

N morphology and its interpretation: The neuter in Central Italian varieties and in Arbëresh

M. RITA MANZINI ó LEONARDO M. SAVOIA (UNIVERSITÀ DI FIRENZE)

The semantic literature (Chierchia 2010) and the theoretical syntax literature (Borer 2005) stress that the traditional opposition of singular and plural hides a tripartition between mass singulars, count singulars and count plurals. We show that inflectional morphology in Central Italian and Arbëresh nouns is sensitive to this tripartition. Specifically, we consider the so-called ‘neuter gender’ of Central Italian varieties (Rohlf’s 1968 [1949]: §419) which has been observed to correlate with mass content (whence the traditional designation ‘neutro de materia’). Second, we present data from Italo-Albanian varieties, where the neuter is externalized by the same morphology as the plural; we take this to reflect the existence of a common syntactico-semantic core between mass nouns and plurals, roughly [set/aggregate]. ‘Gender’ (more generally ‘nominal class’) is to be essentially equated to a classifier as suggested by recent work comparing Bantu and Romance (Kihm 2005, Ferrari 2008, Crisma et al. 2011 Déchaine et al. 2014). We provide evidence for concluding that in languages endowed with a class inflectional system, inflectional class exponents are endowed with semantic content, and are involved in interpretation at the syntax-semantic interface.

1. CENTRAL ITALIAN. The neuter inflection of Central Italian varieties, i.e. *óo* in (1), is found with mass nouns (1a), with eventive/propositional contents (1c), and with the invariable inflections of (unergative and transitive) perfect participles (1b). (1a) illustrates *óo* agreement with the determiner, (2) illustrates *óo* agreement with the adjective (cf. Loporcaro and Paciaroni 2011).

- (1) a. lo ferro lo kafo/ lo latte
 the iron the cheese/ the milk
 b. a parlat-o/ camat-o tutti
 s/he.has talked.to-n/ called-n all
 c. lo so ssaputo
 it I.am known -I know it \emptyset

- (2) lo kafo frejko / lo latte jattfo
 the cheese fresh/the milk cold

Amandola (Fermo)

In proposing a characterization of the content associated with *óo*, it is useful to make reference to the conception of mass terms as aggregates of smaller non-atomic elements (Chierchia 2010, Wiese 2012). Manzini and Savoia (2011), introduce the notation \sqsubseteq to refer to a part/whole relation which they see as playing a role in defining plurality. We adopt the \sqsubseteq (part/whole) notation for the crucial property associated with Central Italian *óo*, yielding structures of the type in (3a). What the *óo* inflection contributes is roughly the content in (3b). In other words the elementary \sqsubseteq content applies to the denotation of ‘cheese’ saying that it admits to be factored into smaller parts (under existential closure, there is some x such that x is a part of the whole ‘cheese’).

- (3) a.
$$\begin{array}{c} \text{N} \\ \diagdown \quad \diagup \\ \sqrt{\text{kaf}} \quad \text{N/Class} \\ \text{o} \\ [\sqsubseteq: \text{part/whole}] \end{array}$$

- b. $\exists x [x \sqsubseteq \text{'cheese'}]$
 (there is an x such that x is a part of ‘cheese’)

The semantic content [\sqsubseteq : part/whole] is also a natural candidate as a representation of the temporal continuum underlying an event, as ‘aggregate[s] of components/ atoms of imagineable continuums (substances/ events)’ (Chierchia 2010). This suggests that *óo* forms of the participle correspond to a lexicalization of the event argument that may be assumed to be associated with any verb (cf. neo-Davidsonian frameworks such as Higginbotham 1985).

ITALO-ALBANIAN. Arbëresh dialects of South Italy preserve a neuter noun class characterized by mass denotation. The definite nominative/accusative singular inflection *ót* in (4a), the demonstrative determiner *ata* in (4b), and the preadjectival article/linker *t* in (4a) all coincide with definite plural

forms. Neuters in the plural take on a specialized (nominalizing) inflection - *r-a* which agrees in the feminine, introducing a kind interpretation (4c). In (5a) the inflection -*t* characterizes the plural of feminine and masculine nouns; (5b) contains the combination of the plural form of the demonstrative with an individual noun in the plural.

- (4) a. dia -t ðt t barð
 cheese-Def is Lkr white
 b. ata dia
 that cheese
 c. dia - ra-t
 cheeses-def
 (5) a. burra-t/ gra:-t
 men-def/women-def
 b. ata burra/ gra
 those men/women

Firmo (Cosenza)

As we mentioned at the outset, the similarities between count plurals and mass singulars have been highlighted by the semantic literature. From the morphological point of view, the link between mass nouns and plural inflection emerges in a number of typologically diverse languages, including Shona (Bantu, Déchaine et al. 2014), Dagaare (Niger-Congo, Grimm 2012), Persian (Ghanabiadi 2012). Manzini and Savoia (2011) provide an account for the -*t* plural and (masculine singular) oblique inflection. Their account uses the idea that the *ót* morphology in Albanian carries both a Definiteness property and the property (\subseteq) that we have already introduced as schematized in the lexical entry in (6).

- (6) -*t*: (\subseteq), definite

Manzini and Savoia propose that *ót* contributes plurality to Nouns in virtue of its (\subseteq) content, as sketched in (7b) for example (7a) *ó* namely by isolating a subset of the set (or set of sets) of all things that are $\neg\text{man}\emptyset$. Since (\subseteq) says that subsets can be partitioned off the set (the property) denoted by the lexical base, it is compatible with what Borer (2005) calls Div. Given the interpretation we impute to plural *ót* in (7), we could further specify the property it introduces as [\subseteq : subset].

- (7) a. burra-t $\neg\text{the men}\emptyset$
 b. the x [$x \subseteq \{\text{man}\}$]
 i.e. $\neg\text{the } x \text{ such that } x \text{ is a subset of the set of things with the property } \neg\text{man}\emptyset$

With this much background, we are ready to go back to the fact that the same *ót* morphology characterizes the direct cases not only of the plural as in (7), but also of so-called neuters *ó* which as we have seen have mass denotation. A count singular is an atomic individual. A count plural is a set of atomic individuals, whose subsets are in turn sets of such atoms, as in (7). Following Chierchia (2010) a mass singular, e.g. $\neg\text{cheese}\emptyset$ is in fact a plurality of sorts, a whole made up of parts each of which is itself $\neg\text{cheese}\emptyset$. The surfacing of the same *ót* morphology on mass singulars as on plurals suggests that the same (\subseteq) content is relevant as for plurals. In this instance, however, it is used as the mereological part-whole operator asserting the existence of non-atomic parts in the whole denoted by the predicative base, i.e. [\subseteq : part/whole] as in (8). To use intuitive terms, a singular mass noun is like a plural count noun in that both include a multiplicity of some sorts *ó* namely a multiplicity of individuals, or a multiplicity of parts.

- (8) a.
$$\begin{array}{c} \text{N} \\ \diagdown \quad \diagup \\ \sqrt{\text{dia}} \quad \text{N/Class} \\ \text{dia} \quad \text{t} \\ \text{[}\subseteq\text{: part/whole]} \end{array}$$

 b. $\exists x [x \subseteq \neg\text{cheese}]$
 (there is an *x* such that *x* is a part of $\neg\text{cheese}\emptyset$)