Possessives with kinship terms in Italian and Italo-Romance dialects: Variation and optionality

Francesca Volpato
Ca' Foscari University of Venice
fravol@unive.it

Gianluca E. Lebani
Ca' Foscari University of Venice
gianluca.lebani@unive.it

Abstract

This study investigates the acceptability of constructions containing third-person possessives combined with singular and plural kinship terms in adult bilectal speakers of Italian and different Italo-Romance varieties spoken in six different geographic areas in northern, central, and southern Italy. The sentences to be judged vary according to the presence and position (prenominal vs. postnominal) of the possessive and the presence vs. absence of the definite article. For Italian, results were consistent with the patterns highlighted by previous studies. For the six dialects, much more variation and optionality were observed. Comparing the results of our questionnaire to data reported in AIS maps (Jaberg and Jud [1928] 1940), we found a situation that only partially replicated the picture presented in these documents in the first half of the last century. Regarding contact issues, we found cases of the influence of the dialect on Italian, instances of the influence of Italian on the dialect, and cases where the dialects have changed independently of Italian. By investigating whether participants' language dominance modulated the acceptability of certain patterns, we

found some influence of Italian on the dialect only for speakers with Italian dominance.

1. Introduction

In Italian, possessives may occupy a prenominal or a postnominal position and may occur with the definite article depending on the type of nouns they are associated with. As a general rule, the prenominal position is regarded as the unmarked one, with both common nouns (*il tuo libro* "your book") and kinship terms (*tuo fratello* "your brother") (Cardinaletti 1998, Cordin 2001, Penello 2002). When possessives occur with common nouns, both in the singular and in the plural, the article is always present (*Il mio/tuo/suo libro* "The my/your/his/her book"; *I miei/tuoi/suoi libri* "The my/your/his/her books").

When possessives occur with kinship terms, more variability is observed. The presence of the article depends on the number features of the noun (singular or plural: *mio fratello* ("my brother") vs. *i miei fratelli* ("the my brothers")) and the position of the possessive (prenominal or postnominal: *mio fratello* ("my brother") vs. *il fratello mio* ("the brother my")).

As Cardinaletti and Giusti (2019) pointed out, fairly similar patterns can be observed in the Italian dialects. However, in the Italian dialects, much more variation is observed. The following examples are from map 13 of the Sprach- und Sachatlas Italiens und der Südschweiz (Linguistic and Ethnographic Atlas of Italy and Southern Switzerland, Atlante Italo-Svizzero, AIS: Jaberg and Jud [1928] 1940), a linguistic atlas that collects dialect data from selected single informants across the Italian-speaking area. They show that singular and plural kinship terms may both co-occur with the definite article (2) or both appear without the definite article (3):

(2)   Firenze
        a.   i   tu   frathello
                the   your   brother
        b.   i   tu   frathelli
                the   your   brothers

(3)   Venezia
        a.   to   fradeo
                your   brother
        b.   to   fradei
                your   brothers

This study aims at characterizing the influences resulting from the contact between Italian and a sample of dialects belonging to three distinct sociolinguistic macro-areas: northern, central, and southern Italy. To this purpose, we collected judgments from a group of bilectal speakers. "Bilectalism", a term introduced by Grohmann and Leivada (2012) and Rowe and Grohmann (2013), describes a

sociolinguistic setting in which two closely related varieties, namely a (high) standard variety and a (low) local variety, coexist. This is observed in Italy, where several Italo-Romance dialects coexist with the national standard language, Italian. Berruto (2011:5) had already described the Italian context as a linguistic system in which Italian and dialects coexist in a relationship of "endogenous bilingualism with relatively low structural distance and dilalia". Dialects, indeed, show a high level of proximity to Italian. The reason for that must be sought not only in the history but also in the fact that some characteristics that are peculiar to the dialects gradually disappeared due to their contact with Italian, thus reducing the structural distance from it (Cerruti 2016). Whereas the influence of Italian on the dialects manifests itself in the lexical, phonological, and morphological domains, this pressure is less perceived in the syntactic domain, although a variability of forms and new paradigms are also found (Dal Negro and Vietti 2011). For some properties (for instance, the position of clitic pronouns in some southern dialects), dialects seem to be influenced by Italian (Cerruti 2011, 2016).

Compared to Italian, dialects are mainly confined to oral and informal communication, but their functions and domains increasingly tend to overlap with standard Italian. This led Berruto (1987) to introduce the term "dilalia" to differentiate the Italian sociolinguistic situation from more common situations of diglossia, where high and low varieties serve distinct purposes or are used in different social contexts (Ferguson 1959). To understand the domains and the frequency of use of Italian and dialects, a 2015 survey by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica) studied the language use among Italians aged six and older[1]. About 46% of the population speaks only Italian in family contexts, 32% uses both Italian and dialects, and only 14% mostly uses a dialect. At all ages, a drop in the use of dialect is observed; however, the use of the dialect is still frequent in elderly people. On the diastratic dimension, although Italian is widely spread among a large part of the population, it is more widely employed by people with higher education and higher social status. Conversely, the use of dialect is often considered a sign of a lower level of education (Dal Negro and Vietti 2011).

With this background, in which the boundaries between the two varieties are often not well-defined, this study investigates how certain variables (plural and singular features on nouns, and the dialect spoken by participants) affect the acceptability of determiners and third-person possessives in different positions when combined with kinship terms. In addition, we aim to verify whether their distribution differs from what was reported in the AIS maps. Finally, we investigate whether the regional varieties of Italian have influenced or have been influenced by the dialects spoken in the relevant areas, and we analyze whether the language profile of the speakers impacts sentence acceptability.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the distribution of possessives with kinship terms in Italian. Section 3 turns to a selection of dialects. In presenting the dialectal data, we focus on the varieties of northern, central, and southern Italy we have included in our study. To address the research questions outlined in Section 4, Section 5 presents a questionnaire covering both regional Italian and the dialects and provides some examples of the items proposed for Italian and the

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[1] https://www.istat.it/it/files/2017/12/Report_Uso-italiano_dialetti_altrelingue_2015.pdf

dialects spoken in the relevant areas. Section 6 offers the analysis of the collected data, and section 7 discusses the results.

2. Possessives with kinship terms in Italian

Definite descriptions containing possessives combined with kinship terms can give rise to four patterns. In the singular, if the possessive is prenominal, they normally appear without the definite article, regardless of the person features of the possessive (POSS-N: (4a)-(5a)) (Renzi 2001). The article is obligatorily expressed when the possessives occur with plural nouns (ART-POSS-N: (6a)) (Dardano and Trifone 1985). If possessives are preceded by the definite article with singular nouns (4b)-(5b) or the article is omitted with plural nouns (6b), the construction is marginal:

(4)   a.   mio/   tuo/   suo   fratello
            my/   your/   his/her brother
      b.   *il   mio/   tuo/   suo   fratello
            the   my/   your/   his/her brother

(5)   a.   mia/   tua/   sua   sorella
            my/   your/   his/her sister
      b.   *la   mia/   tua/   sua   sorella
            the   my/   your/   his/her sister

(6)   a.   i   miei/   tuoi/   suoi   fratelli
            the   my/   your/   his/her brothers
      b.   *miei/ tuoi/   suoi   fratelli
            my/   your/   his/her brothers

If the possessive is postnominal, the definite article is obligatory (ART-N-POSS), as demonstrated by the contrast between (7a) and (7b):

(7)   a.   il   fratello   mio / la sorella   mia
            the   brother   my / the sister   my
      b.   *fratello   mio /   sorella   mia
            brother   my /   sister   my

Note that in Italian, the form of the possessive is the same in prenominal (4)-(6) or postnominal (7) position.
      Third-person possessives may be null. The possessive meaning may be conveyed by a noun phrase that only contains the definite article (ART-N).

(8)   a.   Marco mi   ha   presentato   la   sorella
            Marco me   had   introduced   the   sister
            "Marco introduced me to his sister"
      b.   Marco mi   ha   presentato   le   sorelle
            Marco me   had   introduced   the   sisters
            "Marco introduced me to his sisters"

The array of possible forms raises the question whether they are used to the same extent by all speakers of Italian, or if there is variation due to the specific Italian variety spoken.

3. Possessive with kinship terms in Italian dialects

In Italian dialects, much variation is observed with kinship terms regarding the position and the presence of the possessive and its co-occurrence with the definite article. Both Italian and several Italian dialects allow for the omission of the possessive only in the third person singular. Moreover, in some dialects prenominal third-person possessives are null and require a definite article (Giusti 2022 for Anconetano):

(9)   mi padre   / tu padre   / el   padre
       my father   / your father / his/her   father

This is the main reason why our study focuses only on third-person possessives. This section will present data mainly regarding these forms.
        Cardinaletti and Giusti (2019) and Giusti (2022) extensively discuss the occurrence of possessives in both Italian and different Italo-romance dialects, mainly basing their observations on the AIS maps 14 (*tua sorella* "your sister"; *le tue sorelle* "the your sisters"). Cardinaletti and Giusti (2019) point out that as in Italian, prenominal possessives are the unmarked option in several different dialects spoken in the North of Italy, in the western central areas down to northern Lazio, and Sicilia. In Veneto, possessives occur prenominally without articles with singular nouns (*so pare* "his/her father" in e.g. Padova). In Mira, in the province of Venezia, the same possibility is optionally found with possessives combined with plural nouns (*so fradei* "his/her brothers", *i so fradei* "the his/her brothers"). More generally, in the Venetan dialects, the form of possessives may vary depending on the position in which they occur (prenominal or postnominal). In prenominal position, the form is reduced and does not show any gender or number concord (10). In postnominal position, the full strong form occurs, which agrees in gender and number with the noun (11) (Cardinaletti 1998 for Paduan):

(10)   so   fradeo / so   sorea
       his/her brother / his/her   sister

(11)   el   fradeo suo   / ea sorea sua
       the   brother his/her / the sister his/her

        In Toscana, possessives occur prenominally with the definite article with singular nouns both in the singular and the plural (cf. Firenze, *la tu sorella* "the your sister" and *le tu sorelle* "the your sisters", AIS map 14).
   Rohlfs (1968:129) points out that in Campania, third-person possessives are omitted and the noun is only preceded by the definite article (*o cainatə* "the [his/her] brother-in-law"). This phenomenon is widespread in all southern dialects below the Rome-Ancona line (see Figure 1). It is also attested in other parts of Italy.

Figure 1 shows the rendering of four AIS maps (from 27 to 30, accessed through NavigAIS: Tisato 2009) representing the occurrence of third-person possessives and articles with singular and plural kinship terms covering the areas (or close to the areas) in which our questionnaire was administered (see section 5). Each point in the map is represented by four overlapping dots showing the occurrence and the position of the possessive in the areas under investigation: *il suo cognato* "his/her brother-in-law" (top-left), *la sua cognata* ("his/her sister-in-law" (top-right), *i suoi cognati* "his/her brothers-in-law" (bottom-left), *le sue cognate* "his/her sisters-in law" (bottom-right). Our choice fell on these AIS maps because they show the four third-person forms of the possessive with the same kinship term (i.e. *cognato*).

In Veneto, with both masculine and feminine singular and plural nouns, the prevailing form consists of possessives without articles (POSS-N: *so cugnà* "his/her brother-in-law", *so cugnada* "his/her sister-in-law", *so cugnai/so cugnadi* "his/her brothers-in-law", *so cugnae/so cugnade* "his/her sisters-in-law"). One exception to this pattern is found in Ponte nelle Alpi province of Belluno, where feminine plural kinship terms are preceded by the article and the possessive (ART-POSS-N: *le so cugnade* "the his/her sisters-in-law").

In Emilia-Romagna, in the provinces of Ferrara (Baura and Comacchio), Modena (Nonantola), and Bologna (Minerbio), with singular nouns, the prenominal possessive is not preceded by the article (POSS-N: *so cugnà* "his/her brother-in-law", *so cugnada* "his/her sister-in-law"); with plural nouns, the prenominal possessive is preceded by the article both in the masculine (ART-POSS-N: *i so cugnà /i so cugnè*) and in the feminine (ART-POSS-N: Baura: *il so cugnat*; Comacchio: *il su cugnà*; Nonantola: *al so cugnedi*; Minerbio: *al sau cugnè*). In Piacenza and its province, two patterns are found with singular nouns. In Piacenza and Bardi, singular kinship terms are only preceded by the possessive (POSS-N: *so cugnà* "his/her brother/sister in law"). With plural nouns, the prenominal possessive is preceded by the article (ART-POSS-N: Piacenza: *i so cugnà* (masc.), *il so cugnà* (fem.); Bardi: *i so cugnà* (masc.), *ar so cugnà* (fem.)). In two points in the province of Piacenza (Carpaneto and Coli), nouns are preceded by the possessive and the article in both the singular (Carpaneto: *l so cugnà* (masc.), *la so cugnà* (fem.); Coli: *u sa cugnò* (masc), *a sua cugnà* (fem.)) and the plural (Carpaneto: *i so cugnà* (masc.), *al so cugnà* (fem.); Coli: *i sœ cugné* (masc.), *e su cugné* (fem.)). Considering a larger area surrounding Piacenza and including some cities in Lombardia (Cremona, Pescarolo, in the province of Cremona, and Montù Beccaria, in the province of Pavia), the pattern replicates the one found in Piacenza, namely the bare possessive before singular nouns and the possessive preceded by the article with plural nouns.

Figure 1. Rendering of the AIS maps 27, 28, 29, and 30 for the areas of interest. Each AIS point is represented by four dots showing the occurrence and the position of the possessive with a kinship term. TOP-LEFT dot: *cognato* ("brother-in-law": AIS map 27); TOP-RIGHT dot: *cognata* ("sister in law": AIS map 29); BOTTOM-LEFT dot: *cognati* ("brothers-in-law": AIS map 28); BOTTOM-RIGHT dot: *cognate* ("sisters in law": AIS map 30). The firebrick red line marks the so-called "La Spezia–Rimini line" that separates the Northern dialects from the Central and the Southern ones, while the blue line marks the so-called "Roma-Ancona line" that separates the Central dialects from the Southern ones.
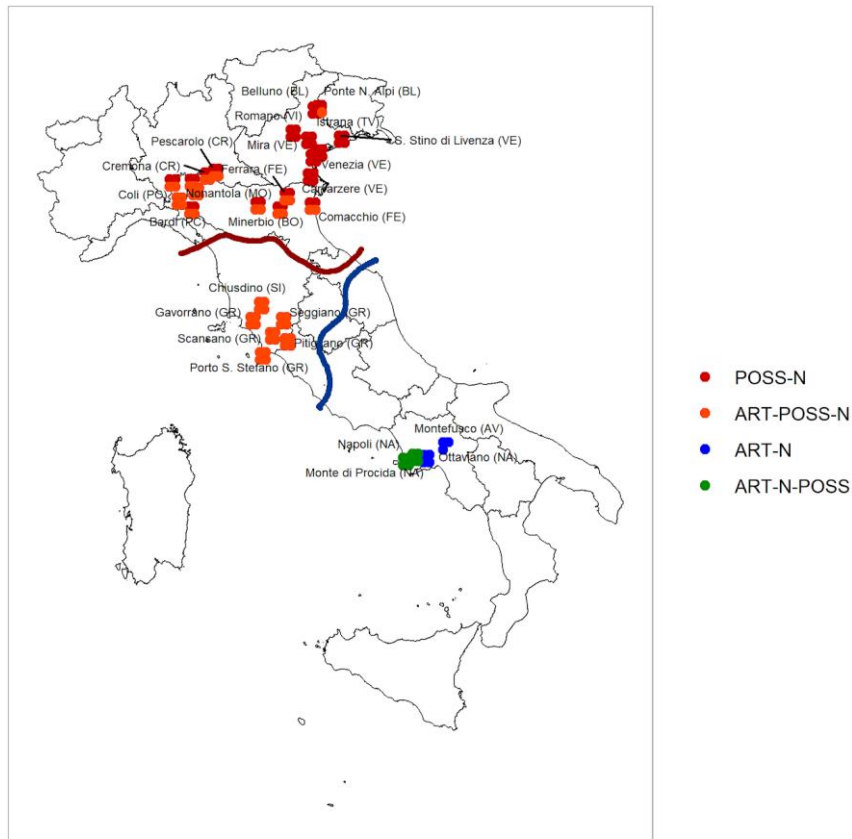
In Toscana (Gavorrano, Scansano, Seggiano, Pitigliano, and Porto Santo Stefano), kinship terms are regularly preceded by the possessive and the article in all forms (ART-POSS-N: masc.sg: *el/al su cugnato/hugnato*; fem.sg: *la su cugnata/hugnata*; masc.pl: *e/i su cugnati/hugnati*; fem.pl: *le su cugnate/hugnate*). The same pattern is found in a point in the surrounding area, in the province of Siena (Chiusdino).

The situation is different in southern Italy, in the area surrounding Napoli[2]. In Napoli and Monte di Procida, the possessive occupies the postnominal position and the definite article is always present (ART-N-POSS). This pattern is found with all gender and number combinations (Monte Procida: *u cainetə suoiə* (masc.sg), *a caineta soi* (fem.sg), *i cainetə suoiə* (masc.pl), *rə cainatə soiə* (fem.pl)). In Ottaviano, the

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[2] The productions collected in the city of Napoli in the AIS maps 27-30 make use of a genitive PP: *o cugnat e killə* (masc.sg.), *a cugnat e killə* (fem.sg.), *e cugnat e killə* (masc.pl), *e cugnatə e killə* (fem.pl). Given that PPs are always post-nominal, these data are not relevant to this analysis.

possessive is omitted and the noun is only preceded by the article (ART-N: *u cainatə* (masc.sg), *a cainat* (fem.sg), *i cainatə* (masc.pl), *e cainatə* (fem.pl). This pattern is also found in Montefusco (province of Avellino), not far from Napoli[3].

As already noted by Cardinaletti and Giusti (2019), summing up, the dialects display three patterns not attested in Italian: (i) the definite article may be absent with both singular and plural kinship terms (e.g. in Veneto dialects); (ii) the definite article may be present with both singular and plural kinship terms (e.g. in Tuscan dialects); (iii) the possessive occurs in postnominal position (e.g. in dialects spoken in Campania). In all patterns, gender never influences the occurrence of the article and the position of the possessive.

4. Research questions

The data and the patterns reviewed in the previous sections have led us to develop the following research questions concerning the acceptability of the four patterns:

(i)   Are these judgments affected by the Italian variety spoken by the participants, in both regional Italian and the dialects?
(ii)   Are these judgments affected by the singular and plural features on nouns, in both regional Italian and the dialects?
(iii)   Are the judgments of speakers of the different dialects consistent with what is reported in the AIS maps from the 1920s, as well as with the evidence available in the literature?
(iv)   Has contact with Italian had an effect on whether and in what form third-person possessives co-occur with kinship terms in dialect?
(v)   Does the speakers' dominance of regional Italian over dialect modulate sentence acceptability?

To address these issues and answer these questions, we designed an online questionnaire aimed at the characterization of the diatopic variation of possessives in the varieties of Italian and the Italian dialects spoken in six different geographic areas. Given the dilalic situation typical of the Italian sociolinguistic context, we expect a high degree of interspeaker variation. The questionnaire was also meant to detect optionality in the distribution of possessives, which is not captured in AIS, by allowing the participants to choose more than one option.

5. The questionnaire

5.1. Participants

189 Italian speakers completed our questionnaire. To filter out the participants who were not compliant with the task instructions, we added to our questionnaire a set of 24 ungrammatical sentences for each language variety (Italian vs dialect) and discarded all the participants that marked at least 30% of these sentences as acceptable.

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[3] Data are reported only for the singular, not for the plural.

Overall, 15 participants failed this manipulation check, so we analyzed the responses of 174 adult participants, recruited in different areas of northern, central, and southern Italy. In northern Italy, we collected data from Conegliano, in the province of Treviso (Veneto, N = 52, Mean age = 45.06 (SD = 17.83)), in the area of Mestre-Venezia (Veneto, N = 15, Mean age = 33.73 (SD = 19.12)), Ferrara (Emilia-Romagna, N = 36, Mean age = 45.92 (SD = 15.89)), and Piacenza (Emilia-Romagna, N = 15, Mean age = 49.8 (SD = 14.55)). In central Italy, we collected data from the area of Grosseto (Toscana, N = 17, Mean age = 33.29 (SD = 13.21)). In southern Italy, we collected data from the area of Napoli (Campania, N = 39, Mean age = 37.72 (SD = 15.6)).

5.2. Materials

The questionnaire included 12 multiple-choice items containing third-person possessives combined with either common nouns or kinship terms and 60 filler items. In this paper, we only consider the 6 items containing kinship terms. The kinship terms included in the questionnaire are *cugina* (cousin.FEM), *fratello* (brother), *sorella* (sister), *cugine* (cousins.FEM), *fratelli* (brothers), and *sorelle* (sisters). For each noun, the participants were presented with the four different patterns presented above: One in which the possessive is in prenominal position and is preceded by the article (ART-POSS-N) (12a), one in which the possessive is in prenominal position, but the article is absent (POSS-N) (12b), one in which the possessive is in postnominal position and the noun is preceded by the article (ART-N-POSS) (12c), and one in which the possessive is missing, and the noun is preceded by the definite article (ART-N) (12d). All sentences in (12) have the same meaning: "This is Joan. Do you know her brother?":

(12)   a.   Questa è Giovanna.   Conosci   il   suo   fratello?
             This is Joan.   Do you know   the   her   brother
       b.   Questa è Giovanna.   Conosci   suo   fratello?
             This is Joan.   Do you know   her   brother
       c.   Questa è Giovanna.   Conosci   il   fratello suo?
             This is Joan.   Do you know   the   brother her
       d.   Questa è Giovanna.   Conosci   il   fratello?
             This is Joan.   Do you know   the   brother

The items were translated into the dialects spoken in the areas under investigation. An example for each dialect (Conegliano, Mestre-Venezia, Ferrara, Piacenza, Grosseto, Napoli) is provided in (13)-(18), respectively.

(13)   Conegliano
       a.   Sta qua l'è 'a Giovana. Conositu   el   so   fradel?
             This is Joan.   Know-you   the   her   brother
       b.   Sta qua l'è 'a Giovana. Conositu   so   fradel?
             This is Joan.   Know-you   her   brother
       c.   Sta qua l'è 'a Giovana. Conositu   el   fradel   soo?
             This is Joan.   Know-you   the   brother her
       d.   Sta qua l'è 'a Giovana. Conositu   el   fradel?
             This is Joan.   Know-you   the   brother

(14)   Mestre-Venezia
    a.   Sta qua xe ea Giovana.   Ti conossi   el   so   fradeo?
        This is Joan.   Do you know the   her   brother
    b.   Sta qua xe ea Giovana.   Ti conossi   so   fradeo?
        This is Joan.   Do you know her   brother
    c.   Sta qua xe ea Giovana.   Ti conossi   el   fradeo suo?
        This is Joan.   Do you know the   brother her
    d.   Sta qua xe ea Giovana.   Ti conossi   el   fradeo?
        This is Joan.   Do you know the   brother

(15)   Ferrara
    a.   Questa l'è la Giuana.   Gnós-at   al   so   fradèl?
        This is Joan.   Do you know the   her   brother
    b.   Questa l'è la Giuana.   Gnós-at   so   fradèl?
        This is Joan.   Do you know her   brother
    c.   Questa l'è la Giuana.   Gnós-at   al   fradèl so?
        This is Joan.   Do you know the   brother her
    d.   Questa l'è la Giuana.   Gnós-at   al   fradèl?
        This is Joan.   Do you know the   brother

(16)   Piacenza
    a.   Custa ché l'è la Giuana.   Cugnusat   al   so   fradel?
        This is Joan.   Do you know the   her   brother
    b.   Custa ché l'è la Giuana.   Cugnusat   so   fradel?
        This is Joan.   Do you know her   brother
    c.   Custa ché l'è la Giuana.   Cugnusat   al   fradel su?
        This is Joan.   Do you know the   brother her
    d.   Custa ché l'è la Giuana.   Cugnusat   al   fradel?
        This is Joan.   Do you know the   brother

(17)   Grosseto
    a.   Sta qua è Giovanna.   Te conosci   il   su   fratello?
        This is Joan.   Do you know the   her   brother
    b.   Sta qua è Giovanna.   Te conosci   su   fratello?
         This is Joan.   Do you know her   brother
    c.   Sta qua è Giovanna.   Te conosci   il   fratello   suo?
        This is Joan.   Do you know the   brother   her
    d.   Sta qua è Giovanna.   Te conosci   il   fratello?
        This is Joan.   Do you know the   brother

(18)   Napoli[4]
    a.   Chist'è Giuvanni.   'U saje   suoio   frato?
        This is John.   Do you know his   brother

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[4] For the Neapolitan dialect, speakers were shown only three patterns (POSS-N, ART-N-POSS, and ART-N). For technical difficulties, the pattern ART-POSS-N was not included.

b.	Chist'è Giuvanni.	'U saje	'u	frato	suoio?
	This is John.	Do you know	the	brother	his
c.	Chist'è Giuvanni.	'U saje	'u	frato?	
	This is John.	Do you know	the	brother	

5.3. Procedure

The questionnaire was created and administered through the online survey tool Qualtrics (2020). After a brief introduction to the task, participants were asked to answer sociodemographic questions about their age, gender, and education level. Subsequently, the relative language dominance (Italian vs. dialect) of each participant was assessed by administering the Dilalic Language Profile questionnaire developed by Procentese et al. (2022). The questions were adapted to the Italian bilectal context from the Bilingual Language Profile (Birdsong et al. 2012), which is used to assess language dominance in bilinguals through self-reports. The questionnaire considers the participant's language history, language use, linguistic competence, and language attitudes. The third section of the questionnaire consisted of two different blocks of forced-choice Yes/No questions: one with the Italian stimuli and the other with the dialectal stimuli. Participants were informed about the possibility of choosing more than one option for each item. The order of presentation of the two blocks was counterbalanced between participants, and the order of presentation of the stimuli in each block was randomized. Participants completed the two different blocks in different sessions.

The first two sections required approximately 10 minutes in total, while each block of the third section required from 20 to 30 minutes. Overall, we collected 8118 binary (Acceptable/Unacceptable) judgments, 4059 for each language (Italian vs. Dialect), distributed as follows: 2496 judgments were collected from speakers living in Conegliano, in the province of Treviso; 720 from speakers living in the Mestre-Venezia area; 1728 from speakers living in Ferrara; 720 from speakers living in Piacenza; 816 from speakers living in Grosseto and 1638 from speakers living in Napoli.

6. Results

We analyzed the data by focusing on the distribution of the by-subject average acceptability scores for both Italian and the dialects in the different points as a function of the number features of the noun (singular vs plural: section 6.1) and language dominance (section 6.2).

6.1. The effect of location and grammatical number

Figure 2.a shows the distribution of participants' acceptability judgments of the different combinations of possessives and articles in both Italian and the dialect spoken in **Conegliano**, in the province of Treviso. In the Italian of Conegliano, with singular nouns, the most frequent form is POSS-N, *sua sorella* ("her sister"), whereas in the plural it is ART-POSS-N (*le sue sorelle* "the her sisters"). The second prevailing form in both the singular and the plural, is the construction in which the noun is preceded

by the article and the possessive is omitted (ART-N, *la sorella* "the sister", *le sorelle* "the sisters"), although it is less accepted than the other form. The pattern observed for singular nouns in Italian is also found in the dialect, although the ART-N strategy is much less frequent than in Italian. For plural nouns, speakers accepted ART-POSS-N (*e so soree* "the her sisters") and POSS-N (*so soree* "her sisters") with similar proportion. Some speakers also accepted the form in which the noun is only preceded by the article (ART-N, *e soree* "the sisters"), although proportions are lower than in the other patterns.

Figure 2.b shows the distribution of participants' acceptability judgments of the different combinations of possessives and articles in both Italian and the dialect spoken in **Mestre-Venezia** and the area surrounding it, in the province of Venezia. The pattern found in Mestre-Venezia for both varieties is quite similar to the one observed in Conegliano. The only slight difference concerns plural nouns in the dialect. As in Conegliano, ART-POSS-N (*e so soree* "the her sisters") and POSS-N (*so soree* "her sisters") have similar proportions but speakers also accepted the form only including the definite article (ART-N, *e soree* "the sisters") to a slightly higher degree than in Conegliano.

Figure 2.c shows the distribution of participants' acceptability judgments of the different combinations of possessives and articles in both Italian and the dialect spoken in **Ferrara** and the area surrounding it in Emilia-Romagna. The pattern found in Ferrara resembles the one observed in Mestre-Venezia in both languages and for both numbers. In Italian, the most frequent form with singular nouns is POSS-N and with plural nouns is ART-POSS-N. The second most accepted form for both singular and plural nouns is ART-N, although proportions are much lower than in the first options. In the dialect of Ferrara, for singular nouns, acceptability rates replicate those found in Italian. With plural nouns, the most accepted form implies the combination of possessive and article in prenominal position (ART-POSS-N: *ill so surèli* "the his/her sisters"). However, many speakers also accepted the form POSS-N (*so surèli* "her sisters").

Figure 2.d shows the distribution of speakers' acceptability judgments of the different combinations of possessives and articles in both Italian and the dialect spoken in **Piacenza** and the surrounding area. The pattern observed for Italian is similar to what is found in the other varieties for both singular and plural nouns. However, a higher proportion of ART-N is attested in both singular and plural. The pattern in the dialect is quite similar to the one reported for Ferrara, but there are higher proportions of ART-N in both singular (*la surela* "the sister") and plural (*al sureli* "the sisters"). An increase of ART-POSS-N is also observed for both singular (*la so surela* "the her sister") and plural nouns (*al so sureli* "the her sisters"), if compared to Ferrara. Both in Piacenza and Ferrara, in addition to ART-N and ART-POSS-N, the POSS-N pattern was judged acceptable both in the singular (*so surela* "her sister") and in the plural (*so sureli* "her sisters").

Figure 2. Distribution of the participants' judgments in the varieties spoken in (a) Conegliano, (b) Mestre-Venezia, (c) Ferrara, (d) Piacenza, (e) Grosseto and (f) Napoli. All subplots have the same structure: acceptability judgments on Italian are shown in the bar plots on the right, while those for the dialectal sentences are shown in the bar plots on the left; the vertical dimension contrasts acceptability judgments for singular nouns (top bar plots) and plural nouns (bottom bar plots).

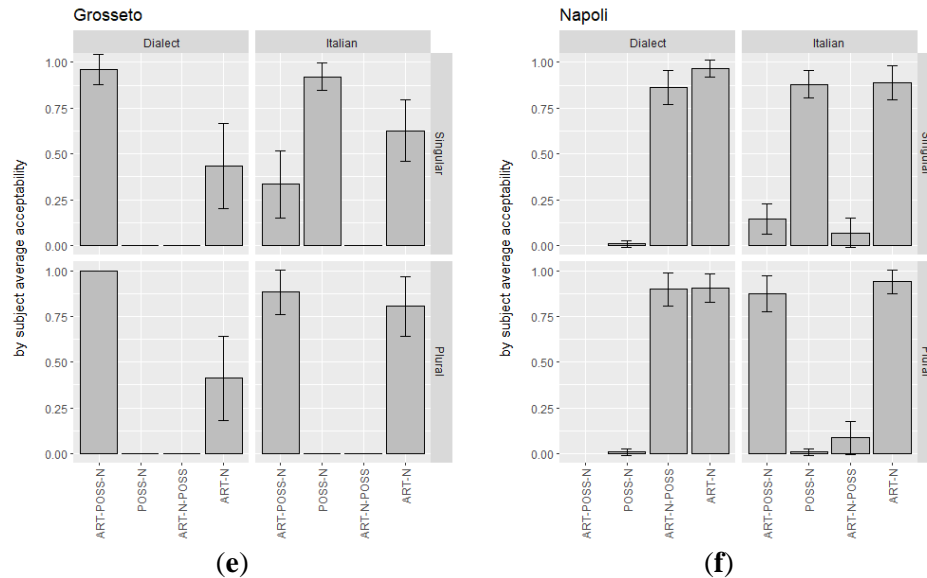(e)   (f)
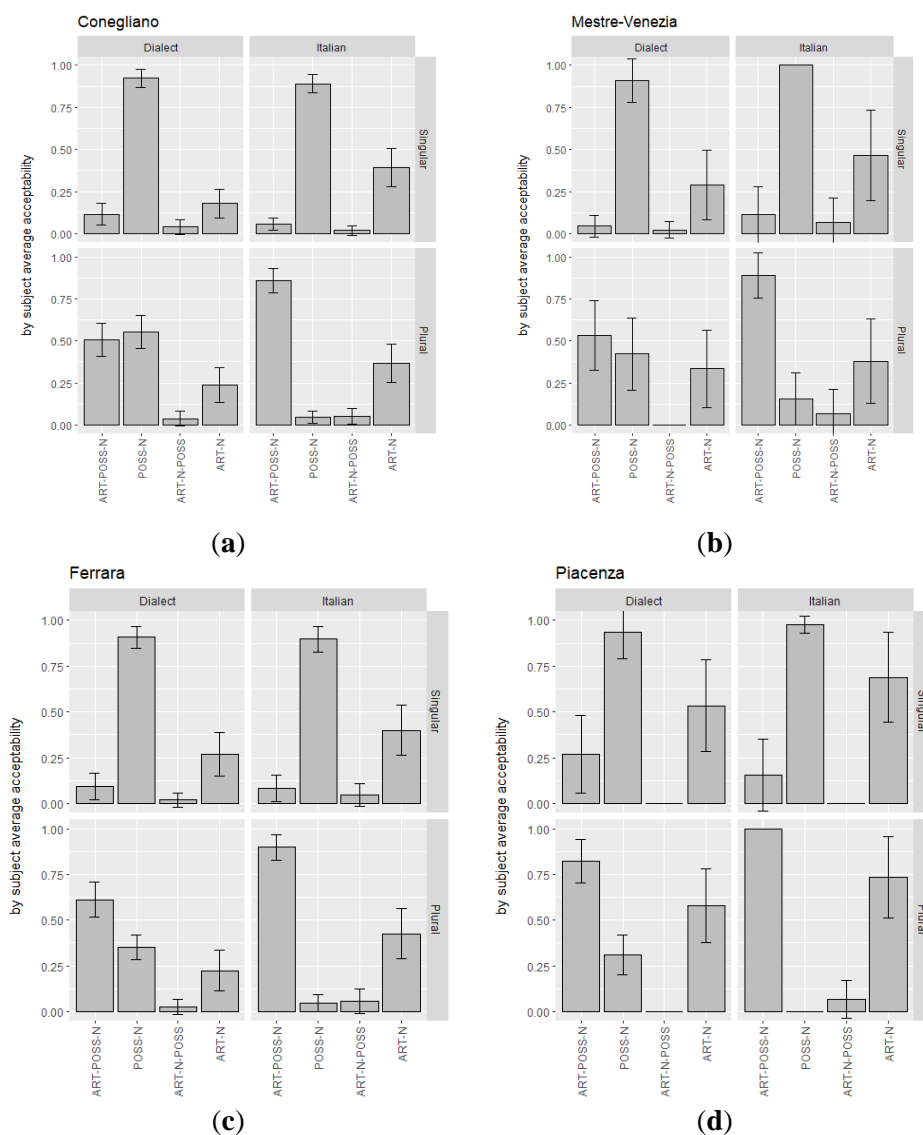
Figure 2.e shows the distribution of speakers' acceptability judgments of the different combinations of possessives and articles in both Italian and the dialect spoken in the province of Grosseto, in Toscana. With plural nouns, in Italian, the pattern is the same as in the other points, although the difference between the acceptability rates of the forms ART-N and ART-POSS-N is lower than in the previous regions. With singular nouns, in Italian, in addition to the strategies mentioned for the other points, greater acceptability of the ART-POSS-N form is observed here than elsewhere. As for the dialect, the most accepted form is ART-POSS-N for both singular (*la su surella* "the her sister") and plural nouns (*le su sorelle* "the her sisters"), although speakers also judged as acceptable the ART-N pattern (*la sorella* "the sister", *le sorelle* "the sisters").

Figure 2.f shows the distribution of speakers' acceptability judgments of the different combinations of possessives and articles in both Italian and the dialect spoken in the province of Napoli. In Italian, the patterns observed for singular and plural nouns are comparable to what is found in all the other points. The prevailing forms are ART-POSS-N and ART-N in the plural, and POSS-N and ART-N in the singular. In the dialect, the attested forms are ART-N-POSS (*'e sore soie* "the sisters of hers") and ART-N (*'e sore* "the sisters").

Summing up the data analyzed so far:

- In Italian, with singular nouns, the predominant form in all points is POSS-N. The second most frequent form is ART-N. The ART-N-POSS form is quite infrequent in Italian. The most accepted form in the plural is ART-POSS-N in all points, although Piacenza, Grosseto, and especially Napoli also show a high proportion of ART-N. In the other points (Conegliano, Mestre-Venezia, and Ferrara), ART-N is less frequent. ART-N is also frequent in the singular in Napoli, and a high rate of occurrence is also observed in Piacenza.

- In the dialects, much more variation is observed. The ART-N-POSS form is very common only in Napoli in both the singular and the plural. In the other points, this form is either absent or very rare. The ART-POSS-N form is the prevailing form in the plural in almost all points, especially in Grosseto and

Piacenza. In Piacenza, this strategy also competes with ART-N. The POSS-N form is the prevailing form in the singular in Conegliano, Mestre-Venezia, Ferrara, and Piacenza, as in Italian. In the plural, this form occurs to a lesser extent; nevertheless, it is well-attested in all these points.

6.2. The effect of language dominance

In this study, we investigate whether participants' language dominance modulated the acceptability of certain patterns of possessive and article combination. The language dominance scores are discretized to obtain four groups of approximately equal size that can be intuitively interpreted as follows:

- [-77.6, 9.08): low to mild dialectal dominance (N = 43);
- [9.08, 37.3): substantial balance between Italian and dialect (N = 44);
- [37.3, 75.2): mild Italian dominance (N = 43);
- [75.2, 167]: strong Italian dominance (N = 44).

Considering the different varieties, a clear pattern emerges only from the analysis of the data collected in the Veneto region, by aggregating the data of Conegliano and Mestre-Venezia[5]. The analysis is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Effects of language dominance on the probability of acceptance of the different patterns with plural nouns in both Italian and the dialect in the Veneto points (Conegliano and Mestre-Venezia).

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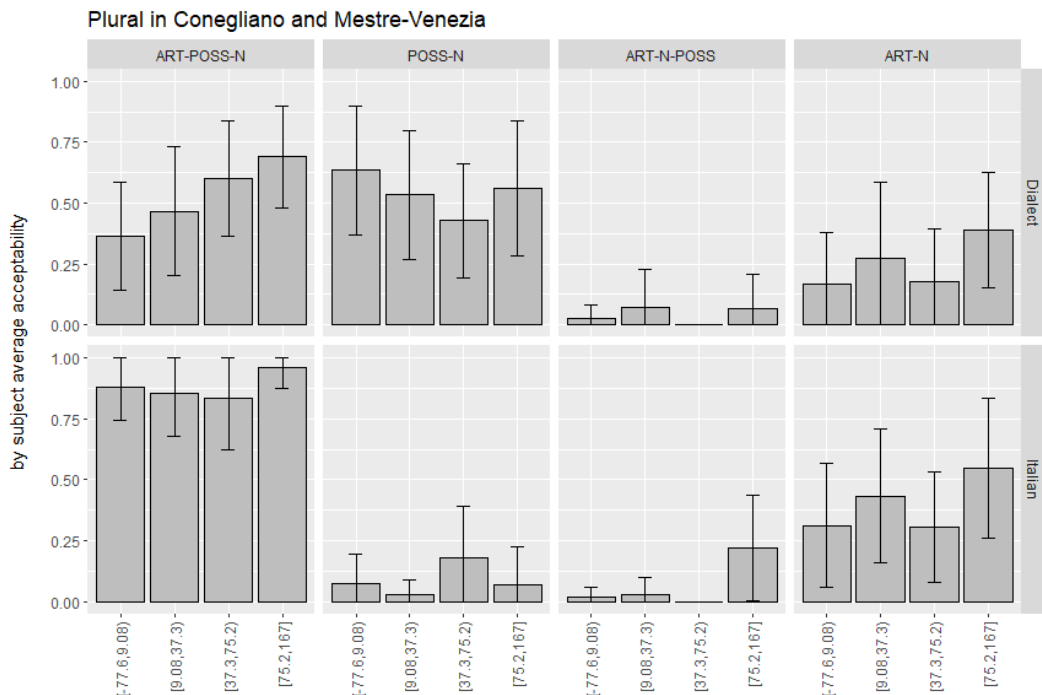
[5] Focusing on this area, our sample size was reduced to 67 speakers, organized as follows: 19 with low to mild dialectal dominance; 15 balanced between Italian and dialect; 17 with mild Italian dominance and 16 showing strong Italian dominance.

Figure 3 suggests that language dominance may have an impact on some judgments provided by Veneto speakers. In particular, a certain level of influence of Italian on the dialect is only found for speakers with Italian dominance and is limited to plural nouns. In the dialect, the probability of accepting POSS-N (which is not acceptable in Italian) tends to decrease in speakers with a marked dominance in Italian. Moreover, speakers with high scores of Italian dominance tend to accept the ART-POSS-N and ART-N more frequently than the other combinations. For the ART-N form, the same tendency is also observed for the judgments on Italian stimuli.

7. Discussion

In this study, we investigate the acceptability of constructions containing third-person possessives combined with kinship terms in adult bilectal speakers of Italian and different dialects spoken in the three macro-areas of Italy: Northern Italy (Conegliano, Mestre-Venezia, Ferrara, Piacenza), Central Italy (Grosseto), and Southern Italy (Napoli). For each item, the participants had to judge the acceptability of four types of sentences that varied according to the presence and position (either prenominal or postnominal) of the possessive, and the presence vs. absence of the definite article. Both singular and plural nouns were included in the sentences, which were proposed in Italian and the dialects in different sessions.

Overall, for Italian, the highest rates of acceptability are found in the pattern in which singular nouns are preceded by bare possessives (POSS-N, *sua sorella* "his/her sister") and in the pattern that includes a prenominal possessive and the definite article (ART-POSS-N) with plural nouns (*le sue sorelle* "the his/her sisters"). These preferences are observed regardless of the variety of Italian spoken by participants. This result is expected and consistent with previous literature. Indeed, several studies (Cardinaletti 1998, Cordin 2001, Penello 2002, Cardinaletti and Giusti 2019) pointed out that prenominal possessives constitute the unmarked and most frequent form in Italian. The ART-N pattern, in which the noun is only preceded by the article (*la sorella* "the sister") is the second form that prevails in Italian, in both the singular and the plural. The presence of this form in Italian, in different areas, was highlighted by Rohlfs (1968). This form is not accepted to the same extent in all Italian varieties. The ART-N pattern is common especially in the center-south areas, in Toscana and Campania. It is however also very frequent in the Italian spoken in the province of Piacenza, whereas the rate of occurrence of this option decreases in the other points (Ferrara, Mestre-Venezia, Conegliano), but remains much more frequent than the other options. Thus, massive optionality in the presence or absence of third-person possessives is found across Italy. In the province of Grosseto, with singular nouns, speakers also accepted the ART-POSS-N form (*la sua sorella* "the his/her sister") at higher rates than in the other points. Based on Rohlfs (1968), the presence of the definite article before the possessive with singular nouns should be limited to the dialect since Italian drops the article with singular kinship terms. This use can thus be seen as an instance of the influence of the dialect on the Italian spoken in the province of Grosseto.

Turning now to the dialects, much more variation and optionality is observed, especially in the plural forms. In the singular, the most widespread pattern of

occurrence is POSS-N for all dialects spoken in northern Italy (Conegliano, Mestre-Venezia, Ferrara, and Piacenza). These results are in line with what is reported by Cardinaletti and Giusti (2019) and Giusti (2022). The data collected from this study only partially replicates the data reported on the AIS maps. For singular nouns, maps 27 (*cognato*, "brother-in-law") and 29 (*cognata*, "sister-in-law") show that in the points surrounding Treviso and Venezia in Veneto, only POSS-N is attested, and the same is true for the points in the province of Ferrara and the area surrounding it. In the AIS maps, the area surrounding Piacenza displays two options: some points allow the POSS-N pattern and others allow the possibility of ART-POSS-N. Two remarks are worth pointing out considering our data. First, in the dialects spoken in and around Piacenza, some speakers accept ART-POSS-N with a higher proportion than in Ferrara, Conegliano, and Mestre-Venezia. Secondly, the use of our questionnaire made it possible to show that in addition to the most frequent pattern, POSS-N, the ART-N form is also accepted by several speakers in northern Italy, and in particular by participants from the area of Piacenza. This pattern is also observed with plural nouns. This phenomenon was not reported on the AIS maps and was described by Rohlfs (1968) as very common in the Italian varieties spoken throughout the whole peninsula, with a higher frequency in the dialects of the southern regions (Campania included). Hence, a phenomenon that is largely attested in a southern variety and is frequent in the standard language has extended to the dialects spoken in northern Italy. This can be seen as an instance of the influence of Italian on the dialect.

The provinces of Grosseto and Napoli show patterns that are quite different from those occurring in northern Italy. In the area of Grosseto, only two patterns are attested. The prevailing form in the singular is ART-POSS-N. However, several speakers also accepted the form ART-N, a pattern not reported on the AIS maps for this area. The latter is the pattern with the highest rates of acceptability in Napoli, immediately followed by ART-N-POSS. Both patterns are attested in the Neapolitan area on the AIS maps. This is a clear case of optionality in the dialects.

The data with singular nouns are replicated with plural nouns only for the provinces of Grosseto (where ART-POSS-N is the prevailing form, followed by ART-N) and Napoli (where ART-N-POSS and ART-N are equally highly acceptable). For all the other points, the plural differs from the singular. In northern Italy, in the plural, ART-POSS-N is the prevailing pattern and increases in acceptability as one moves south towards Emilia-Romagna. The opposite trend is shown for the form without the article (POSS-N). Interestingly, although the rate of POSS-N with plural nouns decreases as one moves south, this pattern is nonetheless attested in Emilia-Romagna, in the provinces of Ferrara and Piacenza. This phenomenon was not reported on either the AIS maps 28 (*cognati*, "brothers in law") and 30 (*cognate*, "sisters in law") or the study by Rohlfs (1968). The fact that in the points in Emilia-Romagna, several POSS-N occurrences have been observed in the dialect for the plural form shows that the article omission that was more frequent in Veneto (AIS maps, Rohlfs 1968) has extended southward. The fact that the results for the dialects of Ferrara and Piacenza are different from those reported in the literature (AIS maps, Rohlfs 1968) suggests that the dialects are dynamic and have evolved autonomously and independently from Italian.

Finally, in Napoli, ART-N-POSS is the prevailing form in the dialect, while it is very rare in Italian. This suggests that the contact between the Neapolitan dialect

and the Italian variety spoken in this area did not have any influence on this construction.

In this study, we also investigated the level at which the speakers' dilalic language profile affects sentence acceptability. A clear pattern emerged only from the analysis of the data collected in Veneto for plural nouns. Speakers with higher DLP scores (i.e., more dominant in Italian) seem to prefer the Italian ART-POSS-N and ART-N patterns in the dialect as well, at the expense of the dialectal form (POSS-N). This may be considered as an instance of the influence of Italian on the dialect for some participants.

To conclude, the contact between the varieties of Italian and the dialects spoken by the bilectal participants in our study resulted in many different patterns. We found cases of the influence of the dialect on Italian, instances of the influence of Italian on the dialect, and cases in which the dialects have changed independently of Italian. Furthermore, in the dialects, we found a situation that only partially replicates the picture reported by the AIS maps in the first half of the last century. In addition to the expected variation, we also found many cases of optionality in both Italian and the dialects. Optionality was not recorded by the AIS maps, which usually report only one option for each point of data collection, but it was detected by our concurrent-measures design, which gave the participants the possibility of choosing more than one option. However, it is important to point out that the comparison of two different data sets leads us to interpret the results with caution, as some of the observed differences between our data and the data available in the AIS maps may be due to methodological differences.

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