Problems for the Breton article system

The exhaustive list of the Breton presumed articles is given in (1). Only the /a/ *vs*. /ə/ vowel alternation encodes syntactico-semantic information: distribution of the associated consonant is phonologically dependent (/n/ before /n, d, t, h/ or vowel; /l/ before /l/; /r/ anywhere else).

(1) a.   /ãn, al, ar/   *definite*
          an natur, **a**l lapin, **a**r c'hokodil > the nature, the rabbit, the crocodile
      b.   /ən, əl, ər/   *indefinite*
          un natur, **u**l lapin, **u**r c'hokodil > a nature, a rabbit, a crocodile

In an older state of the language, a rich gender and number morphology on the article triggered liaison on the following noun. Following reduction of the morphology of articles, the phonological trigger for liaison disappeared, but the liaison remained, leaving in Modern Breton a complex consonant mutation system on the noun. Lenition (/k/>/g/) for example signals a singular feminine noun as in (2a), or a masculine plural noun as in (2b). The article however is still clearly the trigger for consonantic mutation: plural indefinites require article drop and the noun appears un-mutated, independently of gender as in (2c).

(2) a.   ar **g**rokodilez, ur **g**rokodilez   > the/a female crocodile   *fem sing noun*
      b.   ar **g**rokodiled   > the crocodiles   *definite masc plural noun*
      c.   ø **k**rokodiled, ø **k**rokodilezed   > crocodiles, female crocodiles   *plural indefinite*

To summarize, at the syntactic level, the presumed article system is embodied under a three-value alternation (/a/, /ə/ *vs.* /ø/). Presence or absence of the article conditions a morphologically complex system of gender and number marking on the noun.

Descriptive grammars assume that the Breton determiner system mimics the French and English one and propose a [+/- definite] divide as in (1). **In this paper, I provide new data and reject the [+/-definite] divide as naïve, and present new generalisations that any account of these articles has to account for.** The data comes from available descriptive grammars, a crossdialectal broad literature corpus, and ten hours elicitation with a native speaker from the Douarnenez dialect.

First, the /a/ article appears in contexts where its reference can't be identified by the listener: Breton has a system of analytic demonstratives (3) obligatorily associated with the /a/ article. Like the specific indefinite English *this* (Prince 1981, Gundel and al. 1993), the demonstrative occurs in contexts where it has not been activated in discourse (4) (*contra* Schapansky 1996:96: "proximal determiner phrases like *en dén-man* 'this man' have to have been just previously mentioned or activated in the discourse."). The /a/ article thus does appear in specific indefinites, where an /ə/ article would be banned (5).

(3) **a**r plac'h-mañ,   **a**r plac'h-se,   **a**r plac'h-hont
      the girl-here   the girl-there   the girl-over.there
      'this girl'

(4) Aet   on   tre er   bar hag aze meus en em   gavet gant ***ar plac'h-se / ar plac'h-mañ***.
      gone I.am in in.the bar & there I.have REFLEX found P   the girl-there/ the girl-here
      Bez' e oa o kanañ un dra iskis…
      EXPL R was at singing a   thing strange
      'I went into the bar and there was *this* girl. She was singing a strange song.'

(5) * **ur** plac'h-mañ

The /a/ article also appears in structures referring to specific unknown entities, as illustrated by the reduplication structure in (6). Depending on the dialects, the article can itself be reduplicated. Again, an /ə/ article would be banned.

(6) C'hoand am   euz   da gaoud ***ar marc'h-mañ (ar) marc'h***.
      wish   R.1SG have P have   the horse-here horse
      'I want to have a horse.'/'J'ai envie d'avoir *tel cheval*.' (specific unknown/uncited)

Second, the /a/ article is not a morphological ostensibilisation tool for semantic specificity:
Data so far could suggest that /a/ appears anytime a given construction is semantically specific. This is not the case. The /a/ morpheme does not survive article drop in specificity contexts: it is banned in (7) by the proper noun, despite the deictic marker that signals formation of an analytic demonstrative (compare with (3)); and in (8), by the genitive construction (construct state obligatorily triggers article drop).

(7)   ø *Marijo-mañ*
        Marijo-here   >   'Marijo here present'
(8)   ø *dour(-mañ)* lous ar   gêr   Construct State
           water-here   dirty the   town
        'This dirty water of town'/'The dirty water of town'

Finally, there is evidence for a complex semantic calculus: the Breton /a/ article can turn a dependent indefinite (namely an ∃-FCI) into an independent specific indefinite.
The specific unknown indefinite associated with /a/ in (6) does not survive irrealis contexts. The reduplication structure in irrealis contexts requires article-drop (9). I show with extensive evidence that the determinerless reduplication structure is a dependent indefinite: an existential free-choice item. Semantically, any element in the denotation of the restrictor is a suitable candidate for satisfying the nucleus (Jayez and Tovena to appear), and its licensing depends on modality (ex. (10) and table content).

(9) Me meus c'hoant kaout (**ar**) *stajiad-mañ-stajiad* a vefe farsus ha jentil war ar memes tro.
    1SG I.have wish   have the intern-here-intern R would.be funny and nice P the same turn
        'I want to have an intern that would be nice and funny at the same time.'
(10)   Pouez war *touchenn-mañ-touchenn* evit derc'hel da vont.
        press   on   key-here-key   for continue P go
        'Press any key / whatever key in order to continue.'

SYNTACTIC CONTEXT FOR ∃-FCI		except:
Positive assertion with simple past	*	
Negation in episodic context	*	
With modalities	√	Out of the scope of the licensor if no reconstruction
Imperatives	√	
future (both synthetic and analytic)	√	
Conditional	√	
Past conditional	*?	
Direct & indirect WH questions	√	
Restriction of if-clauses	√	
Yes/no questions	*	
Comparatives	*	
Rescuing by subtrigging	*	under ∀ uses

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