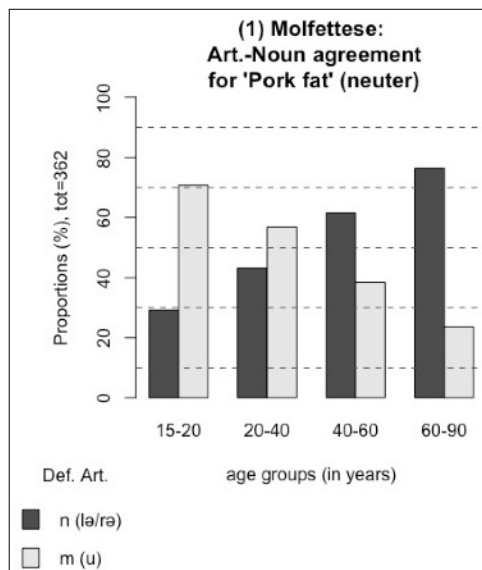


Maceratese and Molfettese: different ways to simplify the neuter-masculine distinction

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Dialects spoken in between the Roma-Ancona line and a line cutting across Puglia and Lucania, display more complex gender systems, featuring a N[neuter] gender class. This class is



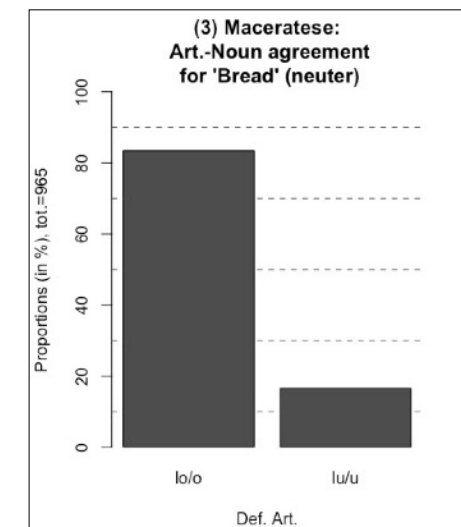
morphosyntactically independent since it has dedicated forms of agreement at least for the definite articles, the demonstratives, and the clitics. Its behavior has been widely investigated (e.g. Campanelli 1896, Contini 1961-62, Lorenzetti 1995, Vignuzzi e Avolio 1991, Schirru 2008), but only a few studies address the present status of the opposition between the N and the M[asculine] in this area. As summarized in Loporcaro (2018: §7), some of the above-mentioned dialects are undergoing a morphosyntactic change by which the N≠M opposition is on its way to being lost and N nouns will eventually be reassigned into the M class. This has been described for example in the Agnonese (Molise) variety in Breimaier (2018)

and the Molfettese (Puglia) variety in Loporcaro et al. (2021) and Breimaier (2021), in which a crowdsourced investigation has shown that younger speakers tend to select an M article with N nouns (1).

	Singular		Plural		
N	lo	'pa	Ø		'the bread'
M	lu	'ka	li	'ka	'the dog'
A	lu	'vrat:ʃu	le	'vrat:ʃe	'the arm'
F	la	'ma	le	'ma	'the hand'

This presentation argues that the same change is unfolding also in the dialect of Macerata (Marche), in which the N≠M opposition is also losing ground, but different intra- and extralinguistic factors come into play here. Maceratese features 4 gender values ((2)), among which the N≠M opposition “relies consistently on the contrast between final unstressed -o vs -u, whose preservation is the defining isogloss of the area” (Loporcaro 2018: 132). In contrast with the Molfettese tendency towards simplification, Maceratese neuter stands out because has been reported

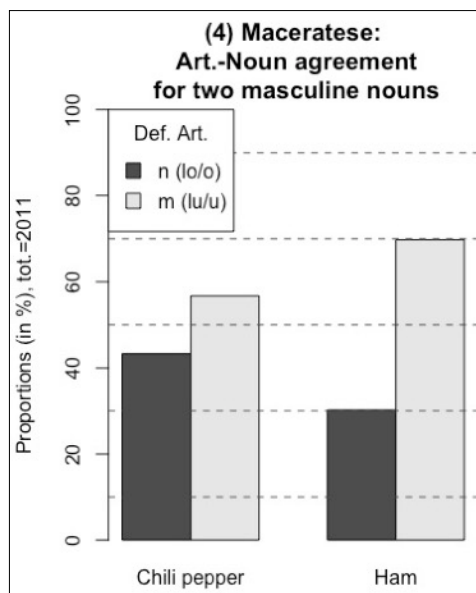
(2): Maceratese gender agreement system (readapted from Paciaroni 2017: 236)



to be “stable” (Paciaroni 2017: 239). This contribution will display the results of a crowdsourced investigation conducted through online questionnaires, which show that the system is not stable in this dialect. The N class seems stable (3). Interestingly, though, the distribution in (4) is unexpected: the two M nouns tend to select N def. articles; for ‘chili pepper’ the two forms of the determiner are in free variation. I will explain this distribution (together with other data on agreement with demonstratives, clitics, and adnominal adjectives) as the results of a phonetic instability that may have repercussions on the gender system. It will be assumed that the phonological distinction between -/o/ and -/u/ is becoming unstable in

Macerata. Already Mengel (1936: 18ss, quoted in Paciaroni 2009: 178) claims that some dialects near Macerata, proximate to the Adriatic coast, show a trend to generalize final *-o* in place of final *-u*. Since the N≠M distinction can be diagnosed only utilizing the behavior of the associated words (Corbett 1991:1), this might eventually be lost in Maceratese due to the instability of this phonological opposition. Evidence from other dialects spoken in the same area will be provided to support this claim; moreover, I will also report preliminary results of a second study, conducted employing Likert scale judgments (Gibson and Fedorenko 2013).

In conclusion, this presentation aims to provide new data about the gender system of Maceratese and to argue that, despite what has been previously assumed, it has not a stable system. The N is losing ground and its nouns will be reassigned to the M. In Molfettese, M articles will be generalized for the blended class, while in Maceratese, the distribution of the two forms of the article displays a high rate of variation. Thus, this contribution, by focusing on a change that invests the morphs-syntax of two Italian varieties, fits in a meeting dedicated to the morphology and the syntax of the Italian varieties.



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