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**N morphology and its interpretation: ~~The neuter in Italian and Albanian~~
varieties.** Romance feminine/plural -a

Abstract

This contribution deals with the structure of nominal inflections in Romance, and specifically with the *-a* inflection in Italian varieties, which realizes the plural as well as the feminine singular. Thus the *-a* inflection externalizes apparently irreducible contents (singular/plural). Feminine plural *-a* alternating with masculine singular characterize Standard Italian and many South-Italian dialects. On the contrary, in some Northern Italian varieties *-a* characterizes feminine singular and plural, while the specialized (-i) plural morphology occurs determiners. We argue that in both of the languages considered, the *-a* plural externalizes a nominal Class property [aggregate]. We propose that [aggregate] is at the basis of the superficial syncretism between plural and singular/feminine in the occurrence of the *-a* inflection. Indeed [aggregate] introduces a notion of plurality as aggregate of individuals compatible at least with mass singulars (aggregates of parts). In general, the inflectional vowels of Romance languages, or in any event Italian *-a*, are not mere byproducts of paradigmatic organization, but are lexical items, endowed with interpretive content.

Keywords: Gender, number, feminine, plural, syncretism, nominal class, nominal inflections

N morphology and its interpretation: Romance feminine/plural *-a*.

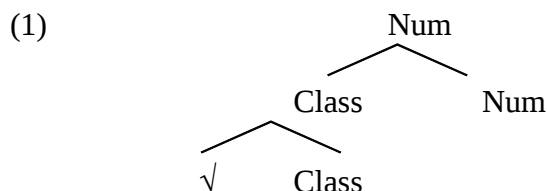
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In the Romance languages, *-a* inflections are attested both as feminine singular and as plural. In this work, we compare some case studies from Central Calabrian and North-Lombard varieties. The crucial point we address is the relation between the feminine singular and the plural interpretation of *-a*. In the following sections, we try to answer the question whether it is possible to unify these two readings. In order to do this, we firstly will propose a theoretical model of inflection and then examine and analyse the distribution of *-a* in the relevant Romance varieties.

1. General matters: The nature of N inflections

This article is placed within the syntactic framework of Chomsky (1995, 2000, 2001, 2013). Morphologically, we adopt a morpheme-based approach and we assume that the same basic computational mechanisms underlie syntax and morphology, as in Distributed Morphology (DM, Halle and Marantz 1993). We differ from DM in assuming that there is no separate Morphological Structure component capable of rearranging the syntax prior to vocabulary insertion. In other words, the syntax projects structures from actual lexical items – and no operations not licenced by a minimalist syntax (e.g. Impoverishment) can take place before lexical insertion. This stance is generally deemed to be too strong – but see Kayne (2010), Manzini and Savoia (2007, 2011a) for arguments that it is quite sufficient (and necessary) to account for considerable portions of the morphosyntax of Romance languages. The morphemic analysis of Indo-European nouns is fairly straightforward (Halle and Vaux 1998, Calabrese 1998, 2008). The first component is a root; following once again DM (Marantz 1997), we may think of the root $\sqrt{}$ as category-less. Next to the root a vocalic morpheme encodes properties that depending on the language, may include gender and/or number and/or declension class. A third slot may be available, specialized for number (e.g. Spanish) or for number and case (e.g. Latin).

When it comes to translating this morphemic sequence into morphosyntactic structures, the consensus in the literature (Piccolo 2008, cf. Déchaine et al. 2014 on Bantu nominal classes, Fassi Fehri 2016 on Arabic) is that at least two functional projections are needed, corresponding roughly to gender and number. In homage to the cross-linguistic comparison with Bantu languages (and possibly with Chinese classifiers, Crisma et al. 2011), the lower category is often labelled Class, the higher category is Num, as illustrated in (1) (alternatively, Carstens 2008 treats Bantu nominal classes as genders).

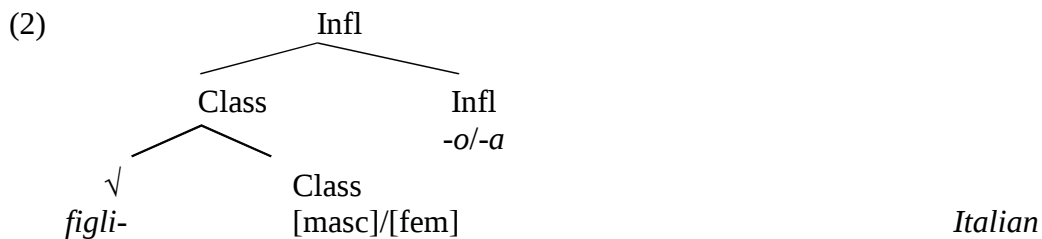


The assumption that even non-eventive nouns are predicates and that they have an argumental slot, called the R-role, is fairly standard in the generative literature (Higginbotham 1985, Williams 1994). Further binding of the R-role by higher Q/D operators yields what is ordinarily known as a referring DP. We reject a variant on the schema in (1) which takes Class to identify with Marantz's (1997) nominalizing category *n* (Kihm 2005, Ferrari Bridgers 2008, Kramer 2014, 2015). A different analysis of the interpretive contribution of Class is proposed by Manzini & Savoia (2005, 2007,

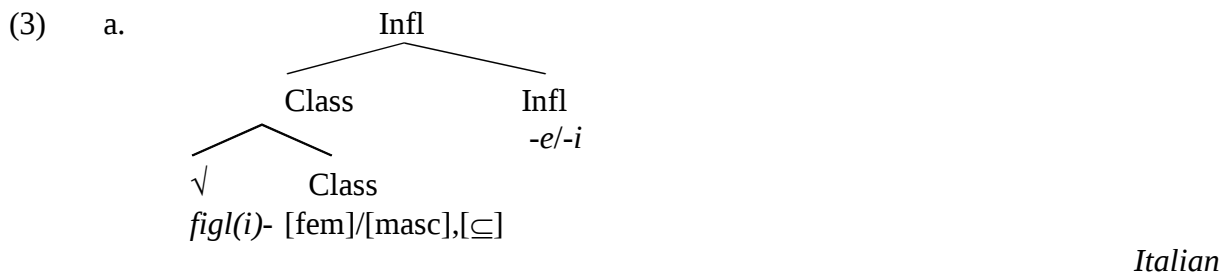
2011a,b). The idea is that class inflections do not so much turn a root (a predicate) into a referential term as they themselves concur to saturating the R-role of the predicative root. In present terms, the category Class restricts the content of the argumental variable ultimately bound by D/Q. Similarly, Percus (2011) entertains the possibility of a conjunctive semantics for the (root, gender) pair. As for the traditional Class/gender vs. Number categorization in (1), Borer (2005) identifies number with a Div (count) property falling within the set of classifiers. Déchaine et al. (2014) incorporate this conclusion in their structure for N(P), by assuming that Class is a field of categories including at least two projections for sortal Class elements (gender) and count/mas Class elements (number).

Extra complexity arises in Indo-European languages from the fact that there is no one-to-one mapping between the content of Class – which enters agreement with determiners and modifiers, and the inflections closing the noun. The latter are instead sensitive to inflectional class. The standard DM treatment of inflectional class (Oltra-Massuet and Arregi 2005, Kramer 2015) has a Th(ematic vowel) node adjoined to Class/*n* postsyntactically. The content of Th are diacritics such as [I] for I inflectional class, etc. and the latter are in turn spelled out as *-a*, *-o*, etc. (e.g. in Latin, in Spanish, etc.). We have already mentioned that we reject the dedicated Morphological Structure component of DM on grounds of restrictiveness. The countercyclic adjunction of Th after the syntactic derivation (contra Chomsky’s (1995) Extension Condition) provides a good illustration of the richness of the model that we reject.

The structures that we will be using throughout are introduced in (2) for Italian *figli-o* ‘son’ and *figli-a* ‘daughter’. In (2) the property *figli-* is compatible with both a feminine and a masculine Class, depending on the sex denoted. We can think that the Class property selects the root, associating with it the specifications traditionally labelled as [masculine]/[feminine]. The inflectional vowel is assigned to an Infl position which embeds both the root and the Class node. The tree in (2) is to be understood as belonging to the syntax.



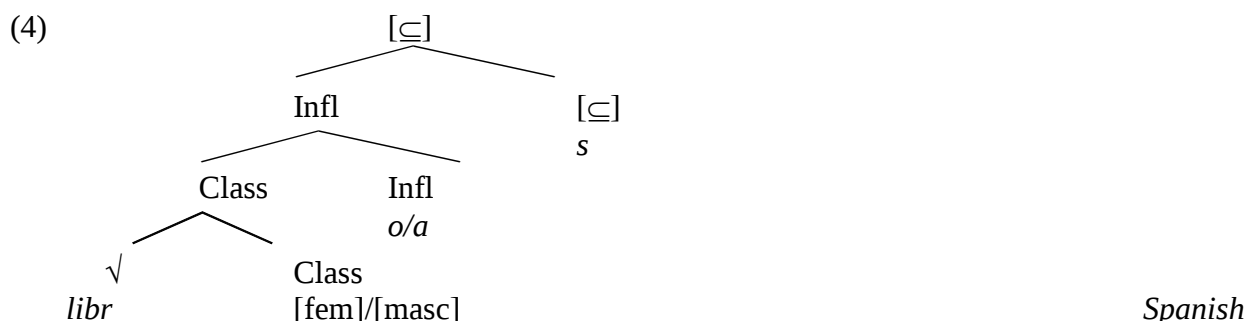
While languages like Spanish have an independent lexicalization for the plural, namely *-s*, in Italian, pluralization is obtained by a change of the inflectional morpheme. Following Manzini and Savoia (2011a, b), we formalize the content of the plural node as $\subseteq$, saying that the denotatum of the predicate can be partitioned into subsets. In these terms the plural of *figlio/figlia* in (2), namely *figli-i* ‘sons’, *figli-e* ‘daughters’ has the structure in (3a). The $(\subseteq)$ property contributes plurality as schematized in (3b) – namely by isolating a subset of the set (or set of sets) of all things that are *figli-*; in other words, $(\subseteq)$ says that subsets can be partitioned off the set (the property) denoted by the lexical base.



- b. $\exists x \quad [x (\subseteq) \{\text{figli-}\}]$
i.e. there is an *x* such that *x* is a subset of the set of individuals with the property

‘offspring’

On the other hand, if we keep identifying the vocalic inflection of a language like Spanish with the Infl position, it is evident that the specialized –s segment for plurality in Spanish must occur on top of Infl itself, as schematized for *libro-s/libra-s* ‘books/pounds’ in (4).



The layered structuring of gender is independently advocated in current literature. For Steriopolo and Wiltschko (2012), gender can be distributed over at least three node, namely the root, the *n* node and the D node (cf. also the Inner and Outer NAsp of Dèchaine et al 2014). Fassi Fehri (2016) in his discussion of Arabic –*at*, suggests that singulative –*at* is merged in Class under Num. At the same time, –*at* can also be a plurative; this results from a reversal of the structure where gender takes scope over number.

Let us then assume that we have an adequate working model of the categories and structures involved in nominal inflection. This still leaves several questions. One has to do with the correct pairing of roots with their gender. Indeed, gender is not necessarily predictable from the root – even when sexed referents are involved. Thus Italian *la guida* ‘the guide’ is feminine even when referring to a male guide – and Italian *il contralto* is masculine even when referring to a female singer (as it normally does). The other problem has to do with pairing root, gender and number units with their appropriate inflection.

The various matches required can be obtained by the standard syntactic mechanism of selection. For Kramer (2015) the diacritics [I], [II], [III] in, say, Spanish, are inserted under Th and then interpreted as vocalic endings, namely –*a* for [II], etc. Technically the rule that inserts the class diacritics is sensitive to the context determined by certain sets of roots. But this means that we are in the presence of a selectional restriction, which can also be expressed as matching inflectional endings directly to roots, e.g. insert –*e* in the context √*padr*, √*madr*, etc. Indeed this is the position taken by Kayne (2010: 73-74).

Furthermore, Kramer (2015: 54) explicitly endorses the view that gender she terms ‘arbitrary’, is selected by the root. A similar approach is suggested by Acquaviva (2009: 5), namely that “morphological and semantic information can be dependent on the choice of a root without being encoded on the root itself”. To say “a noun has gender X”, for instance, means in this perspective “a root Vocabulary item is licensed in the context of [n] with gender X”. In other words, the standard syntactic notion of selectional restriction is powerful enough to encode the fact that a certain Class content is associated with a certain lexical base and not with others.

This does not prevent Class contents from being determined directly by the root (see Italian *donn-a* ‘woman’, feminine or *marit-o* ‘husband’, masculine). What is more some (root, Class) combinations are interpreted compositionally, as indeed *figli-o*, *figli-a* in the previous examples. Theorists generally do not question the fact that Class may sometimes be interpreted and sometimes not and simply seek to model it. For Kramer (2015), the difference is to be expressed via the [interpretable] feature. Yet in general, we do not expect to find that a certain category is sometimes interpreted and sometime not – which is profoundly different from the interpretable/uninterpretable alternations of standard minimalist theory. Similarly, it is problematic to find that in some languages

(the familiar Indo-European one) there are morphological exponents that do not introduce any semantic content at all – but only a paradigmatic content. The lack of meaning is particularly unexpected in a framework like the present one where we try to enforce the idea that morphology is syntax. However, the appeal to paradigmatic organization undermines all morpheme and merger based views of morphology, including of course DM, as is well-known in the literature (Blevins 2006).

Attributing an interpretive content to inflection also connects to rethinking the notion of agreement. As is fairly well known, the multiple agreement seen in Romance (or Bantu) DPs, even in the simplest of examples, like (5), pose special problems to minimalist probe-goal Agree (Carstens 2000 and subsequent literature). D would be expected to be an uninterpretable probe on c-command grounds. However, D can be interpreted in isolation, namely as a (clitic) pronoun – which means that its phi-features must be interpretable. If we therefore associate the N head with uninterpretable features, we are faced with a probe that looks upwards rather than downwards – namely to interpretable D head that eventually checks it. This type of difficulty has recently given rise to a stream of literature about multidirectional probing/agreement (Baker 2008, Béjar and Rezac 2009). Probing indifferently upwards and downwards may achieve empirical adequacy. Theoretically however it weakens the minimalist conception of agreement originally defined by Chomsky (2000) in terms of c-command. In other words, questions concerning the interpretable/uninterpretable nature of probe-goal pairs seem devoid of theoretical interest, at least in the Romance type of nominal agreement.

For these reasons, we follow the model proposed by Manzini and Savoia (2005, 2007, 2011a, b), whereby the Agree rule matches n-tuples of elements that are all interpretable and as such concur to the saturation of the same argument slot(s). In other words, departing from current minimalist practice, we assume that there are only positive properties in language. Therefore, there are no uninterpretable properties; all lexical material is interpreted at the Conceptual-Intentional (C-I) interface. Suppose we renounce the distinction between probes (uninterpretable) and goals (interpretable). Still we can say that an argument agrees with the predicate, in the sense that the Identity relation (Match) holds of them. What is more, Agree *qua* Minimal Search and Match (Chomsky 2001), is triggered by Full Interpretation at the C-I interface, specifically by the Theta Criterion requiring a one-to-one mapping between argumental slots and referential items. The only difference is that the result of the operation is not the deletion of all copies of identical feature clusters but one. Rather it is the creation of an equivalence set (a ‘chain’ of occurrences) of feature clusters, interpreted as a single referent.

Having outlined these general assumptions, let us briefly introduce the inflectional element that directly interests us here, namely *-a* in Italian varieties. In Italian, *-a* appears to be feminine and singular by default; however (apart from occurrences as masculine singular, not immediately relevant here), it also introduces the plural of a set of nouns characterized by a distinctive semantics, denoting “a plurality of weakly differentiated parts” (Acquaviva 2008), as illustrated in (5b). The singular of these nouns is masculine, as in (5a) and it sometimes displays a regular masculine plural with a pure count interpretation such as (5c), referring to artifacts. Romance languages have only two target genders, namely masculine and feminine – and the *-a* plural agrees in the feminine with determiners and adjectives in (5b). A comparison can usefully be made with other language families that have genders, for instance the Semitic languages (Fassi Fehri 2016, Kramer 2015), which display the same syncretism between feminine singular and plural (non-gender specific), despite the fact that unrelated morphology is involved.

- | | | | | | |
|-----|----|---------|----------|-------------|-------------|
| (5) | a. | il | bracci-o | lung-o | |
| | | the.msg | arm-msg | long-msg | |
| | b. | l-e | bracci-a | lungh-e | |
| | | the-fpl | arms-Apl | long-fpl | |
| | c. | i | bracc-i | più lungh-i | (del fiume) |

the.mpl arms-mpl more long-mpl (of the river)

The potential theoretical interest of taking up the classical topic of the feminine/plural syncretism is that recent formal syntax and semantics studies revise the traditional distinctions between singular and plural, and between gender and number – yielding potential insights into their syncretism. First, underlying the standard number opposition singular/plural, there is an interpretive tripartition between mass nouns, count singulars and count plurals. More to the point mass singulars overlap in many respects quite closely with count plurals (Chierchia 2010); while in other respects the opposition is between count nouns, irrespective of number, and mass nouns (Borer 2005 for a syntactic model). So, it may be expected that singular (at least mass singular) and plural may share a lexicalization.

2. Feminine/plural *-a* in Central Calabrian

Our first case study concerns the Central Calabrian variety of Iacurso, which in the singular distinguishes the two genders [fem] and [masc] as well as the three inflectional classes *-a*, *-u*, *-ε*. At least *-ε* can combine with feminine or masculine bases. The plural has the gender-neutral realization *-i* on nouns, on adjectives and on functional categories of the noun, as illustrated in (6)-(8).

- | | | | |
|-----|---------------------------|----|----------------------------|
| (6) | [masc, sg] | | [plural] |
| a. | l-u puərku-u
the pig | a' | l-i puərtʃ-i
the pigs |
| b. | l uəcc-u
the eye | b' | l uəcc-i
the eyes |
| (7) | [fem, sg] | | [plural] |
| a. | l-a rət-a
the wheel | a' | l-i ruət-i
the wheels |
| b. | l-a nutʃ-a
the walnut | b' | l-i nutʃ-i
the walnuts |
| c. | la buffett-a
the table | c' | li buffett-i
the tables |
| (8) | [masc, sg] | | [plural] |
| a. | l-u mɛlun-ε
the melon | a' | l-i mɛlun-i
the melons |
| | [fem, sg] | | |
| b. | l-a cav-ε
the key | b' | l-i cav-i
the keys |

Iacurso also has *-a* plurals, illustrated in (9), for *-u* masculine singular bases; but while in Italian (1) *-a* plurals can be seen to switch to the feminine, in Iacurso in the absence of gender distinctions on adjectives and on functional categories of the noun no such switch is visible. In Iacurso, as in Italian, some Ns can be seen to alternate between the *-a* plural and the *-i* plural.

- | | | | |
|-----|---------------------------|----|----------------------------|
| (9) | [masc, sg] | | [plural] |
| a. | l-u jiðit-u
the finger | a' | l-i jiðit-a
the fingers |
| b. | l-u labbr-u
the lip | b' | l-i labbr-a
the lips |
| c. | l uəv-u
the egg | c' | l əv-a
the eggs |

- | | | | |
|----|----------------------------|----|--|
| d. | l-u liettu
the bed | d' | l-i lett-a
the beds |
| e. | l-u kurtiɛɾ-u
the knife | e' | l-i kurtɛɾ-a/l-i kurtiɛɾ-i
the knives |

As already mentioned, plural agreement on determiners and adjectives is systematically *-i*, independently of whether the singular is masculine or feminine, and whether the plural inflection is *-i* or *-a*, as further illustrated in (10) (where A = *-a* plural). This allows us to study the differentiation of *-i* from *-a* plural independently of the complexity introduced in Italian (5) by the fact that plurals are gendered.

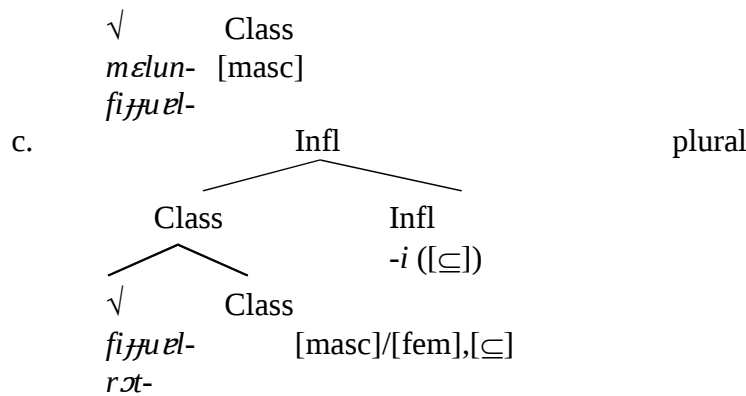
- (10)
- | | | | | |
|----|---------------------|---------------|--------------|--|
| a. | kir-i | ɔman-i | ɣruɛss-i | |
| | those | men | big.pl | |
| | 'those big men' | | | |
| b. | st-i | buf'fiɛtt-i | sunu luɛŋg-i | |
| | these | tables | are long-pl | |
| c. | l-i kurtɛɾ-a | sunu lavat-i | | |
| | the knives-A | are washed-pl | | |
| d. | iɾu tɛnɛ | l-i labbr-a | russ-i | |
| | he has | the lips-A | red-pl | |
| e. | l-i jiðit-a | /diɛnt-i | luɛŋg-i | |
| | the fingers-A/teeth | | long-pl | |

Applying tests devised by Acquaviva (2008) we find that in partitive construction with a singular head of the type 'one of...', the gender of the noun on the numeral is determined by its singular form – regardless of whether an *-a* plural is involved, as in (11). We conclude that there is no evidence in Central Calabrian for the switch of gender and we can study the alternation of two pure plurals, in *-i* and *-a*, in their simplest form.

- (11)
- | | | | |
|---------------------|----|----------|---------|
| un-u | dɛ | kir-i | ɔv-a |
| one-msg | of | that-mpl | egg-Apl |
| 'one of those eggs' | | | |

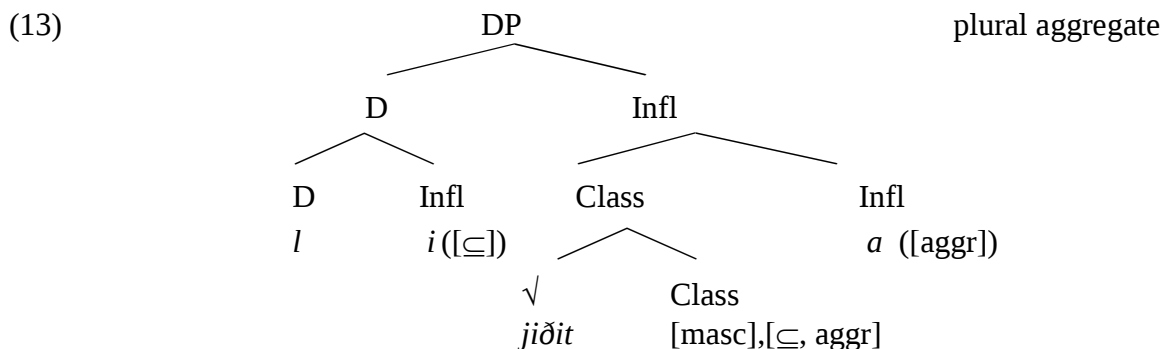
Leaving aside for the moment the *-a* plural, the system illustrated in (6)-(8) can be accounted for on the basis of structures like Italian (2), (3), in which the root is associated with an Infl slot and a Class slot. The latter can host three specifications, namely feminine, masculine and plural. We will say that in Calabrian, the *-i* Infl is associated with semantic content, namely [±], since it never appears but as a plural, along the lines of (12).

- (12)
- | | | |
|----|--|-----------|
| a. | <pre> Infl / \ Class Infl / \ -ɛ/-a √ Class cav- [fem] rɔt- </pre> | feminine |
| b. | <pre> Infl / \ Class Infl / \ -ɛ/-u </pre> | masculine |



Acquaviva's (2008) semantic characterization of *-a* plurals as consisting of 'weakly differentiated parts' appears to hold for Calabrian as well, witness the body part Ns present among *-a* plurals (*labbr-a* 'lips', *jiðit-a* 'fingers'). We take it that this characterization applies to body part Ns in Iacurso and to foodstuff with very much the same properties, such as *ɔv-a* 'eggs', *pir-a* 'pears', *pum-a* 'apples'. Other *-a* plurals attach to artifacts; like *kurɛɣ-a* 'knives'. Therefore, following Manzini and Savoia (to appear a, b) we assume that the *-a* inflection corresponds to a set whose members are rather more like parts of whole than like individuated atoms, that we characterize as [aggregate]. At the same time, of course, basic tests like the possibility of partitive structures in (11) confirm that we are dealing with plurals.

The notion of an aggregate of parts is used by Chierchia (2010) to characterize mass denotation. Assuming the existence in Romance (or Indo-European) of an [aggr] class, it is tempting to differentiate the *-a* plural from the *-i* plural by associating with the former the properties [$\subseteq$, aggr]. This would yield structures of the type in (13) for *jiðit-a* 'fingers'. Note that despite having insisted on the non-availability of gender differences in the morphology of the plural in Iacurso, we have nevertheless kept the [masculine] Class property in the representation in (13). This is because anaphoric material in the singular, e.g. 'one of them' in (11) shows masculine gender. This confirms that *-a* plurals, though connected to a gender change in Italian, do not have any necessary connection to it.



The structure in (13) implies a very elementary ontology, consisting in the squaring of the two properties [$\subseteq$] [aggr] – each of which can be represented by specialized morphology in the languages we are considering. Thus in Italian varieties, including Iacurso, *-i* is a dedicated morphology for plural [$\subseteq$] while Central Italian varieties have a dedicated neuter, i.e. [aggr], morphology *-o* (with residual attestation in the determiners of languages like Spanish), cf. Manzini and Savoia (to appear and references quoted there). In consonance with the minimalist program, we hold that the syntax and the lexicon are relatively impoverished, albeit quick and efficient means, to restrict meaning, whose articulations are ultimately determined by contextual enrichment. Thus we are not claiming that the underlying ontology of natural languages is as simple as mass/count crossed with sg/pl – we are just claiming that this is what is syntactically represented (in the type of languages we are considering).

Acquaviva (2008:155-156) comments on “the dimness of some grammatical intuitions” going on to state that “the lack of individual distinctive properties is a matter of how the lexical predicates are conceptualized, and this often leads to variation among speakers and uncertain intuitions for one and the same speaker”. This is consistent with what we are proposing here; rephrasing Acquaviva, the Iacurso speakers who indifferently render Italian *coltell-i* ‘knives’ with *kurtɛɽ-a* or *kurtiɛɽ-i* simply have two different ways of presenting the predicative content ‘knife’ – namely as consisting of individuated atoms or as consisting of non-individuated atoms. In this sense the label proposed by Déchaine et al. (2014) for what we have called here Class, namely NAsp, seems particularly appropriate.

We are finally in a position to come back to the question concerning the syncretism of plural and gender in the *-a* ending. In the structure in (12c) we have embedded the assumption that the Infl element *-i* is associated with interpretive content, namely [_{CL}]. As discussed in the text, *-i* never turns up as nominal Infl except as a plural; this is made explicit in the lexical entry in (14a). In turn, from the point of view of number specifications, *-a* in (13) is unambiguously associated with [aggr], so that we suggested that *-a* does in fact have an [aggr] content. Obviously, if we are to continue assuming that there is a single Infl item *-a* occurring in the (feminine) singular as well, [aggr] must be associated with *-a* only optionally, as in (14b). In the absence of other restrictions, we predict nevertheless that the property [aggr] may be present on *-a* in the singular as well. This is fairly trivially verified by the fact that the inflectional *-a* class will include mass nouns (e.g. *petl-a* ‘stone’). When *-a* selects roots with individual content, like ‘wheel’ in (7), it is not associated with the [aggr] content, because of its optionality.

- (14) (a) $-i$: Infl, [$\subseteq$]
(b) $-a$: Infl, ([aggr])

The lexical entry in (14b) provides an explanation of sorts for the syncretism of inflectional class and number morphology that we were seeking. Indeed, given the discussion that precedes, we can point to a positively specified property of *-a* that bridges between singular and plural namely [aggr]. In other words, it is in virtue of the property [aggr] that *-a* turns up both as a plural, and a singular inflectional class marker. What escapes this analysis, on the other hand, is the fact that *-a* happens to be feminine (at least by default). The latter is a matter to be learned by the child.¹

3. -a in singular and plural feminines

In this section we consider a different pattern of occurrence of *-a* inflections attested in Romance, whereby *-a* externalizes both singular and plural in feminine nouns. The relevant pattern characterizes Bregaglia Valley and North Lombardy varieties and appears in the dialects spoken in North-West Tuscany (Lunigiana and Garfagnana). We will concentrate on the North Lombardy variety of Tresivio (Valtellina). In this variety a type of agreement system emerges in which the same determiner *i* and nominal modifiers *-i* inflection cover feminine and masculine plural, as illustrated in (15)–(16). The adjectives have the same inflectional system as nouns, thus introducing *-a* both in singular and plural feminine, as shown by the plural forms in (15a'–c'). In the masculine, prenominal adjectives can assume the *-i* plural inflection, behaving like prenominal determiners, as in (16a'–c').

- (15) a. l-a femm-a a'. i femm-a

¹ It is worth noting that the classical historical account of Indo-European feminine singular/neuter plural *-a* (see the summary in Clackson 2007:107) is that a neuter/collective plural *-a* was extended to a new inflectional class for collective/abstract singulars – which only secondarily came to coincide with the default class for feminine animates. Viewed as a projection on the historical, external axis of an analysis motivated on internal grounds, this reconstruction appears to be quite compatible with the present discussion.

	the-f woman-f		the.pl woman-f
b.	kwel-a bəl-a femm-a	b'.	kwi bəl-a femm-a
	that-f nice-f woman-f		those nice-f woman-f
c.	n-a femm-a weʒ-a	c'.	kw-i femm-a weʒ-a
	a-f woman-f old-f		those woman-f old-f
(16) a.	l kaŋ	a'.	i kaŋ
	the dog		the.pl dog
b.	l dʒi'nø:tʃ	b'.	i dʒi'nø:tʃ
	the knee		the.pl knee
c.	kwe-l bəl kaŋ	c'.	kw-i be-i/braw-i kaŋ
	that nice dog		those nice.pl dog
d.	kwe-l om ve:tʃ	d'.	kw-i o:m ve:tʃ
	that man old		those man old

It is worth noting that plural *-i* occurs in a subset of masculines, as illustrated in (17a-b). Besides, the morphologization of the plural takes place also in prenominal possessives, in the form of a metaphonetic outcome of the tonic vowel, as in (17c-d). By contrast, the morphology of the plural possessive combining with feminine nouns is *-a* exactly as for the singular, as in (18). So, possessives behave differently from determiners.

(17) a.	əl kur'təl	a'.	i kur'te-i
	the knife		the knives
b.	əl fra'dəl	b'.	i fra'de-i
	the brother		the brothers
c.	əl me/tə/sə fra'dəl	c'.	i me/tə/sə fra'de-i
	the my/your/his brother		the my/your/his brothers
d.	əl nəs/vəs/sə fra'dəl	d'.	i nəs/vəs/sə fra'de-i
	the our/your/their brother		the our/your/their brothers
(18) a.	l-a mi-a/to-a/so-a surel-a	a'.	i mi-a/to-a/so-a surel-a
	the my/your/his sister		the my/your/his sister
b.	l-a nəs-a/wəs-a/so-a surel-a	b'.	i nəs-a/wəs-a/so-a surel-a
	the our/your/their sister		the our/your/their sister

The data in (15)-(18) suggest that inside the DP the plural is realized as *(-)i* in determiners and partially in masculine nouns, adjectives and possessives. Feminine nouns, adjectives and possessives in the plural preserve *-a* inflection.

Apparently comparable data come from Costa and Figueiredo (2002) concerning some Brazilian Portuguese varieties in which the plural inflection only occurs on the determiners or prenominal adjectives, as in *O-s/est-es/algum-s/un-s livr-o muit-o bonit-o* 'The/these/some book very nice'. In Brazilian Portuguese this restricted distribution of *-s* involves both feminine and masculine. Our data are less transparent. One may describe the Tresivio data by saying that the occurrence of *(-)i*, either as inflection of the determiners and pre-nominal adjectives or as autonomous lexicalization of plural articles and subject/object clitics, is not the only realization of plural. Rather, feminine plurals just introduce *-a*, which has both singular and plural interpretation.

A point made by Costa and Figueiredo is potentially relevant for us, namely the distinction between singleton and dissociated morphemes. According to Embick and Noyer (2001), agreement and case morphemes are not syntactic projections and so they are not represented in syntax but they are added postsyntactically "during Morphology". Typically, dissociated morphemes convey an information "separated from the original locus of that information in the phrase marker" (Embick and Noyer 2001: 557). According to Costa and Figueiredo (2002), in Brazilian Portuguese the plural corresponds to a singleton, i.e. a specialized interpretable morpheme, and as such it associates only

with the “element anchoring the information concerning number”, namely Determiners. Costa and Figueiredo (2002) reach this conclusion by differentiating the effect of the Spec-head configuration, that triggers the Subject-I agreement, from the D-N relation, where the plural singleton occurs². In European Portuguese, where plural agreement occurs on all of the elements internal to DP, it is a dissociate morphemes “associate post-syntactically with all items able to bear plural mark” (p. 24); in Brazilian Portuguese it is a singleton, a morpheme that “anchors on the category relevant for the interpretational component” (pp. 25-26), as we just saw.

Our approach is different. First, we assume, as discussed in section 1, that morphemes convey an interpretable content that projects syntax. From this perspective, the distinction dissociated/singleton could be rephrased as the split between agreement properties with general occurrence and those associated only with one category, i.e. with specialized occurrence. In the Tresivio variety, the element (-)i could be understood as a specialized morpheme, given that it is realized only as a determiner, as a subject or object clitic - and possibly in prenominal adjectives - but not with other forms, like postnominal adjectives or participles in (19b-b’).

- | | | | | | | | | | |
|------|----|-----|---------------------|-----|----------|-----|-------------------------|--------|----------|
| (19) | a. | a | ll | a | tʃamað-a | a’. | i | a | tʃamað-a |
| | | SCl | her | has | called-f | | them | he.has | called-f |
| | | | ‘He has called her’ | | | | ‘He has called them(f)’ | | |
| | b. | a | ll | a | tʃamat | b’. | i | a | tʃamat |
| | | SCl | him | has | called | | them | he.has | called |
| | | | ‘He has called him’ | | | | ‘He has called them(m)’ | | |

In addition, in the Tresivio dialect, verbs do not externalize 3rd person number agreement by means of a specialized plural inflection; in the verbal paradigm, 3rd singular, 3rd plural, 2nd singular and 1st plural coincide in an identical form, as illustrated in (20). Thus, the agreement morphology of the verb is reduced and appears only on the 1st person singular and 2nd person plural. It is subject clitics *əl*, *la* and *i* that differentiate 3rd person singular from plural; the plural is lexicalized by the *i* morpheme, indifferently for masculine and feminine, like the determiners of nouns.

- (20) dɔrm-i
te dɔrum
əl/la dɔrum
əŋ dɔrum
dur'm-i
i dɔrum
‘I sleep/you sleep/ etc.’

Following the generalization of Vikner (1997), the presence of a specialized inflection in a sub-set of forms allows us to assume that the usual verbal agreement mechanism applies. More precisely, we conclude that for instance in (21), subject clitics do the same work as determiners in lexicalizing, or contributing to lexicalize, the plural interpretation [$\subseteq$]. In other words, object clitics in (19) and subject clitics and articles in (21) lexicalize the plural content, independently of whether the verbal or nominal head have a specialized morphology for it.

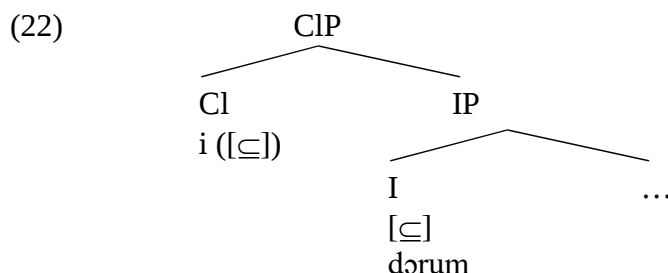
- | | | | | | | | | | |
|------|----|-----|-------------|-------|-----|--------|------------------|--------|-------|
| (21) | a. | ly | əl | dɔrum | a’. | i | re'das | i | dɔrum |
| | | he | SCl.m | sleep | | the.pl | boy | SCl.pl | sleep |
| | | | ‘He sleeps’ | | | | ‘The boys sleep’ | | |
| | b. | le | l-a | dɔrum | b’. | i | femm-a | i | dɔrum |
| | | she | SCl-f | sleep | | the.pl | woman-f | SCl.pl | sleep |

² On the basis of Vikner (1997), Costa and Figueiredo conclude that despite the partial lack of Verb agreement in Brazilian Portuguese, it requires V-to-I movement and agreement just like European Portuguese.

‘She sleeps’

‘The women sleep’

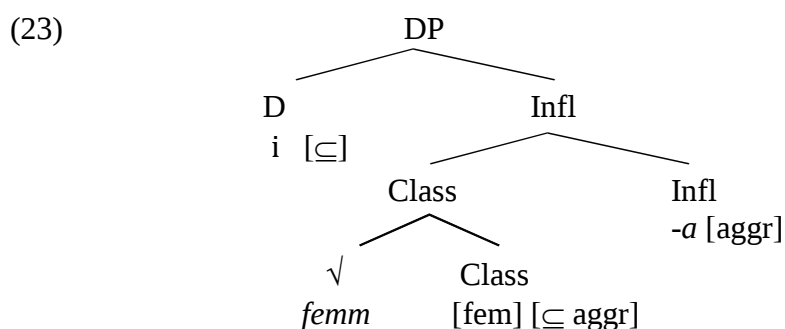
The fact that the plural *(-i)* systematically lexicalizes the plural independently of gender distinctions means that its only content is the pure property of plural, like *-i* in the Iacurso dialect in section 2. We conclude that this morpheme is associated to what we have characterized as the plural interpretation, i.e. the part-whole relation $[\subseteq]$. This reading includes both the inflectional occurrence of *-i* and its occurrence as an object or subject clitic in (19) and (21), as in the representation in (22) for its subject clitic occurrence.



Moreover, data like (16c') show that the plural agreement morphology *-i* may occur in prenominal adjectives. Possessives in turn lexicalizes $[\subseteq]$, even if by means a morpho-phonological device. In order to account for these facts we need to consider *-a* first.

The distribution of *-a*, does not fit in with the distinction proposed by Costa and Figueiredo. In Portuguese and Spanish and other Romance varieties, *-s* introduces plural without interacting with the Class category and the vocalic inflection. By contrast, recall that Italian dialects, as well as Italian, express plural by changing the inflection, and possibly Class, as seen for the *-a* plural in Iacurso dialect in section 2. A consequence of this is that in Italian varieties, while the plural in masculine DPs is lexicalized by *-i* or other types of morphology specialized for $[\subseteq]$, in feminine combinations *-a* is able to externalize the plural. The case of possessives is telling. The *-a* inflection with plural value is retained independently of the fact that a specialized morphology for the plural is available, not necessarily associated to the determiners, but extended to prenominal modifiers in the masculine. In a word, *-a* expresses the plural in feminines. The possibility for *-i* to occur in masculine adjectives and nouns contributes clarifying that *-a* is really the plural inflection of feminines.

The question is why *-a* is compatible with both the singular and the plural – while we have no attestations of comparable Romance patterns with the masculine (*-u*, *-o* inflectional classes). We argue that this is just a different manifestation of the fact that *-a* has the content that in section 2 we have characterized as $[\text{aggr}]$. This is sufficient to lexicalize plural, though determiners require a specialized plural inflection $[\subseteq]$. Specifically, we obtain a structure like that in (23), where the $[\subseteq]$ specification, introduced by the root, is externalized by the $[\text{aggr}]$ content triggered by the *-a* inflection.



(23) confirms the idea of section 2 that *-a* is assigned the content $[\text{aggr}]$, which in the Tresivio dialect subsumes the plural reading in combination with the feminine Class. So, only the determiner has a

specialized number inflection also in the feminine. In the Tresivio dialect this form is in fact the same as for masculine, hence it is a pure gender-neutral plural.

This leaves the question open why determiners take the plural *-i* inflection, also in the context of feminine nouns. Costa and Figueiredo (2002) explain the association of the plural *-s* with determiners by assuming that “it must be attached to the head responsible for establishing the link with semantic interpretation”, that is the determiner, introducing the definite reading. Naturally, we agree with the idea that determiners have a crucial interpretive role, in that they provide definiteness and other deictic informations to the C-I system. Manzini and Savoia (2005: 8.2.3, 8.2.5), in discussing a similar distribution of the plural inflection *(-i)* in DP of some Italian varieties, conclude that the plural inflection “appears on the functional elements of the phrase in that they lexicalize the definiteness properties associated to the D position of the DP”. In other words, we may expect some type of morpho-syntactic split, whereby definiteness and deictic elements are endowed with specialized morphology given the play role they in the identification of the participants in (arguments of) the event. In the case at hand this is true of the *(-i)* morphology introducing the plural reading [_☐]. We assume that the relevant property is simply intrinsic to the lexical entries involved, namely determiners and clitics, and interpreted when merged in a sentential context.

Languages strongly vary in the morphemes-syntax arrangements and DM or cartographic interpretations face these wide and subtle linguistic differentiation essentially by denying its syntactic import. What matters in syntax, and hence at the C-I interface are abstract underlying patterns that are largely universal; all that is left is differences in pronunciation that are by definition removed from both structure and interpretation. Our proposal, grounded on the ability of the inflectional elements to convey specialized semantic content, seems to be more revealing to the extent that it allows morphological variation to be dealt with within a restrictive (minimalist) syntactic component.

4. Conclusions

This work has dealt with two main questions, the theoretical status of inflection, on the basis of Romance varieties, and the particular behavior of *-a*, as possibly introducing a plural interpretation besides the feminine one that it normally lexicalizes. We develop a model in which inflectional morphemes are endowed with interpretable content and their combination with the roots gives rise to different meanings. In Central Calabrian, the *-a* plural results from the combination of the plural content [_☐] and the [aggr] content, where the *-a* Infl element has [aggr] content. Vice versa the *-i* Infl is specialized for [_☐] content. In short, Central Calabrian has [masc] and [fem] gender Classes – and what would be traditionally called a neuter plural, here however understood to correspond to an [_☐, aggr] class. The varieties that extend *-a* inflection to plural as well, like that of Tresivio, provide evidence for a [fem], [aggr] Class externalized by *-a*. So, we propose that the superficial syncretism in the occurrence of the inflection *-a* can be adequately explained in the terms of a theory based on the assumption that any morpheme is associated with interpretive content.

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