

Italian isoglosses and compositional agreement

Ever since the seminal work by von Wartburg, it has been fairly standard to consider the loss of final *-s* as a diagnostics for typological affiliation: western Romance languages preserve Latin Final *-s*, while eastern Romance languages do not. The isogloss cuts across the Italian peninsula and has been used in the *Atlante italo-svizzero* as one of the major criteria for dialectal membership (isogloss 1) (see a.o. Hall 1976, Tagliavini 1969 a.o.). Nevertheless, within the gallo-italic area the *s*-isogloss leaves a considerable amount of islands where final *-s* has been – at least – partially preserved. Conversely, Ladin, Friulan and Sardinian dialects by times have preserved final *-s* in an inconsistent fashion, maintaining it in some cases, but losing it in others.

The partial conservation of final *-s* are relics of the Latin morphological encoding of grammatical features. In Latin final *-s* is used as a morphological marker both in nominal (and pronominal) morphology and in verbal morphology. In nouns (and adjectives and pronouns) it encodes plural in the accusative (1a-c). In verbs it participates in expressing either a second person feature (2a-b) or a plural feature (2b-c).

- (1) a sg. lupum - lupos
 b sg. illum - illos
 c (sg. me) - nos
 (sg. te) - vos
- (2) a cantas
 b cantatis
 c cantamus

In this paper, I claim that the dialectal relationships can be expressed in a more straightforward way considering the outcome of Latin *-final -s* not as a phonological, but rather as a morphological issue. All dialects that have preserved final *-s*, use this form to encode at least either a plural feature (62 dialects) or a second person feature (74 dialects) as can be seen in (3). Therefore, it seems reasonable to identify two primitive *s*-morphemes: plural and second person.

(3)	N. of dialects	nominal morphology	verbal morphology		
		pl.	2. sg.	1. pl.	2. pl.
a	18		✓		
b	3		✓		✓
c	9	✓			
d	7	✓	✓		
e	28	✓	✓		✓
f	18	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Total (83)	62	74	18	49

The dialectal variation can be seen to follow from the setting of two variables: the substantive properties of morphemic *-s* (whether it encodes plural or second person) and the categorial status of the morpheme (nominal or verbal).

(3)	substantive property	
	categorial property	pl.
a	N	(3c), (3d), (3e), (3f)
b	V	(3f)

The hypothesis that final *-s* encodes one of these features in line with the compositional view of pronouns (see Harley and Ritter 2002) and suggests a similar compositional view of (verbal) agreement as well.

The fact that *-s* happens to play a role in the encoding of plural and second person, may be taken as a consequence of Harley and Ritter's proposal. Since *Addressee* (i.e. second person) and *Group* (i.e. plural) constitute the marked values of distinct feature nodes, resp. *PARTICIPANT* and *INDIVIDUATION*, it seems possible to reinterpret the substantive property of morphemic *-s* as the single realization of the more abstract notion of marked feature, and the dialectal variation as differences in the targets of this morpheme: *PARTICIPANT* or *INDIVIDUATION*.

References

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