

Gender Grammatical Polarization in Late Latin and some Italian Dialectal Areas. A Cognitive View

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In this paper I have examined the diachronic evolution of grammatical gender systems from the first changes in Late Latin noun declensions to some Italian dialects (West Tuscan, Ventimiglia and Montale Pistoiese). The hypercharacterization process underlying the spread of *-o* (masculine) vs. *-a* (feminine) morphemes in the dialects mentioned above has been here reinterpreted as a drift governed by a cognitive principle of polarization. By means of this principle the semantic categories of masculine and feminine are grammaticalized in morphological classes. In linguistic systems which have been shown to be particularly sensitive to dichotomic expression of grammatical gender such a bipolar ending couple (*-o* vs. *-a*) is imposed in noun declension as a reflection in grammar of a mental categorization strategy.

*Introduction.**

Introducing his recent work on gender, G. Corbett (1991:1) begins by assuming that "Gender is the most puzzling of the grammatical categories". Complex research taking a general look at over 200 languages demonstrates the truthfulness of such an assumption. The presentation of data from so many different languages (belonging to as many different language types: from the Bantu family to the Australian languages, crossing over the Indo-European language family) illustrates the heterogeneity of what is traditionally classified as a unique grammatical category. There are gender languages which show predominantly semantic systems. This is the case of Lak, which is discussed by the Author as a good example of noun gender assignment fundamentally based on semantic criteria. Like the other Caucasian languages, Lak classifies the conceptual world in a system of four class,

* The first suggestions of the ideas date back to the intensive years of my doctoral training at the University of Pavia (1987/90). E. Tuttle brought part of the data discussed in this paper to my attention (namely data from Montale and Ventimiglia's dialect). Later paths of my personal research and further amplification of data has led me to reanalyze the whole question under a new light (a cognitive perspective). Thanks are therefore due to E. Tuttle for his stimulating lessons, the memory of which is still dear to me.

whose labels are: I male rational, II female rational, III other animate (but many inanimates too), IV residue. Rationality, animateness and natural sex intersect in this complex semantic pattern as the dominant features selected by native speakers (Corbett 1991:25). Noun-class languages, as Lak has been demonstrated to be, presuppose one or more semantic principles for individuating entities in the real domain and grouping them into separate kinds¹. Granted that semantic factors are necessarily associated with the notion of gender itself, and going on to try to draw the different properties that the assignment of gender systems possess in natural languages, it has been found that formal (morphological and phonological) rules are also involved in language gender systems. As we shall see in the following pages of this paper, gender assignment rules in the old Indo-European languages were essentially based on morphological rules. As far as it has been recently reconstructed, Vedic Sanskrit did not exhibit gender as a grammatical category: the gender of each noun had simply to be learnt and remembered by the native speaker. At the end of the development which gave rise to the grammatical category of gender, vowel quantity could automatically assign nouns to different gender classes: short vowel endings required the feminine feature, whereas long vowel endings selected the masculine one².

Most of the old Indo-European languages established a noun classifying system functioning thanks to formal properties³, whose syntactic effect is the well-established mechanism of agreement. Its working definition, as proposed in Moravcsik (1978:333), concerns a various class of syntactic procedures: agreement refers to a covariance relationship between some phonological and morphological properties of a grammatical constituent (agreeing constituents) and a meaning-related constituent that is adjacent in the noun phrase. Strictly speaking, one might account for grammatical gender in simple formal terms, as it

¹ Nevertheless, it must be considered that noun classes systems always include formal ways of marking nouns insertion in the set. Every individual languages grammatical system will choose noun classifiers in a range which develops from free forms to inflectional morphemes. Diachronically it may be pointed out that the movement and the direction of the well-known pendulum (lexicon - grammar) has been observed to go from lexicon to grammar mostly. In this respect, an interesting discussion on the lexical process of incorporation ("[...] whereby a noun stem and verb stem are compounded to form a derived verb stem") is included in Mithun (1986:384).

² The grammaticalization process began with the vowel \bar{a} and it progressively extended to the entire set of vowel endings nouns in Sanskrit. As a synchronical result of the drift, one may discover a typical assignment system based on formal criteria: I declension nouns are masculine and II declension nouns are feminine (Lazzeroni 1992). Although the theoretical difficulty of drawing a distinction between morphological and phonological assignment rules, it seems reasonable to assume that Sanskrit exhibit a phonological gender assignment rule. In fact, according to the criterion suggested by Corbett at this regard, "phonological rules refer just to a single form of a noun, for example, noun endings in a vowel in the singular are feminine." (Corbett 1991:33).

³ As it will be pointed out in the following section (cfr. *in/ra* 1.), Ancient Greek and Latin grammaticalized gender in terms of formal distinction between noun endings associated in a prevalent degree to masculine nouns (it is the case of *-os) or to feminine nouns (typically signaled by the \bar{a} /-yā markers). Neuter declension had a different and more complex development as a sharply distinct grammatical category.

was suggested in the first versions of Transformational Grammar (cfr. Chomsky 1965:175). But despite its undeniable syntactic prominence, grammatical gender always seems to maintain a semantic dimension. In Western tradition there is no doubt that the first linguistic thoughts on gender as a grammatical category emphasized its semantic core: the iterate attempts to find a causal relationship between the grammatical gender status of a noun as *vir/mulier* "man/woman" and the natural gender feature of its immediate referent. The applicability of such an analysis quickly loses its powerfulness, if we consider the frequent cases of those nouns which belong to a feminine class, as the typical feminine gender marker \bar{a} testifies (I declension in Latin, for instance) - but the opposite is equally true - despite their intrinsic masculine value (cfr. Lat. *poeta*, \bar{a} e "poet"). And the agreement is consequently regulated by the masculine feature (*Latini poetae*, "Latin poets", where the adjective is marked as masculine and the plural by the inflectional morpheme \bar{i}). As far as research has shown, the most well-balanced definition of gender is that including the two major functions it universally shows: "there are no gender systems in which the genders are purely formal categories" was Corbett's (1991:307) final assumption on this topic, and one could probably add that every gender system based on predominantly formal criteria has a strong semantic counterpart.⁴

Enough has been said to give some indications on the problems and difficulties which arise when approaching the category of gender. Being aware of the complexity of its theoretical definition and evaluation, in the present issue we shall move to analyse some diachronic situations in which gender assignment systems underwent considerable changes. The question of the so-called *hypercharacterisation* principle will be specifically dealt with: this is a morphological process that typically affects noun declensions in terms of "messa in risalto di uno dei tratti distintivi che caratterizzano una forma linguistica", according to the definition proposed by Malkiel (1957/58 = [1970]) in his classical and well-known article on this topic. The intriguing case of some Italian dialectal areas will be considered in detail (West Tuscany, and specifically, some well delimited regions inside the administrative provinces of Lucca and Pistoia, and the Ventimiglia dialect), where the process has been well accomplished, or is still at work. It will be demonstrated that the change, in short terms, moves towards a two-noun declension system characterized by endings \bar{a} (for feminine nouns) vs. \bar{o} (for the masculine ones), attracting in their domain every more ambiguous and opaque markers (\bar{e} for instance). To illustrate the internal mechanisms which justify the diachronic development of a noun gender system, we will examine the Late Latin noun declension

⁴ In this perspective gender has been examined in recent Italian linguistic issues: see Chini 1993, who suggests a so-called "approccio integrato" (where formal and semantic properties combined) as the most useful way of correctly defining the category, and Simone (1991:312-315) who underlined a certain relationship between natural and grammatical gender as a sign of grammatical iconicity.

collapse, especially what it has influenced in the direction of dialectal gender assignment system changes (see below 1.). As we shall try to explain in the next paragraphs, the varying degrees of widespread feminine vs. masculine markers received support from cognitive principles and strategies which organize and process grammatical categories in native speakers' competence.

1. Gender as a grammatical category in Indo-European and Classical languages.

Our preliminary investigation begins by briefly looking at the Indo-European situation, bearing in mind that the grammaticalization of gender still raises some crucial questions. Scholars who attempt to reconstruct the rise and development of this category in IE must still clarify the following points:

- i) The historical genesis and development of the grammatical expression of the feminine gender marker and its propagation firstly in the pronominal system and later in the noun declension system of IE;
- ii) The clear-cut differentiation of the grammatical opposition masculine (M) vs. feminine (F) inside the adjective declension and its being dependent on noun lexical gender;
- iii) Gender agreement mechanisms and properties and their occurrence in the noun phrase;
- iv) The interplay between gender and number across the diachronic evolution of noun declension;
- v) Formal and semantic readjustments of the category in individual languages and dialects of IE domain.

Taken together, the above-cited questions call for a large research program. A number of them still remain open, despite the increasing theoretical energy employed by linguists in this field. As a matter of fact, most of the issues dealt with the subjects we are concerned with seem to approach this problem simply from the point of view of historical products.

An essential picture of the development of Indo-European gender system can be briefly drawn, making reference to the well-known hypothesis outlined by scholars belonging to the best tradition of IE linguistic studies, such as Meillet (1931), Adrados (1975) and Martinet (1986=[1987]). Adrados (1975:329) described the original noun declension system of Indo-European in the following way:

- (1) a. Thematic nouns nominative singular +s ending $w\check{I}k^{w}os$ type
- b. $-i/-u$ stems " $*owis$, $*sūniūs$ type
- c. Stems ending in stops " $wōk^{w}s$ type
- d. $-ā$ / $-ī$ stems pure stem in nomin. sing. $*ēkwā$, $*pōtīnī$ type
- e. $-r/-s/-n$ stems with vowel insertion $*patēr$ ($\leftarrow *pHit-$) $*ausōs$, $*kuōn$ types

In the noun declension system quoted above the grammatical categories of case and number generally worked synchronically, except for the secondary and later development of the ending $-s$ as a plural marker. As far as the gender system is concerned, it is still debated whether initially the original Proto-Indo-European system was a three member masculine-feminine-neuter (as some of the attested languages show: Sanskrit, Ancient Greek, Latin etc.) or rather two member (animate vs. inanimate) as the Anatolian language family seems to demonstrate⁵. Apart from this uncertainty (it must be added, however, that the former thesis has in many respects been predominated by the latter: Comrie 1993:103), it is well ascertained that the formal markers indicating the feminine ($-ā$ < $*eH_2$ and $-ī$ < $-i-H_2$) were grammaticalized later. According to a very widespread reconstruction of facts suggested by Martinet (1986=[1987]:194-195), gender grammatical identity was firstly restricted to pronominal declension system. From a flexive archetype where the singular opposed $*so$ (+ANIM) $*to$ (+INANIM) to the plural form $*toi$ (pl.), a more complex three member system came to be and is preserved in historical languages, with the rise of $*so + H_2 > *seH_2$. In Martinet's view of the facts the feminine ending was acquired from root-nouns designating feminine referents (as for $*g^wōenH_2$ "woman").

The ultimate aim of grammaticalization can be discovered in the overtly marking the agreement features and properties which a certain language shows on a special class of constituents (the adjective class in the IE language family). The selected morpheme is regularly required to vary in correspondence with a noun which is its partner constituent in the noun phrase. In the IE morphological system, adjective paradigm is traditionally identified with the primary epicentre of the overt grammatical opposition between masculine and feminine endings ($-os = M$ vs. $-ā = F$). The new-coined ending $-ā$ rapidly 'inflects' noun

⁵ As it has been recently pointed out (Luraghi 1993) the question of gender system in Hittite and in the Anatolian linguistic area is far to be resolved. It is common science that in terms of gender category Hittite knows a two members opposition between common and neuter. The factor under discussion regards the legitimate interpretation assignable to this bipolar system: is it to be read as a direct evidence of the oldest protoindoeuropean situation (where the hittite common gender would have represent the undifferentiated animate category), or must be given credit to other theories (as in Kammenhuber 1963) which argued the primacy of the masculine-feminine opposition (in this opinion hittite gender system would result from the masculine - feminine merging). An accurate review of elements claimed to influence gender development in Hittite and Anatolian area is given in Luraghi (1993:205 and 218), who concludes her issue recalling that "Quello del genere non è che uno dei numerosi problemi irrisolti che la linguistica anatolica si trova a fronteggiare oggi" (*ibid.* 219).

declension, as the Latin examples (*lupa* "wolf female" which progressively replaces the previously long used *lupus femina*) clearly testify⁶. In the same line it must be inserted the appearance of feminine nouns and adjectives, as Ancient Greek θεά "Goddess" beside the oldest epicene form θεός "God, Goddess" notoriously indifferent to grammatical gender opposition.

Other interesting traces of the previous state of affairs is well represented by a special adjective class, in which a morphological opposition between masculine and feminine endings cannot be allowed: Ancient Greek adjectives, such as ἔντιμος, -ον "honoured", φρόνιμος, -ον "wise" etc. neutralize the above mentioned opposition merging masc. and fem. genders in a unique ending -os which could agree with a masculine noun as well as with a feminine one. Otherwise gender agreement rules may be apparently broken when we find noun declension classes where the semantic feature [+FEM] is associated with the ending -os or, on the contrary, semantic feature [+MASC] actually accomplished by -ā ending as Ancient Greek νεανίας "young man", ἀγρότης "farmer" (with analogical -s); Latin *scriba* "scribe", *auriga* "charioteer"; Ancient Slavonic *sluga* "servant", etc.

Despite these disagreements, it could be summarized that thematic adjectives give rise to grammatical gender in IE. In Adrados' opinion (1975) when the adjectival morpheme -ā becomes sensitive to gender category, automatically associating to feminine feature, the ending -os begins by playing its complementary role as a masculine characterized morpheme. Originally, gender opposition was not grammaticalized in Indo-European noun declension: some lexical items could be easily found which opposed different lexemes for the opposite referents in terms of natural sex: as in *g^wenā/*wiros, "woman, man" *bhrāter/swesor, "brother, sister". A vowel ending insertion (-ā or less often -ī) in noun paradigm plausibly determines propitious conditions for an overt grammatical distinction between male and female notions in noun declension. Then *e/o stems attract majority of masculine and neuter nouns⁷, as well as *ā/*yā become the attractive pole of most of feminine ones.

The other feminine marker currently attested in the Indo-European domain is *yeH₂/*-iH₂, whose presence is clearly illustrated by thematic nouns with genitive ending (-i) in Latin and Celtic. Old IE employed that marker to create a feminine adjective from a noun such as for *vr̥kās*

⁶ Lexical replacements, such as the one mentioned above, are often brought by a semantic differentiation between two competing items. As far as the case under debate is concerned, it must be added that the new-coined *lupa* metaphorically designated "prostitute", a meaning which was totally excluded from the original semantic nucleus of the common noun *lupus* (Malkiel 1957/58 = 1970:211). This additional connotation had apparently facilitated the propagation of the new item.

⁷ Different events characterized the development of neuter declension up to its relatively early loss in some Indo-European linguistic areas (Romance with the exception of Rumanian, see below 4.2). Space and time constraints keep us from considering this special gender subsystem.

"wolf" -> *vr̥kīh* "that of wolf" -> "wolf female". This feminine marker could hardly be successful: it remained restricted to athematic paradigm, some traces surviving in the noun inflectional system but in no other cases (Ancient Greek πόσις, πότις "master, mistress").

By analysing the gender system developing in Late Latin and Romance, we shall try to explain the reasons why the ending -a rapidly gained first place in the competition between feminine markers.

2. Late Latin data: inflectional system collapse and noun declensions metaplasms.

Latin noun declensions can be considered as formal classes whose cohesive principle is an intelligible paradigmatic pattern. Belonging to a class automatically implies the selection of a special set of morpheme, regularly connected to three main grammatical categories, namely: gender, number and case. Morphological endings and functional meanings are not linked, as is well-known, by a biunivocal relationship. A well-known example is the nominal ending Lat. -us, which can be associated with the following grammatical features: nominative singular masculine (*Iupus*, -ī type), nominative-accusative singular neuter (*genus*, -eris "kind, family", type), accusative singular masculine (*domus*, -us "house", type). Grammatical categories, which the Latin nominal system preserves, exhibit the same surface ambiguity. We shall now turn from a general view of the grammatical features interplay in a nominal system to the other part of its diachronic evolution, which especially affects gender category. Since the first centuries of Christian Era, noun declension system undergoes transformational processes whose ancient roots may be discovered in the classical language, albeit by means of sporadic actuations. A working process can be observed at play in a clear-cut tendency to biunivocally distribute grammatical genders in -os stems class and in -a stems class respectively.⁸ The trend we are dealing with may be summarized as follows:

- (2) a. feminine -a stems <--- ē stems (Lat. V decl.: fem.)
 b. masculine -us stems <--- ī stems (Lat. IV decl./III decl.ntr.)

In other words, inflectional -a and -os endings became catalytic agents for a large part of lexical stems deriving or from other noun declension classes. Along the intricate set of shifting from one class to another, the two crucial morphemes quoted above were capable of attracting members of other morphological paradigms. The change in a relatively short time produces the suppression of puzzling couples such

⁸ Following a different way of its own, neuter was finally assimilated by the masculine noun class (Bynon 1978:99 ff.).

as *materia/māteriēs*, "material", still existing in Classical Latin at a synchronic level.

The season of co-existence of such allotropic doublets may be approssimatively placed up to the first century of Christian Era (as *App. Probi* admonitions peremptory recall); a long list, such as that drawn up below, still tells us a lot about how the morphological change originates. The destinies of embarrassing allotropes (see below) were largely predictable: it is common science that grammar does not bear the weight of such an opacity for a long time.

Here is the list of alternating noun stems belonging to Lat. V decl. (on the left) and to Lat. I decl. (on the right), both forms being feminine as far as their gender identity is concerned:

(3) Metaplastic attraction exerted by *-a* stems (feminines):

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------|
| a. CONGERIES ~-IA | "heap" |
| b. DŪRITIES ~-ITIA | "hardness" |
| c. EFFIGIES ~-IA | "likeness, copy" |
| d. INTEMPERIES ~-IA | "inclemency" |
| e. LUXURIES ~-IA | "luxury" |
| f. MĀTERIES ~-IA | "material" |
| g. MOLLITIES ~-IA | "softness" |
| h. MUNDTITIES ~-IA | "cleanliness" |
| i. PIGRITIES ~-IA | "laziness" |
| l. PUERTITIES ~-IA | "childhood" |
| m. RABIES ~-IA | "anger" |
| n. TRISTITIES ~-IA | "sadness" |

The Romance results of *-ē-* nominal stems clearly demonstrate the attraction powerfulness wielded by Lat. I decl. prototypical *-ā-* stems over other feminine stems:

- | | | |
|---------------------|-------------|--------------|
| (4) | asp. | ait. |
| a. CALVITIES | calvez (-a) | calvezza |
| b. DŪRITIES | durezza | durezza |
| c. MOLLITIES (-IA) | molleza | mollezza |
| d. PIGRITIES (-IA) | pereza | pigrezza |
| e. PLĀNTITIES (-IA) | llaneza | planezza |
| f. TRISTITIES (-IA) | tristeza | tristezza |
| g. MĀTERIES (-IA) | madera | materia |
| h. CĀRIES | cat. quera | "rot" |
| i. DIES | dia | "day" |
| l. FACIES | faz (h-) | faccia |
| m. GLACIES | ghiaccia | "face, look" |
| | | "ice" |

- n. RABIES
o. SCABIES

- rabia
scabbia

- "anger"
"scaber"

Analogous events affected the masculine lexical domain. An equally important specular change concerns the crowding of Lat. II decl. (*lupus* type) by a really heterogeneous group of lexical items deriving from different noun paradigms. Since Late Latin a strong pressure has been exerted on neuter stems belonging to III decl. (*tempus*, *-oris* "time", type) externally, namely by *lupus* type. In brief, *tempus* *-oris* becomes *tempus*, *-i* as soon as well-known evidence illustrates (Lazzeroni 1990). Furthermore, on the other hand, IV decl. members also (*domus* *-ūs*) occasionally move to II decl. Romance results do not leave any doubt about the direction of change.

(5) Metaplastic attraction exerted by *-us* stems (masculines):

- a. ARCI in side of ARCUS (Varr. and Svet.) "arrows"
b. FRUCTOS in side of FRUCTUS (Varr.) (Rohlf's 1968:17) "fruits"

(6) Lat. it.

- a. ACUS, -US I(o)' ago/ gli aghi "needle/-s"
b. FICUS il fico/i fichi "fig/-s"
c. MANUS la mano/le mani "hand/-s"

The third noun declension, notoriously the most heterogeneous and formally complex Latin class, seems to endure massive contraction by means of surviving of the *-e* ending (masc. or fem.), originating from phonetic evolution of different lexical stems (see, for instance, Lat. *collis* > It. *colle*; "hill"; *caro, carnis* > It. *carne* "meat"). Imparisyllabic nouns exhibit a tendency to loss of the nominative base-form, in order to model themselves upon the base-form arising from the remaining part of declension.

- | | | | | |
|-----|--------------|---------|---------|------|
| (7) | Lat. | It. | Anc.Fr. | Fr. |
| a. | bōs, bovis | > bove | bues | boef |
| b. | dens, dentis | > dentē | denz | dent |
| c. | pēs, pedis | > piede | piez | piet |

As regards the adjective paradigm, similarly a widespread co-existence of alternating doublets can be similarly found (I and II decl. members), as well as not rare cases of paradigmatic shifts from second (*facilis* (masc.-fem.), *-e* (ntr.), "easy" type) to the first one (*bonus* (masc.), *-a* (fem.), *-um* (ntr.), "good" type):

- (8) a. HILARIS/HILARUS, -A, -UM
 b. IMBĒCILLIS ~ IMBECILLUS, -A, -UM
 c. ĀCRE NON ĀCRUM (App. Probi) (> it. acre/agro)
 d. TRISTIS NON TRISTUS (App. Probi)
 e. PAUPER MULIER NON PAUPERA MULIER
 (App. Probi)

In these readjustments of the adjective class, feminine feature seems to have automatically produced agreement properties in adjectives paradigm: drawing initial inferences about the mechanisms by which the change is governed, it must be noted that belonging to a formal class does not seem to be determined by a formal implicative principle, but clearly appears to be caused by a selective criterion depending on gender category.

Opinions traditionally expressed about the historical roots of such a process would appear to be convincing only to some extent: individual cases are mostly discussed and classified one by one, on the basis of the following criteria:

- i) a tendency to lose lexical distinctions with low functional productivity;
- ii) a tendency to make uniform grammatical markers: this kind of explanation applies to metaplastic changes such as *tempus*, *-oris* (III decl.) > *tempus*, *-i* (II decl.) (see above).

The massive migration of lexical items from one to another declension has been traditionally classified as *metaplasma*, i.e. a regular shift which entails morphological features substitution and can equally affect nouns or verbs¹⁰. Behind this external picture, an attempt must be made to account for the cognitive mechanisms which have produced a biplanar morphological system. Metaplasms seem to be determined by the creation of a polarly oriented inflectional pattern: *-os* masc. vs. *-a* fem. endings. It should, however, be stressed that such a prototypical morphological schema must be interpreted as a result of internal forces at work in the Latin noun declension system: there is no doubt that the first two nominal declensions were synchronically the most productive and, what is more impressive, that they were characterized by a higher

⁹ Along a well-attested semantic drift, this word has radically changed its original meaning to produce Modern Italian adjective *imbecille* "stupid, incapable" which has a derogatory central connotation.

¹⁰ As far as verb metaplasms are concerned, it should be remembered that Latin verbal stems are regularly arranged in formal classes (from I to IV conjugation) which represent the ideal counterparts of nouns declensions. Late Latin diachronic evolution is rich in instances of this kind of shift (such as II decl. verbs that were assimilated from the III more productive paradigm: see, for example, *masceo*, *-ere* > It. *mescere* "to mix, join"). Other intriguing evidence in the interesting field of metaplastic changes is well attested by diathetic movements from one another diathesis: on account of such a change, Late Latin knows the arising of new active verbs originating from deponent class progressively disused (*revertor/revertio* "to come back", *dēmōlior/dēmōlio* "to destroy" and so on). On this topic see also our recent contribution (Giannini 1994).

formal and functional degree of homogeneity. Since ancient times, I and II classes were crowded, in fact, from the majority of feminine (the first) and masculine (the second) nouns respectively. Nevertheless neutra membership of the II decl. are inscribed in a well-compact formation which is easily recognizable, especially thanks to the presence of *-m/-a* morphemes in singular and plural nominative-accusative cases respectively.

3. Data from some Italian dialectal areas: gender grammatical polarization in noun declension system.

3.1. West Tuscan noun declensions readjustments: hypercharacterization and hypocharacterization as conflicting principles.

In the various and rich landscape of Italian dialects¹¹, not every linguistic point harmoniously agrees with morphological developments which produced the collapse of Late Latin noun declensions. Some morphological processes apparently contradict such a diachronic evolution. Nevertheless, intriguing instances of more conservative dialects can also be found, which strengthened the above-mentioned changes affecting the Latin nominal system. As we shall try to illustrate in this section, this is easily demonstrable for the Montale and Ventimiglia dialects. Our attention will now focus especially on those linguistic situations where it is legitimate to discover a gender re-determination strategy.

A detailed search through the exhaustive and classical collection of Italian dialectal material by Rohlfs (1968) showed that the relevant working principles operate in the following morphological trends:

- i) *-a* stems > *-e* stems:
- (9) *la porta* > *la porte* "the door"

This isogloss embraces a region including North-Western Tuscany (Versilia, Garfagnana) and some specific marginal points of Liguria (La Spezia, Zoagli, Rovegno); the change clearly seems to be contrary to the above discussed metaplasma I > III decl. (see above 2.). The epicentre of this change can be indicated in Lucca's province (cfr. Rohlfs 1968:12 ff.), although it must be remembered that in the same region the noun declension system frequently undergoes an opposite trend, observable in cases such as *la fune* > *la funa* "the rope" *l'ape* > *l'apa* "the bee" (see

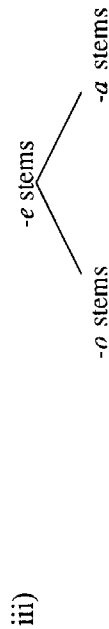
¹¹ Our investigation has been restricted to north-central area, with particular reference to some interesting situations of Tuscany and of Liguria local dialects.

also: > *la lapa*¹². A plausible explanation has been put toward by Rohlfs (1968:13) himself: "Nell'uscita di *-e* dovremo in parte vedere una reazione ipercorretta. Data l'incertezza tra *ape* e *apa*, forme come [scilicet. *la*] *porte*, *vespe*, *querce*, ecc. potevano infatti apparir quelle corrette". According to his opinion then, the passage *-a* > *-e* may be interpreted as a hypercorrectism effect.

ii) *-o* stems > *-e* stems:

- (10) a. il diavolo > il diavole (also *diàule*: province of Lucca) "the devil"
 b. il mento > il mente¹³ (Versilia, Garfagnana, Lucca) "the chin"
 c. il fieno > il fiene (Umbria: Gubbio; Garfagn., Versilia) "the hay"

The masculine stem shift (ii) obviously represents the counterpart of feminine movement from *-a* stems to *-e* stems (i).



In *-e* ending noun declension, grammatical gender is not automatically predictable, as normally happens for *-a* and *-o* nouns which are mostly feminine and masculine respectively in standard Italian¹⁴. Diachronically, stems ending in *-e* assimilate masculine and feminine nouns belonging to the III Latin declension (cfr. above): under this chapter of language history, we can find a masculine noun such as *il ponte* "bridge" (< Lat. *pons*), besides feminine nouns types as *la fronte* "the forehead" (< Lat. *frons*)¹⁵. Dialectal areas considered here draw a solution to formal ambiguity of ending *-e*, uniformly distributing masculine and feminine nouns in two more diagrammatical noun paradigms, whose formal exponents prototypically represent individual grammatical genders: *-a* for feminines and *-o* for masculines. Therefore the underlying pattern seems to be the following:

¹² Cfr. Neri (1944) who, discussing this particular dialectal form *la lapa*, refers a popular saying which sounds "*niffito come una lapa*" "nervous as a bee".

¹³ It must be, in passing, noticed that this same word having feminine gender (*la mente*) means "mind" in Standard Italian. Gender identity (immediately recoverable from article ending *-a* in the noun phrase) allows dialect native speakers not to confuse these two homonyms.

¹⁴ Lepschy & Lepschy (1981) is a useful reference for matters of Standard Italian grammar.
¹⁵ Here we are in presence of the so-called *ambigenera* words, whose gender change automatically determines a radical semantic change: cf. *il fronte* "the front", *la fronte* "the forehead"; *il fine* "the aim", *la fine* "the end" ecc.

(11) Stand.It. Lucca's dial.

- a. il cece, il pesce > il cecio, il pescio (Versilia: data from Pieri; LU prov. first example)
 "the gram", "the fish"
 b. il maiale, lo stivale > il maiato, lo stivalo (North-western Tusc. corner; Lunigiana, Garfagnana)
 "the pig", "the boot"
 c. la cimice, la pulce > la cìmicia, la pucia (Lucca's dial.: data from Nieri, Pieri)
 "the bug", "the flea"

As in the cases quoted earlier, Rohlfs (1968:16) provides a clear description rather than a real explanation: "Nel complesso si può dire che il fenomeno può pensarsi ovunque dovuto a una naturale esigenza di chiarezza; e che appar particolarmente intenso là, dove la vocale finale è divenuta indistinta". In the perspective suggested here, whereas the previous changes (cfr. above, (9) and (10)) may be read as actualizations of a *hypocharacterization* principle¹⁶, the last one (iii) inherited the opposite tendency to *hypercharacterization* strategy from Late Latin morphological evolution. We shall move on to develop these notions in the next paragraph of the present article.

A somewhat similar conflicting development can be found in the following morphological readjustments of some particular sections of ancient noun declension. The first case we are going to examine concerns the preservation of relicts proceeding from IV Lat. decl. (*-us* stems: *manus*, *-ūs* "hand" type):

- (12) a. la mano/le mano "the hand/-s" (Lucca, Pisa, Elba Island, Grosseto, Umbria, Marche, Lazio; Neaples also: *le mmano*)
 b. la figo/le figo "the fig/-s" (Southern Umbria)

In these cases gender hypercharacterization seems to be blocked by a consistence preservation of invariable morpheme in the singular and plural (*-o*), consequently invariable items from shifting to the first inflectional class (such a shift notoriously affects Lat. *nurus*, *-us* (*nora*) > It. *nuora*, *-e* "daughter-in-law", *soror* > **sorūs*, *-us* > It. *suora*, *-e*, Span. *sorera* "sister") etc.¹⁷.

¹⁶ For a definition of these two important concepts, Malkiel's well-known paper remains especially useful: "Se una formazione linguistica si sviluppa in maniera tale da permettere, a un certo punto, che uno dei suoi lineamenti distintivi risulti in maniera più netta di quel che facesse nello stadio immediatamente precedente, si può parlare di *ipercharacterizzazione* (o *iperdeterminazione*) di quell'elemento in una prospettiva diacronica. [...] All'opposto ogni corrispondente affievolimento che si verificò col passar del tempo, visto sotto questa luce, può essere a buon diritto chiamato *ipercharacterizzazione*".

¹⁷ These examples have long been familiar to historical linguists and Romanists; in the same perspective they had been discussed in Malkiel (1952:491): "On the one hand, speakers have favored the transfer of the two inherently feminine words to the declensional class associated with the feminine in the simplified inflection of late colloquial Latin, by substituting *-A* for *-US*".

The gender assignment system prevailed on the number morpheme selection in a further set of lexical items, such as:

- (13) a. la chiave/le chiavi > le chiavi (Anc. pis. and sen.; Lucca's prov.)
 "the key/-s"
 b. la gente/le genti > le gente (Anc. sen., Florence dial.)
 "the people" (pl.)
 c. la noce/le noci > le noci (Lucca's prov.)
 "the nut/-s"
 d. la parte/le parti > le parte (Lucca, Florence dial., Anc. It.)
 "the part/-s"

In most of the examples listed above it has long been thought of as an influence of the Latin ending *-ēs*¹⁸ (*-ēs* > *-e*); but number morpheme invariance in the adjective (whose attestations especially occur in the Northern Lucca rural dialect: *le scarpe marone*¹⁹ "the brown shoes", *le foglie verde* "the green leaves"; *le scarpe marone* authorize us to discover that the same hypercharacterization principle is at work here, which we have already experienced in some of the previous cases (see above (iii)). The phenomenon seems to be implemented by the alliteration effect which is yielded by syntactic agreement in the noun phrase: it goes in the opposite direction compared to Italian literary language tendencies in plural assignment systems formation (where Lat. nom. pl. *-ēs* > *-i*: *la torre/le torri* "tower, towers"), according to an implicit exigency to determine number category. Rohlf's (1968:32) had already grasped the crucial role played by the alliteration effect of the article and demonstrative in the noun phrase; although without mentioning examples from the Lucca rural dialect, he argued that because of the greater number of *-e* plural feminine items than masculine ones (*i cani* "the dogs", where article and noun endings openly disagree) this *-e* has been better preserved after the feminine plural article (*le*) [...], whereas

¹⁸ See also Rohlf's (1968:32).

¹⁹ The colour adjective *marrone* "brown" (< Fr. *marron*) is notoriously invariable in Standard Italian grammar (see Lepschy & Lepschy 1981:101-102) as well as other Italian adjectives designating colours (such as *rosa* and *viola*: *la cravatta rosa* "rose neck-tie", *le cravatte rosa* "rose neck-ties"). In West Tuscan dialect *marrone* apparently works differently: its invariability seems due to an unaware breach of general agreement rule governing the adjectival phrase in that dialect, rather than to the conscious compliance with its inflectional invariability rule of Standard Italian. The proof of what we are suggesting here lies in native speakers' linguistic habit. Educated speakers (whose linguistic competence is strictly closed to the Standard) normally inflect *marrone* in the plural form *marroni* (*Ho comprato dei pantaloni marroni* "I bought some brown panths"), whereas dialectal or uneducated speakers regularly omit the agreement number rule in the same environment (*le scarpe marone*).

on the contrary article influence easily pushes *i cani* towards *i cani* (with number and gender markers agreement).

3.2. Gender grammatical polarization in the Montale and Ventimiglia dialects.

Italian dialects which best represent a tendency to grammatical polarization of gender are Montale dialect, the only linguistic description we have is the old monograph by Nerucci (1865), and Ventimiglia dialect, which has been more recently examined by Azaretti (1977) in a traditional but detailed investigation. Both idioms show a hypercharacterization process of grammatical gender in a very advanced state with respect to what we have so far observed as it was attested in diachronic development of literary Italian (educated Tuscan regularly maintains *-e* nouns undistinguished as regards the gender marker: cf., for instance, masc. *il fine* "the aim", fem. *la fine* "the end" with a radical variation at a semantic level).

The main changes which have affected noun inflectional system in Montale's dialect may be classified as follows (data quoted from Nerucci 1865):

i) Feminine nouns: *-e* (sing.)/*-i* (pl.) > *-a* (sing.)/*-e* (pl.)

- (14) a. la canzone > la canzona/ le canzone "the song/-s"
 b. la fornace > la fornacia/ le fornace "the kiln/-s"
 c. la dote > la dota/ le dote "the marriage settlement/-s"

ii) Fem. ending in *-o* (sing.)/*-i* (pl.) > *-a* (sing.)/*-e* (pl.)

- (15) la mano/le mani > la mana/le mane "the hand/-s"

iii) Masc. nouns in *-ce* or *-ge* (sing.) > *-o* (sing.)

- (16) a. pesce > pescio "fish"
 b. rege > regio "king"

iv) Masc. nouns in *-a* are redetermined as feminine by the assignment of the article *la*:

- (17) a. il sistema > la sistema "the system"
 b. il diadema > la diadema "the diadem"

The rule does not apply to such nouns when they seem to be received as masculine "pe natura e necessariamente" (as Nerucci marginally annotated, p.18): a typical example could be *il papa* (masc., "the Pope"), whereas **la papa* (fem.) would be impossible.

v) The interrogative pronoun system: invariable forms take gender markers regularly assigned to the different gender classes (*-o* vs. *-a*):

(18) *quale*²⁰ > *qualo* (masc. sing.) / *quala* (fem. sing.)

Inflectional patterns around which the above-mentioned typology seems to be built are *-a* and *-o* respectively, as the best exponents for feminine and masculine gender classes. Every item which evidently transgresses such a structure has been immediately led inside it.

As regards the diachronic developments of the inflectional noun system in Ventimiglia's local idiom, shifts from one class to another closely follow metaplastic evolution already started in Late Latin. A massive set of data (in quantitative and qualitative terms) regard passages of nouns from Lat. III and V decl. to the I one, and from Lat. III and IV to the II one. Attractive poles are once again represented by feminine *-a* stems (sing.) and masculine *-u* (< *-us*). Some of the most interesting instantiations are listed below:

vi) Attraction exerted from feminine nouns ending in *-a*:

- (19) a. COLLE > *cola* "hill"
 b. CORBE > *corba* "basket"
 c. FLÔRE > *sciura* "flower"
 d. FURFURE > *fiarfura* "flake chaff"
 e. GLANDE > *ganda* "acorn"
 f. PÛLICE > *prüxa* "flea"
 g. PUPPI > *pupa* "stern"
 h. TRIBUNAL > *tribiuna* "law-court"
 i. VÎTE > *via* "vine"

Lexical items belonging to Lat. V decl. regularly shift to the feminine class (with ending in *-a*); the change in Late Latin had passed along the same lines (cf. above 2.):

- (20) a. FACIES > *faça* "face"
 b. GLACIES > *giassa* "ice"
 c. RABIES > *ragia* "anger"

Some plural neutral items flowed in the same inflectional class:

- (21) PECORA > *pegura* (sg.) "sheep"

The same phenomenon of the merging of plural neutral items (Lat. *arma* "arms", *folia* "leaves" type etc.), in parenthesis, is a panromance isogloss (cf. Lat. *arma* > fr. *arme*, "arm"; Lat. *folia* > Fr. *feuille*, It. *foglia* "leaf" etc.).

²⁰ It is well-known that interrogative pronoun *quale* does not take any gender marker in Standard Italian. It becomes clearer if we consider its adjectival use: *quale abito* (masc.) *hai indossato ieri sera?* "How did you dress yesterday evening?"; *quale penna* (fem.) *hai usato?* "what pen did you use".

vii) Attraction exerted from masculine nouns with *-u* ending:

- (22) a. ABETE > *avéu* "pine"
 b. ARBORE > *arbiuru* "tree"
 c. CICERE > *ceixu* "chick pea"
 d. ELECE > *erxu* "holm oak"
 e. FASCIE > *fasciu* "bundle"
 f. FULGURE > *furgaru* "lighting"
 g. MARMORE > *marmaru* "marble"
 h. MUGILE > *müzaru* "mullet"
 i. NEPOS > *nevu* "nephew"
 l. PISCE > *pesciu* "fish"
 m. SALICE > *sarxu* "willow"
 n. SULFURE > *surfanu* "sulphur"
 o. TRABE > *travu* "beam"
 p. VERME > *vermu* "worm"

Masculine items belonging to II lat. declension with *-er* ending in the original Classical Latin inflection undergo the same destiny:

- (23) a. MAGISTER > *maixiru* "school-master"
 b. SOCER > *söixuru* "father-in-law"

IV decl. items (*fructus* "fruit" type), which had already been attracted from the second inflectional class in Late Latin (whose members were mostly masculine with *-us* ending), become *-u* stems:

- (24) a. ARCU > *arcu* "bow"
 b. FRUCTUS > *frütu* "fruit"
 c. PORTICU > *pörtegu* "portico"
 d. VERSU > *versu*

In the formation of the plural, Ventimiglia's dialect is inclined to privilege a gender assignment system, rather than to follow a formal assignment marker principle. In Classical Latin the plural assignment system worked on the basis of a formal criterion: *rosa* "rose" and *poeta* "poet" had the same plural morpheme *-ae*, against gender disagreement; *lupus* "wolf" and *fructus* "fruit" differed because of the plural markers, which were represented by two different morphemes (*-i* and *-us* respectively) in spite of gender agreement. Modern Italian takes masculine nouns (*poeta* type) back to their own lexical gender: the plural marker is the same for *poeta* as for *libro* "book", namely *-i* (> pl. *poeti*, "poets" *libri* "books"). In Ventimiglia's dialect (Azaretti 1977:148 ff.) every masculine noun normally takes the plural agreement marker *-i*, such as feminines (both nouns shifted to the I decl. through the

neuter plural marker *-a* and those originating from III Lat. declension) model themselves on the feminine plural marker *-e* by analogy.

Therefore the bipolar opposition at work in this idiom is as follows:

- (25) Masc. sing. > Pl.
 a. *övu* > *övi* "eggs"
 b. *zenugliu* > *zenugli* "knees"
 c. *ossi* > *ossi* "bones"

- (26) Fem. sing. > Pl.
 a. *ciave* > *ciave* "key"
 b. *turre* > *turre* "tower"
 c. *nuxe* > *nuxe* "nut"
 d. *virpe* > *virpe* "fox"

As a result of such a development it becomes impossible to distinguish between singular and plural for the feminine items; number assignment is relegated to other members of the noun phrase, such as articles and demonstrative adjectives: in the noun phrase (cf., for instance, *a virpe* "the (fem.sing.) fox", *e virpe* "the (fem.pl.) foxes", *chela virpe* "that (fem.) fox", *chete virpe* "those foxes") the form of the article (*a, e*) and adjective (*chela, chete*) will clearly indicate noun number (Azaretti 1977:149).

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that nouns with a double gender marker (as for BRACHIU > *brassu* (masc.) and *brassa* (fem.) "arm") normally take the plural marker depending on which gender class they belong to: in Ventimiglia's dialect here is the couple *brassu, brassi* (masc.pl.) besides *brassa, brasse* (fem.pl.); here again, we have *legnu* (masc. sing.), *legni* (masc. pl.), besides *legna* (fem. sing.), *legne* (fem. pl.) "wood".

From this brief look at Ventimiglia's dialect (but the same can probably be said for most central dialects) proposed here it can be argued that gender determination strategies predominate over the need to clearly mark number categories. Complex and rich interplay between gender and number categories both in Indo-European languages and in Italian dialects might be worthy of a separate and accurate investigation²¹.

21. As far as we can see, the last study devoted to the complex interplay between these two categories is chapter 7 in Corbett (1991), and especially 7.1. However, he faces the topic essentially from a theoretical and general perspective.

4. A cognitive interpretation.

4.1 Hypercharacterization and grammatical polarization as cognitive processes.

Data elicited from Late Latin, Romance and some Italian dialectal areas exhibit a clear-cut tendency to clarify grammatical exponents of gender category, overcoming a previous stage of embarrassing formal fluctuation. Similar linguistic situations (with incidental reference to gender determination in Romance) have been examined by Y. Malkiel (1957/58 [=1970]) in a famous essay, which is still an undeniable landmark in this field of research. According to Malkiel's typology, hypercharacterization and hypocharacterization processes differentiate each other in grammar as two opposite linguistic forces which respectively give prominence to (*hypercharacterization*) or weaken (*hypocharacterization*) one specific grammatical feature. The different kinds of hypercharacterization move on to more definiteness in morphological elements which were originally less determinate. In brief, these are the cases of hypercharacterization process listed by Malkiel (1970:179):

(i) Less determinate morpheme > more determinate morpheme:

- (27) Fr. *lion* > *lion-esse* in stand of *lionne* ²² "lion/ess"

(ii) Undeterminate form > determinate form:

- (28) Anc. Sp. *cuchar* (fem.) > *cuchara*

(iii) Undeterminate form > determinate form with gender change:

- (29) Lat. *pulex* > Sp. *pulga* "flea"

(iv) Ambiguously determinate form > unambiguously determinate form:

- (30) It. dial. *manu* (fem.) > *mano* "hand"

Each process in the list yields more transparent and efficacious devices for communication purposes. The phenomenon may affect grammar, namely a specific grammatical (morphological or syntactic) category, as happens in (i-iv) cited above, or lexicon, when a lexical item can be formally modified in order to adapt it to the semantic field it belongs to. Common property shared by processes corresponding to points (i-iv) is an attempt to make determinate and definite what seems to be opaque and ambiguous at a formal or semantic level. Linguistic strategies underlying hypercharacterization (both cases affecting

22. The Author evidently suggests, not without expressing any doubt, an intermediate stage where a form *lionne* hypothetically survived (Malkiel 1970:179).

grammar and those concerning lexicon)²³ answer the speakers' needs to chiefly specify linguistic categories with formal or semantic devices. Categorization principles applied in such a cognitive operation seem to follow these passages:

- (a) specifying feature selection, in order to guarantee transparency;
- (b) specifying feature widespread to a lexical or morphological class;
- (c) specifying feature stabilization inside the class and its consequent paradigmatic readjustment.

In the light of this theoretical pattern, diachronic morphological change outlined above can be articulated in the following points:

1. - speakers organize grammatical paradigms (such as inflectional classes have been demonstrated to be) according to the same categorial principles by means of which they structure lexical items of a certain language. Each linguistic category is determined by salient and distinctive features that immediately allow their identification (at formal and semantic level) and, on the other hand, by means of marginal features, which are often collocated at fuzzy categorial boundaries²⁴;
2. - such morphological changes take place by selecting and generalizing prototypical features (for it follows a pattern synchronically responsible of categories working); by progress prototypical features are extended to marginal membership.

These cognitive and conceptual strategies are openly reflected on linguistic structure both at a synchronic and a diachronic level. Formal classes, which normally constitute the morphological component of synthetic language types²⁵, modify around a schema that imposes prototypical markers on different components of grammar (endings, phonological and prosodic patterns, syntactic structures). Those paradigmatic classes slowly attract external membership inside the grammatical category, in the same way as it has been demonstrated that semantic and lexical components of language systems work (Taylor

1989; see also Cruise, Geeraerts and Kleiber contributions to the present issue).

It becomes therefore clearer how and why bipolar propagation of gender markers in some linguistic points of Italy have been guided by the principle of hypercharacterization. Since Late Latin, as we have seen, the noun declension system starts by changing its internal structure according to the need to create a diagrammatic relationship between gender markers and gender classes which survive the noun declension collapse. Thus, in our opinion, the choice of the oppositive couple *-os* vs. *-a* must become necessary; nevertheless, later linguistic developments of some Italian dialects accomplished the grammatical polarization process (with the widespread endings: *-ol-u* vs. *-a*) which originated in Late Latin metaplasms. This last step of the morphological drift further supports a cognitive interpretation of facts.

4.2. *IE Gender development: a synthetic review in a cognitive perspective.*

In an attempt to sum up the main lines of the gender development, we must consider that in the first stage of Indo-European linguistic history gender arises as a *covert* category (the notion originates in Whorf's linguistic thoughts, 1957 = [1970]:73-98; on this topic also cf. Simone 1991:300): information about the belonging of each noun to a gender class were included in the lexicon and came out only in the noun phrase and sentence where there could be a constituent syntactically dependent on it (cfr. Martinet example above-quoted: *seH₂ g^{won}neH₂ "this woman"*).

Grammaticalization of the gender category is actualized by means of a morphological and syntactic process: a feminine marker has been identified (whose source is almost unanimously focused in a pronominal system) and regularly introduced in noun declension. The insertion of a feminine marker creates a class specifically characterized by the presence of such a marker (adjectives class). Noun → adjective derivation follows the same way of opposition masculine ≠ feminine: from an original formal indifferenciation the class can be isolated in distributional and syntactic terms. Syntactic agreement mechanism assures a marker common to the noun declension system.

Therefore gender becomes an *overt* category (in the same meaning suggested by Whorf) everywhere in the Indo-European linguistic domain with exception of the Anatolian area (where, as is well-known, the distinction has been restricted to the inanimate world). In this way, a second level of noun declension is growing and prevailing: masculine and feminine grammatical markers are easily recognizable and opposite each other (Lat. *lupus, lupa*; "wolf, wolf female", *bonus, bona, bonum*; "good", Anc. Gr. *νεός, νεά* "new"). Notwithstanding, allomorphic

²³ In Malkiel's theoretical classification lexical hypercharacterization may be represented by: a) lexical polarization, a formal rapprochement between semantically opposed concepts (cfr. prov. *grèu* "heavy, serious" and *leu* "light"); b) lexical ranging, pressure exerted on a single item by a lexical group. A good sample of this process has been provided by Malkiel himself (1952:494), who reminds the reader of the Vulgar Latin antithetic pair *levis* "light" ≠ *gravis* "heavy", whose formal contamination led to the coinage of *grèvis* "heavy".

²⁴ The notion of fuzzy boundary is by now familiar in the field of cognitive linguistics. In order to clarify the meaning of this concept and its useful applications the reader is referred to Taylor (1989).
²⁵ It is necessary to consider what kind of linguistic type each language belongs to, in order to correctly evaluate different degrees of transformation morphological and syntactic changes produce. Typological aspects are in fact strictly connected to drift movements individual languages diachronically undergo.

associations remain as visible relics of the previous stage preceding gender grammaticalization: thematic nouns are mostly masculine (or neuter), but there are also feminine (cfr. Lat. *fāgus*, Anc. Gr. ἡ φηγός "beech" and, generally speaking, plant words; ἡ νυός, Lat. *nurus* "daughter-in-law"; Anc. Gr. ἔντιμος, -ον "honoured"). -ā-/-yā- stems are mostly feminine, but the same morpheme may also give rise to masculine abstract nouns and *nomina agentis* (Lat. *agricola*, "agriculturist", Anc. Sl. *sluga* "servant" type). There are, in addition, the so-called epicene (ἵππος "horse, horse female"), whose nominative singular ending equally works for both genders.

Historically attested IE languages (with the exception of Hitrite and some restrictions for Armenian and Tocharian) show a nominal system [+ANIM] which is polarly oriented by two antithetic classes of masculine and feminine. The category of unanimateness remains expressed by neuter. In the set of competing feminine markers produced by the system, morpheme -ā (< -eH₂) seems to be as prevalent as the best prototypical member of dycotomic opposition. Greek data offer precious evidence: ὁ φάτρη originally meaning "brother" does not have a feminine pendant originated by the same root; later given the original meaning specialization of this noun as "member of a *fratria*"²⁶ meanwhile, in the common language, ὁ ἀδελφός would root as "brother", gender opposition was before long grammaticalized: feminine "sister" is, in fact, ἡ ἀδελφή.

There appear, then, to be many interesting instances of noun declensions restructuring on the basis of an evident gender hypercharacterization principle in Late Latin (metaplasms) and on different points of the Italian dialectal area (Montale's dialect; Ventimiglia's dialect; west corner Tuscan dialects): grammatical polarization of the gender system, as regards the feature [+ANIM], has been at best codified by the antithetic couple of endings -o(s) ≠ -a. Such a morphological opposition seems to reflect that "metafora di polarizzazione" (Lazzeroni 1992), which gender, as linguistic category, has indicated to represent on a conceptual level. It may happen that gender grammatical polarization also affects number: in less conservative Italian dialects (those which strengthened developmental trends of Late Latin inflectional noun declension, against the braking power exerted by literary language), gender noun is grammatically specified in plural according to the opposite pattern (fem. -e vs. masc. -i). This may also happen if such morpheme attribution yields opacity with respect to number category (see above instances as *la chiave* -i "the key, -s" > *le chiavi* "the keys", *le foglie verde* "the green leaves" etc.). Number specification remains due to article agreement. In other

²⁶ This term originally designated a special religious and political association, which constituted a subsystem of tribe unity (φύλη) in archaic Greek society.

words, if gender and number determination go to conflicting, the first one usually predominates.

A. Meillet has several times confuted the opinion that morpheme -ā - intrinsically included [+FEM] valence (Meillet 1932). The hard core of his thesis is part of a famous essay on this topic; the substantial thoughts are as follows:

- a) masculine ≠ feminine distinction is relatively late in IE linguistic history and it variously embodies a language from another in diachronic and structural terms: in a previous ancient era, in peripheral languages and later in central ones; a lesser role in a dialectal group which includes Armenian, Italic, and Celtic, and a greater role in linguistic area ranging from Indo-Iranian to the Germanic languages;
- b) allomorphic features observable in individual linguistic domains (see above) testify that the ending -ā - is not a specifically distinctive morpheme for [+FEM];
- c) throughout the spread of gender opposition the crucial role was played by *nomina agentis*;
- d) the propagation of -ā feminine marker took place over a relatively long period of time; it is worth noting that gender does not appear grammaticalized in nouns which represent the hard core of lexicon (*pater*, "father", *māter* "mother", *bōs* "ox", *ovis* "sheep" etc.).

Meillet's claim on how and why morpheme -ā has been distributed in noun declension loses its powerfulness, if we consider individual morpheme value but also, first and foremost, evaluating the meaning of polarized morphological couple -os vs. -a. In such a way, it will be possible to assess that the ending -ā - predominates over any other feminine marker (obviously in those languages which possess such an opposition), because of it belongs to a well-attested antonymic binomial in nouns and adjective declension. For it follows that in athematic adjectives class gender opposition was neutralized: Lat. *facilis*, -e "easy" and *audax*, "audacious" types so far as Anc. Gr. εὐδαίμων "happy", εὐγενής "noble" types do not exhibit, as is well-known, a distinct ending for feminine (in the case of *audax*, syncretism also includes neuter).

An alternative view of syncretism affecting Ancient Greek and Latin adjective is claimed by Corbett (1991:150 ff.), who distinguishes controllers gender (noun agreement classes: M-F-Ntr in noun system inherited by classical languages) and targets gender (agreement classes of constituents related to noun in the noun phrase). In order to justify theoretical necessity of two separate interpretative labels, Corbett gives Rumanian examples: Rumanian is the only Neo-Latin language to have kept the gender tripartition M-F-Ntr inalterate; there are therefore three

noun agreement classes. Corbett's explanation is based on a theoretical distinction between controllers \neq targets gender: in his opinion, Rumanian has three controllers gender, but only two targets. I is usually called masculine (nouns taking *-o* in the sing. and *-i* in the pl. *bárbat* "man"); II is feminine (nouns taking *-o* in the sing. and *-e* in the pl. *scaun* "chair") and III is the disputed gender class, sometimes called neuter and sometimes ambigenetic (nouns taking *-a* in the sing. and *-e* in the pl. *fată* "girl").

Aronoff's (1992) reflections and counterarguments appear to be reasonable: the cases discussed above are easier to explain in terms of syncretism, because ending identity shared by two out of three agreement classes in the singular and plural is phonological and morphological, i.e. a substantial one. In order to illustrate the theoretical licity of suggesting two different gender agreement levels, a language could be found, whose gender agreement classes and targets were distinct. Furthermore, gender and number interplay will be conveniently evaluated: as we have examined in the preceding section of this paper, data deriving from a brief look at the complex dialectal domain of Italian testify impressive evidence of continuous interaction between these two categories, both as regards noun inflection synchronic working and as regards their historical development (see above 3).²⁷

5. Conclusions.

The state of affairs resulting from our investigation of gender hypercharacterization processes in Late Latin and some Italian dialectal points suggests the following reflections:

- i) Gender category development may be interpreted as a slow transformation from a covert category (when information concerning gender was intrinsically included in lexical items by no means marked by any formal device) to an overt category (when a specific marker appears in order to identify nominal items as \pm M-F-Ntr).
- ii) Gender grammaticalization totally affects the IE linguistic domain (with the well-known exception of Anatolian family), following morphological and syntactic procedures:
 - a) feminine marker identification (*eH*₂ > *-ā-*) in pronoun declension;
 - b) new-coinage of the adjective class characterized by the regular presence of such a marker and depending on a syntactic agreement: inflectional ending necessarily changes

corresponding with the noun which it depends on in the noun phrase;

- c) propagation of gender markers to noun declension system.
- iii) Later (but not everywhere: namely, Late Latin and Romance) noun classes undergo a grammatical polarization process, probably reflecting on grammatical and formal level conceptual representation of gender category: prevailing endings couple definitively are *-os* (> *-o/-u*) vs. *-a*. Morpheme *-a* predominates over competing feminine markers, as the most productive and spread ending in individual languages and the most diachronically resisting.
- iv) The spread and performance of this morpheme largely depends on its antonymic position with respect to the noun thematic inflection of masculine: the so-called three ending adjective is probably the pattern which supports marker *-a* as the best prototypical feminine morpheme (I class: Lat. *bonus, bona, bonum*, gr. *ἀγαθός, ἀγαθή, ἀγαθόν* "good"; Got. *blinds, blinda*). From this point, the opposition has spread to noun declension, creating *agna* "lamb female" (< *ἀδελφή* "sister" (< *δ ἀδελφός*), beside ancient *agnus fēmina*, or *ἡ ἀδελφὴ* "sister" (< *δ ἀδελφός*), which in a short time replaces the weakest heir of IE root **swesor*, attested in glossaries as *eor*.
- v) Some north-central Italian dialects (Liguria and north-west Tuscany) maximally strengthened grammatical polarization M \neq F, which was already testified by declension metaplasms common in Late Latin: in the noun declension system of Ventimiglia's and Montale Pistoiese's dialect grammatical gender is redeterminate (hypercharacterized). In the same idioms it is worth to consider interesting tendency to determinate gender to the detriment of number: *le chieve* "keys" type wins standard plural *le chievi*.

It must be, in passing, added that some modern IE languages, namely English, might appear to be a counterexample to the picture depicted in these pages, as far as point i) quoted above is in particular concerned: in modern English gender went back to the status of covert category (cfr. *he-cat, she-cat*).²⁸ This historical development seems to reflect the typological features of a language system: English grammar is undoubtedly oriented to a strongly analytic structure; on the other hand the opposite direction of the change (gender as a covert category >

²⁷ Aronoff does not deny the possibility of introducing a new-coined notion in order to account for historical and synchronic interplay of gender and number categories.

²⁸ English pronominal system is the only lexical field of grammar overtly maintaining gender distinctions: cfr. *he she it*.

overt category), affecting the first post-diasporic stage of historical IE language constitutions, was very receptive to the massive proliferation of inflectional devices and, consequently, for the synthetic structure which old IE languages universally shared. The question of gender development depending on and corresponding to typological features of individual IE languages still remains an intriguing chapter in the field of historical linguistics.

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