

## Variation in the possession of kinship terms in the dialects of Italy

Sonia Masi | Western University

The term ‘dialects’ often refers to varieties that derive from the standard form of a language (Clivio et al. 2011). This definition, however, does not apply to the non-standard dialects of Italy, as they are not variants of Standard Italian (SI). Rather, they are widely considered to be separate varieties descended from the Vulgar Latin of the Roman Empire. Thus, the dialects of Italy have been grouped geographically (dialects of northern/southern Italy), rather than by their similarities with SI, as intelligibility among the dialects (due to their phonetic, morphological and syntactic similarities) is seemingly correlated with geographic proximity (Clivio et al. 2011).

In this work, I consider the traditional categorization of the dialects of Italy and, using a primary dialectological technique of comparing forms and structures between variants, I explore the forms and the syntactic distribution of the possessives that are used with kinship terms. The goal is to determine whether the traditional geographic division of the dialects holds with respect to these constructions. The focus is mainly whether the dialects of southern Italy should be grouped together. My examples are taken from the AIS (Jaberg and Jud 1928-1940), and from original research on the southern dialect of Ardore Superiore.

To mark the possession of kinship terms, SI uses prenominal possessive adjectives that agree in gender and number with the kinship noun. These possessives cannot co-occur with determiners, unless they are used in the possession of plural kinship nouns. In those cases, the definite article is obligatory:

SI:

- |                                                                                              |                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. A. (*il)        mio                padre<br>DET.MSG POSS1SG.MSG father.MSG<br>“My father” | B. *(le)        mie                sorelle<br>DET.FPL POSS1SG.FPL sister.FPL<br>“My sisters” |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Many dialects of northern Italy (DNI) also use prenominal possessive adjectives with kinship nouns; however, these possessives are invariable (Trionfera 2018). Furthermore, it appears that these possessors must always co-occur with a definite article:

Bienate dialect (Milan):

- |                                                                                           |                                                                                      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2. A. *(la)        to                suela<br>DET.FSG POSS2SG sister.FSG<br>“Your sister” | B. *(i)        to                suel<br>DET.PL POSS2SG sister.FPL<br>“Your sisters” |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

The dialects of southern Italy (DSI), on the other hand, prefer postnominal enclitic possessives over possessive adjectives, especially with 1SG and 2SG possessors (Cardinaletti and Giusti 2019). These possessives are generally invariable and cannot occur with determiners, unless they attach to plural kinship terms:

Barese dialect (Bari):

- |                                                                                                                         |                                                                                    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3. A. (*u/a)        maríte/mughier-mə/-tə<br>DET.MSG/FSG husband.MSG/wife.FSG-POSS1SG/POSS2SG<br>“My/your husband/wife” | B. li            nepúde-mə<br>DET.MPL grandchild.MPL-POSS1SG<br>“My grandchildren” |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Although a large number of dialects follow these patterns, there is considerable variation within each group, especially in the dialects of southern Italy. For instance, the Sicilian DSI do not have any enclitic possessives, and the possessive adjectives that are used pattern like the DNI and unlike the DSI, which have postnominal possessive adjectives. Whether all the dialects of southern Italy should be grouped together in this respect is, thus, put into question. I highlight these types of differences, ultimately providing a more comprehensive description of these possessive constructions in the dialects of Italy.

## References

- AIS = Jaberg, Karl and Jakob Jud. 1928–1940. *Sach- und Sprachatlas Italiens und der Südschweiz*. Zofingen: Ringier.
- Cardinaletti, Anna, and Giuliana Giusti. 2019. Micro-variation in the Possessive Systems of Italian Dialects. In *Language Use and Linguistic Structure. Proceedings of the Olomouc Linguistics Colloquium*, eds. Joseph Emonds, Markéta Janebová, and Ludmila Veselovská, 137-154. Olomouc: Palacký University Press.
- Clivio, Gianrenzo P., Marcel Danesi and Sara Maida-Nicol. 2011. *An introduction to Italian dialectology*. Munich: Lincom Europa.
- Trionfera, Cristiana. 2018. The morphosyntax of kinship terms in Italian dialects. Master's thesis, Università Ca'Foscari Venezia.