3SG/3PL syncretism in Italo-Romance verbal inflection

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A number of Romance varieties of the Northern half of Italy and neighbouring areas display identical morphological realization of 3SG and 3PL in verbs. This syncretism is found, for example, in Macerata (see Maiden et al. 2010 and Table 1). It occurs across all tenses, across all conjugations (e.g. first /ˈkanda/ 'sing.3.PRS.IND', /kanˈdɔ/ 'sing.3.PRET') and even in highly irregular verbs /ˈɛ/ 'be.3.PRS.IND', etc.). We hence regard these syncretisms as systematic and qualitatively different from those which, in Italy and beyond, neutralize person-number values in only some tenses (e.g. It. ˈkanti 'sing.SG.PRS.SBJV') or in some conjugations or verbs only (e.g. It. ˈsono 'be.1SG/3PL'). Given the original morphology of these forms, at least some of these 3SG/3PL syncretisms (cf. Latin /kanta:wit/ 'sing.3SG.PRET' vs /kanta:we:runt/ 'sing.3PL.PRET', /est/ 'be.3SG.PRS.IND' vs /sunt/ 'be.3PL.PRS.IND') must be due to morphological rather than sound change, which constitutes further evidence for their systematic nature.

	Present indicative		Present subjunctive		Preterite		Future	
	SG	PL	SG	PL	SG	PL	SG	PL
1	ˈdiko	diˈʧimo	ˈdiko	diˈʧamo	diˈʧii	diˈʧimmo	diˈrɔ	diˈrimo
2	ˈdiʧi	diˈʧete	ˈdiʧi	diˈʧate	diˈʧiʃti	diˈʧeʃte	diˈraj	diˈrete
3	ˈdiʧe	ˈdiʧe	ˈdika	ˈdika	ˈdesse	ˈdesse	diˈra	diˈra

Table 1: 3SG/3PL syncretism in the partial paradigm of 'say' in Macerata (Maiden et al. 2010)

Despite isolated mentions of this syncretic pattern (Politzer 1958, Rohlfs 1968: 256, Benincà et al. 2016: 193, Loporcaro & Paciaroni 2016: 243, Benincà & Vanelli 2016: 147, Loporcaro 2018: 106, Gardani & Romagnoli 2019), we are still largely in the dark regarding its exact extension, as well as its motivation. Here we present a first attempt towards this.
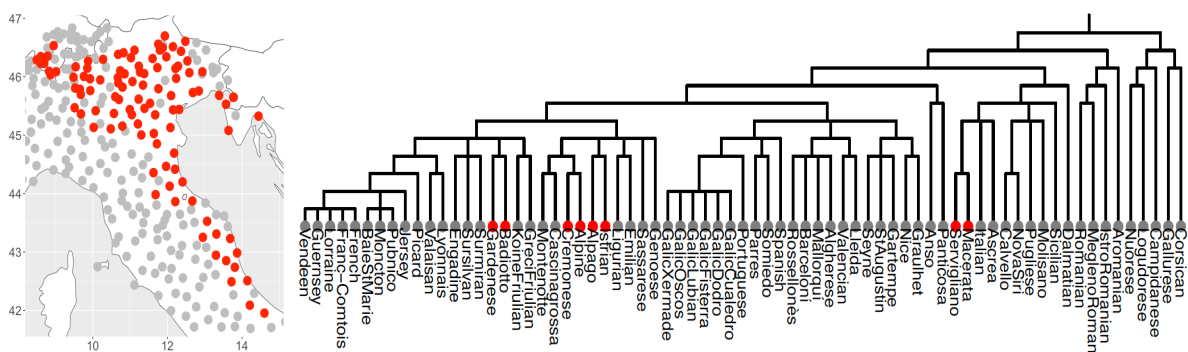

Figure 1: Systematic 3SG/PL syncretism in Northern Italy (left) and within Romance (right)

We inspected in the *Atlante Italo Svizzero* (Jaberg & Jud 1928) which varieties have (red) or lack (gray) 3p-syncretism and found it in 104 of the documented locations (25.6%). We also inspected the syncretism in the Romance varieties documented in Maiden et al. 2010. While the varieties that show the systematic syncretism pattern occupy a geographically contiguous area (lower Po valley and Northern Italy East of the Apennines), they do not constitute a phylogenetic unit within Romance (Glottolog classification, extracted through *glottoTrees*,

Round 2021). This points towards it being a phenomenon which spread areally through language contact (maybe through the influence of Venice/Venetian) rather than through vertical inheritance exclusively.

The success of this pattern of syncretism compared to other ones that exist in Romance could be explained through the same factors that make it the most common one cross-linguistically (see Baerman 2002, and the 'horizontal homophony hierarchy' of Cysouw 2009: 255-256): the more compositional/transparent meaning of number in 3 (i.e. 3+3) compared to other persons (i.e. 2+2, 2+3; 1+1, 1+2, 1+3, 1+2+3), and a greater redundancy of number marking in 3, given the more frequent overtness of third person subjects (often NPs already inflected for number) compared to many null pronouns in first and second. In Northern Italo-Romance, in addition, the emergence of obligatory subject clitics (Pescarini 2022) might have rendered many of these older agreements redundant.

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