

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

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This paper focuses on a comparative and contrastive analysis of different interpretations of the French determiners *plusieurs*, *certain*s, and *quelques*, and their Slovene counterparts. The semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic influence is treated in order to identify the major similarities and differences between the two languages, and to account for any possible deviations that may characterize the interpretation of Slovene translations of the chosen French indefinite determiners. This preliminary study is based on a number of different studies of French quantifiers. The examples illustrate the different morphosyntactic systems in the two languages.

This paper shows that French and Slovene interpretations of the selected indefinite determiners do not always correspond. The paper also represents the restrictions that prevent the same interpretation in both languages, and sheds some light on why Slovene does not always allow for two interpretations, even though two interpretations may be entirely acceptable in French if the context allows it.

Keywords: *indefinite determiners, existential interpretation, non-existential interpretations*

1 Introduction

The following article is a preliminary study which will analyse how the indefinite determiners for expressing quantity in French and Slovene determine the meaning of a phrase and how French and Slovene quantifiers¹ can be interpreted. It will also look at the various kinds of quantity that indefinite determiners express. The study will only include French *quelques*, *plusieurs* and *certain*s² and their Slovene equivalents. In Slovene, the category of indefinite determiners is mainly covered by nominal and adjective pronouns (Toporišič, 2004). The most common and expected Slovene translations are: *nekaj* for *quelques* (some), *več* for *plusieurs* (several/more), *nekateri* for *certain*s (certain).

I have taken some researches on French quantifiers as a base for an analysis and comparison to their Slovene counterparts. This paper attempts a comparative and contrastive analysis of the indefinite determiners in French and Slovene, in terms of their uses and meanings in order to find the major similarities and differences between French and Slovene and to account for any possible deviations that may characterize the interpretation of Slovene translations of the chosen French indefinite determiners. As far as I know, there haven't been many detailed studies on Slovene quantifiers. In Slovene, they are mentioned in different grammar books and in dictionary of standard Slovene language (SSKJ) but till now they haven't been the subject of any specific linguistics analysis.

French uses various determiners (*déterminants*): articles (*articles*) and adjectives (*adjectifs*) for expressing the determinacy of the nominal phrase. The prescriptive Slovene is not familiar with articles, as the Slovene nominal phrase does not need an article in

¹ Wilmet 1986: a determiner indicating extensity is said to be quantifier.

² In general the form *certain*s is used for *certain*s and *certain*es.

order to be realized. In addition, Slovene is not familiar with in/determinacy as a nominal morphological category, but knows it as an adjective category. Nominal phrases express determinacy nonetheless. In Slovene, determinacy is expressed with an adjective suffix *lepi* (*nice*), or with the “article” *ta* (*this*) in colloquial language in which even *en* (*one*), functioning as an “indefinite article” or numeral, can be used for expressing determinacy (Marušič and Žaucer 2007). Determinacy in Slovene can either be expressed on the lexical or discursive level. French and Slovene also differ in grammatical number, as French only knows singular and plural, whereas Slovene also knows dual.

The indefinite determiners *certain*s, *quelques*, *plusieurs*, and their Slovene counterparts normally occur on a quantitative level in which the exact number of a quantity is not precisely determined. They can mark both smaller indefinite amounts of units and indefinite units. The expressed quantity and the interpretation depend on the context and situation, and can change according to different circumstances. These NP with indefinite determiners denote the nominal referent, which is introduced into the discourse as unknown. The chosen Slovene and French determiners introduce new quantities into the discourse. The difference between the grammatical number and the indefinite number of the involved values sometimes make it difficult to find exact Slovene equivalents for the abovementioned quantifiers.

This preliminary study will provide a comparison and analysis of structures, along with possible interpretations of chosen indefinite determiners. The existential interpretation will be discussed at the beginning, and will be followed by partitive, taxonomic, referential, distributive, generic, and specific interpretations. Nominal phrases are not necessarily existential, as there are other possible interpretations, which depend on the context. All the examples selected have the indefinite NP subject. Sentences with special operators, which can facilitate one or another interpretation, are excluded from this work.

As in different grammars and dictionaries *certain*s/*plusieurs*/*quelques* are often treated as synonyms (Leeman 2004, Bacha 1997), it is presumed that will not considerably influence the interpretations. It is also assumed that the translation of these determiners and the interpretation should not be problematic in spite of different morphosyntactic systems.

2 Dictionary definitions of the chosen quantifiers

QUELQUES (Eng: some, a few)

TLF³: is used to mark a small but indeterminate number of people or things; *un certain nombre de...*, *parmi plusieurs autres*

Pt.Robert: a small number, a certain number of...; *plusieurs*

Fr-Slo dictionary: *quelques-un(e)s: nekateri; nekaj*

PLUSIEURS (Eng: several, more)

TLF: a certain number, most often of a small quantity, more than two (sometimes only more than one); *quelques, maint.*

Pt.Robert: more than one, a certain number; *quelques*

Fr-Slo dictionary: *več, mnogi*

³ TLF: Trésor de la langue française.

CERTAINS (Eng: *certain*)

TLF: denotes an unknown number of people whose identity or number can not be specified or has no interest in being specified

Pt.Robert: Some among others: *aucun, plusieurs, quelqu'un (quelques-uns)*

Fr-Slo dictionary: *nekateri*

DICTIONARY OF THE SLOVENE LANGUAGE (SSKJ)

English equivalents of the indefinite determiners or pronouns in SSKJ provided in parenthesis are usually found in Slovene-English dictionaries:

NEKAJ (*some*):

pronoun: expresses an unknown or purposely unnamed object or phenomenon;

adverb: expresses indefinite smaller number or quantity

VEČ (*several*): *adverb*:

expresses a larger quantity or amount;

expresses an indefinite larger number or quantity,

NEKATERI (*some / several / certain*): *pronoun*:

expresses a smaller number of unspecified individuals of a specific kind;

expresses a smaller number of individuals which are known, but do not wish to or cannot name themselves.

3 Some semantic characteristics

Determiners expressing an indefinite quantity can be divided into two categories: determiners which only have a quantitative value (*quelques* and *plusieurs*) and determiners which also have a qualitative value (involving distinctions based on qualities) (*certain(e)s*, *différent(e)s* and *divers(es)*) (Gondret 1976, Flaux et al. 1997). Even though *certain* belongs to the second category, it is discussed together with *plusieurs* and *quelques*, since the three determiners share some common characteristics.

Certain is not used as a quantitative indefinite determiner as often as it is used as a characterizing determiner. It involves the fact that the speaker knows the identity of the referent he is speaking about, and presupposes his existence (Leeman 2004). *Certain* enables the speaker to speak about the chosen objects or persons without making it clear why and how they are specific, and what makes them different from the others in the set. It therefore denotes the fact that it does not speak about objects or persons in general. *Plusieurs* and *quelques* are different in that they only express a part of units from a larger set.

The most common dictionary translations and the most expected Slovene translations for French indefinite determiners *plusieurs/quelques/certain* are *več/nekaj nekateri*, which were also checked in Slovene-French parallel corpus Spook. *Več* is an adverb, expressing a larger indefinite quantity. It remains always unchangeable but demands a singular form of a verb it is referring to. *Nekaj* can be used as a pronoun or an adverb, expressing indefinite smaller quantity. As a pronoun it changes according to declinations and also demands a singular form of a verb. The adverbs *več* and *nekaj* demand a singular form of a verb and neutral form where the structures with participle demand it. *Nekateri* is a pronoun but can also have an adjective use, expressing a smaller number of unspecified individuals with specific characteristic. It demands a plural form of a verb and distinguishes between feminine, masculine and neutral.

Due to case and verb agreement and other various syntactical structures demanded by *nekaj/več/nekateri* (*some/plusieurs/certain*), Slovene translations are divided into two lines.

In Slovene, *certain*s can sometimes⁴ also be translated as *določen*⁵ (*defined*), even though it does not name definite units but merely denotes that we are speaking about something that differs from the rest in the whole set, and that we do not wish to name it explicitly. Standard Slovene dictionary explains adjective *določen* as: presented in a manner that makes it impossible to doubt what expresses the noun (SSKJ 2008). The interpretation is similar to French interpretation of *certain*s.

Certain also distinguishes between gender and number (*certain,-e, -s*), *quelque* only distinguishes between singular and plural number (*quelque(s)*), whereas *plusieurs* only occurs in a plural form, and is therefore unchangeable. *Quelques* and *plusieurs* share many semantic characteristics and can be interchangeable in identical contexts. In such cases, their substitution causes some differences in interpretation of meaning (1a,b).

- (1) a. *Quelques /Plusieurs/ certaines femmes parlent.*
 some /several/ certain women talk-PRES.3.PL.⁶
- b. *Nekaj/Več ženske govori.*
 some/several women talk-PRES.3.SG.
Nekatero ženske govorijo.
 certain women talk-PRES.3.PL.
 ‘Some/Several/certain women are talking.’

The “synonyms” for *quelques* and *plusieurs* that we find in various grammars and dictionaries normally do not help us in determining the number precisely: *one or more* (*un ou plusieurs*), *(a) little / few* (*peu*), *a few units* (*quelques unités*), *a definite amount of units* (*un certain nombre d'unités,...*) and often refer us from one term to another (Leeman 2004). *Quelques* and *plusieurs* are prototypically used when marking more than two units, (2a). They can also mark a set of just two units (Bosveld-De Smet 1994, Wilmet 1986). The Slovene equivalents for *quelques* and *plusieurs* (2b) – *nekaj/več* usually mark three elements at the least. In Slovene *two* denotes dual, and does not have the meaning of *several*. The dual form in Slovene can be expressed in noun or adjective declinations and also on the verb conjugation.

- (2) a. *Deux / Quelques / Plusieurs personnes sont entrées.*
 two / some / several people are entered-PTC.PL.F
- b. *Dve osebi sta vstopili.*
 two person-D AUX.D entered-PTC.D.F
Nekaj / Več oseb je vstopilo.
 some/ several people is entered- PTC.N.SG
 ‘Two/Some/More people entered.’

Unlike *plusieurs* and *quelques*, *certain*s can denote at least two units (Leeman 2004):

⁴ Examples from Slovene-French parallel corpus Spook.

⁵ The normative use advises against it, whereas the “spontaneous” does not.

⁶ In the glosses in this paper the following abbreviations are used: D = dual, PTC = participle, N = neutral, CLIT = clitic, INF = infinitive, D.AR. = definite article, PR = pronoun, GEN = genitive, DAT = dative, ACC = accusative.

- (3) a. *Certains enfants ne peuvent pas partir*
 certain children not can-PRES.3.PL.CLIT not go
en colo: Ali et Marie.
 prep. holiday.camp A. and M.
- b. *Nekateri otroci ne morejo iti v kolonijo:*
 certain children not can-PRES.3.PL. go-INF. in holiday.camp
Ali in Marie.
 Ali and Marie
- b'. **Nekatera otroka ne moreta iti v kolonijo:*
 certain-D children-D. not can-PRES.3.D. go-INF. in holiday.camp
Ali in Marie.
 A. and M.
 'Certain children can't go to holiday camp: Ali and Marie.'

The literal Slovene translation (3b) with the plural *nekateri otroci* is also suitable in this case. Although the NP *nekateri otroci* (*some children*) is preserved, we would expect that at least three children should be numbered in Slovene, to satisfy the plural. The example (3b') which could be a real dual (*nekatera otroka – m. dual*) is unacceptable. We cannot put *nekateri* in a dual form, but nevertheless, it can sometimes mark only two units.

4 Different interpretations of *plusieurs*, *quelques* and *certain*s and their counterparts in Slovene

4.1 Existential interpretation

The existential interpretation of a NP is only possible with a certain type of predicate and with a certain reference point. The basic existential sentences introduce a new referent into the discourse. They can also introduce a referent which cannot be identified by the speaker, or define a certain characteristic with the help of an argument. According to Dobrovie-Sorin and Beyssade (2004) some sentences assert existential reading and the others presuppose this existence. No referent with an existential interpretation acts as a “part” of a set, due to the fact that the existence of a new referent is completely subordinated to the action expressed by the predicate. The three given indefinite determiners (*quelques*, *plusieurs*, *certain*s) can also be classified as existential determiners in certain NP. Whenever an existential interpretation is possible in a set of sentences, it can be paraphrased with an impersonal structures such as *il y a* in French and with the help of existential verbs in Slovene, e.g. *biti*, *obstajati* (*to be*, *to exist*).

Keenan and Stavi (1986) (in Bosveld-de Smet 1994) define the indefinite determiner as one performing an existential function (4). In both languages (4) can be explained in a way that there *exist* children, playing in the garden. It is the time and space setting that makes it possible to specify individual units in the discourse.

- (4) a. *Quelques /Plusieurs/ Certains enfants jouent dans le*
 some /several/ certain children play-PRES.3.PL in D.AR
jardin.
 garden

- b. *Nekaj/Več otrok se igra na vrtu.*
 some /several children self play-PRES.3.SG on garden
Nekateri otroci se igrajo na vrtu.
 certain children self play-PRES.3.PL on garden
 ‘Some/Several/Certain children are playing in the garden.’

In Slovene it would be possible to say: *Otroci se igrajo na vrtu*, without any determiner. The context with the time and space settings can make this phrase also existential. Slovene does not use articles and can also omit determiners. If there is no special need to express the quantity of a NP, then the Slovene noun can be bare and still have an existential interpretation.

Even though the chosen determiners are acceptable in this case, which points to an existential interpretation in both languages, because *otroci, ki se igrajo* (‘the children, which are playing’), are asserted to exist. Bosveld-De Smet (1994) states that due to its semantic value, *certain* does not necessarily possess an existential property but rather a characteristic one.

The following examples show an interesting use of *plusieurs, quelques* and *certain* and their Slovene counterparts. In this existential interpretation, *plusieurs, quelques* and *certain* are not interchangeable. The example (5) could be seen as impolite, as both languages show the same restrictions caused by the actual language use. In the example (6), *certain/nekateri* remain completely unacceptable, because both overly determine a single unit out of a whole set. They also express a quality, but we are asking for a number of minutes - the quantity. Only the example (7) can be treated as perfectly natural and therefore acceptable. In Slovene we would rather ask (7b’) for a *couple of minutes* or for *some time*, instead of *few minutes*. This example is taken from a spoken language. Due to its frequent pragmatic use, *par* lost his primary meaning of *two units* or *a couple*. It can be used when asking for a small amount of something.

- (5) a. *?As- tu plusieurs minutes?*
 have-PRES.2.D you several minute
 b. *?Imaš več minut?*
 have-PRES.2.D several minute
 ‘Have you several minutes?’
- (6) a. **As- tu certaines minutes?*
 have-PRES.2.D you certain minute
 b. **Imaš nekatero minuto?*
 have-PRES.2.D certain minute
 ‘Have you certain minutes?’
- (7) a. *As- tu quelques minutes?*
 have-PRES.2.D you some minute
 b. *Imaš nekaj minut?*
 have-PRES.2.D some minute
 ‘Have you some minutes?’
 b'. *Imaš par minut?*
 have-PRES.2.D couple minute
 ‘Have you a couple of minutes?’

The examples (5, 6) are completely correct syntactically in French and Slovene, but unacceptable in this case due to their pragmatic function. The speaker is asking for some time and at the same time alludes that he is not satisfied with the limited amount of time he was given, which is probably the reason for the aggressive tone of the question. In the third question, the speaker only asks for a moment of time (Gattonne 1991).

The existential interpretation shown in the examples (6, 7, 8) only demands a certain type of answer when *quelques/plusieurs/certains* are used, which is clear from the examples (8–13). It is interesting that this type of negative answer in which indefinite determiners cannot be negated with the construction “*ne...pas*” is only necessary in the case of “weak” indefinite determiners (in the sense of Corblin 1997), including *certains/plusieurs/quelques*. Slovene translations reveal a considerable structural similarity to French sentences. In the negative answer, Slovene does not negate a certain part of the units (*regrets, sons*), but uses sentential negation (11, 13, 15) instead.

- (8) a. *Avez-* *vous* *quelques remords?*
have-PRES.2.PL you-2.PL some regret
‘Have you any regrets?’
- b. *Je n’ ai pas de remords / ??quelques remords.*
I not have CLIT ART regret some regret
‘I don’t have any regrets./ some regrets.’
- (9) a. *?Imas’ nekaj obžalovanj? / Ali kaj obžaluješ?*
have-PRES.2.PL some regret or what regret-PRES.2.SG
‘Do you have some regrets?/ Do you regret anything?’
- b. **Nimam nekaj obžalovanj. / obžalovanj / Ne obžalujem.*
not.have-PRES.1.SG some regret / regret. /no regret-PRES.1.SG
‘I don’t have some regrets./ regrets./ I don’t regret.’
- (10) a. *As-* *tu* *certain remords?*
have-PRES.2.PL you-2.SG certain regret
‘Do you have certain regrets?’
- b. *Je n’ ai pas de remords. / Je n’ en ai aucun. /*
I not have CLIT ART regret /I not PR have any /
??Je n’ ai pas certains remords.
I not have CLIT certain regret
‘I don’t have regrets./ I don’t have any./ I don’t have some regrets.’
- (11) a. **Imas’ nekatera obžalovanja? / Ali kaj obžaluješ?*
have-PRES.2.PLF certain regret or what regret-PRES.2.SG
‘Do you have certain regrets?/ Do you regret anything?’
- b. **Nimam nekaterih obžalovanj. / obžalovanj. /*
not.have-PRES.1.SG certain regret / regret. /
Ne obžalujem.
no regret-PRES.1.SG
‘I don’t have certain regrets. /regrets / I don’t regret.’
- (12) a. *As-* *tu* *plusieurs* *fils?*
have-PRES.2.SG you several son
‘Do you have more sons?’

- b. *Je n' en ai pas. / Je n' ai pas de fils. /*
 I not PR have CLIT / I not have CLIT ART son /
 ??*Je n' ai pas plusieurs fils.*
 I not have CLIT several son
 'I don't have them. / I don't have sons. / I don't have several sons.'
- (13) a. *Imaš več sinov?*
 have-PRES.2.SG several son
 'Do you have more sons?'
- b. *Nimam jih. / sinov. / ??več sinov.*
 not.have-PRES.1.SG them-GEN / son-GEN.PL / several sons
 'I don't have them / sons / more sons.'

The answers (10b, 12b, 14b) would be acceptable if they provided a contrast to something. In this case, the second part of the sentence should not deny the referent's existence (*Je n'ai pas quelques doutes, j'en ai beaucoup*) (Leeman 2004). In the case of (10), the sentence cannot be continued with a quantitative expression or with a number, meaning that *certain*s probably has a qualitative value as well.

4.2 Partitive and taxonomic interpretation

An interpretation in which the predicate is not set at a particular time and space can be partitive. Partitive interpretation is not limited to certain predicates but rather depends on the context. Indefinite NP's without context are normally first interpreted with an existential function, even though *plusieurs*, *quelques* and *certain*s can get a partitive interpretation. Partitive interpretation includes the "isolation" of a particular subtype taken from a particular set, whereas existential interpretation includes the introduction of particular subtypes (Bosveld-de Smet 1994). In a partitive interpretation the referent of Slovene and French NP is presented as a subset of one larger set

In some cases, *plusieurs*, *quelques* and *certain*s are existential and not partitive (14). In (14), what is referred to is *the existence of solutions*, which is regarded as a set (Leeman 2004). The same interpretation occurs in Slovene in which the verb *obstajati* ('to exist') itself implies a whole. Slovene existential phrase can also be used without any determiner (*Obstajajo rešitve* / exist-PRES.3.SG solutions-NOM.PL).

- (14) a. *Il y a quelques / plusieurs / certaines solutions.*
 He there have-PRES.3.SG some / several / certain solution
- b. *Obstaja nekaj / več rešitev.*
 exist-PRES.3.SG some / several solution
Obstajajo nekatere rešitve.
 exist-PRES.3.PL certain solution
 'There exist some/several/certain solutions.'

On the other hand *certain*s, *plusieurs* and *quelques* can also be partitive and non-existential (15). The division (*la partition*) of the whole is based on the supposed whole. The existence of *all pencils* is not referred to, and the pencils are not introduced as new referents. We only judge a limited part of pencils (15) that can be numbered, e.g. *There are some blue pencils amongst the pencils in the box*. It is clear from the example that the mentioned determiners also have a partitive interpretation in both languages. The *pencils* only refer to

those that are blue. In the following example, it is shown that Slovene is familiar with partitive interpretation (15b) as well.

- (15) a. *Quelques /Plusieurs/ Certaines crayons sont bleus.*
 some /several/ certain pencils are blue
 b. *Nekaj / Več svinčnikov je modrih.*
 some/ several pencils is blue
Nekateri svinčniki so modri.
 certain pencils are blue
 ‘Some/Several/Certain pencils are blue.’

In both languages, the quantitative determiners in a partitive interpretation denote individuals with some special characteristics. From the same reason, it is obvious from the following example (16) that *certain* allows for a partitive interpretation, because of its principal characteristic to define and limit individuals i.e. *sad students*.

- (16) a. *Certains étudiants sont tristes.*
 certain students are sad
 b. *Nekateri študentje so žalostni.*
 certain students are sad
 ‘Certain students are sad.’

In French, partitive interpretation is not possible in sentences containing the indefinite article *des* or partitive articles, as they do not allow for a quantitative interpretation (17). As Slovene does not use articles, this phrase without any kind of determinant, cannot be interpreted as partitive. Also the partitive article in Slovene does not exist and it cannot influence the Slovene phrase. Partitive interpretation is not possible (b), because only *all students could be sad*. We can conclude that quantitative determiners are necessary to denote a part of *students being sad*, because only the characteristic of being sad is not sufficient for a partitive interpretation.

- (17) a. *Des étudiants sont tristes.*
 I.AR. student are sad
 b. *Študentje so žalostni.*
 student are sad
 ‘Students are sad.’

Besides partitive interpretation (18), some examples allow also for taxonomic interpretation (19). These cases do not denote individual units but rather express subtypes and subcategories of a given kind (Bosveld-de Smet 1994). They can also express a special category marked by the NP.

- (18) a. *Quelques / Plusieurs / Certaines pommes sont pourries.*⁷
 certain / several / some apples are rotten

⁷ Examples (18, 19) are taken from Bosveld-de Smet (1994).

- b. *Več / Nekaj jabolk je gnilih.*
 several / some apples is rotten
Nekatera jabolka so gnila.
 certain apples are rotten
 ‘Some/Several/Certain apples are rotten.’
- (19) a. *Quelques / Plusieurs / Certaines insectes sont utiles à l' homme.*
 several / some / certain insects are useful to D.AR man-DAT
- b. *Več / Nekaj žuželk je koristnih človeku.*
 several / some insects is useful-GEN man-DAT.
Nekateri žuželke so koristne človeku.
 certain insects are useful-NOM man-DAT.
 ‘Some/Several/Certain insects are useful to man.’

Example (18) denotes *a few apples* from the basket of apples, which are rotten. In (19), the taxonomic interpretation is expressed in *a certain type of insects that are useful to man*. Taxonomic interpretation is regularly used along with the indefinite determiner *certain*s, as the determiner itself expresses a number of chosen individual units.

4.3 Referential interpretation

Referential interpretation allows for the interpretation of the NP with its nominal nucleus, functioning as the argument in the sentence (Corblin 1987). We can also refer to a referential interpretation in case it is obvious from the context that the speaker is familiar with the referent's identity, whereas the addressee is not (Leeman 2004).

- (20) a. *Plusieurs questions sont résolus: la livraison, le paiement,...*
 several question are unsolved D.AR delivery, D.AR payment
- b. *Več vprašanj je nerešenih: dostava, plačilo, ...*
 several question is unsolved delivery payment
 ‘Several questions are unsolved: delivery, payment, ...’

Quelques and *certain*s are similar in that they do not allow for referential interpretation. *Quelques* denotes the speaker's unfamiliarity with the subject, whereas *certain*s denotes that the speaker does not want to reveal the identity of the person he is thinking about. The following French examples (21a, 22a) are therefore unacceptable. But in Slovene *nekaj* (*some*) does not seem to have such restrictions. Although *nekaj* (*some*) denotes indeterminacy it is highly natural to name these persons. The unfamiliarity with the subject can be explained in the sentence (21b), functioning as a reply to and an explanation for *some students*. As we can see, *nekateri* acts in a different way. Obviously its denotation is too strong, to be explained in the same sentence (22b). When it is used in one sentence, then we will not explicitly name these persons. We could start a new phrase just enumerating the people we had in mind with *certain*. (22b) could be acceptable with the replacement of *nekateri* with *določeni* (defined). *Določeni* (22b') is even stronger in determining individuals and is the only completely acceptable in this place, where the phrase contains the explanation (*professors*). This example justifies that the translation of *certain*s by *določen* is not a “mistake”.

- (21) a. *?Il y a quelques étudiants pour nous aider: Paul, Anne et Michel.*
 he there have some students for us help-INF Paul, Anne and Michel
- b. *Nekaj študentov nam bo pomagalo: Paul, Anne et Michel.*
 certain students us-DAT will-FUT.3.SG help-PTC.N.SG Paul, Anne and Michel
 ‘There are some students to help us: Paul, Anne et Michel.’
- (22) a. *?Certaines personnes sauront vous aider: les professeurs.*
 certain people know-FUT.3.PL you-DAT help-DAT D.AR professors
- b. *?Nekatere osebe vam bodo znale pomagati: profesorji.*
 certain people you-DAT will-FUT.3.PL help-PTC.F.PL help-INF professors
- b’. *Določene osebe vam bodo znale pomagati: profesorji.*
 defined people you-DAT will-FUT.3.PL know-PTC.F.PL help-INF professors
 ‘Certain people will know how to help you: the professors.’

There would be no doubts when ending these examples without enumeration or explanation.

4.4 Collective and distributive interpretation

Indefinite expressions allow for the possibility of a collective and distributive interpretation. Distribution is a conceptual element (Muller 2006) that demands a predicate with a plural argument, which is susceptible to distribution. The distribution's role in (1) is that it distributes as many acts of *speaking* as there are *women*. The semantic consequence of distribution is the reduction of quantity according to the number of given objects in a sentence (in this case *ženske* [*women*]). Different distributions can depend on the context in which case the chosen indefinite determiners are not replaceable:

- (23) a. *Ton frère et ses amis ne sont que quelques /*plusieurs/ *certains imbéciles qui se feront arrêter à la première occasion*
 your brother and his friends not are only some /several/ certain fools who self make-FUT.3.PL arrest-INF PREP D.AR first occasion
- (Corblin 1987)

- b. *Tvoj brat in njegovi prijatelji, to je nekaj / *več / *nekateri*
 your brother and his friends this is only / some / several
bedakov, ki jih bodo aretirali ob prvi
 fools who them-ACC will-FUT.3.PL arrest-PTC.PL.M at first
priložnosti.
 occasion
- b'. *Tvoj brat in njegovi prijatelji so le bedaki, ki jih*
 your brother and his friends are only fools who them-ACC
bodo aretirali ob prvi priložnosti.
 will-FUT.3.PL arrest-PTC.PL.M at first occasion
 'Your brother and his friends are just some/several/certain fools, who
 will be arrested at the first occasion.'

The translation (23b) is literal and rather awkward in Slovene. The translation (b') in which Slovene omits the indefinite determiner of quantity and replaces it with the adverb *le* (*only*) is better. The Slovene adverb *le* denotes the limited condition of the units it is referring to. It does not explicitly express the quantity but expresses its full limitation on the referred individuals. It can also be combined with *nekaj* and *nekateri* but not with *več*. It is probably due to the semantics of *več* which refers to a larger quantity whereas *nekaj* and *nekateri* refer to a smaller quantity.

The following example (24) can be interpreted collectively in Slovene and French (*Some/several/certain friends ate one pizza together*.) or distributively (*Each friend ate his own pizza*.). In this case, the perfective aspect of the Slovene verb does not affect the interpretation.

- (24) a. *Quelques / Plusieurs / Certains amis ont mangé une pizza.*
 some / several / certain friend have-PRES.3.PL ate one pizza
- b. *Nekaj / več prijateljev je (po)jedlo pico.*
 some / several friend is (after)eat-PTC.N.SG pizza
Nekateri prijatelji so (po) jedli pico.
 certain friends are (after)est-PTC.M.PL pizza
 'Some/several/certain friends ate a pizza.'

A number of examples exist in which the predicate refers to individual units. In these cases, only the distributive interpretation is possible in both languages. Although the predicate is in plural it attributes the property of *being Slovene* to each atomic individual of mass denoted by the quantifiers. There is the same number of *boys* and the same number of those, who are Slovene, what enables the distributive reading.

- (25) a. *Quelques / Plusieurs / Certains garçons sont slovène.*
 some / several / certain boys are Slovene
- b. *Nekaj / več fantov je Slovencev.*
 some / several boys is-PRES.3. SG Slovene
Nekateri fantje so Slovenci.
 certain boys are-PRES.3.PL Slovene
 'Some/Several/Certain boys are Slovene.'

Corblin (1997) classified the indefinite determiners into quantifiers (*certain*s) and proper indefinite determiners (*au sens strict*). These are further classified into vague

determiners (*indéfinis vagues*), including *plusieurs* and *quelques*, and numerals. Quantifiers only allow for distributive interpretation, whereas proper indefinite determiners also allow for collective interpretation. *Plusieurs* and *quelques* are plural indefinite determiners in the “narrow sense” (*sens étroit*), as Corblin (1997) names them. The two determiners often allow for a collective interpretation, but they also tolerate a distributive interpretation (26).

- (26) a. *Quelques/Plusieurs élèves ont confectionné une affiche.*
 some / several students have made one poster
 (Leeman 2004)
- b. *Nekaj študentov je izdelalo (en) plakat.*
 certain students is made one poster
 ‘Some/Several/Certain students made a poster.’

In French, there are two ways of interpreting *quelques/plusieurs* in the example (26a). One proposes that *some/several students made the poster together*, whereas the other states that *each student made his own poster*. The double interpretation is not possible in Slovene. To interpret these sentences in a distributive manner in Slovene, the object would have to be either dual or plural (29, 31), depending on the number expressed by the subject.

As opposed to *quelques* and *plusieurs*, *certain* is normally only given a distributive interpretation. This is again due to the qualitative characteristic of *certain*. But this is not the case in Slovene. *Nekateri* denotes some of the students, who *made* only one *poster*. The different number, plural expressed in subject and singular expressed in object, prefers the collective interpretation of *nekateri*.

- (27) a. *Certains élèves ont confectionné une affiche.*
 certain students have-PRES.3.PL made one poster
 (Leeman 2004)
- b. *Nekateri študentje so izdelali (en) plakat.*
 certain students are-PRES.3.PL made-PTC.PL.M one poster
 ‘Certain students made a poster.’

Even if indefinite determiners were substituted with names, the example could be read both collectively and distributively in French. The results in Slovene are similar to those in the abovementioned example, in which a distributive interpretation is not acceptable, as it would call for a dual or plural object (29b, 31b). Both interpretations of the phrase would not be possible even if the numeral *en* (*one*) was added to the object *poster* in (28b). It can therefore be deduced that Slovene phrases with names instead of quantitative determiners and singular object only allow for a collective interpretation. Examples expressing the same number in subject NP and Object NP can have also a distributional reading (29, 31).

- (28) a. *Ivana et Julija ont confectionné une affiche.*
 Ivana and Julija have made a poster
- b. *Ivana in Julija sta naredili (en) plakat.*
 Ivana and Julija are-PRES.3.D made-PTC.D.F one poster-ACC.SG
 ‘Ivana and Julija made a poster.’

- (29) a. *Ivana et Julija ont confectionné deux affiches.*
 Ivana and Julija have made two posters
 b. *Ivana in Julija sta naredili dva plakata.*
 Ivana and Julija be-PRES.3.D made-PTC.D.F two posters-ACC.D
 ‘Ivana and Julija made two posters.’
- (30) a. *Ivana, Julija et Miha ont confectionné une affiche.*
 Ivana, Julija and Miha have-PRES.3.PL made one poster
 b. *Ivana, Julija in Miha so naredili plakat.*
 Ivana, Julija and Miha are-PRES.3.PL made-PTC.PL.M poster-ACC.SG
 ‘Ivana, Julija and Miha made a poster.’
- (31) a. *Ivana, Julija et Miha ont confectionné des affiches.*
 Ivana, Julija and Miha have-PRES.3.PL made I.AR posters-ACC.PL
 b. *Ivana, Julija in Miha so naredili plakate.*
 Ivana, Julija and Miha are-PRES.3.PL made-PTC.PL.M posters-ACC.PL
 ‘Ivana, Julija and Miha made posters.’

The example (28) could be interpreted distributively only in the sense that Ivana and Julija *were making a poster*, whereas Miha and Luka *were making a mosaic*. In (28b), *Ivana and Julija* probably made one poster. An imperfect verb could raise the possibility of a distributive interpretation, even if the latter is in the borderline between acceptable and unacceptable in Slovene. If the object *plakat* (poster) is put in the dual (*dva plakata*), it denotes that they could have made *two posters together*, or that *each girl made her own poster*. In this case, both collective and distributive interpretations are possible. Considering the fact that *nekaj/več/nekateri* usually denote at least three persons or objects in Slovene, it would be highly unlikely to replace them with merely *Ivana and Julija*. It would be much more plausible to replace the three determiners with *Ivana, Julija and Miha* (30, 31), even if it results in a similar situation, namely if the perfect verb is replaced by the imperfect verb *so izdelovali plakat* (*were making a poster*), a distributive interpretation is possible: *eni so izdelovali plakat, drugi trije pa so izdelovali mozaik* (*three children were making a poster, and the other three were making a mosaic*). Nonetheless, the acceptability of this interpretation remains highly limited, as Slovene prefers the use of a plural or dual object in the case of a collective interpretation.

It can be deduced from the abovementioned examples that in Slovene, the collective and distributive interpretations are the most acceptable in the cases in which the subject and the object express the same quantity. This variation from singular to plural is not necessarily significant in French, as phrases with plural subject and singular object can easily accept both interpretations. It was shown that Slovene can change the interpretation with the use of an im/perfect form of the verb in perfect.

The following example is interesting as all the three indefinite determiners in NP subject position can only have distributive interpretation (Asnes 2005):

- (32) a. *La tête de quelques / plusieurs / certains garçons dépassait du*
 D.AR head of some several certain boys stick.out D.AR
rideau.
 curtain

- b.* *Glava nekaj / več / nekaterih fantov je pokukala*
 head some / several / certain-GEN boys-GEN is peep
iz za zavese.
 out.from.behind curtain
- c. *Glave nekaj / več / nekaterih fantov so pokukale*
 heads some / several / certain-GEN boys-GEN are peep
iz za zavese.
 out.from.behind curtain
 ‘A head of some/several /certain boys stuck out of the curtain.’

Because of the distributive quantification of *quelques*, *plusieurs* and *certain*s, only a distributive interpretation is possible, regardless of the fact *la tête* (‘the head’) is in singular. It is interesting that Slovene in this case does not allow for a singular of *glava* (‘head’), but demands a plural form to obtain the only possible interpretation, the distributive one.

4.5 Generic and specific interpretation

We can speak of specific interpretation when the indefinite determiner denotes individual elements from a set with the same characteristics. When these individual elements cannot be defined, we speak of generic interpretation. The generic interpretation of an indefinite determiner is only possible in certain syntactical contexts, which are not existential, and at the same time substitute the agent. Indefinite determiners can, however, always be interpreted specifically (33) (Corblin 1987). The numeral, or rather indefinite article *un(e)* can be interpreted generically (34).

The example (33) indicates a specific interpretation, because we define a number of virtues that refer to the whole class defined by the indefinite determiners. Ansombre (2001) says that generic NP in this case is distributed. The example (34), on the other hand, indicates that the meaning of only one virtue refers to the whole class. On the contrary standard Slovene does not use the numeral or indefinite article *en(a)* (‘one’). Only the spoken Slovene could use *en* (‘one’) or *nek* (‘a certain’) for a indeterminacy and to express genericity (Schlambergar-Brezar 2004). A generic interpretation (34) in Slovene is expressed without any determiner. The other possible way to make a general reading out of a Slovene phrase is to use the quantifier *vsak* (‘each’): *vsaka družba* ‘each society’. Sentences containing *each* make a claim about all the members of the class which is quantified over. It is about a general interpretation based on the distributional reading.

- (33) a. *Quelques / Plusieurs/Certaines sociétés reposent sur des*
 some / several /certain societies base-PRES.3.PL on I.AR
principes.
 principles
- b. *Nekaj / Več družb temelji na principih.*
 some / several society base-PRES.3.SG on principle
Nekatero družbe temeljijo na principih.
 certain society base-PRES.3.PL on principle
 ‘Some/Several/Certain societies are based on principles.’

- (34) a. *Une société repose sur des principes.*
 one society base-PRES.3. SG on I.AR principle
 (Corblin 1987)
- b. *Družba temelji na principih.*
 society base-PRES.3.SG on principle
 ‘A society is based on principles.’

In (35) the indefinite determiners *quelques/nekaj* and *plusieurs/več* can be interpreted generically, but *certain/nekateri* can only be interpreted specifically (36). The two interpretations coincide in both languages. In case of specific interpretation, *certain* can also be translated in Slovene as *določen* (‘defined’) instead of *nekateri* (‘certain’), as it places an even greater stress on the specifics of the marked units. *Certain/nekateri* does not allow for generic interpretation, as it heavily stresses the referent's identity in the sense *not all*.

In the example (35) (Leeman 2004), the genericity is based on the quantitative opposition plural-singular; *quelques/plusieurs* and *a long*. We insist on the quantity and wish to convey: *Better to have more drawings than only one long speech*. *Certain* cannot accept this interpretation and opposition, as it is not a real quantifier. It is the same in Slovene; *nekateri* denotes individuals which are specific in one way, that is why only a specific interpretation is possible in (36) (Leeman 2004).

- (35) a. *Quelques / Plusieurs schémas valent mieux qu’ un long discours.*
 some / several drawing worth-PRES.3.PL better that one
 long speech
- b. *Nekaj/Več risb pove več kot dolg govor.*
 some /several drawing say-PRES.3.SG more than long speech
 ‘Some/Several drawings are worth a thousand words.’
- (36) a. *Certain schémas valent mieux qu’ un long discours.*
 certain drawing worth-PRES.3.PL better that one long speech
- b. *Nekateri risbe povedo več kot dolg govor.*
 certain drawing say-PRES.3.PL more than long speech
 ‘Certain drawings are worth a thousand words.’

The distribution of one interpretation or the other can change according to the context and is therefore very problematic. Since Slovene has no articles, it cannot properly limit some individuals without any determiner. French could do so by using the indefinite article *des* in “partitive genericity”. This *open class* (Corblin 2001) presents an introduction to quasi-genericity, which is marked by *certain* and also *nekateri*. Also (Anscombe 2001) claims, when the NP is not distributed it can have a partitive interpretation of a class. Only a part of this class is concerned by NP. As it was mentioned above, the characteristic nature of *certain* and *nekateri* can always delimit some atomic individuals and make them “general” in some contexts (37). Here, the partitive genericity in French and Slovene is possible in the field of *dogs, loving classical music*.

- (37) a. *Certains chiens aiment la musique classique.*
 certain dogs like-PRES.3.PL D.AR music classical
- b. *Nekateri psi imajo radi klasično glasbo.*
 certain dogs have-PRES.3.PL like-ADJ classical music
 ‘Certain dogs like classical music.’

Plusieurs allows for a generic interpretation in (38), whereas it is not optimal in the case of *quelques* in (39). According to the context, the example (39) can only indicate that not all *pays voisins* (‘neighboring countries’) are included in it. Both Slovene equivalents share the same semantic characteristics as the French quantifiers. They cannot include *all neighboring countries*, and they cannot say which *neighboring countries* are considered. The interpretation of *quelques/nekaj* is thus similar to that in (40) in which *certains/nekateri* is used (Corblin 1987). The examples (39) and (40) once again show partitive-genericity. A generic interpretation (38) is only logical again if we insist on quantity (*plusieurs pays*), the same as in (35).

- (38) a. *Plusieurs pays voisins finissent par se fédérer.*
 several country neighbouring finish-3.PRES.PL by self federate-INF
 (Corblin 1987)
- b. *Več sosedskih držav se na koncu združijo.*
 several neighbouring country self on end federate-PRES.3.SG
 ‘Several neighbouring countries eventually federate.’
- (39) a. *Quelques pays voisins finissent par se fédérer.*
 some country neighbouring finish-PRES.3.PL by self federate
 (Corblin 1987)
- b. *Nekaj sosedskih držav se na koncu združijo.*
 some neighbouring country self on end federate-PRES.3.SG
 ‘Some neighbouring countries eventually federate.’

Similarly, *certains/nekateri* do not allow for generic interpretation in the following example, as they do not apply to any number of ‘neighboring countries’. What is more, *certains* as well as *nekateri* indicate that not a whole class of countries is included. The same interpretation can be used in Slovene, since ‘some countries’ (*nekateri države*) are limited to a number of chosen countries in reality and do not include a whole class of *countries*.

- (40) a. *Certains pays voisins finissent par se fédérer.*
 certain country neighbouring finish-PRES.3.PL by self federate
 (Corblin 1987)
- b. *Nekateri sosedske države se na koncu združijo.*
 certain neighbouring country self on end federate-PRES.3.PL
 ‘Certain neighbouring countries eventually federate.’

Corblin (1997) argues that indefinite determiners in the “narrow sense” (*sens étroit*), which include *plusieurs* and *quelques*, allow for a generic interpretation even in sentences that do not explicitly express genericity (41). A generic interpretation is therefore acceptable in both Slovene and French in certain contexts: *a larger amount of people cannot agree upon who will govern and how*. This has to do with the fact that similarly as in (35) and (38), we insist on a larger quantity as opposed to singular.

Plusieurs and *več* do not include all the units of a set, but in general readings, they can be interpreted largely, to be generally applied to all the units.

- (41) a. *Plusieurs personnes ne peuvent s'entendre pour gouverner.*
 several people not can self agree for govern
 (Corblin 1997)
- b. *Več ljudi (Mnogi ljudje) se ne more dogovoriti za vladanje.*
 several people (many people) self not can-PRES.3.SG
 agree for govern
 'Many people can not agree to govern.'

On the contrary, indefinite determiners 'in the large sense' (*sens large*), e.g. *certain*s, do not allow for generic interpretation. In the following example (42), *certain*s denotes 'certain people, who have a problem with governing'. In this case, generic interpretation is not acceptable. There is once again the specificity of *certain*s/*nekateri* which proves the qualitative characteristic of these two quantifiers, which do not allow for generic readings neither in Slovene nor in French.

- (42) a. *Certaines personnes ne peuvent s'entendre pour gouverner.*
 certain people not can self agree for govern-INF
 (Corblin 1997)
- b. *Določeni /Nekateri ljudje se ne morejo dogovoriti za vladanje.*
 defined /certain people self not can agree for governing
 'Certain people can not agree to govern.'

The NP *več ljudi* (*more people*) in (41) is quantitative, whereas the phrase *določeni ljudje* ('defined people') in (42) is characterizing and quantitative.

To sum up, the characterizing use of the indefinite determiner that refers to the referent's identity prevents generic interpretation. *Certain*s only occurs in specific interpretation, as its meaning is limited to specific referents whose identity is known to the speaker, who does not wish to reveal it. It can therefore not be used in generic interpretation. On the contrary, *quelques* can be used both in specific and generic interpretation, which can sometimes be prevented by the context. *Quelques* and *plusieurs* denote the speaker's unfamiliarity and are most often used in cases in which they propose a hypothesis.

General interpretation in Slovene can be easily expressed without any quantifier or determiner. The role of use of quantifiers only accentuates the indefinite quantity of referring individuals. On the other hand French can use articles to replace determiners and change the semantic value of NP, which is impossible in Slovene.

5 Summary

The role of the indefinite determiners is to single out a chosen class of individual units (NP) out of a whole set, and name it with *plusieurs/quelques/certain*s or *več/nekaj/nekateri*, which are their most common equivalents in Slovene. The quantifier reaches across the minimal sentence to which it belongs, regardless of its syntactical characteristics.

The study proves that beside the absence or presence of the referential context determining the interpretation, also the number expressed in subject NP or object NP and the nature of predicate, can largely influence the interpretation in French and Slovene.

Plusieurs/quelques/certains and the Slovene equivalents can be used in existential structures, and in sentences that assert existentiality. They can also be used in non-existential sentences, especially when they do not have a reference point (Kleiber 2001). In this case, the existence of individual units and subtypes is not placed in time and space. In order to enable the existential interpretation, the referential context needs to be placed in space and time.

Existential interpretation is not possible without a “specific” predicate containing detailed information on the referent’s object. In this case, a different kind of non-existential interpretation needs to be chosen. Whenever a sentence is open to standard generic, partitive, or taxonomic interpretation, existential interpretation is not possible. In case of specific partitive interpretation, difficulties occur in defining the whole set along with its particular limitations. The limited whole is restricted by the noun’s semantics, the context, and the semantic value of the determiner.

It is common for the chosen French and Slovene indefinite determiners to mark a unit of individuals taken from a larger set, which can also be marked as partitive. The chosen examples were generally not difficult to translate. There were just some structures demanding transformations of phrases and there were also some instances in which the interpretations do not match in French and Slovene. *Quelques* and *plusieurs* so as *nekaj* and *več* proved to be replaceable in most cases with slightly changing the NP quantity. *Certains* proved to have some specific characteristics in French and in Slovene.

In most examples *nekateri* demands a different syntactic structure. Also in most interpretations *certain* and *nekateri* do not share the same interpretations as *quelques/plusieurs* and *nekaj/več*. For example, they are regularly used in taxonomic interpretation, only in specific (and not generic) interpretation and do not allow for referential interpretation. This characteristic can be explained with a partition of *certain/nekateri*, i.e. *certain among the others*. Concerning the collective and distributive interpretation, the most differences between the two languages appeared. *Certain* is normally given only a distributive interpretation but *nekateri* prefers collective interpretation.

The differences that most often occur in the case of collective and distributive interpretation concern *quelques/plusieurs* again. They prefer the collective interpretation but allow also for distributive interpretation. But *nekaj/več* in Slovene normally allow only for collective interpretation. There are only some examples on the borderline of acceptability, which can be interpreted in a distributive way in Slovene as well.

The study highlights that as opposed to French, Slovene does not allow for both interpretations in some cases. This largely depends on the number expressed by the subject and object NP, and on the im/perfectivity the verb. Since verbal im/perfectivity depends on the syntactic position, the perfectivity and imperfectivity of the verb in Slovene was mentioned. The influence of the verb aspect seems to be important only in collective/distributive interpretation, nevertheless it was expected that the verbs’ im/perfectivity influence would be larger.

The difference appeared also in the field of generic and specific interpretation, where French can replace a quantifier with an article, which is not possible in Slovene. On the other hand Slovene can have a bare NP to express genericity.

The result showed that there are similarities and differences between two systems of the three indefinite determiners in French and Slovene. The similarities between them facilitate the interpretation and translation, whereas differences make the translation more complicated and give the possibility to examine the different language systems.

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