

Different interpretations of *plusieurs, quelques* and *certain* in French and Slovene

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1. EXISTENTIAL INTERPRETATION

Existential interpretation (2) introduces new entities into the discourse by placing them in time and space. The chosen indefinite determiners are in this case often interchangeable (1). With **existential interpretation**, the clauses can be replaced by impersonal structures both in French and Slovene.

- (1) a) *Certains / Plusieurs / Quelques enfants jouent dans le jardin.*
b) *Nekateri / Več / Nekaj otrok se igra na vrtu.*
Certain / More / Some children oneself playing [3rd p.sg.] on garden.
- (2) a) *Certains / Plusieurs / Quelques enfants qui jouent dans le jardin existent.*
b) *Nekateri / Več / Nekaj otrok, ki se igra na vrtu, obstaja.*
Certain / More / Some children who oneself playing [3rd p.sg.] on garden exist

Examples of existential interpretation where *certain*, *plusieurs* and *quelques* are not interchangeable either in French or in Slovene.

(3)

Impolite question	Natural, polite question	Unacceptable, <i>certain</i> overly determines a single unit of the whole set
a) ? Avez-vous <i>plusieurs</i> minutes?	Avez vous <i>quelques</i> minutes?	* Avez-vous <i>certaines</i> minutes?
b) ? Imate <i>več</i> minut?	Imate <i>nekaj</i> minut?	* Imate <i>nekater</i> e minute?
have[2nd p.pl.] more minutes	have[2nd p.pl.] some minutes	have[2nd p.pl.] certain minutes

2. NONEXISTENTIAL INTERPRETATION

2.1. PARTIAL AND TAXONOMIC INTERPRETATION

An interpretation in which the predicate is not set at a particular time or space can be partial. Partial interpretation is not restricted to definite predicates but rather depends on the context.

Every indefinite determiner can be **existential** without being **partial** (4). The same interpretation occurs in Slovene, where the verb *to exist* (slv. *obstajati*), for example, implies totality.

- (4) a) *Malheureusement, il y certaines / plusieurs / quelques difficultés.* (Leeman 2004)
b) *Na žalost obstajajo določene / več / nekaj težav.*
On sadness exist[3rd p.pl.] *certain / more / some* difficulties[gen].

Every indefinite determiner can also be **partial** without being **existential** (5). In both languages, the distribution is based on the assumed totality.

- (5) a) *Certains / Plusieurs / Quelques ballons sont noirs.*
b) *Nekateri / Več / Nekaj balonov je črni.*
Certain / more / some balloons is black.

We can only speak of **taxonomic interpretation** when we are referring to a particular kind. This interpretation is most frequently used with the indefinite determiner *certain* (Bosveld-de Smet 1994).

- (6) a) *Certains / Plusieurs / Quelques insectes sont dangereux pour l'homme.*
b) *Nekateri / Več / Nekaj žuželk je nevarnih za človeka.*
Certain / more / some insects is[3rd p.sg.] dangerous for man[acc].

2.2. REFERENTIAL INTERPRETATION

Referential interpretation is only possible when it is evident from the context that the speaker is familiar with the referent's identity.

- (7) a) *Plusieurs questions restent irrésolus. (la livraison de l'eau, le paiement, ...)*
b) *Več vprašanj ostaja nerešenih. (dostava vode, plačilo, ...)*
More questions[gen.] remain[3rd p.sg.] unsolved. (delivery of water, payment ...)

Quelques and *certain* do not allow for referential interpretation. In example (8), *quelques* expresses the speaker's lack of knowledge (on the subject), whereas in example (9), *certain* clearly shows that the speaker does not wish to reveal the identity of the person he has in mind.

- (8) a) ? *Il y aura bien *quelque* étudiant pour nous renseigner: Paul Dupont.* (Leeman 2004)
b) ? *Zagotovo obstaja *kak* študent, ki nas bo usmeril - Paul Dupont.*
Certainly exist[3rd p.sg.] some student who us[acc] will[3.p.sg.] direct[3rd p.sg.] - Paul Dupont.

- (9) a) ? *Certaine personne saura vous renseigner: Ève Durant.* (Leeman 2004)
b) ? *Določena oseba vas bo usmerila - Ève Durant.*
Certain person you[acc] will[3rd p.sg.] direct[3rd p.sg.] - Ève Durant.

We can encounter the same restriction in Slovene. *Kak / some* denotes indefiniteness (9), making it unnatural to further name that person. In the case of both clauses, the person could be revealed in a new clause, meant to clarify who this *kak študent* or *določena oseba* is.

2.3. COLLECTIVE AND DISTRIBUTIVE INTERPRETATION

Distribution depends on varying contexts and situations, resulting in the fact that the chosen indefinite determiners are not interchangeable in some cases. Quantifiers only allow for distributive interpretation, whereas proper indefinite determiners also allow for collective interpretation.

Plusieurs and *quelques* induce a collective interpretation, but also allow for distributive interpretation (10). In Slovene, only the collective interpretation is possible. Both interpretations are acceptable in Slovene only when the subject and the object express the same quantity (12).

- (10) a) *Quelques / Plusieurs élèves ont confectionné une affiche.* (Leeman 2004)
b) *Nekaj / Več študentov je izdelalo plakat.*
Some / more students is made[ppct, 3rd p.sg, n] poster.

When indefinite determiners are replaced by proper names in French, the possibility of collective and distributive interpretation is retained (11). In Slovene, the distributive interpretation would still call for an object in the dual or plural, depending on the number expressed by the subject.

- (11) a) *Ivana, Julija et Miha ont confectionné une affiche.*
b) *Ivana, Julija in Miha so naredili plakat.*
Ivana, Julija and Miha are made[ppct, 3rd p.pl, m] poster.

- (12) a) *Ivana, Julija et Miha ont confectionné des affiches.*
b) *Ivana, Julija in Miha so naredili plakate.*
Ivana, Julija and Miha are made[ppct, 3rd p.pl, m] posters.

- (12') a) *Ivana et Julija ont confectionné deux affiches.*
b) *Ivana in Julija sta naredili plakata.*
Ivana and Julija are[3rd p.dual] made[ppct, 3rd p.dual, f] posters [dual].

Distributive interpretation is only possible in Slovene (12 and 12') if it explains that *Ivana, Julija and Miha* were 'making a poster', whereas *Ana, Peter and Luka* were 'making a house'. The imperfect only allows for distributive interpretation, which is still highly questionable in this case, as Slovene prefers a dual (12') or plural object.

In both languages, *certain* (as opposed to *quelques* and *plusieurs*) normally results only in distributive interpretation.

- (13) a) *Certains élèves m'ont fait un cadeau.* (Leeman 2004)
b) *Nekateri študenti so mi dali darilo.*
Certain students are[3rd p.pl] me[dat] gave[ppct, m] present

Because of distributive quantification of all three chosen indefinite determiners, only distributive interpretation is possible in example (14), even though the 'head' is in singular (14):

- (14) a) *La tête de certains / plusieurs / quelques filles dépassait du rideau.*
b) **Glava nekaterih / več / nekaj deklet je pokukala čez zaveso.*
Head certain / more / some girls is[3rd p.sg.] peeked[ppct, f, sg.] over curtain
b') *Glave nekaterih / več / nekaj deklet so pokukale čez zaveso.*
Heads certain / more / some girls is[3rd p.sg.] peeked[ppct, f, pl.] over curtain

It is interesting that in this case, Slovene does not allow for the singular 'head', but demands a plural form and therefore a distributive interpretation.

2.4. GENERIC AND SPECIFIC INTERPRETATION

In French and Slovene, the generic and specific interpretations coincide both for *certain*, *quelques* and *plusieurs*. The distribution of one or the other can change according to context, and is therefore very complex.

The following example (15) shows that **generic interpretation** is also possible in French and Slovene:

- (15) a) *Quelques / Plusieurs schémas valent mieux qu'un long discours.* (Leeman 2004)
b) *Nekaj / Več risb pove več kot dolg govor.*
Some / More sketches tell[3rd p.sg.] more than long speech.

Only **specific interpretation** is possible in both French and Slovene in (16):

- (16) a) *Quelques / Certaines plantes ont besoin d'eau pour vivre.* (Leeman 2004)
b) *Nekaj / Nekateri rastline potrebujejo vodo, da preživijo.*
Some / Certain plants need[3rd p.pl.] water[acc] to survive[3rd p.pl.].

Plusieurs and *quelques* allow for generic interpretation even in clauses (17) which do not explicitly express genericity (Corblin 1997).

- (17) a) *Plusieurs / Quelques personnes ne peuvent s'entendre pour gouverner.* (Corblin 1997).
b) *Več / Nekaj ljudi se ne more dogovoriti za vladanje.*
More / Some people oneself not can[3rd p.sg.] settle[inf] for govern.

Certain, on the other hand, can only have a specific interpretation, as its meaning is restricted to a number of referents the speaker is familiar with. Their identity is known to the speaker, but he does not wish to reveal it. In the case of specific interpretation, *certain* can be translated into Slovene as *določeni* (instead of *nekateri*), which highly stresses the special features of the unit it represents.

- (18) a) *Certaines personnes ne peuvent s'entendre pour gouverner.* (Corblin 1997)
b) *Določeni ljudje se ne morejo dogovoriti za vladanje.*
Certain people oneself[acc] not can[3rd p.sg.] settle[inf] for govern