

## Gallo-Romance patterns in Italo-Romance: number marking and *bare nouns*

Cristina Guardiano<sup>1, 2</sup>, Emanuela Li Destri<sup>1</sup>, Marco Longhin<sup>1</sup>, Gaia Sorge<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Università di Modena e Reggio Emilia, <sup>2</sup> Scuola Universitaria Superiore IUSS Pavia

The interaction between the licensing of *bare* argument nominals (BNs) and the realization of number alternations on nouns (N) in Romance has been discussed at least since Delfitto/Schroten (1991), who argue that the absence of an overt plural suffix on N prevents the licensing of a null D, thereby rendering BNs ungrammatical. The prediction is borne out in French, where overt plural marking is restricted to a limited subset of Ns. Conversely, in Italian, where Ns lacking overt number marking are the exception, BNs are grammatical (Crisma/Longobardi 2020). This contrast becomes more nuanced once dialectal variation within the Gallo-Romance and the Italo-Romance domains is considered. In this contribution, we examine a selection of such varieties, with particular focus on some Gallo-Italic dialects, and show that, despite variation, the northern Italian “core” patterns with French/Gallo-Romance rather than Italian/Italo-Romance.

In Romance, the ungrammaticality of BNs is a recent diachronic development (Maiden 2016). Latin, endowed with robust number morphology, freely licensed BNs. In our analysis, the disappearance of BNs is linked to the phonological erosion of word-final vowels (Tagliavini 1949), which resulted in the (partial or complete) loss of suffixal morphology, thereby disrupting the morphosyntactic mechanisms responsible for the licensing of null Ds. Relevant examples are discussed below.

In the Italo-Romance dialects where word-final vowels have not undergone loss or weakening to the point of neutralization, number features remain visible on suffixes and BNs are grammatical, resulting in systems that pattern with Italian. This profile is attested, for example, in the Extreme Southern group, as well as in Veneto (1), Ligurian, and Friulian (Poletto/Pinzin 2022a/b), albeit with partially divergent number-marking strategies (Manzini et al. 2020, Pescarini 2020).

- (1) a. pèsego/pèseghi (‘peach/es’)                      ànara/ànare (‘duck/s’)                      VICENZA  
b. go netà **bruscàndoli** e go bevù **acqua**    ‘I cleaned hops and drank water’  
c. el tozeto ‘l ga magnà **dei** pèseghi            ‘the child ate some peaches’

By contrast, in dialects where word-final vowels have been lost or reduced to indistinctness, the overt exponence of number on suffixes is obscured. In most such dialects, these developments have targeted a subset of vowels, yielding “reduced” systems (Manzini/Savoia 2005, vol. III:574) in which some classes of Ns preserve number alternations while others do not. These systems match neither the Italian nor the French type. Similar phenomena have been reported for northern Gallo-Romance (Smith 2016:313-14) and Francoprovençal (Kristol 2016:357). In the Gallo-Italic dialects of Piedmont (Parry 1997, Cerruti/Regis 2020), Emilia and Romagna illustrated in (2), the generalized deletion of word-final vowels except for *-a* results in two main sets of Ns (2a): Ns lacking suffixes and consisting of the bare lexical root, and Ns systematically displaying number alternations. The latter are also preserved in nouns ending in *-al/-el* (e.g., *caval/cavaj*, like in French) and, in some dialects, in restricted sets of Ns affected by metaphonetic processes (e.g., *ffor/ffur*; Foresti 1988, Parry 1997, Savoia/Maiden 1997). Crucially, despite the partial persistence of overt number alternations, BNs are ungrammatical (2b). As in French, D is lexicalized by an “indefinite Partitive Article” (IndefPA, Pinzin/Poletto 2022a/b, Ihsane ed. 2020).

- (2) a. can (‘dog/s’)                      machina/machini (‘car/s’)                      NOVELLARA  
b. a cat \*(**dal**) **furmighi**/\*(**dla**) **polver** dapertot    ‘I am finding ants/dust everywhere’

The Gallo-Italic dialects of Sicily (3) display a similar pattern, with the difference that word-final vowels are not entirely lost: *-a* is typically preserved (as well as *-ö* in Nicosia), while the other vowels are generalized as *-ə*. In some classes of Ns, this yields an opposition where singulars in *-a/(-ö)* alternate with plurals in *-ə* (*scarpa*, *gatö*, *machəna* in 3a), while in other classes the singular/plural alternation is neutralized (*ddibbrə* in 3a). BNs are grammatical (3b), in line with the broader Sicilian pattern. Another property aligning these dialects with the rest of Sicily and setting them apart from the other Gallo-Italic dialects is the absence of IndefPAs (3c).

(3) a. <i>scarpa</i> / <i>scarpə</i> ('shoe/s')	<i>gatö</i> / <i>gatə</i> ('cat/s')	NICOSIA (Trovato/Menza 2020: 94; 781)
<i>machəna</i> / <i>machənə</i> ('car/s')	<i>ddibbrə</i> ('book/s')	AIDONE (Guardiano et al. 2022: 34)
b. <i>ponö veni gəntə</i>	'we can have visitors'	NICOSIA (Trovato/Menza 2020: 302)
<i>an a vənì amizə</i>	'some friends will come'	AIDONE (Guardiano et al. 2022: 19)
c. <i>vittə (*di) cai</i>	'I saw dogs'	AIDONE
<i>aggjə bbəvuitə (*du) vinghə</i>	'I drank wine'	

This evidence shows that BNs are ungrammatical in languages where nominal suffixes have undergone partial or complete loss, in line with the prediction of Delfitto/Schroten (1991). In contrast, not all languages in which BNs are grammatical exhibit generalized number alternations on suffixes. We take this to indicate that, in languages where word-final vowels are preserved across all Ns, they retain suffixal status and remain able to encode number information even in the absence of overt exponence. Accordingly, the mechanism whereby the null operator in D is licensed by the number suffix on N is preserved. In the case of Aidone and Nicosia, the identification of *-ə* as a suffix encoding (plural) number is warranted by oppositions such as *scarpa/scarpə* or *machəna/machənə*; this interpretation then extends to Ns lacking visible alternations (e.g., *ddibbrə*).

Further evidence comes from the Upper Southern group (4; Guardiano/Cambria/Stalfieri 2022). Here, the reduction to *-ə* affects all word-final vowels. Nonetheless, there is evidence for productive morphosyntactic marking of number. In some dialects (see, e.g., Savini 1881:58; Ledgeway 2007:106; Andriani 2017:92), certain Ns retain suffix alternations in selected syntactic contexts (4d). Moreover, many of these dialects have developed compensatory strategies, such as the extension of metaphonetic alternations to lexical roots not etymologically affected by metaphony (Fanciullo's 1994 "morphometaphony"; *debbətə/djebbətə* in 4a). In these dialects, BNs are possible (4b), though with a more constrained distribution than in Italian. This is consistent with the hypothesis that *-ə* encodes the morphosyntactic properties of a suffix, whose number features are accessed through a range of strategies, including harmonic agreement with root-vowel alternations (Manzini/Savoia 2016; see also Koopman 2020 for a distributed analysis of number morphology). Another difference with respect to both Italian and French is the absence of IndefPAs (4c).

(4) a. <i>fiλλə</i>	('child/children')	FRANCAVILLA IN SINNI
<i>ʃorə/ʃurə</i>	('flower/s')	(etymological)
<i>debbətə/djebbətə</i>	('debt')	(non-etymological)
b. <i>Pumbejə vennə pummədorə</i>	'Pompea sells tomatoes'	
<i>tiənəsə farinə?</i>	'have you got any flour?'	
c. <i>emmə vistə (*di) kumbagnə</i>	'we saw friends'	
<i>eggjə vippətə (*du) vinə</i>	'I drank wine'	
d. <i>a makəna bbellə / i makənə bbellə</i>	'the beautiful car(s)'	

Taken together, these data support a connection between the synchronic hypothesis that null Ds can be licensed by suffixes overtly realizing (plural) number on N and the diachronic processes that have led, across large portions of the Romance domain, to the loss of word-final vowels. Within the Gallo-Italic dialects, the data point to a split between two groups. In a "core" area, including at least Piedmont, Emilia, and Romagna (Biondelli 1853), morphophonological erosion has produced effects comparable, though less generalized, to those observed in French and other Gallo-Romance varieties outside of Italy, and has resulted in the vanishing of most nominal suffixes. In these dialects, the ungrammaticality of BNs and the distribution of IndefPAs pattern with French/Gallo-Romance. Conversely, in dialects regarded as more "peripheral", such as Ligurian or Sicilian Gallo-Italic (which, as in many other syntactic domains, patterns with the rest of Sicily: De Angelis 2020), the morphosyntactic mechanisms responsible for number exponence on N (Castiglione 2024) have not undergone comparable disruption, with no consequences for the licensing of BNs.