '(strong) indefinite' or 'presuppositional', i.e., for interpretations of nominal expressions that involve a presupposition of existence. This use has sometimes been generalized to *ne*, in association to its quantity interpretation: either because it resumes the nominal complement of a weak quantifier in the discourse context or because it has an indefinite non-specific denotation.<sup>7</sup>

In other cases, 'partitive' refers to a pattern of morphological marking, partitive inherent case (a sub-type of genitive for some). This morphological marking,

7. For instance, Casadio (1994: 71, 75) states that in Italian *ne* cliticization applies to "indefinite partitives" and to mass terms, generic terms and collective or plural noun phrases.

however, has been argued to have implications as to the semantics of the nominal phrase: Belletti (1988) states that partitive case can only receive an indefinite interpretation; for this reason, *ne* would be semantically connected to indefiniteness. Indeed, *ne* can only pronominalize the indefinite complement of a weak quantifier, not the definite complement of a birelational partitive head (14).

- (14) *N'*he pres {un quilo / deu/ unes quantes} [cireres] *d'aquestes fruites*.  
 NE.I.have eaten a kilo ten a few cherries of.these fruits  
 'I've eaten {a kilo/ten/a few} of these fruits.'

Cardinaletti and Giusti (1992) treat Italian *ne* as a partitive clitic in the following sense: they suggest that *ne* realizes the NP-complement of a Q functional head, which assigns partitive case to it in structures like (15) (cf. also Cardinaletti & Giusti 2006).

- (15) [<sub>QP</sub> molti [<sub>NP</sub> libri ]]  
 'many books'

However, already in this early analysis, Cardinaletti and Giusti (1992) distinguish the portion of structure lexicalized by *ne* in (15) from the definite partitive PP complement of quantifiers in (16).

- (16) a. Ho visto molti di quei ragazzi.  
 I.have seen many of those boys  
 'I saw many [boys] of those boys.'
- b. *Ne* ho letti molti di quelli che mi hai dato tu.  
 NE I.have read many of those that to.me you.have given you  
 'I have read many [books] of those you gave me.'
- (Cardinaletti & Giusti 1992: 9, 12)

According to Cardinaletti and Giusti (1992: 10), "the hypothesis of the categorial uniformity of *ne* must be rejected on the basis of empirical evidence". *Ne* as the lexicalization of an NP complement receives an indefinite interpretation, which represents a fundamental difference with respect to genuine partitive complements, whose determiner must be definite by default (Jackendoff 1977; Barwise & Cooper 1981; Ladusaw 1982). In some cases, the NP complement of the quantifier, realized by *ne*, co-occurs with a definite partitive, as in (16b): Cardinaletti and Giusti (1992: 12-15) assume that in structures like *molti dei tuoi libri* there is an empty category (17), cf. Milner (1978: 121-125).

- (17) [[molti [e]] dei tuoi libri]  
 many of.the your books

The connection between *ne* and partitivity became prominent in the study of unaccusativity in Italian: *ne*-cliticization was singled out as a diagnostic for unaccu-

sative predicates (Burzio 1986), which were argued to assign partitive case to their argument (Belletti 1988). However, soon the objection was raised that the syntactic phenomenon of partitive case had to be treated separately from the semantic notion of partitivity (de Hoop 1992).

In Italian *ne* cannot pronominalize (part of) a preverbal subject (Belletti & Rizzi 1981: 138-9) (18a). However, some contextual factors (contrast and novelty) can improve *ne* with preverbal subjects (Belletti & Rizzi 1981: 144, fn. 1) (18b). Moreover, there is inter-speaker variation, and some diatopic varieties accept *ne* in anaphoric relation to subjects of unergative predicates as well (Sornicola 2014: 164; Cerrone & Sprouse 2019) (18c). Thus, the ban only concerns subjects of transitive predicates.

- (18) a. \*Tre *ne* sono stati letti da Gianni. [di libri]  
 three NE are been read.PL by Gianni DE books  
 ‘Three have been read by Gianni.’ (of books)
- b. ??Tre *ne* passano rapidamente. [di settimane]  
 three NE elapse quickly DE weeks  
 ‘Three elapse quickly.’ (of weeks)
- c. Alcuni galli cantano all’alba. *Ne* cantano all’alba alcuni.  
 some roosters crow at.dawn NE crow at.dawn some  
 ‘Some roosters crow at dawn. Some crow at dawn.’  
 (adapted from Belletti & Rizzi 1981: 119, exs. (1c, 50b);  
 Sornicola 2014: 164, ex. (5c))

In the *Gramàtica del català contemporani* Todolí (2002: 1377) relates the so-called partitive pronoun *ne* with NPs that are direct objects of transitive verbs (19a), postverbal subjects of unaccusative verbs (19b), and the nominal head of postverbal subjects of unaccusative constructions (periphrastic and pronominal passives, existential locatives) (19c-d). Thus, the restrictions on the pronominalization by *ne* must be related to the syntactic position of the constituent (which must be postverbal) and the syntactic function of the NP.

- (19) a. Vam anar a comprar *entrades* per al concert, però ja no *en*  
 PAST go to buy tickets for the concert but already not NE  
 quedaven.  
 left  
 ‘We wanted to buy tickets for the concert, but there were no more.’
- b. Ahir encara sortien *trens*, però avui ja no *en* surten.  
 yesterday still left trains but today already not NE leave  
 ‘Trains were still leaving yesterday, but today they no longer leave.’
- c. Es van rebutjar totes les *propostes* i només se’n va acceptar una.  
 CL PAST reject all the proposals and only CL.NE PAST accept one  
 ‘All proposals were rejected and only one was accepted.’

- d. Per aquest carrer ja no *n*'hi passegen gaires, de *turistes*.  
 by this street already not NE.CL walk many DE tourists  
 'Not many tourists walk down this street anymore.'  
 (Todolí 2002: 1377, ex. (39) and (40b))

From a syntactic perspective, partitive case, which is assumed to be assigned obligatorily by unaccusative predicates and optionally by transitive ones, is somehow opposed to accusative case, as the French examples in (20) may be taken to illustrate.

- (20) a. Marie a vu *des* étoiles.  
 Marie has seen DE.D.PL stars  
 'Marie saw stars.'  
 b. Marie a vu *les* étoiles.  
 Marie has seen the.PL stars  
 'Marie saw the stars.'

However, the only difference between the minimal pair in (20) is the (in)definiteness of the verb complement. In fact, already Kayne (1975: 120-121) proposes that *des* in similar structures is a complex determiner and the phrase is of category NP. Espinal and Cyrino (2022a) show how indefiniteness is a general characteristic of Romance nominals introduced by *de* and postulate a common derivation for bare plurals, bare mass and *de* phrases.

If we move to Italian (Burzio 1986; Belletti 1988), a sentence with an unaccusative verb such as *arrivare* 'to arrive' is supposed to require a postverbal subject that bears partitive inherent case, which in (21) would be marked by *de*. Similarly, Cardinaletti and Giusti (2016) conclude that the clitic *ne* is the realization of partitive case assigned to indefinites at the VP-level. However, as (21) illustrates, since a bare plural is also possible, we cannot conclude that *de* is a marker of Case, more specifically of partitive case, unless we admit that partitive case can also have a null realization (Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016: 78).<sup>8</sup>

- (21) Sono arrivati (*degli*) studenti.  
 are arrived DE.D.PL students  
 'Students arrived.'

For Catalan, Martí-Girbau (1995, 2010) has defended that indefinite nominals are QPs whose head is an indefinite quantifier selecting a partitive Case projection (KP). In other words, a (null) weak Q selects and assigns partitive Case, *de* is the manifestation of this partitive Case and the clitic *en* is claimed to be the head of the nominal complement, as illustrated in the structure (22b).

8. An anonymous reviewer suggests a further possibility: to postulate that the interpretational differences between *de*-indefinites and bare plurals (on which see Cardinaletti & Giusti 2018; Pinzin & Poletto 2022) correspond to different syntactic positions, which, in turn, would have different case-marking properties.

- (22) a. *D'aigua, te'n portaré de fresca.*  
 DE.water you.NE bring.FUT DE fresh  
 'I'll bring you fresh water.'

(adapted from Martí-Girbau 1995: 253, ex. (27b))

- b.  $[_{QP} [_Q ] [_{KP} [_K de ] [_{NumP} [_{Num} ] \dots [_{NP} [_N en ]]]]]]$   
 (Martí-Girbau 1995: 257, (36))

We consider that several assumptions appear to be unquestioned in this kind of approach. Are indefinite nominals syntactic QPs (with a null Q)? Are quantifiers case assigners? Is there a quantifier in the base position of (22a) to justify an overt *de* preceding the stranded adjective *fresca*? Why should a quantifier assign partitive (or genitive) case to a nominal?

Note that under the principles of Case Theory, so-called partitive case is neither structural, nor non-structural, and that in current models determiners and quantifiers are not case assigners. Structural Case is related to certain syntactic configurations in the vicinity of a functional category responsible for the checking of the corresponding case: Tense for nominative checking and *v* for accusative checking. Therefore, although *de*-phrases emerge as internal arguments (generated either in postverbal position or in a dislocated position), they cannot qualify as instances of structural Case, since partitive is not a proper Case feature of T or *v*. Additionally, while structural Case is purely syntactic (or morphosyntactic) in nature with no link to semantic interpretation, *de/di*-phrases are not purely syntactic phenomena, since they are morphophonological markings associated with indefiniteness.

Non-structural inherent case has been related in the generative literature to thematic relations. It may be assigned by an adposition, usually indicating source, location, instrument, goal, recipient, among others. However, *de* in contemporary Catalan, French and Italian cannot be considered a proper instance of inherent Case, since the nominal expressions it introduces do not relate to any specific thematic role, and *de/di* (in combination with *ne*) no longer conveys origin, extraction 'taken from' or partition 'being part of', but pure indefiniteness.<sup>9</sup>

From a semantic perspective, partitivity proper, as we saw, is a relational notion in the sense that proper partitives relate a subset to a superset. By contrast, weak indefiniteness is not based on such a relational notion: bare plurals, bare mass nouns and indefinite *de*-phrases simply introduce nominal expressions and most commonly refer to non-maximal sets of entities. A relation between the denotation of these expressions and the denotation of already introduced supersets in discourse is possible, but not necessary. This difference is illustrated in (23).

- (23) a. *Ho visto alcuni dei giudici.*  
 I.have seen some of.the judges  
 'I've seen some of the judges.'

9. See Espinal and Cyrino (this volume) for additional discussion on structural and non-structural Case.

- b. Ho visto alcuni giudici.  
I have seen some judges  
'I've seen some judges.'

In (23a) *de* is the head of a partitive structure that relates a complement DP, referring to the maximal set of *i giudici* 'the judges', with a specifier QP whose head is *alcuni* 'some'; the restriction of this quantifier is a null nominal complement that refers to a subset of the judges of the maximal set (Falco & Zamparelli 2019). By contrast, in (23b) the quantifier *alcuni* 'some' ranges over the set denoted by the nominal complement *giudici* 'judges'. One might suggest that (23b) pragmatically presupposes a maximal set of judges from which reference is made to a subset of them; however, it is important to notice that this meaning is not semantically determined by the indefinite expression *alcuni giudici*, whereas it is syntactically constrained by the partitive one *alcuni dei giudici*.

As advanced previously in this section, "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). In von Heusinger's (2002, 2011: 1052) terms, partitives are discourse-anchored by their superset and partitive-specificity involves an indefinite choice from a definite set. Partitive heads are bi-relational because they relate a subset (headed by a weak quantifier) with a superset (usually headed by a definite DP or an indefinite QP, specific in context, which is part of a contextually salient group), and carry an existence presupposition.

Crucially, standard partitives (24a) are excluded from existential sentences (exactly like definite DPs, (24b)), while bare plurals (24c) and dislocated *de*-phrases resumed by *ne* (24d) are not. This is exemplified in (24a-d) for Catalan and in the French example (24e) that contains a so-called 'partitive article' (that is, an indefinite determiner).<sup>10</sup>

- (24) a. \*Després de l'atemptat hi hagué *algunes de les seqüeles* (entre  
after of the.attack there had some of the sequels among  
les víctimes).  
the victims
- b. \*Després de l'atemptat hi hagué *les seqüeles* (entre les víctimes).  
after of the.attack there had the sequels among the victims
- c. Després de l'atemptat hi hagué *seqüeles* (entre les víctimes).  
after of the.attack there had sequels among the victims  
'After the attack there were sequels among the victims.'

10. For Italian, see Storto (2003), who argues, against Chierchia (1998), that bare partitives in Italian are indefinites. According to Storto (2003: 330), Italian *dei* (exactly like French *des* in (24e)) is a lexical indefinite plural determiner, rather than the morphosyntactic composition of the partitive preposition and the definite article. For the debate between a true partitive vs. an indefinite treatment of partitive articles in Italian see further Zamparelli (2008), Cardinaletti and Giusti (2016).

- d. Després de l'atemptat *n* hi hagué, *de* seqüeles (entre les víctimes).  
 after of the.attack NE.there had DE sequels among the victims  
 'After the attack there were sequels among the victims.'
- e. Après l'attaque, il y a eu *des* séquelles (parmi les victimes).  
 after the.attack he there has had DE.D.PL sequels among the victims  
 'After the attack there were sequels among the victims.'
- (adapted from Espinal & Cyrino 2022b: 19-20, ex. (33))

Interestingly, this set of examples suggests that while the status of *de* appears to be that of a preposition, a relational category carrying an existence presupposition only in (24a), *de* is no longer a preposition in (24d,e), where it simply introduces an indefinite nominal complement that entails existence.

### 2.3. *Ne* is a quantitative clitic

As has already emerged in Section 2.2, the discussion of the syntax and semantics of *ne* is strongly tied to the debate on the internal structure of quantificational expressions, and to the relation between existential quantification and indefiniteness (Cardinaletti & Giusti 1992, 2006, 2017; Ihsane 2008, 2013; Baunaz 2011, among others).

When *ne* stands for an argument of the verb, it can occur by itself or accompanied by a weak quantificational expression: a numeral or a quantifier with existential force like *molti* 'many', *pochi* 'few'. Milner (1978) posits a structural and semantic distinction between partitive *de* and quantitative *de*. Quantitative *de* is found after certain quantificational determiners, such as e.g. French *beaucoup* or *peu* (25).

- (25) a. J' ai lu beaucoup / peu *de* livres.  
 I have read many few DE books  
 'I have read many/few books.'

- b. Je *n'* ai lu beaucoup / peu.  
 I NE have read many few

(Ihsane 2013: 217-218, ex. (3))

In this perspective the issue, then, is to distinguish which quantificational determiners head properly partitive structures and which, instead, have a nominal complement. Because of this connection with quantificational nominal phrases, Cardinaletti and Giusti (2006, 2017) discuss *ne* under the heading of 'quantitative clitic', which they take to correspond to the nominal constituent following the quantifier (the 'quantitative phrase' in their terms, which is in fact a DP in the complement of Q). They focus on constructions in which *ne* is related to a nominal phrase introduced by existential quantifiers (*many*, *few*, *some*) and cardinal numerals, and ask whether *en* in (26) corresponds to the paraphrase in (26a) or to the one in (26b).

- (26) J' *en* ai vu deux.  
 I NE have seen two  
 'I have seen two.'
- a. J' ai vu deux *garçons*.  
 I have seen two boys  
 'I have seen two boys.'
- b. J' ai vu deux *de ces garçons*.  
 I have seen two of these boys  
 'I have seen two of these boys.'

(Cardinaletti & Giusti 2017: 4, exs. (8-9))

In Baunaz (2011: 5), French object clitics *l\** and *en* realize the restriction of a quantificational phrase, leaving the quantifier floating. Syntactically, the restriction is a DP, which in the case of *en*-cliticization can take various forms (*des N*).<sup>11</sup> *Toutes* yields a definite interpretation, whereas *aucune* has an indefinite one.

- (27) a. Juliette les a toutes chantées.  
 Juliette them has all sung  
 'Juliette sang them all.'
- b. Juliette *en* a chanté aucune.  
 Juliette NE has sung any  
 'Juliette sang none of them.'

(Baunaz 2011: 5, exs. (17-18))

From these examples it is clear that *ne* does not correspond to an entire QP, but to its nominal restriction. The quantifier itself remains stranded. Furthermore, as we will discuss in more detail in Sections 2.4 and 3, *ne* can pronominalize complements when there is no expression of quantity involved, as in (28).

- (28) Ho visto giudici. *Ne* ho visti.  
 I.have seen judges NE have seen  
 'I've seen judges.'

Distinguishing *ne* from quantitative expressions allows us to capture distributional and interpretational differences such as the following. When quantified and cardinal indefinites are left-dislocated, accusative definite clitics – but not the clitic *en/ne* – must be used in those languages that have the two series of pronouns (e.g. Catalan, French and Italian), as illustrated in (29). The reason behind this difference is that, whereas bare plurals denote properties, quantifier expressions denote sets of sets. The definite pronoun usually requires a strong antecedent with which

11. However, there is a difference in terms of case marking (Baunaz 2011: 19-20): *en* is argued to realize a partitive case-marked phrase (in a Split-DP structure), while *l\** realizes an accusative case-marked phrase (in a Floating-Quantifier structure).

it is coreferential. However, when the antecedent is a quantitative expression, it is considered a weak antecedent of the pronoun (Enç 1991), as such a quantitative expression is referentially anchored to a salient discourse participant or another discourse referent (von Heusinger 2011), and it is resumed by an entity-type anaphora (Espinal & Cyrino 2022a: 19).

- (29) a. Unes quantes galetes, te *les/\*en* pots menjar.  
 some biscuits you them/NE can eat  
 ‘You can eat some biscuits.’
- b. Molte cose *le/\*ne* abbiamo lasciate nella vecchia casa.  
 many things them/NE have left in.the old house  
 ‘We left many things in the old house.’  
 (adapted from Espinal & Cyrino 2022a: 19, exs. (28a,c))

Crucially, when *ne* occurs by itself, its meaning is indefinite, as opposed to the definite meaning that a pronoun like *li* would have. This is illustrated in (30) for Italian (where the definite clitic in (30b) carries an exhaustivity entailment that is absent from the version with *ne* in (30a)).

- (30) Quest’ anno abbiamo molti studenti dalla Sicilia.  
 this year we.have many students from.the Sicily  
 ‘This year we have many students from Sicily.’
- a. *Ne* ho conosciuti durante la prima riunione.  
 NE I.have met during the first meeting  
 ‘I met sm during the first meeting.’
- b. *Li* ho conosciuti durante la prima riunione.  
 them I.have met during the first meeting  
 ‘I met them during the first meeting.’

Directly linked to the last observation, it should be pointed out that when *ne* occurs by itself, it is always anaphorically related to a non-specific antecedent. Thus, in (31a) the use of *ne* in the main clause is well-formed because it anaphorically refers to the non-specific indefinite expression *delle paste*, no matter how many pastries might be considered in context. By contrast, in (31b) *ne* cannot be associated with the indefinite within brackets because in the context the antecedent necessarily has a specific interpretation. An indefinite count noun can act as the antecedent of *ne* only if it receives a non-specific interpretation (31c).

- (31) a. Se trovi [delle paste come quelle che piacciono a me], compramene!  
 If find DE.the pastries like those that like to me buy.me.NE  
 ‘If you find pastries like those I like, buy me sm!’

- b. \*Ho trovato [una bicicletta che avevo messo in cantina] dopo  
 I.have found a bicycle that I.had put in storage after  
 che *ne* avevo rotta.  
 that *NE* I.had broken  
 ‘I found a bicycle that I had put in storage after I had broken (one).’
- c. Volevo [una bicicletta], ma non *ne* vendono più del tipo  
 I.wanted a bicycle but not *NE* sell anymore of.the type  
 che piace a me.  
 that like to me  
 ‘I wanted a bicycle, but they don’t sell them anymore of the type that I like.’  
 (Cordin 1988: 635, ex. (17a), (19b), (18b))

This contrast supports the well-established claim that *ne* appears to refer to a subset of a presupposed larger set that might be activated in the context, which would correspond to the alleged ‘partitive’ reading. More specifically, when *ne* co-occurs with quantificational determiners, it is traditionally taken to pronominalize a partitive complement, as discussed in Section 2.2. Thus, Cordin (1988: 637) considers (32b) to be the pronominal version of (32a), for which she uses the same subindex, indicating an anaphoric relation between the two constituents.

- (32) a. Visiterò alcuni [dei musei di Roma].  
 I.visit.FUT some of.the museums of Rome  
 ‘I will visit some [of the museums in Rome].’
- b. *Ne*<sub>i</sub> visiterò alcuni.  
*NE* I.visit.FUT some  
 ‘I will visit some [of the museums of Rome].’  
 (Cordin 1988: 637, ex. (27))

However, we consider more likely an alternative interpretation, which does not involve any partitive relationship, as in (33), where *ne* resumes the indefinite complement of the quantifier *alcuni*.

- (33) a. Visiterò alcuni [musei di Roma].  
 I.visit.FUT some museums of Rome  
 ‘I will visit some [museums in Rome].’
- b. *Ne*<sub>i</sub> visiterò alcuni.  
*NE* I.visit.FUT some  
 ‘I will visit some [museums of Rome].’

Overall, this suggests that *ne* is a clitic pronoun for the restriction of the quantifier which is overt in (33a) but covert in (33b), cf. Cardinaletti and Giusti (1992) discussed in Section 2.2. When both *ne* and the restriction of the quantifier are overtly expressed within a sentence, this may create redundancy or ill-formedness, as illustrated in (34).

- (34) \**Ne*<sub>i</sub> visiterò alcuni musei<sub>i</sub>.  
 NE I.visit.FUT some museums  
 ‘I will visit some museums.’

#### 2.4. *Ne* is a nominal clitic

Since, as we saw in Section 2.3, *ne* substitutes for a portion of the (quantified) nominal phrase, leaving the quantifier itself stranded, some proposals in the literature have identified it as an NP-clitic (for French see discussion in Kayne 1975, Postal 1994, Pollock 1998; for Italian Belletti & Rizzi 1981, Burzio 1986).

*Ne* is distinguished from accusative clitics in that it does not resume an entire DP or QP accessible from discourse, but only the NP (the N or the modified N) without any quantifier. This is exemplified for Catalan in (35) (examples inspired on Todolí 2002: 1378).

- (35) a. —Han portat *entrepans freds*? —No. *N*’han portat *de*  
 have brought sandwiches cold.PL not NE.have brought DE  
*calents*.  
 hot.PL  
 ‘Did they bring cold sandwiches? No, they brought hot ones.’
- b. —Han portat *entrepans freds*? —Sí que *n*’han portat.  
 have brought sandwiches cold.PL yes that NE.have brought  
 ‘Did they bring cold sandwiches? Yes, they brought sm.’

In example (35a) the clitic resumes the bare plural in the antecedent question; in the reply the clitic combines with a stranded adjective preceded by *de*, which is supposed to specify the null bare noun resumed by *ne* and modified by the adjective *calents* (Cardinaletti & Giusti 1992; Espinal & Giusti 2024). In example (35b) the clitic has as its antecedent the N+A in the question and replaces the whole NP.

An analysis as pro-NP has been proposed, among other authors, for English *one* by Déchaine and Wiltschko (2002: 419–420), based on distributional arguments (*one* can follow determiners, (36a); *one* is found where languages like French have a null noun, (36b–c)).<sup>12</sup>

- (36) a. the real one
- b. La [voiture]<sub>i</sub> rouge est plus chère que la [∅]<sub>i</sub> jaune.  
 the car red is more expensive than the yellow
- c. The red [car]<sub>i</sub> is more expensive than the yellow [one]<sub>i</sub>.  
 (Déchaine & Wiltschko 2002: 420, exs. (27c, 28b, 29b))

12. Panagiotidis (2003), instead, treats *one* as an element of category N, that is, as the overt counterpart of the empty nouns he discusses.

For French *en*, Déchaine and Wiltschko (2002: 426-428) propose an analysis in terms of a pro-N (differing from *one* in its phrasal status, given its clitic nature), while accusative clitics of French are argued to be pro- $\phi$ s. They argue that *en* substitutes for a lexical noun in cases involving weak quantifiers, cardinal numerals, and indefinite *un*. They observe that, differently from English *one*, which can appear with definite and indefinite determiners, French *en* only occurs in indefinite nominals (while with noun ellipsis in definite contexts French has a null category, cf. (36b), and they suggest that this may be due to a limitation on extraction from definite DPs.

With respect to Italian, already Tekavčić (1972: 577) observes that *ne* substitutes for the nominal complement of *di*, not for the entire PP. A formal analysis of Italian *ne* as a substitute for a nominal category is proposed by Belletti and Rizzi (1981), who however, consistently with theoretical assumptions of the time, consider *ne* as a pro-N' (since they place the quantifier in the Specifier of NP and they work in a framework allowing for movement of intermediate projections). Belletti and Rizzi (1981: 118) say that “the N' modified by the quantifier can be pronominalized in Italian in two different ways: either with clitic *ne* or with a phonetically null pronoun ( $\emptyset$ )”. That is, *ne* corresponds to a structural portion of the nominal phrase smaller than the highest projection occupied by a quantifier. The alternation between *ne* and  $\emptyset$  is illustrated in (37)-(38) with examples from Belletti and Rizzi (1981: 118).

(37) Gianni trascorrerà tre *settimane* a Milano. Gianni *ne* trascorrerà tre  
 Gianni stay three weeks in Milano Gianni NE stay three  
 a Milano.  
 in Milano  
 ‘Gianni will stay three weeks in Milano.’

(38) Tre *settimane* passano rapidamente. Tre  $\emptyset$  passano rapidamente.  
 three weeks elapse quickly three elapse quickly  
 ‘Three weeks elapse quickly.’

In subsequent work, Cardinaletti and Giusti (1992) propose an analysis in terms of a maximal category, that is of a pro-NP, to which partitive case is assigned, as seen in Section 2.2. Unlike Belletti and Rizzi (1981), Cardinaletti and Giusti (1992) propose that *ne*, like other clitics, corresponds to a maximal projection. Quantifiers are outside NP, and the stranded adjectives found in structures like (39) are predicative (thus outside of NP as well). Also for Cinque (1991), Zamparelli (2008: 307-308), Falco and Zamparelli (2016) *ne* in these cases is a pro-NP.

(39) Mi sono portata *molti libri* in vacanza. *Ne* ho letto *uno molto*  
 me are brought many books on holidays NE have read one very  
*bello*.  
 nice  
 ‘I brought many books with me on vacation. I read one that was very good.’

The distributional arguments discussed by Cardinaletti and Giusti (1992) and subsequent literature show that *ne* may pronominalize a maximal projection smaller than the entire QP (for French, Ihsane 2013 proposes an articulated set of functional projections within the DP targeted by *en*-pronominalization). In the case of *ne*, we may have something that does not contain the determiner / referential layer. Because of this, as we will argue in Section 3, nominal *ne* semantically functions as property anaphora.

The crucial question for the pro-NP analysis concerns cases like (40), where an indefinite nominal phrase is introduced by the determiner *dei*, and cases like (41), with an unmodified bare indefinite nominal phrase:

(40) Ho visto *dei grandi monumenti*. *Ne* ho visti.  
 I.have seen DE.D.PL big monuments NE I.have seen  
 ‘I’ve seen big monuments.’

(41) Ho visto *monumenti*. *Ne* ho visti.  
 I.have seen monuments NE I.have seen  
 ‘I’ve seen monuments.’

So far we have discussed that nominal *ne* is neither a prepositional clitic, nor a partitive clitic nor a quantitative clitic. In what follows we will discuss how to best address cases like (40)-(41) in a uniform manner.

### 3. *Ne* is a property-type anaphora

Having reviewed the main claims made in the literature concerning the syntax of the clitic *ne*, in this section we argue in support of the hypothesis that nominal *ne* is a property-type anaphora that resumes a non-specific weak indefinite nominal expression.

#### 3.1. Non-specific weak indefinite antecedents

Let us first consider the division between strong and weak indefinites (Milsark 1974, 1977). Weak indefinites differ from strong indefinites in their ability to occur as *internal arguments of existential constructions* (see also McNally 1992).<sup>13</sup>

- (42) a. There are {birds, sm birds, two birds, no birds}.
- b. *\*??*There is {every bird, each bird} / *\*??*There are {both birds, two of the birds}.

13. See Morosi (2025) for an extensive review of the weak vs. strong distinction as applied to the interpretation of indefinite expressions in Italian, as compared to other Romance languages.

Whereas the examples in (42a) are felicitous and contain weak indefinites (a bare plural, weak ‘some’, a cardinal numeral, a negative indefinite) in existential constructions, those in (42b) are ill-formed, due to the fact that they include strong indefinites, such as universal quantifiers, distributive quantifiers and partitive constructions in argument position.

Weak indefinites also differ from strong ones in that they must take the *narrowest possible scope* in the presence of other scope-bearing elements such as the negative marker (Ladusaw 1994; Dobrovie-Sorin 1997; McNally 2004, 2020), as attested in (43). These examples illustrate the scope differences in meaning of a bare plural indefinite and the indefinite *uns* in object position of a transitive verb in Catalan.

- (43) a. No he trobat *estudiants*. narrow scope  $\neg > \exists$  Catalan  
 not have.1PSG found students  
 ‘I didn’t find any student.’
- b. No he trobat *uns estudiants*. narrow  $\neg > \exists$  and  
 wide scope  $\exists > \neg$   
 not have.1PSG found some students  
 ‘I didn’t find any student. / There are some students I didn’t find.’

This contrast between (43a-b) has supported analyses of weak indefinite bare plurals as property-denoting expressions of type  $\langle e, t \rangle$  (McNally 2004), whereas strong indefinites –by allowing wide scope– have been treated as generalized quantifiers (de Hoop 1992) of type  $\langle e(\langle e, t \rangle) \rangle$ .

A third property that has been described in the literature to distinguish between the strong vs. the weak reading of indefinites is the fact that weak indefinites can never convey a specific interpretation, whereas strong indefinites easily display a tendency to convey specificity, more specifically *referential specificity* (von Stechow 2002, 2011). This term is argued to correspond to the referential intention of the speaker to refer to a particular referent accessible in a given context. Thus, the contrast between (43a-b) can also be attributed to the fact that the bare plural, in contrast to the expression with the determiner *uns* ‘sm’, can never be assigned reference to specific individuals.

To sum up, strong indefinites are excluded from existential sentences, they allow wide scope and specific (i.e., referential) interpretations. By contrast, weak indefinites are allowed in existential sentences, and neither allow wide scope nor specific readings.

With this in mind we now consider the pronoun correlates of weak vs. strong indefinites. As the following existential constructions illustrate, in Catalan only weak indefinites can be resumed by means of *ne*. Notice that in (44a-f) the left-dislocated bare plural is preceded by the determiner *de*, here glossed as DE (Espinal & Giusti 2024). The last two examples are ungrammatical because *la majoria de* ‘most of’ and *ambdós* ‘both’ are strong quantifiers. In (44g) the dislocated constituent is the complement of a partitive construction.

- (44) a. Hi ha ocells.  
there has birds → *D'ocells, n'hi* ha.  
DE.birds NE.there has
- b. Hi ha tres ocells.  
there has three birds → *D'ocells, n'hi* ha tres.  
DE.birds NE.there has three
- c. Hi ha (alg)uns ocells.  
there has some birds → *D'ocells, n'hi* ha (alg)uns.  
DE.birds NE.there has some
- d. Hi ha molts ocells.  
there has many birds → *D'ocells, n'hi* ha molts.  
DE.birds NE.there has many
- e. \*Hi ha la majoria d'ocells.  
there has the most DE.birds → \**D'ocells, n'hi* ha la majoria.  
DE.birds NE.there has the most
- f. \*Hi ha ambdós ocells.  
there has both birds → \**D'ocells, n'hi* ha ambdós.  
DE.birds NE.there has both
- g. \*Hi ha tres dels ocells.  
there has three of.the birds → \**Dels ocells, n'hi* ha tres.  
of.the birds NE.there has three

In interaction with other operators, as it is the case in negative sentences, *ne* resumes an indefinite bare plural (which in right dislocated position is also preceded by the determiner *de*). This indefinite bare plural may correspond to the complement of a weak determiner such as *gaires* 'much, many', as illustrated in the Catalan example in (45b).

- (45) a. No *n'he* trobat, *de* mandarines.  
not NE.have found DE tangerines  
'I did not find tangerines.'
- b. No *n'he* trobat *gaires*, *de* mandarines.  
not NE.have found many DE tangerines  
'I did not find many tangerines.'

Notice also that quantifiers are not resumed by *ne* as the following examples illustrate. *Ne* can resume a head noun (which might be modified), but not an entire quantifier expression.

- (46) a. Tots portaven un *entrepà* calent, però Marta *en* portava *dos*  
everybody had a sandwich hot but Marta NE had two  
de freds.  
DE cold.PL  
'Everybody had a hot sandwich, but Marta had two cold ones.'
- b. Tots portaven *dos entrepans* calents, però Marta *en* portava  
everybody had two sandwiches hot.PL but Marta NE had  
*un*.  
one  
'Everybody had two hot sandwiches, but Marta had a cold one.'

(adapted from Todolí 2002: 1378)

- (47) 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<sub>NE</sub> have many in the his library  
 ‘This writer has many dictionaries at home. He {has them, has many} in his library.’
- b. Aquest escriptor a casa té *diccionaris*.  
 this writer at home has dictionaries  
 {\**Els té, en té*} a la seva biblioteca.  
 them have<sub>NE</sub> have in the his library  
 ‘This writer has dictionaries at home. They are in his library.’  
 (Espinal 2022: 64-5, ex. (7))

When specificity comes into play, pronominalization strategies are different. Non-specific weak indefinite antecedents (such as bare plurals and *di*-phrases in Italian) are resumed by *ne*, whereas specific indefinite antecedents (comprising specific DE.D.PL phrases) are resumed by an entity-type anaphora. Consider the following contrast in Italian:

- (48) a. (*Di*) *biscotti*, Gianni *\*li/ne* ha mangiati.  
 DE biscuits Gianni them/NE has eaten
- b. *Dei* *biscotti*, Gianni *li/\*ne* ha mangiati.<sup>14</sup>  
 DE.D.PL biscuits Gianni them/NE has eaten  
 ‘Gianni ate biscuits.’  
 (adapted from Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016: 67-8, exs. (41a) and (4a))

According to Cardinaletti and Giusti (2016) it is the overt determiner present in *dei* what forces resumption by means of an accusative clitic. However, as the following example shows, a *dei* phrase in object position can be resumed by both *ne* and *li*, being the former associated with a non-specific reading and the latter with a specific interpretation.<sup>15</sup>

- (49) a. Oggi Carlo ha cucinato *dei biscotti* e *ne* sono avanzati per  
 today Carlo has cooked DE.D.PL biscuits and NE are left for  
 domani.  
 tomorrow  
 ‘Today Carlo cooked biscuits and left some for tomorrow.’

14. For the intended contrast to hold, *dei biscotti* must be interpreted as a topicalized indefinite nominal phrase (and not as a true partitive, in which case *ne* becomes possible).

15. We thank P. Morosi for these examples (p.c.).

- b. Oggi Carlo ha cucinato *dei biscotti* e *li* abbiamo mangiati  
 today Carlo has cooked DE.D.PL biscuits and them have eaten  
 a cena.  
 for dinner  
 ‘Today Carlo cooked biscuits and has eaten them for dinner.’

Therefore, we conclude that it is not the presence of an overt article what determines resumption by an accusative clitic, but the fact that in (48b) the left-dislocated *dei* phrase only admits a specific reading. By contrast, the in situ *dei biscotti* in (49a), as well as the left dislocated *di* phrase in (48a) do not allow such a specific reading and must be resumed by *ne*.<sup>16</sup>

Relevant to this this discussion is Giusti’s (2021: 50) observation that *ne* under the scope of negation (50b) only corresponds to a non-specific reading of the indefinite DE.D.PL nominal in (50a).

- (50) a. Non ho scritto (*delle*) lettere.  
 not have written DE.D.PL letters  
 ‘I didn’t write letters.’  
 b. Non *ne* ho scritte.  
 not *ne* have written  
 ‘I didn’t write any (of them).’

(Giusti 2021: 50, exs. (26a-b))

To sum up, pronominalization strategies are such that weak indefinite antecedents in existentials are resumed by *ne*, but not the complement of universal and distributive quantifiers and the complement of partitive constructions. Likewise, weak indefinite antecedents that are complements of indefinite quantifiers are pronominalized by *ne* leaving the quantifier in situ. Finally, weak non-specific indefinites, in contrast to specific indefinites, are also resumed by *ne*.

We next consider the semantic status of the constituents that can be resumed by *ne*.

### 3.2. *Ne resumes a property-denoting expression*

So far, the examples correlated with *ne* resumption include fundamentally bare count plurals. However, as generally observed in the literature, bare mass nouns, when they are internal arguments of transitive verbs or postverbal arguments of unaccusative structures (in both Catalan and Italian) are also resumed by *ne*. This is illustrated in the following Catalan examples.

16. In north-western Italo-Romance varieties, particularly in southern Piedmont and Liguria, dialects strongly influenced by French, bare *di* phrases convey weak indefiniteness. See Battye (1990), Cardinaletti and Giusti (2018), Pinzin and Poletto (2021, 2022), and Morosi (2025).

- (51) a. *De mitjons, en tinc molts.*  
 DE socks NE have many  
 ‘I have many socks.’
- b. *D’aigua, te’n portaré de seguida.*  
 DE.water you.NE bring immediately  
 ‘I’ll bring you water immediately.’

(Martí-Girbau 1995: 252, ex. (22))

Although less discussed in the literature, it is also common to both Catalan and Italian the fact that bare abstract nouns that occur in object position are resumed by *ne*.

- (52) a. *Les criatures volen amor. En volen.*  
 the children want love NE want  
 ‘Children want love.’
- b. *Trump transmet odi. En transmet.*  
 Trump conveys hatred NE conveys  
 ‘Trump conveys hatred.’

More interesting is the possibility observed in Catalan, but not in Italian, that bare nominals morphologically singular but syntactically unmarked for Number (Espinal 2010) in object position of have-predicates (Espinal & McNally 2007, 2011) be resumed by *ne*. Consider the data in (53).

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

(Espinal 2022: 65, ex. (9))

Catalan, in contrast to Italian, also allows bare predicates (not only of category N but also of category A) to be resumed by *ne*, alternating with the neuter clitic pronoun *ho*.

- (54) *La Maria és mestra. (De mestra,) la Maria ho/n’és.*  
 the Maria is teacher.FEM DE teacher.FEM the Maria it/NE.is  
 ‘Maria is a teacher. Teacher, she is.’

(adapted from Espinal & Giusti 2024: 461, ex. (8a))

- (55) a. *Més o menys feliç, qui no ho/n’ha estat.*  
 more or less happy who not it/NE.has been  
 ‘Who has not been more or or less happy?’

- b. Qui no *ho/n*' ha estat, *de feliç*?  
 who not it/NE.has been DE happy  
 'Who has not been happy?'

(Badia 1947: 55)

Bare predicate resumption by *ne* is not only insensitive to gender but to number as well (see also Kayne 1975).

- (56) En Pau i la Maria són *mestres*. (*De mestres*), en Pau i la Maria  
 D Pau and D Maria are teachers DE teachers D Pau and D Maria  
*ho/en* són.  
 it/NE are  
 'Pau and Maria are teachers.'

- (57) a. Més o menys *feliços*, no *ho/n*'han estat mai.  
 more or less happy.PL not it/NE.have been never  
 'They have never been more or less happy.'

- b. No *ho/n*'han estat mai, *de feliços*?  
 not it/NE.have been never DE happy.PL  
 'Have they never been happy?'

Once we have reached this point, one may wonder what semantic properties are shared by the whole set of constituents that can be resumed by *ne*. The whole set of examples in this section gives support to the hypothesis that *ne* resumes an antecedent that is not referentially specific and that it denotes a property (Espinal & Giusti 2024): either a property of individual entities (McNally 1992, 2004; Van Geenhoven 1998) in the case of bare plurals, a property of non-individuated entities (Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 1996, 2003) in the case of mass nouns, a property of kinds (Espinal 2010, 2013; Borik & Espinal 2015) in the case of bare nouns unmarked for number, and a predicate property (Beyssade & Dobrovie-Sorin 2005) in the case of antecedents that are bare nouns or bare adjectives in postcopular position.<sup>17</sup>

If the antecedent of *ne* is a property-denoting expression, it seems reasonable to conclude that the indefinite clitic *ne* is a property-type anaphora and that the indefinite determiner *de/di* that appears in dislocated positions is an operator that –parallel to *ident* (Partee 1987)– shifts an entity ⟨*e*⟩ into a property ⟨*e,t*⟩, and is of type ⟨*e* ⟨*e,t*⟩⟩ (Espinal & Cyrino 2022a).

Crucially, the functional element *de* shows up not only with dislocated indefinite arguments (as illustrated in (51) and (53)), but also with stranded adjectives (see below (58)) in both Catalan and Italian. According to Cardinaletti and Giusti

17. We leave outside of this list abstract nouns, which appear to denote properties of abstract objects. See Levinson (1978) for the distinction between properties and qualities, Goddard and Wierzbicka (2014) for the hypothesis that an abstract noun stands for an attribute of a thing, and Moltmann (2013) for the idea that an abstract noun such as *wisdom* does not refer to a property but rather it stands for a plurality of particulars (tropes or modes, that is, particularized properties).

(1992) for Italian and Martí-Girbau (1995) for Catalan, the clitic *ne* and the marker *de/di* that precedes adjectives in structures with elliptical nominals are the manifestation of the same phenomenon: partitive case marking. However, we follow Espinal and Giusti (2024), who reformulate this analysis by postulating that the *de/di* that introduces stranded adjectives is an overt concord marker of indefiniteness. “This means that one single indefinite argument (the indefinite nominal expression) may be discontinuous at Spell-Out provided that the scattered portions display overt concord for relevant features. In other words, the co-presence of the dislocated *de*, the clitic *ne* and the stranded *de* must be considered discontinuous Spell-Outs of indefiniteness and therefore of the same property-type denoting constituent” (Espinal & Giusti 2024: 483).

- (58) a. He llegeix llibres *(\*d')*interessants. / Ho letto libri *(\*di)*  
 I.have read books DE.interesting.PL I.have read books de  
 interessanti.  
 interesting.PL  
 ‘I read interesting books.’
- b. (*De llibres*), *n* he llegeix *(d')*interessants. / (*Di libri*), *ne* ho  
 de books NE.I.have read DE.interesting.PL DE books NE I.have  
 letti *(di)* interessanti.  
 read DE interesting.PL  
 ‘Books, I read interesting ones.’  
 (Espinal & Giusti 2024: 482, exs. (43a) and (44a))

Finally, notice that *ne* cannot resume a nominal expression with unique or maximal reference.

- (59) a. *\*De l'electricista*, no *n*'ha vingut.  
 DE the.electrician not NE.has come  
 (adapted from Todoli 2002: 1382, ex. (49b))
- b. *\*No n*'hem aconseguit, *de totes les entrades* per a l'espectacle.  
 not NE.have obtained DE all the tickets for to the.show
- (60) a. *\*Dell'electricista*, non *ne* è venuto  
 DE.the.electrician not NE is come
- b. *\*Non ne* abbiamo ottenuti, *di tutti i biglietti* per lo spettacolo  
 not NE have obtained de all the tickets for the show

To sum up, in this section we have shown that *ne* is a clitic that necessarily resumes a property-denoting antecedent that can take the form of a bare count plural noun, a bare mass noun, a bare abstract noun, a bare noun unmarked for syntactic number, and a bare (nominal or adjectival) predicate. From this we conclude that *ne* itself is a property-denoting clitic.

### 3.3. Property-denotation, specificity and discourse accommodation

If the clitic *ne* is a property-type anaphora and the determiner *de* preceding dislocated constituents (*de* in Catalan, *di* in Italian) is a property-denoting determiner, as we hold (following Espinal 2010, 2013; Espinal & McNally 2007, 2011; Espinal & Cyrino 2022a; Espinal & Giusti 2024), we come back again to the Italian contrast between *di* + NP and *dei* + NP. See example (48) repeated here as (61).

- (61) a. *(Di) biscotti*, Gianni *\*li/ne* ha mangiati.  
 DE biscuits Gianni them/NE has eaten
- b. *Dei biscotti*, Gianni *li/\*ne* ha mangiati.  
 DE.D.PL biscuits Gianni them/NE has eaten  
 ‘Gianni ate biscuits.’  
 (adapted from Cardinaletti & Giusti 2016: 67-8, exs. (41a) and (4a))

First, notice that if *di* in both (61a) and (61b) is assumed to be a determiner, i.e., the instantiation of an indefinite operator that guarantees that the nominal expression it precedes is a property-denoting expression (Espinal & Cyrino 2022a, 2022b; Espinal & Giusti 2024), the clitic *ne* is predicted to be possible in (61b) as it is in (61a). See the discussion around (49).

Second, why is the *di/dei* distinction apparently so determinant at the time of clitic resumption in Italian? To answer this question we would need an improved understanding of the discourse-related reasons that lead speakers to choose between (61a) and (61b). For the time being we have explained this contrast by hypothesizing that the left-dislocated *dei* indefinite nominal phrase is closely related to the notion of specificity (von Heusinger 2002, 2011), whereas the weak indefinite *di* phrase can never convey specificity (i.e., referential, epistemic and topical specificity). A specific reading is brought about by the anchoring of a referent to another element salient in the discourse domain. Thus, the clitic *li* is preferred in (61b) because this nominal expression is referentially anchored to the referent of another expression in the sentence (i.e., the left-dislocated topic).

Let us now consider a similar puzzle presented by Ihsane (2013: 218-9), which concerns French data: “some *de*-containing NPs, in particular some *du/des* NPs, cannot be replaced by *en*”.

- (62) Speaker A:
- a. J’ai vu *des enfants* dans la cour. C’était Pierre, Paul et  
 I.have seen DE.the kids in the yard it.was Pierre Paul and  
 Jacques.  
 Jacques  
 ‘I saw some children in the yard, namely Pierre, Paul, and Jacques.’
- Speaker B:
- b. \*Oui, j’*en* ai vus aussi.  
 yes I.EN have seen too

- c. Oui, je *les* ai vus aussi.  
 yes I them have seen too  
 ‘I’ve seen them, too.’

(Ihsane 2013: 219, ex. (6))

First, we regard the contrast between (62b-c) not an issue of grammaticality but as a difference in accommodation. We base our claim on a similar puzzle that had been discussed in the literature on Catalan *ne* in Espinal and McNally (2011): if bare count nominals unmarked for number are property-denoting expressions and require *en* resumption, why are *faldilla* ‘skirt’ and *pis* ‘apartment’ in (63) replaced by a third person singular accusative clitic?

- (63) a. Per la festa es va posar *faldilla*. Se l’havia comprat la  
 to the party CL PAST.3PSG put.on skirt CL it.had bought the  
 tarda anterior.  
 afternoon before  
 ‘She put on a skirt for the party. She had bought it the day before in the  
 afternoon.’
- b. Ja tinc *pis*. El vaig comprar ahir.  
 already have apartment it PAST.1PSG buy yesterday  
 ‘I already have an apartment. I bought it yesterday.’

(Espinal & McNally 2011: 97, exs. (23a,b))

These examples are puzzling in so far as the bare nominal antecedent, object of a have-predicate is expected to be resumed by *ne*, since the antecedent does not appear to license discourse anaphora to true third person accusative pronouns.

In our understanding what the French example in (62) has in common with the Catalan examples in (63) and the Italian example in (61b) is not that the nominal grammatically conveys referential specificity (in the sense discussed in Section 3.1), but rather that the nominal introduces a discourse topic that is accommodated into the discourse as referring to an entity-type expression (Lewis 1979; Beaver & Zeevat 2007; van der Sandt 2012). In other words, when an indefinite antecedent introduces discourse reference to individuals (as favored by the continuation *c’était Pierre, Paul et Jacques* in the case of the French example, by the PP *per la festa* or the adverbial *ja* in the case of the Catalan examples, and the discourse topic *dei biscotti* in Italian), then resumption by means of an accusative clitic pronoun is no longer discarded because reference is no longer made to a property-type expression but to an accommodated entity-type expression the speaker is committed to.

We leave for future work the development of the idea that cliticization might not only depend on grammatical factors but also on accessibility to the speaker’s and hearer’s commitments.

#### 4. Concluding remarks

In this paper we have first reviewed the main hypotheses discussed in the literature concerning the syntax of *ne*, as a prepositional, a partitive or a quantitative clitic. On the basis of data from Catalan and Italian, we have defended that *ne* is a nominal clitic. We have next supported the hypothesis that, semantically, nominal *ne* is a property-type anaphora that resumes a non-specific weak indefinite nominal expression. Finally, we have analyzed the potential resumption of indefinite nominal phrases by means of accusative clitics as cases of discourse accommodation.

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