

Morphosyntactic Reorganization Phenomena in Arbëresh Dialects: The Neuter*

Benedetta Baldi and Leonardo M. Savoia

Università degli Studi di Firenze (<benedetta.baldi@unifi.it>; <lsavoia@unifi.it>)

Abstract:

Italo-Albanian communities show different degrees of mixing between Arbëresh, the local Albanian dialect, and the Romance variety in contact. In some Arbëresh dialects the mixing is extensive, affecting lexicon, morpho-syntax and phonology. Contact and bilingualism favour changes in the internal organization of the grammar, as generally in the creolization processes (Savoia 2010; Manzini and Savoia 2015; Baldi and Savoia 2016). This contribution addresses the so-called neuter inflection that Arbëresh dialects spoken in Southern Italian communities preserve, an inflection no longer surviving in standard and other varieties of Albanian, where masculine morphology has replaced it. The coincidence between the specialized *-t* neuter inflection in nominative and accusative and the plural inflection *-t* characterizing North-Calabrian Arbëresh led Manzini and Savoia (2017a, 2017b, forthcoming) to connect this morphology with the interpretive properties associated to mass denotation. We hold on to this proposal that has the merit to explain the relation between plural and mass properties. In North-Lucanian and Apulian Arbëresh systems this sub-set of nouns, while maintaining the inflection *-t*, agrees in feminine. This result can be understood as a consequence of the reorganization that affected these partially mixed grammars, where the original morpho-syntactic mechanisms have been lost or modified.

Keywords: agreement, internal reorganization of grammar, Italo-Albanian, neuter

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1. Neuter inflection in Arbëresh varieties

Arbëresh dialects spoken in Southern Italian communities of Albanian origin, preserve the so-called neuter inflection attested in old documents (Demiraj 1985). Now this inflection does not survive more in standard and other varieties spoken in Albania, where masculine morphology has replaced it. If we compare both the inflectional structure and distribution of neuter morphology in different Italo-Albanian varieties some differences show up, so providing a testing ground for the treatment and interpretation of morpho-syntactic micro-variation in contact contexts. Specifically, we will investigate the Calabrian Arbëresh varieties spoken in Firmo, Civita, San Benedetto Ullano (Cosenza) and Vena di Maida (Catanzaro), the Lucanian Varieties of Barile and Ginestra (Potenza), the Apulian varieties of Casalvecchio (Foggia) and San Marzano di San Giuseppe (Taranto); finally we will consider also the data of the variety of Greci (Campania, Avellino). Variation involves the relation between neuter inflection and plural inflection and the agreement with demonstratives and adjectives. Differently from the agreement with demonstratives and pre-nominal/adjectival articles, agreement with the verb and adjectives is in the singular. In the minimalist framework (Chomsky 2001), agreement processes are associated with the rule of Agree – conceived so as to account for agreement in the sentential domain. Following Manzini and Savoia (2005, 2007, 2011), we keep the assumption that Agree also applies within DPs. What impels Agree to apply is the necessity of creating equivalence classes of phi-feature bundles denoting the same referent.

We begin by considering the Arbëresh dialect of Greci in (1), that we will compare with Calabrian dialects of Benedetto Ullano, in (2), Firmo, in (3) and Civita, in (4). In Greci variety, the entire paradigm of neuter singular in (1a) presents the same inflections as the plural forms of count nouns. The plural inflection characterizes also demonstratives, which realize as *kt-a/ a-ta* as illustrated in (1b). We note that *at-a/ kt-a* are originally plural masculine, contrasting with *at-ɔ/ kt-ɔ* plural feminines; however, generally Arbëresh dialects use only one form with ambiguous reference, as in the examples in (1), where *at-a/ kt-a* combine both with feminine and masculine. (1a') and (1b') exemplify plural inflection and demonstratives in contexts with count nouns, showing the formal coincidence between neuter and plural inflection. Besides, the plural inflection appears also in the pre-adjectival article in the contexts combining a neuter noun with an adjective, in (1c) or a genitive, in (1d). In the glosses *-t* morpheme is characterized as Def(inite) and, for the sake of clarity, we assign the gender class, *m*, for *n*, to the lexical bases.

- (1) a. diaθ-t ift tə/ a mir
 cheese.n-Def is Lkr.pl good
 'the cheese is good'
 uj-t tə kroɪ-t ift a mir
 water.n-Def Lkr.pl spring.Obl is Lkr.pl good
 'the water of the spring is good'

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|-------------|
| diaθ-t | na | kəndan / | heŋgra | diaθ-t |
| cheese.n-Def | to.us | like.3ps / | I.ate c | henese.-Def |
| 'I like the cheese/I ate the cheese' | | | | |
| em | nə jund | diaθ | | |
| give.me | a piece (of) | cheese.n | | |
| 'give me a piece of cheese' | | | | |
| b. | at-a/ kt-a | diaθ | | |
| | that/ this-pl | cheese.n | | |
| | 'that/ this cheese' | | | |
| | kt-a | i | diaθ-t | |
| | this-pl | is | cheese.n-Def | |
| | 'this is cheese' | | | |
| c. | trim-a-t | / gra:-t | | |
| | boys.m-pl-Def | / women.fpl-Def | | |
| | 'the boys/the women' | | | |
| d. | at-a | burr-a | / gra: | |
| | those-pl | men.m-pl / women.fpl | | |
| | 'those men/women' | | | |
| | trim-a-t | t / a | mbðɛŋ-a | |
| | boys.m-pl-Def | Lkr.pl | big-pl | |
| | 'the boys are big' | | | |

Greci

The neuter system attested in San Benedetto Ullano in (2), Firmo in (3), Civita in (4) presents the definite nominative/accusative singular inflection *-t* in (2a)-(4a), the demonstrative determiner *at-a/ kt-a* in (2b)-(4b), and the pre-adjectival article *tə* in (2a)-(4a), all coinciding with definite plural forms. Between the base and *-t* the morpheme *-i-* is inserted in contexts of a root final coronal, as in (3a'). The fact that the inflectional exponents and determiners of neuter nouns have the plural inflection is confirmed by the comparison with plural nouns, as in (2c)-(4c), where inflection *-t* characterizes the plural of feminine and masculine nouns. (2d)-(4d) contain the combination of plural demonstratives with a plural count noun. As we noticed above, the plural of demonstratives has just one plural form in *-a* for masculine and feminine, originally the masculine specialized form. Some Calabrian varieties present a demonstrative allomorph specialized for the nominative/ accusative neuter, i.e. *kitt*, as in (2e) for Firmo.

- | | | | | | |
|--------|---|----------------|------------------|---------|--------|
| (2) a. | diaθ-t | / kət-a diaθ/ | at-a diaθ | ŋɛə mə | pərcɛn |
| | cheese.n-Def / | this cheese.n/ | that.pl cheese.n | not | to.me |
| | 'I don't like (the) cheese/that cheese/this cheese' | | | | |
| b. | at-a | diaθ | əft | tə | mir |
| | that-pl | cheese.n | is | Lkr.pl | good |
| | 'That cheese is good' | | | | |
| b'. | aj-ɔ/kj-ɔ | grua | əft | ɛ | ʎart |
| | that-fsg/this-fsg | woman | is | Lkr.fsg | tall |
| | 'This/that woman is tall' | | | | |

- b". a-i/k-i burr əft i λart
 that-msg/this-msg man is Lkr.msg tall
 'This/that man is tall'
- c. bieita diaθ-t / kət-a diaθ frisku/diaθ-t tə barð
 I.bought cheese.n-Def / that-pl cheese.n fresh / cheese.n-Def Lkr.pl white
 'I bought (the) cheese/that fresh cheese/the white cheese'
- d. kət-a / at-a gra/burr-a jan tə λart-a
 these-pl / those-pl women.fpl/men.mpl are Lkr.pl. tall-pl
 'These/those women/men are tall'

S. Benedetto Ullano

- (3) a. diaθ-t əft tə barð
 cheese.n-Def is Lkr.pl white
 'the cheese is white'
- a'. mil-i-t əft tə barð
 flour.n-Def is Lkr.pl white
 'the flour is white'
- b. at-a diaθ
 that-pl cheese.n
- c. burr-a-t / gra:-t
 men.m-pl-Def / women.fpl-Def
 'the men/the women'
- d. at-a burr-a / gra:
 those-pl men.m-pl / women.fpl
 'those men/those women'
- e. kit/ kt-a miaλ mə piλcen
 this.n/ this.pl honey.n to.me likes
 'I like this honey'

Firmo

- (4) a. mij-t
 meat.n-Def
 the meat'
- a'. bar-i-t tə λart
 grass.n-Def Lkr.pl tall
 'the grass is tall'
- b. kt-a mij əft tə rɛʃkt
 this-pl meat.n is Lkr rotten
 'this meat is rotten'
- c. burr-a-t / gra:-t
 men-mpl-Def / women.fpl-Def
 'the men/the women'
- d. kt-a burr-a / gra:
 these men.m-pl / women.fpl
 'these men/these women'

Civita

In Calabrian varieties the oblique forms of neuter, in (5), have the masculine oblique singular inflection *-i(-t)*, as evidenced by the comparison between (5a) for neuter and (5b) for masculine. In contrast, in the dialect of Greci, in (6), the plural oblique inflection *-ui/-ua* occurs.

- (5) a. ε vura pərpəra kət-ij /at-ij diaθ-i /mif-i /miaʎ-i
 it I.put in front of this-msg.Obl /that-msg.Obl cheese.n-Obl/meat.n-Obl/honey.n-Obl
 'I put it in front of this/that cheese/meat/honey'
 kərc-a ε diaθ(-t)-i-t mə pərcən
 rind.fsg-Def Lkr.fsg cheese.n-Obl-Def to.me pleases
 'I like the rind of the cheese'
- b. ε vura purpara at-ij cəlc-i
 it I.put in front of that-msg.Obl glass.m-Obl.msg
 'I put it in front of that glass'

S. Benedetto Ullano

- a. sapur-i i diaθ-i-t
 taste.msg-Def Lkr-msg cheese.n-Obl-Def
 'the taste of cheese'
- b. burr-i-t
 to/of man.msg-Obl-Def
 'to/of the man'

Firmo

- a. pirpara mif-i-t
 in front of meat.n-Obl-Def
 'in front of the meat'
 sapur-i i diaθ-i-t
 taste.msg-Def Lkr.msg cheese.n-Obl-Def
 'the taste of cheese'
- b. burr-i-t
 to/of man.m-Obl-Def
 'to/of the man'

Civita

- (6) a. sapur-i i miay-ui-t
 taste.msg-Def Lkr.msg flour.n.-Obl.pl-Def
 'the taste of the flour'
 a vura para diaθ-ui-t / ati-vr-a diaθ-ui
 it I.put in front of the.cheese.n-Obl.pl-Def / those-Obl-pl cheese.n-Obl.pl
 'I put it in front of the cheese/ those cheese'
- b. j-a ðε trim-ui-t / ati-vr-a trim-ui
 to.them.it I.gave boys.m-Obl.pl-Def. / these-Obl-pl boys.m-Obl.pl
 'I gave it to the boys/to those boys'

Greci

Finally, in some varieties such as those of Firmo and Civita in (7), neuter nouns admit a special plural feminine inflection *-ər-a*, coercing (cf. Cowper and Currie Hall 2012) the interpretation ‘types of’ (or possibly ‘pieces of’). This inflection is generally present in the Albanian varieties as a sort of collective suffix (Genesin 2012); more precisely it is the plural of nouns denoting ‘a plurality of weakly differentiated parts’ in the sense of Acquaviva (2008) like ‘the fingers’, ‘the bones’, as illustrated in (7b).

- (7) a. diaθ-ər-a-t
types of cheese.n-Affix-pl-Def
‘types of cheese’
b. ɛft-ər-a-t
bone.m-Affix-pl-Def
‘the bones’

Firmo

- a. mij-ər-a-t
types of meat.n-Affix-pl-Def
‘types of meat’
b. jift-ər-a-t
finger.m-Affix-pl-Def
‘the fingers’

Civita

Summarizing so far, an unexpected occurrence of *-t* shows up, that introduces the definite inflection of nominative and accusative singular in a sub-set of nouns, traditionally called neuter (Demiraj 1985). That definiteness morpheme *-t* is a sort of plural is demonstrated by its agreement with the plural form of the pre-adjectival articles in (1)-(6) and by the fact that *at-a/ kt-a* demonstratives combine with masculine and feminine plurals, as in (1d)-(4d).

2. Noun internal structure. Neuter, plural and mass nouns: a proposal

In what follows we adopt the analysis of nominal inflection and case of Albanian varieties developed in Manzini and Savoia (2011b, 2012, 2017a), where inflectional phenomena depend on the same basic computational mechanisms underlying syntax (Chomsky 2005; Manzini and Savoia 2005, 2011a, 2011b, forthcoming). Inflected nouns are analysed as the result of the Merge operation that combines a lexical root with gender (feminine/masculine) and other classificatory properties, including case and number, that contribute to specifying the argument introduced by the lexical root. The first component of the Noun is a root; following Marantz (1997), the root $\sqrt{\quad}$ is category-less. Next to the root a vocalic morpheme encodes properties that, depending on the language, include gender/declension class and/or number. A third slot may be available, specialized for number (e.g. Spanish) or for case (e.g. Latin).

In keeping with the proposals of Chomsky (1995, 2005) morphosyntactic structures are projected from the lexicon, where we understand lexical items as pairs of Conceptual Intentional (CI) and Sensory Motor (SM) properties. In the standard Distributed Morphology (DM, Halle and Marantz 1993) treatment of inflectional class (Oltra-Massuet and Arregi 2005; Kramer 2015) Th(ematic vowel) node adjoined to Class/*n* postsyntactically. The content of Th are diacritics such as [I], [II], etc. for I, II inflectional class, etc. in turn spelled out as *-a*, *-o*, etc. for example in Spanish. We do not agree with this treatment based on a countercyclic operation and on the redundant stipulation of both inflectional classes and their corresponding vowels. Instead, we introduce an Infl node to host inflectional vowels selecting the underlying bases.

In Albanian varieties, case, gender and plural inflection overlap in the sense that a systematic syncretism shows up whereby the same endings correspond to different interpretations (Manzini and Savoia 2012). Leaving out morphemes with more restricted distribution, we have the picture in (8):

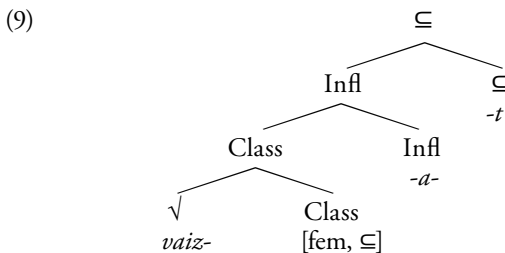
- (8) *-a* indefinite plural in nominative (EPP) and accusative (Internal Argument) contexts: *burr-a* ‘men’/ *vajz-a* ‘girls’
 definite feminine in nominative (EPP) context: *vajz-a* ‘the girl’
-ε indefinite singular oblique in feminine and indefinite plural in a sub-set of feminine
-i definite singular in nominative (EPP) contexts: *burr-i* ‘the man’
 indefinite singular oblique in masculine: *burr-i* ‘of/ to a man’
-n definite singular accusative (Internal Argument) contexts: *vajz-ε-n* ‘the girl’, *burr-i-n* ‘the man’
-t definite plural in nominative (EPP) and accusative (Internal Argument) contexts: *burr-a-t* *vajz-a-t* ‘the men/ the girls’
 definite singular oblique (possessor or beneficiary) contexts in masculines: *burr-i-t* ‘of/to the man’
 definite singular neuter in nominative and accusative contexts, di: *diaθ-t* ‘the cheese’
-s definite singular oblique in feminine, as in *vajz-ε-s* ‘to/of the girl’
-ve indefinite plural oblique: *vajz-a-ve* ‘of/ to girls’, *burr-a-ve* ‘of/ to men’; definite forms include final *-t*, *vajz-a-ve-t* ‘of/ to the girls’, *burr-a-ve-t* ‘of/ to the men’
i, *t(ə)*, *s(ə)*, *ε/a* occur also as linkers - traditionally pre-nominal articles - introducing the post-nominal or predicative adjectives and genitives, as in *burr-i i mad* ‘man.the the big, i.e. the big man’ (Manzini and Savoia 2011b; Manzini *et al.* 2015)

In the model here applied, syncretisms are explained by assuming that the different occurrences of the same morpheme imply one lexical entry endowed with a semantic content able to satisfy different syntactic contexts and interpretations. In this sense we pursue a perspective in which syntactic structure is construed on the basis of the lexical properties of items.

- In keeping with Higginbotham (1985), the category-less root is interpreted as a predicate. The predicate represented by the root has one open argument place (the R-role, Williams 1994), which is ultimately bound by a D/Q operator.

- Gender and number specifications, and in general classifiers, apply to the argument x open at the predicate. In other words, these elements, that we identify with the Class category, restrict the content of the argumental variable bound by D/Q.
- Inflectional elements are separated from the nominal Class properties and inserted in specialized positions, Infl and Number $[\subseteq]$
- Following Manzini and Savoia (2011b, 2017a,b) plural morphology is associated to the property part-whole/ inclusion, i.e. $[\subseteq]$, suggesting that the argument of the root can be partitioned into subsets.
- The same quantificational property of inclusion $[\subseteq]$ characterizes also dative and in general other contexts possessee-possessor/ locative inclusion, etc. (Manzini and Savoia 2012). The externalization of plural by $-t$ $[\subseteq]$ entails definiteness in all contexts.
- Case category can be understood as associated to referential properties, individuating argumental sub-sets.

Let us consider, in this light, the structure of the plural *vaiz-a-t* ‘the girl’ Nom/ Acc. In (9) Class includes gender and other classificatory properties, in this case plural. Infl corresponds to the inflectional formatives, such as *-a*, *-i*, etc., in turn endowed with interpretive properties; the third category, $[\subseteq]$, embedding the other parts of the noun, is the specialized inflection for plural.



We saw that *vaiz-a* can occur both as singular definite nominative and plural indefinite form. Our first conclusion is that *-a* introduces denotational properties sufficient to satisfy the EPP definiteness requirements and plural specifications. The operator notated $[\subseteq]$, that is the part-whole (inclusion) relation, is the reading of *-t* (Manzini and Savoia 2012; Franco *et al.* 2015). This proposal is compatible with the fact that in the plural definite nominative and accusative require this element. In other words, the externalization of the two arguments of a transitive verb or the only argument of an intransitive is satisfied by the simple inflection *-t* introducing definiteness as the result of a part-whole interpretation. When the *-t* takes scope over the noun it attaches to, it contributes plurality as in (10) – namely by individuating a subset of the set of all things that are ‘man’. $[\subseteq]$ says that the set (the property) denoted by the lexical base can include subsets. In conclusion, the case properties identify with definiteness/quantificational properties, as sufficient

to express definiteness requirements implied by what we name nominative or accusative.

- (10) a. *burr-a-t* ‘the men’
 b. *the x* [$x \subseteq \{\text{man}\}$]
 ‘the *x* such that *x* is a subset of the set of things with the property ‘man’

A count singular is an atomic individual. A count plural is a set of atoms/individuals, whose subsets are in turn sets of atoms. As for the occurrence of *-t* morphology in the oblique, e.g. as complement of a noun, of a preposition or a ditransitive in (11) (cf. (5)-(6)), we can connect the part-whole relation to the meaning of genitives/ datives (possession). Following Belvin and den Dikken (1997) on ‘have’ and the proposals in Manzini and Savoia (2012), we take the relevant characterization of possession to be an ‘inclusion’ one, hence the notation \subseteq . Locatives in turn specify the inclusion within of a referential space.

- (11) a. *libr-i i* *burr-i-t*
 ‘the book of the man’
 i.e. ‘the book’ ‘included by/possessed by’ ‘the man’
 b. *ja ðε burr-i-t*
 ‘I gave it to the man’
 i.e. ‘it’ ‘included by/possessed by’ ‘the man’

Civita

Coming back now to the neuter paradigm illustrated in (1)-(7), the crucial point is that neuter nouns select the plural inflection morpheme *-t*, including the linker *t* in combination with adjectives or genitives. Nevertheless, verbal agreement is in the singular, as in the examples in (1)-(6). According to Manzini and Savoia (2017a, 2017b, forthcoming) the selection of plural inflection in neuter is explained by assuming that neuter nouns have a mass content. This, on the one hand, confirms that the content of *-t* is not generically ‘plural’, but a more sophisticated property, here characterized as \subseteq , and, on the other hand, that there is a link between mass and plural interpretation. The link between mass nouns and plural inflection, is documented in the literature for different languages.

In Shona (Déchaine *et al.* 2014) a class of mass nouns is characterized by the *mì* prefix which in count nouns externalizes the plural.

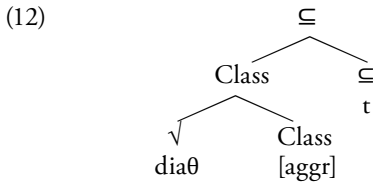
In Dagaare (Gur, Niger-Congo-Grimm 2012), the same *-ri* morpheme is the exponent of plural for individuated referents but of the singular for less or not individuated ones (like ‘seed’), including mass-nouns.

In Persian, the plural inflection *-hâ* can combine with mass nouns introducing a definite reading (Ghanabiadi 2012).

The occurrence of the same *-t* morphology on a non-countable singular suggests that the same part-whole operator is relevant. In this instance how-

ever it corresponds to the existence of non-atomic parts in the mass continuum denoted by the predicative base. In other words, a singular mass noun is treated like a plural count noun; this can be connected to the fact that both include a multiplicity of some sorts – namely a multiplicity of individuals, or a multiplicity of parts. Manzini and Savoia (2017a, 2017b, forthcoming), Savoia *et al.* (2018) argue for an analysis that identifies the mass content with the [aggregate] interpretive property, where [aggr] is understood as the conceptualization of a weakly differentiated set of parts/atoms (Acquaviva 2010). The notion of aggregate is used by Chierchia (2010) to characterize the common core of mass and plural denotation. This can help us to highlight the link between plural inflection, externalizing a plurality of atoms, and mass denotation, corresponding to a continuum of weakly differentiated parts.

In the structure in (12), the Class category introduces classificatory properties of the lexical base $\sqrt{\text{dia}\theta}$, i.e. [aggregate], corresponding to the mass interpretation. The inflectional morpheme associated to $[-t]$ embeds the combination $\{\{\text{dia}\theta\} \text{aggr}\}$; in other words, the plural reading of $-t$ is compatible with [aggregate], that in its own specifies a type of concealed weakened plurality of parts.



x is a part of the undifferentiated/ weakly differentiated continuum of parts of ‘cheese’.

An interesting point of the data we are examining is that the typologically and functionally separate notions of nominal class, number and case can be lexicalized by the same exponent, the $-t$ inflection, as discussed by Manzini and Savoia (2011b, 2012). In other words, it is the traditional categories of number etc. that are to some extent opaque; surface morphological fact may, after all, provide interesting pointers to deeper (ontological) categories of natural languages. In (12) the $-t$ definite plural morphology selects a lexical base specifying ‘an aggregate of components/ atoms of imaginable continuums (substances/ events).

This analysis accounts for the fact that Arbëresh neuter prevents the ‘plurality of individuals’ interpretation. In other words, the morphology of Albanian brings the relation between plurality and mass interpretation to light by associating the same plural inflection to count nouns and singular of mass nouns, as schematized in (13a), contrary to usual systems of the type

in (13b), where mass nouns fall in the same inflectional class of the singular count nouns.

- (13) a. plural count nouns + singular mass nouns vs. singular count nouns
 b. plural count nouns vs. singular nouns (mass/count)

The conclusion is further corroborated by two phenomena:

- In Greci's dialect plural morphology concerns the entire paradigm of neuter, including also the oblique, in which the specialized plural inflection *ui/ua* occurs, as in (6).
- In Calabrian dialects also the mass nouns with feminine definite inflection *-a* require the plural forms of demonstratives and linkers, as in (14). This confirms the idea that the conceptual nucleus of mass nouns is an aggregate of parts, so complying with the plural morphology. This relation, in these varieties, is externalized having recourse to the plural inflection.

- (14) a. *ver-a* *tə* *barð-a*
 wine.fsg-Def Lkr.pl white-pl
 'the white wine'
- b. *at-a* *ver-a* *ɔft* *tə* *mir*
 this-pl wine.fsg-Def is Lkr.pl good
 'this wine is good'

Civita

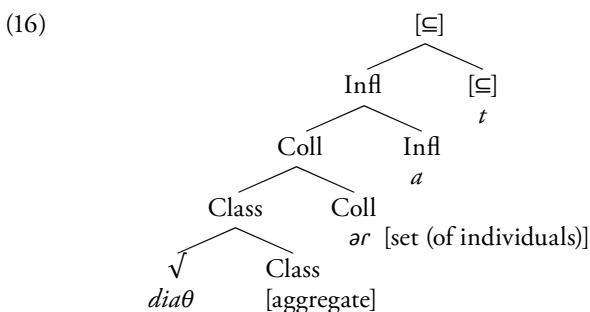
In these varieties, the pluralization of mass nouns requires the suffix *-ər-*, involving a 'type' interpretation, followed by the normal *-a* inflection of the plural and the plural definite morphology *-t*, as illustrated in (7a). Interestingly, this type of pluralization may include also the feminine mass nouns like *ver-a* 'the wine', as in (15), where the plural form *ver-ər-a* 'types of wine' in (15a) is compared with the singular form in (15b). As we see, the pre-nominal modifier and the linker have the plural form, whereas the agreement with the verbal and adjectival inflection is different, plural in (15a) and singular in (15b).

- (15) a. *kt-a* *ver-ər-a* *jan* *tə* *mir-a*
 these.pl wine.f-Affix-pl are Lkr.Def.pl good.pl
 'these types of wine are good'
- b. *kt-a* *ver.fsg* *əft* *tə* *mir*
 these.pl wine is Lkr.Def.pl good
 'this wine is good'

Firmo

The suffix *-ər-*, as shown in (7b), usually characterizes the plurals of the type of 'fingers', 'bones', etc., where *-ər-* introduces collectives including

weakly differentiated parts which are generally represented together. Following Wiese (2012), collectives conceptualize set(s) of individual referents, understood as lacking a clear-cut individuality (Acquaviva 2008). So, this suffix implies some sort of countable interpretation for the argument of the root, i.e., in this instance, ‘types of cheese’, ‘pieces of cheese’ etc. We tentatively treat the suffix *-ar-* as a mereological category that specifies a collection of weakly differentiated individuals, as such able to combine with [aggregate] class characterization, as in (16).



The combination with an aggregate reading gives rise to the collective interpretation referring to types or parts of the same substance.

Before concluding this section, we will dwell on the mechanism of agreement. Following recent proposals discussed in Manzini and Savoia 2005, 2007, 2011, Savoia *et al.* 2017, agreement is a morphological-level saturation of arguments (cf. Chomsky *et al.* to appear). The Agree rule matches elements, i.e. lexical items, that are all interpretable and as such contribute to saturating the same argument slot(s). This model departs from current minimalist practice, in many respects, questioning the idea that agreement is a mechanism whereby unvalued features on a Probe match inherent valued features on a Goal. We adopt a model that presupposes that each morpheme is associated with a content able to predict its distribution. As a consequence, the different occurrences, say, of *-a* are not an instance of syncretism in the sense of DM, but an instance of ambiguity, in the sense that the interpretive category the morpheme is associated to, is sufficient to explain its ability to express plurality and feminine. In other words, what for us is the ability of a lexical item to externalize superficially different interpretations, is very conceptually distant from the treatment by DM, that assigns a complete pre-established set of interpretive categories to each syntactic node, which, later, morphology takes care of obscuring. This mechanism appears to be strongly doubtful in terms of simplicity conditions and, in a more theoretical perspective, as it is inconsistent with the requirements of evolvability and learnability of the language design (Chomsky *et al.* to appear).

3. Loss of neuter: masculine vs feminine agreement

Not all dialects comply with the distribution so far depicted. What we see is that the loss of neuter inflectional system leads to possible solutions, whereby masculine or feminine inflection is selected on demonstratives and in adjectival constructions. However, in all the dialects that select the masculine or feminine agreement, nominative and accusative definite forms preserve the *-t* inflection; in other words, this exponent keep characterizing this subset of nouns, separating it from the masculine class in *-i* and the feminine class in *-a*. What changes is the type of agreement, that implies masculine or feminine demonstratives and linkers/ adjectives, according to the different varieties. The oblique generally matches with the gender agreement.

In the dialect of Vena (Central Calabria) demonstratives, adjectives and pre-nominal articles (linkers) have the masculine inflection, in (17). Vena's dialect has in turn the plural inflection *-ər-a*, in order to specify a plurality of types, as in (17c). These last forms require the feminine agreement on demonstratives and adjectives.

- (17) a. diaθə-tə
cheese.n-pl.Def
'the cheese'
- b. k-i diaθə ɛft i mirə
this-msg cheese.n is Lkr.msg good
'this cheese is good'
- c. a't-ɔ diaθ-ər-a jan tə zɛz-a
those-pl cheese.n-Aff-pl are Lkr.pl blak-pl
'those types of cheese are blak'
- d. k-i jə'ri / at-ɔ jɛrəs
this-msg man.msg / those-pl men.mpl
'this man / those me'

Vena di Maida

On the contrary, most Arbëresh dialects select feminine inflection on demonstratives and linkers/ adjectives in agreement contexts. This system characterizes the varieties at the border between Apulia and Lucania, as illustrated by the data of Casalvecchio (Apulia) and Barile (Lucania) in (18)-(19) and (20)-(21) for prepositional contexts. (18c) and (19c) show the corresponding occurrence of the feminine agreement with feminine count nouns, such as *kəmiʃ* 'shirt' and *grua* '(the) woman'. In (19a) *-s* oblique inflection is realized.

- (18) a. mil-t ift a barð-a
flour.n-Def is Lkr.fsg white-fsg
'the flour is white'
- a'. əm diaθ-t
give-me cheese.n-Def
'give me the cheese'

- b. aj-ɔ / kj-ɔ diaθ / mil mə pəʎcɛn
 that-fsg / this-fsg cheese.n / flour.n to.me pleases
 'I like that / this cheese / flour'
- c. kj-ɔ / aj-ɔ kəmiʃ ift a barð-a
 this-fsg / that-fsg shirt.fsg is Lkr.fsg white-fsg
 'this/that shirt is white'
- c'. k-i / aj-i cɛʎc ift i barð
 this-msg / that-msg glass.m is Lkr.msg white
 'this/that glass is white'
- Barile
- (19) a. ʃaθ-t / miəl-t / miʃ-t ift a mir-a
 cheese.n-Def / flour.n-Def / meat.n-Def is Lkr.fsg good-fsg
 'the cheese/the flour/the meat is good'
- a'. bʎeva ʃaθ-t a rɛ
 I.bought cheese.n-Def Lkr.fsg new.fsg
 'I bought the new cheese'
- a''. pɛva vajz-ən
 I.saw girl-fsg.Def.Acc
 'I saw the girl'
- b. aj-ɔ / kj-ɔ ʃaθ / miʃ ma kəndat
 that-fsg / this-fsg cheese.n / meat.n to.me likes
 'I like that/this cheese/meat'
- c. kj-ɔ / aj-ɔ grua ift a bukr-a
 that-fsg / this-fsg woman.fsg is Lkr.fsg fine-fsg
- c'. k-i / aj-i bur ift i bukr-i
 this-msg / that-msg man.m is Lkr.msg fine-msg
 Casalvecchio
- (20) a. pəpəra diaθ-t
 in front of cheese.n-Def.Acc
 'in front of the cheese'
- a' pəpəra kəmiʃ-ən / cɛʎc-ən
 in front of shirt-f.Def.Acc / glass-m.Def.Acc
 'in front of the shirt/the glass'
- Barile
- (21) a. pəpəra ʃaθ-s / miʃ-s / miəl-s
 in front of cheese.n-Oblfsg / meat.n-Def.fsg / flour.n-Def.fsg
 'in front of the cheese/the meat/the flour'
- pəpəra asaj ʃaθ
 in front of that.Obl.fsg cheese.n
 'in front of that cheese'
- b. pəpəra asaj grua / atij ʃaʎ-i
 in front of that.Obl.fsg woman.fsg / that.Obl.msg cock.m-Obl.msg
 'in front of that woman/that cock'
- Casalvecchio

In S. Marzano variety an advanced contact bilingualism is documented (Savoia 1980, Manzini and Savoia 2007). Again, the feminine agreement is extended to the nouns of this class; as in the other varieties, the *-t* morphology embraces nominative and accusative, in (22a,b,c). Some informants prefer masculine agreement for *mialə* ‘honey’, maybe induced by the Italian gender, as reported in the example in (22c). The data in (22b) illustrate the occurrence of the feminine agreement on the linkers in predicative and adjectival contexts. The oblique is realized by the feminine inflection *-sə*, as in (22d). Finally, the morphology of masculine and feminine nouns is shown for the sake of comparison in (22a’), (22b’), (224c’) and (22d’).

- (22) a. aj-ɔ / kj-ɔ miələ / uɟə / miɟə
 that-fsg/ this-fsg flour.n / water.n / meat.n
 ‘that/ this flour / water / meat’
 mə pərcəkətə uɟə-tə / miɟə-tə / miar-t
 me it.pleases water.n-Def / meat.n-Def / honey.n-Def
 ‘I like the water / the meat / the honey’
- a’. a-i / k-i burrə / aj-ɔ / kj-ɔ gru-ε
 that-msg / this-msg man.msg / that-fsg / this-fsg woman.fsg
 ‘that / this man’ ‘that/ this woman’
- b. uɟə-tə ift ε ŋgrɔɣərə / friddu
 water.n-Def is Lkr.fsg hot / cold
 ‘the water is hot / cold’
 aj-ɔ miɟə / miɟə-tə iftə ε cərbərə
 that-fsg meat.n / meat.n-Def is Lkr.fsg rotten
 ‘that meat / the meat is rotten’
 miələ-tə ift ε bardə / biε-mmə miələ-tə ε bardə
 flour.n-Def is Lkr.fsg white / give-me flour.n-Def Lkr.fsg white
 ‘the flour is white / give me the white flour’
- b’. vərɲun-j-a ε madd-ε / vərɲun-i i matə
 girl-fsg Lkr.fsg big.fsg / boy-msg Lkr.msg big
 ‘the big girl / the big boy’
- c. biε-mmə aj-ɔ miələ / miɟə-tə / k-i / cɔ miələ
 give me that-fsg flour.n / meat.n-Def / this.msg / fsg honey.n
 ‘give me that flour / the meat / the/ this honey’
- c’. kammə pərə vərɲunə-ni / vərɲunə-nə
 I.have seen boy.m-Acc.msg / girl.f-Acc.fsg
 ‘I saw the boy / to the girl’
- d. sapər-i tə miələ-sə / miɟə-sə / miələ-sə
 taste-msg Lkr.Def flour.n.-Obl.fsg / meat.n.-Obl.fsg / honey.n-Obl.fsg
 ‘the taste of the flour / the meat / the honey’
 vər-ε hpara (n)də miələ(-tə) / uɟə-tə / hpara miələ-sə
 put it in front of Prep. flour.n(-Def) / water.n-Def / in front of flour.n-Obl-fsg
 ‘put it in front of the flour / the water’
- d’. kamm-ja tənə vərɲunə-ti / vərɲunə-sə
 I.have-to.him/her.it given boy.m-Obl.msg / girl.f-Obl.fsg
 ‘I gave it to the boy / to the girl’

S. Marzano

Other original neuter nouns have adopted the declension of feminine or masculine. For instance, *diah* ‘cheese’, has the *-a* feminine inflection. So, its morpho-syntactic behaviour comes to coincide with the one of other feminine mass nouns such as *ver-a* ‘the wine’ and *kripp-a* ‘the salt’, as in (23a,b).

- (23) a. *diah-a* / *vər-a* / *kripp-a* *mə pərcekətə*
 cheese-fsg / wine-fsg / salt-fsg *me it.pleases*
 ‘I like the cheese / the wine/ the salt’
 b. *kammə blərə diahə-nə* / *vərə-nə* / *krippə-nə*
 I.have bought cheese-Acc.fsg / wine-Acc.fsg / salt-Acc.fsg
 ‘I bought the cheese / the wine / the salt’ S. Marzano

Summing up, we observe a clear preference for feminine morpho-syntax, which led the original neuters to assume feminine agreement and feminine exponent in the oblique. The occurrence of a sub-set of feminine mass nouns such as *ver* ‘wine’, *krip* ‘salt’, could contribute to strengthening this solution.

The change from plural to masculine/feminine agreement may be understood as a result of internal mechanisms of morphosyntactic reorganization driven by the contact conditions that have affected Arbëresh systems (Manzini and Savoia 2015, Baldi and Savoia 2016). In the varieties in (18)–(23) a reduced morpho-syntactic system emerges that extends the occurrence of feminine. In the Arbëresh of Ginestra (Lucania) the reorganization of the neuter morphology intertwines with the overall mixed nature of this variety, bringing about an unexpected agreement mechanism combining feminine and masculine in the DP domain and in predicative contexts. In Ginestra neuter nouns preserve the inflection *-t*, demonstratives are in the feminine and Linker and adjectives present the masculine inflection, as in (24a). In oblique contexts the *-t* inflection emerges, as in (24a’).

- (24) a. *miał-t* / *aj-ɔ* / *aj-ɔ titər* *miał* *ift i* *mir-i*
 honey.n-Def / that-fsg / that-fsg other.fsg *honey.n* *is* *Lkr.msg* *good.msg*
 ‘the honey / that honey is good’
diaθ-t / *aj-ɔ* *diaθ* *ift i* *mir-i*
 cheese.n-Def / that-fsg *cheese.n* *is* *Lkr.msg* *good.msg*
 ‘the cheese / that cheese is good’
uj-t / *aj-ɔ* *uj* *ift i* *mir-i*
 water.n-Def / that-fsg *water.n* *is* *Lkr.msg* *good.msg*
 ‘the water / that water is good’
mif-tə / *kj-ɔ* *mif* *ift i* *ngurt-i*
 meat.n-Def / this-fsg *meat.n* *is* *Lkr.msg* *tough.msg*
 ‘the meat / this meat is tough’
 a’ *prəpara* *uj-ət* / *diaθ-t*
 in front of *water-Def* / *cheese-Def*
 ‘in front of the water / the cheese’

Ginestra

- (26) kj-ɔ treiz ift fɔrt-u
 this-fsg table is strong-msg
 ‘this table is strong’
 kj-ɔ gru-a / k-i bur ift pulit-u
 this-fsg woman / this-msg man is clean-msg
 ‘this woman / this man is clean’

Ginestra

3.1 Restrictions on gender inflections and agreement

In the literature the acquisition of loans and the general process of borrowing into a language are connected to the contact processes determined by bilingual linguistic knowledge. Romaine (1995: 64) schematizes the observed tendencies in terms of functional generalizations, implicationaly ordered as in (27).

(27) Hierarchy of borrowing	Ease of borrowing
Lexical items	High
Derivational morphology	↑
Inflectional morphology	↓
Syntax	Low

The tendency to prefer nouns is related by the authors to the wider autonomy that nouns have in the discourse (Romaine 1995). On the contrary, verbs need to be integrated in the morpho-syntactic system of the host language. Another generalization concerns the fact that loan processes and interference would tend to spare the nuclear lexicon – nouns denoting body parts, numbers, personal pronouns, conjunctions, etc. (Romaine 1995; Muysken 2000). Nevertheless, the borrowing of grammatical mechanisms is also frequent (Manzini and Savoia 2015; Baldi and Savoia 2016). In the case that we consider, interference seems to work in reducing agreement to a twofold system of the Romance type. At the same time, at least three main issues remain:

- What is the nature of the *-t* inflection in systems where it by now agree with feminine demonstratives and adjective
- Why feminine is generally preferred in grammars where a new system of agreement is introduced
- The split between demonstratives and the other lexical and functional categories inside DP (and in predicative contexts).

As to the first question, we can think that *-t*, insofar as it is endowed with the quantificational content [⊆], is available for interpretation involving a definite argument, typically in nominative/ accusative plural and in definite oblique. In fact, we have associated this interpretation to the definite neuter in (12), in the case of dialects that preserve the original system of the neu-

ter agreement in (1)-(7). We conclude that *(-)t* has been preserved also in the other varieties where the old type of agreement of neuters has been eroded in favour of a different system, for instance feminine in (16)-(19). This, by virtue of its $[\sqsubseteq]$ nature, is able to combine with any gender and agreement class. Less clear is the preference for feminine agreement on demonstratives and adjectives. We can only suppose that feminine class has a content more suitable to externalize the aggregate content of the neuter sub-class. This possibility is reasonable to the extent that feminine class inflection *-a* combines in Albanian both plural and feminine singular interpretations. This distribution recalls the behaviour of *-a* in many Italian Romance varieties, including standard Italian, where *-a* specifies both feminine singular and (a class of) plural. Manzini and Savoia (2017a, b), Savoia *et al.* (2017, 2018) propose that the *-a* is associated to the [aggregate] reading. In the case of Albanian varieties we noticed that *-a* characterizes masculine and feminine plurals such as *burr-a* ‘men’/ *vajz-a* ‘girls’ and feminine definite singular nominative *vajz-a* ‘the girl’. Moreover, feminine is also associated to mass reading, where it triggers the plural agreement, as in (14). This behaviour could suggest that feminine is available for an aggregate interpretation also in Albanian. In other words, this distribution seems to evoke a content including both singular and plural, similarly to Romance feminine. Here, we only suggest that this referential property could explain the preference for feminine agreement for mass noun in the internal reorganization phenomena occurring in Arbëresh dialects.

The last question is the co-occurrence of the feminine in pre-nominal demonstratives with the *-t* inflection on nouns. The compatibility between feminine pre-nominal demonstratives and masculine inflected adjectives showing up in the dialect of Ginestra in (24)-(25), broadens the set of phenomena involving the interpretive difference between referential elements, such as demonstratives, and nouns/adjectives. As we have discussed in the preceding section about the data of Ginestra, the selection of feminine is connected with the requirement of a stronger denotational capability. We may expect that the domain of determiners realizes specialized referential properties, considering the role they play in the identification of arguments. More precisely, pre-nominal modifiers contribute to fixing the subset of referents to which noun applies (Savoia *et al.* 2018; Manzini and Savoia, forthcoming). The asymmetry between the agreement properties of determiners – and nominal modifiers/ adjectives – and nouns have been brought to light in the literature (cf. Cinque 2014). Indeed, different types of split emerge, generally concerning the distribution on number specifications (Savoia *et al.* 2018). In the case at hand, the contrast is between feminine on demonstratives and *-t* inflection/ masculine in the NP domain. We have seen that feminine is endowed with a richer denotational content; we can conclude that modifiers select feminine just by virtue of its denotational force and not as a ‘weak’ or default-like type of agreement. This explanation can be extended also to

linkers, insofar as they contribute to identifying the argument introduced by the noun (Manzini *et al.* 2015).

4. Conclusions

This work investigates the distribution of the neuter inflection in some of the Arbëresh dialects spoken in Calabria, Lucania and Apulia in Southern Italy. The original inflection of neuter coincides with the one of plural, at least in nominative and accusative forms, characterizing a sub-set of mass nouns. Other mass nouns belong to the feminine class and present the corresponding inflection. In several Arbëresh communities, language mixing has led to a partial or, in some cases, deep reorganization of the noun systems, affecting also neuters, that show different types of inflection and agreement. As the first point, we have examined the nature of the neuter inflection *-t*, assigning it a quantificational value [\subseteq] that makes it possible to explain its distribution as the definite nominative/accusative and oblique inflection, specifying a referent interpreted as a part of a denotationally recognizable whole.

The second part of this article is devoted to the phenomena of mixing that have induced internal morpho-syntactic and phonological reorganization in Arbëresh varieties. As to neuters, there are dialects where neuter nouns select feminine agreement inflection both on pre-nominal modifiers/demonstratives and adjectives; some tendencies that are driven by Romance agreement. A crucial point is the dissociation between agreement and gender inflection in the sense that usually neuters preserve the *-t* inflection, independently of the gender agreement that is selected. This fits with the proposal that the content of *-t* is substantially quantificational in nature; as for demonstratives and pre-nominal modifiers we have seen that feminine is generally favored, suggesting that it is endowed with a richer referential content.

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