

-*ŋ* feminine plural inflection in North-Lombard varieties. A comparison

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In the North-Lombard varieties of Casaccia (Bregaglia) and Soazza (Mesolcina) (Manzini and Savoia 2005, 2007), feminine plural *-ŋ* shows an asymmetric occurrence in the DP and in the sentence, interacting with the nominal class (gender) inflection *-a*. We argue: (i) that the asymmetries are restricted to the feminine *-a* because of the mass/plural properties of Romance *-a*; (ii) that the asymmetric distribution is phase-based distinguishing phasal heads from their complement.

1. Casaccia. In this variety, feminine plural *-ŋ* occurs once in a given DP, on the first determiner/modifier, as in (1). Masculine nouns generally lack inflectional endings; in the plural, *(-i)* appears on determiners and in a subset of adjectives and nouns, as in (2).

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|-----|----|---|----|--|
| (1) | a. | l-a / kwel-a bel-a don-a
the-F / that-F fine-F woman-F | b. | l-a-ŋ / kwel-a-ŋ brav-a don-a
the-F-PL / that-F-PL good-F woman-F |
| (2) | a. | ɛl / kwel kaŋ
the / that dog | b. | i / kw-i/ kwjft-i/ tantf-i kaŋ
the.M.PL/that-M.PL/this-M.PL/many-M.PL dog |

Historical literature derives feminine plural *-ŋ* from the 3rd plural morphology of the verb (Salvioni 1902). Indeed, *-ŋ* is realized on the finite verb, as in (3), excluding its realization on subject clitics and on predicative elements (adjectives, nouns and participles) in (3b-c). In these contexts the *-a* inflection occurs, independently of the singular or plural reading, as in the DP in (1).

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|-----|----|------------------------|---|-----|---------------------|---------------|
| (3) | a. | i / l-a
3.M.PL/ 3-F | dɔrm-aŋ
sleep-3PL | cf. | al/ l-a
3.M/ 3-F | dɔrm
sleep |
| | b. | l e-ŋ
CIS | nøv-a/ dɔn-a/ nid-a
they.are-PL new-F/ women-F/ come-F | | | |
| | c. | i e-ŋ ni
CIS.MPL | 'are-PL come' | | | |

The masculine 3rd person subject clitic has the plural *i* form. Both *i* and *l-a-ŋ* occur as plural object clitics, in (4a). The singular object clitic in (4b) takes one form *l-a*, independently of gender.

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|-----|----|--|----|-------------------------------|
| (4) | a. | a l-a-ŋ / i ve
3 3-F-PL / 3.M.PL (s)he.sees | b. | a ll-a ve
3 3-F (s)he.sees |
|-----|----|--|----|-------------------------------|

(5) schematizes the distribution of *-ŋ/-i* plurals in (1)-(4). The two main points are: (i) the interplay between verb and noun inflection *-ŋ* in the CP phase – as well as the more obvious interplay in the DP-phase; (ii) the nature of the *-a* inflection, compatible both with singular and plural reading.

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|-----|-----|-----------|--------------|------------|--------|-----|
| (5) | (a) | DP phase: | D/Q | Adj | N | Adj |
| | | | <i>-ŋ/-i</i> | ∅/(-i) | ∅/(-i) | ∅ |
| | (b) | CP phase: | SubjCl | I | | |
| | | | ∅/i | -ŋ | | |
| | (c) | vP phase: | ObjCl | Participle | | |
| | | | <i>-ŋ/i</i> | ∅ | | |

2. Soazza. In this dialect (Sganzi 1933) *-ŋ* occurs on nouns and pre-/post-nominal modifiers but not on determiners, (6a) – providing a mirror image of sorts to the Casaccia variety. By contrast, plurality in masculines appears on the determiners/modifiers, as in (6b).

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|-----|----|---|--|---|------------------|
| (6) | a. | l-a / kwel-a fɔkabel-a / msat-a
the / that chair/ girl | | l-a / kwelə-ŋ fɔkabel-əŋ / ma't-a-ŋ
the / those chairs / girls | <i>feminine</i> |
| | b. | el/ kwel ɔm/ di:t
the/ that man/ finger | | i/ kwi ɔm-əŋ/ di:t
the/ those men/ fingers | <i>masculine</i> |

Feminine subject clitics in (7) and object clitics in (8) exclude *-ŋ* and realize as *l-a* for singular and plural, while *-ŋ* is realized in either context on the inflected verb. This originates ambiguous readings in (9a). *-ŋ* occurs on the object enclitic in imperative (9b) excluding a morphological impossibility.

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|-----|----|----------|---------|--------------|------------|---------|------------|------------|------------|-----------------|
| (7) | sg | əl | /la | dɔrm | <i>mpl</i> | i | dɔrm | <i>fpl</i> | la | dɔrm-əŋ |
| | | CIS.MSG/ | CIS.FSG | (s)he.sleeps | | CIS.MPL | sleep | | CIS.F | sleep-3FPL |
| | sg | l | a | dɔr'mi:t | <i>mpl</i> | i | a | dɔr'mit | <i>fpl</i> | l a-ŋ dɔr'mit |
| | | CIS | has | slept | | CIS.MPL | have slept | | CIS | have.3FPL slept |

- (8) *sg/mpl* tu l / la / i ve:t *fpl* tu la ved- əŋ
 CIS him/ her / they.m you.see CIS them.F you.see-FPL
- (9) a. la la tʃam-əŋ b. tʃama-l-əŋ
 she/they.F her/them.F call-3FPL call them.F!

Summarising, feminine plural *-ŋ* excludes D elements, i.e. articles and 3P clitics, which present *l-a* in feminine singular and plural – both in the DP phase (10a) and in the CP/vP phases (10b).

- (10) (a) DP phase: D/Q Adj N Adj
 Ø/-i -ŋ/(-i) -ŋ/(-i) -ŋ
- (b) CP / vP phase: SubjCl ObjCl I Participle
 Ø/i Ø/i -ŋ Ø

Nevins (2011) names ‘omnivorous number’ the phenomenon whereby agreement on the finite verb realizes plural indifferently of whether the subject or the object is targeted – based on the assumption that singular is not syntactically active. The microvariation in (5)/(10) shifts the issue to a more general one of phasal distribution of plurals. The latter has been so far explored only in connection with the distribution of *-s* plurals in the DP (Costa & Figueiredo 2002, Bonet & Mascarò 2012).

3. Morphology. The first problem is the nature of the asymmetry between the masculine and the feminine. Approaches originally developed for Ibero-Romance *-s* cannot explain the asymmetry (though it can of course express it). We suggest that the lexical content of *-a* is responsible for this asymmetry. Specifically *-a* (in some Romance languages) is compatible with a property [aggregate], yielding mass/plural readings (Chierchia 2010). Therefore, standard and Center-South Italian *-a* plurals (of weakly differentiated parts, Acquaviva 2008) are neither lexical plurals, nor a third gender (Loporcaro & Paciaroni 2011), but [aggregate] plurals; in these varieties *-a* satisfies the referential requirements of deictic and definiteness elements (Manzini & Savoia 2017, Savoia et al. forthcoming). In this perspective, *-ŋ* is the exponent of specialized plurality (cf. Div in Borer 1985) or, as we prefer to say, as the subset relation [\subseteq]. The resulting structures are as in (11). The interplay between inflection and clitics suggests that the verb inflection has the same nature as that of the noun, and introduces the same property, namely [\subseteq] for the *-ŋ* morpheme. If nominal inflection has interpretive content, as we assume, then also verbal nominal inflection is in turn interpretable.

- (11) [[kwel_D]-a_{AGGR}]-ŋ_⊆ cf. (1b)

4. Syntax. The syntactic problem is the distributions in (5) and (10). Within the DP phase, Casaccia inserts *-ŋ* only on the article, reflecting an independently known asymmetry in DP, whereby it is D (the phase head) that hosts a richer referential inflection. Soazza instead preserves *-ŋ* on the lexical elements (the complement of the phase head), generalizing *-a* on articles. The phase theory may predict the split between phasal heads and phasal complements, but not the coupling of each with richer or poorer morphology, at least within the DP phase. In the CP and vP phase, in Casaccia, both the finite verb and object clitics lexicalize the plural specifications by means of the exponent *-ŋ*. The presence of the morphology on I (by inheritance from C) in (5b) complies with the generalization that it is the phase head that hosts it. In the vP phase (5c), the presence of the morphology on the object clitic suggests that the object clitic rather than the participle is associated with the *v* phase head (cf. Roberts 2010). In Soazza, the plural *-ŋ* is introduced on the inflected verb, in (12), and agrees with *l-a* which can lexicalize the external or the internal argument. *-ŋ* behaves like an enclitic adding to the personal inflection, as in the 1st sg where combines with the ending *-i*, as in *la tʃam-i-əŋ* ‘them.f I.call-1ps-fpl’ i.e. ‘I call them’.

- (12)
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graph TD
 Root --> Infl1[Infl]
 Root --> I1[I]
 Infl1 --> Class[Class]
 Infl1 --> Infl2[Infl]
 Class --> RootNode[√]
 Class --> fem["[fem]"]
 RootNode --> l["l-"]
 Infl2 --> a["-ax/y"]
 I1 --> I2[I]
 I1 --> sub["[⊆]"]
 I2 --> ved["vedλx,y"]
 sub --> encl["-əŋx/y"]

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As a tentative conclusion, clitics agree in plurality [pl] with I, independently of being subject or object, missing out on the vP phase.

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