

Italian dialects at the phonology-syntax interface: The case of propagination

Giuseppina Silvestri*

Abstract. In southern Italian dialects propagination, a phonological phenomenon involving vowel alteration via assimilation, is re-interpreted as a manifestation of the phonology-syntax interface. Cases of optional occurrence of propagination are linked to distinctive (morpho)syntactic configurations of the Determiner Phrase and, ultimately, to the semantic-syntactic category of Number. Propagination parallels metaphony in conveying unexpected morphological patterns. More than one phonological phenomenon play a determining role in the grammar of some Italo-Romance varieties: this calls for an approach that accounts for both the phonological outcomes and the structural configurations.

Keywords. phonology-syntax interface; determiner phrase; agreement; Italo-Romance

1. Introduction. Propagation (or *propaggiazione* in Italian; Ascoli 1873; Rohlfs 1966-69: §§ 296-7; Tuttle 1985a; Schirru 2008, 2013; Vincent 2016:38) is a specific type of vowel harmony (Rizzi and Savoia 1993) attested in a number of upper southern Italian dialects in a non-homogeneous diatopic distribution. More specifically, propagation corresponds to a segmental sound change which typically results either in the insertion of an etymologically unexpected glide or in the change of the vowel's quality (see §2).

In this contribution I present some uncharted empirical evidence gathered in northwestern Calabria in a new light: the phonological outputs of propagation will be assessed based on their interaction with some morphosyntactic features of the determiner phrase (DP). I show how cases of optional licensing/blocking of propagation can be scrutinized as strictly depending on the structure of the DP (Silvestri 2021). I will parallel the multifaceted behavior of propagation with the morphological role of metaphony. I will put forward a structural interpretation following the assumption that the phonology-syntax interface is not only a fundamental module of the grammar (Chomsky and Halle 1968; Selkirk 1984 ss.; Hauser et al. 2002), but also an increasingly necessary perspective from which comprehensively (re)assess a number of phonological, morphological, and morphosyntactic phenomena that were traditionally classified as belonging to only one of the domains of the linguistic research, typically phonology.¹

The data provided in this paper are part of my research project centered on the interplay between segmental and suprasegmental sound changes and the phenomena ascribable to the syntax-semantics-pragmatics level such as information structure and utterance modality (Silvestri 2018, 2021).²

The data discussed here come from the dialects of Orsomarso and Verbicaro (northwestern Calabria; Upper southern Italian dialects).

*Some developments of this piece of research as well as its dissemination were possible thanks to the research funds provided by the UCLA Department of Linguistics.

Author: Giuseppina Silvestri, University of California, Los Angeles (g.silvestri@ucla.edu)

¹See pioneering approaches in Italo-Romance in Biberauer and D'Alessandro (2006) and Cruschina et al. (2019:1-40).

² The data discussed here were collected through a number fieldwork trips in northwestern Calabria from 2014 to 2019.

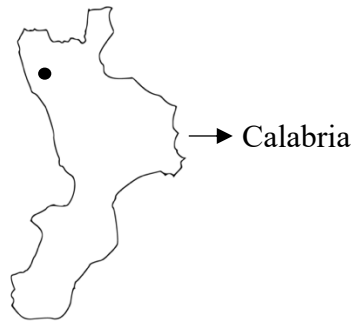


Figure 1. Dialects of Orsomarso and Verbicaro on the map of Calabria region

2. Propagation: phonetic and phonological notes. In the specific literature the term ‘propagation’ refers to a case of progressive vocalic assimilation between two adjacent syllables, which occurs either word-internally or in external sandhi across words. Given a sequence of two adjacent syllables, i.e. Syllable1-Syllable2, propagation corresponds to the left-to-right spread of all (or part of) the phonological features of underlying etymological segments /u/, /o/, /i/ from Syllable1 onto Syllable2. The result is the alteration of the phonetic make-up of Syllable2’s nucleus, as shown in the examples from northwestern Calabrian:

- (1) Verbicaro
- a. kə'mmwara (< /ku'mmara/)
 - buddy.FSG
 - ‘buddy’
 - b. [ɔ 'twɛŋŋə] (< /u'tɛŋŋə/)
 - it.OBJ.MSG hold.IND.PRS.1SG
 - ‘I have/hold it.’

The output of propagation in the examples in (1) is the insertion of the glide [w].³ In (1a) propagation happens word-internally, where the trigger vowel is Syllable1 /ku/- and, as a result, the glide [w] is inserted in the nucleus of Syllable2 -/mma/. In (1b) propagation occurs across words: /u/, which represents the masculine singular direct object clitic pronoun (/u/ ‘it’), affects Syllable2 /tɛ/-, i.e. the first syllable of the following word (a verb form).

Constraints on Syllable2 apply for propagation to be licensed. Although a certain degree of diatopic variation is observed, tonicity (2) as well as the quality of the target vowel of Syllable2 play the main role for propagation to occur.⁴ Generally Syllable2 has to bear primary (2a) or secondary stress (2c,d). In the latter case, in the dialects of northwestern Calabria propagation is optional (2c,d).

³ In all the attested cases, the outputs of propagation correspond to an alteration of the nucleus of Syllable2. Such alteration can display different outcomes, including the change of the vowel quality or insertion of a glide, either [j] or [w] (Schirru 2013).

⁴ The selection of the target-vowel might be determined by the [±grave] trait of the vowel (Loporcaro 1988:192-4; Schirru 2013). Furthermore, Tuttle (1985a) pointed out that the phonetic makeup of syllable onset is possibly hierarchically defined.

- (2) Verbicaro
- a. [ʊ 'kwanə] (vs. [ʊ ka'ninə])
 the.MSG dog.MSG the.MSG canine.MSG
 'the dog' 'the canine'
- d. [kkʊ ,kanə'ʃiəddə] / [kkʊ ,kanə'ʃiəddə]
 with.THE.MSG little.DOG.MSG
 'with the doggy'

In what follows I will show that propagation interacts with the morphosyntax of the dialects of northwestern Calabria, especially the dialects of Verbicaro and Orsomarso. Then, I will move onto the specific case-study of propagation within the syntactic domain of the DP.

2.1. PROPAGINATION IN THE DIALECTS OF NORTHWESTERN CALABRIA. In the dialects of northwestern Calabria propagation is triggered if Syllable1 contains /u/ and /o/. The the original final atonic vowels /u/ and /o/ of Syllable1 became schwa, but they remain phonetically active and trigger propagation:

- (3) Orsomarso
- ['ɣattə 'jwaŋkə] < /'gattu 'janku /
 cat.MSG white.MSG
 'white cat'

Given the input of /u/ and /o/ in Syllable1, the output of propagation in the dialects of northwestern Calabria is the insertion of [w] into Syllable2, *iff* Syllable2 is tonic [a(:)], [ɛ(:)], [i(:)].

It was noticed that in the dialects of northwestern Calabria, propagation shows optionality when specific external sandhi contexts are considered, especially syntactic boundaries (Rizzi and Savoia 1993; Masutti and Silvestri 2015, 2016). The data discussed in this study confirm that propagation might (not) occur across words when specific syntactic relations are at work. In the next paragraph I will take into consideration propagation between a functional element of the DP and the following nominal. More specifically, I will show how propagation does not exhibit the expected outcomes when occurring between specific numerals and the following nominal and it is ruled out in cases in which it would be allowed by the phonological constraints.

2.2. PROPAGINATION WITHIN THE DETERMINER PHRASE. In the dialects of northwestern Calabria propagation can be expected to be displayed within singular (masculine) DPs, inasmuch the morpho-phonology of the masculine definite determiners offers the phonological input for propagation to apply. In singular DPs headed by a masculine determiner, i.e. a DP produced highly frequently by a speaker, propagation is triggered by the vowel /u/, which is the morphological mark of the definite and the indefinite masculine singular determiner, i.e. /u/ and /nu/, respectively.

- (5) Verbicaro
- a. [nʊ 'βrwattə] (*[nʊ 'βrattə])
 a.MSG arm.MSG
 'an arm'
- b. [ʊ 'ʃʃwemə] (*[ʊ 'ʃʃemə])
 the.MSG idiot.MSG
 'the helmet'

- c. [o 'mwɪja] (*[o 'mɪja])
 the.MSG mine.MSG
 'mine'

By the same token, propagation is not expected to occur in plural definite DPs which are typically headed by a masculine/feminine plural definite article (6), which corresponds to the form /i/. In the northwestern Calabrian dialects the vowel /i/ is not among the vowels in that in Syllable1 trigger propagation:

- (6) Verbicaro
- a. [ɪ 'βrattsə] (*[ɪ 'βrwattsə])
 a.MPL arm.MPL
 'the arms'
- b. [ɪ 'ʃʃɛmə] (*[ɪ 'ʃʃwɛmə])
 the.MPL idiot.MPL
 'the idiot'
- c. [ɪ 'mɪja] (*[ɪ 'mwɪja])
 the.MPL mine.MPL
 'mine'

Therefore, in singular masculine DPs propagation is expected to occur, given that the functional elements, i.e. the masculine singular determiner, provides the phonological input for propagation to be triggered. Conversely, in plural DPs propagation is not expected to occur as, probabilistically, the plural DP is headed by the definite determiner /i/: the phonological conditions in Syllable1 are not satisfied due to the fact that /i/ does not trigger propagation.

Hence, based on the morphology of definite determiners, propagation is strongly associated with singular DPs, whereas it is not expected to be found in plural DPs.

2.3. PROPAGINATION WITHIN IN DPs MODIFIED BY NUMERALS. The expectation about DPs marked as plurals not to display propagation is also met when we consider plural DPs where another type of functional element occurs, i.e. numerals. More specifically, the numerals 'eight' and 'a hundred' provide the phonological environment for propagation to occur, given that the final vowels of two numerals /'ɔtto/ 'eight' and /'tʃintu/ 'a hundred' are among the segments that in Syllable1 trigger propagation. Nonetheless, despite the permitting phonological context, propagation is ruled out with 'eight' and 'a hundred' (7):

- (7) Orsomarso
- a. /'ɔtto 'kani/ > ['ɔttə 'kanə], *['ɔttə 'kwanə]
 eight dog.MPL
 'eight dogs'
- b. /'tʃintu 'tavuli/ > ['tʃintə 'tavələ], *['tʃintə 'twavələ]
 a.hundred table.MPL
 'one hundred tables'

In (7) propagation is blocked, despite being allowed by the phonological restrictions. Therefore, a first interpretation is that plural DPs with numerals 'eight' and 'a hundred' are never affected by propagation (8a) and consistently behave like those DPs where propagation is phonologically ruled out (8b):

- (8) Verbicaro
- a. /'ɔt:o 'kani/ > ['ɔt:ə 'kanə],*['ɔt:ə 'kwanə]
 eight dog.MPL
 'eight dogs'
- b. /'i 'kani/ > [ɪ 'kanə],*[ɪ 'kwanə]
 the.MPL dog.MPL
 'the dogs'

Yet, such interpretation does not exhaustively account for the complex picture that the northwestern Calabrian dialects exhibit. Namely, there are cases in which the numerals 'eight' and 'a hundred' do trigger propagation. Propagation occurs in DPs modified by the numerals 'eight' and 'a hundred' if the DPs are morphosyntactically set on singular number:

- (9) Verbicaro (Silvestri 2021)
- a. /a 'tʃiəntu 'liri/ > [a 'tʃiəntə 'lwiɾə], *[a 'tʃiəntə 'lirə]
 the.FSG a.hundred lira.FPL
 'the (coin of) one hundred liras'
- b. /a 'ɔt:o 'litri/ > [a 'ɔt:ə 'lwiɾə], *[a 'ɔt:ə 'litrə]
 the.FSG eight liter.MPL
 'the (jug of) eight liters'

In (9a) the referent is a singular coin of a hundred liras and in (9b) the referent is a single jug that can contain eight liters. The feminine singular definite article heading the DPs in (9) grammaticalizes the singular number of the DPs.

In the northwestern Calabrian dialects propagation occurs between the numerals 'eight' and 'a hundred' and the following nominal (often a noun) when these numerals modify singular DPs. These pieces of evidence further corroborate the generalization whereby propagation is associated with the singular number of the DP (§2.2). Table 1 summarizes what we observe in the dialects of northwestern Calabria with respect to the optionality of propagation in DPs modified by the numerals 'eight' and 'a hundred'.

syntactic context (DP)	propagation	phonologically expected?
SG(M) article - N	+	Y
PL article - N	-	N
Num 'eight' or 'a hundred' + N (in plural DPs)	-	Y
Num 'eight' or 'a hundred'+ N (in singular DPs)	+	Y

Table 1. Propagation and Number in DPs

Propagation is ruled out when 'eight' and 'a hundred' occur in a plural DP, despite all the phonological requirements being fulfilled. Therefore, the occurrence of propagation reflects the morphosyntactic category of Number and marks the singular number, in so far as propagation is blocked between the quantifier (i.e. numerals 'eight' and 'a hundred') and the noun if the quantifier grammaticalizes plural number.

2.4. PROPAGINATION AND THE SYNTAX OF DP. In the dialects of northwestern Calabria propagation is a consistent signal of Number features:

(10) Propagation: [-plural]

Speakers produce propagation in several different contexts beyond the nominal domain (see (1c) and (5c)). Within the nominal domain, speakers synchronically (re)analyze propagation as a morpheme conveying singular number. The occurrence of propagation between the numerals ‘eight’ and ‘a hundred’ and the following nominal expresses other semantic values of the DPs. Propagation functions as a mark of collective unity (9), i.e. DPs which are morphosyntactically singular, but refer to a set of identical items.⁵

A question arises about propagation being a *tout-court* morphosyntactic device through which nominal agreement is carried out in (Italo-)Romance. In order to answer this question, I shall present further aspects related to the phonology of the dialects of northwestern Calabria, as phenomena that are phonological in nature deeply interact with the morphology and the syntax of nominals.

In the dialects of northwestern Calabria the merging of functional categories like articles or demonstratives in the structure of the DP may involve the occurrence of propagation (PPG). In turn, propagation corresponds to the morphological exponence of masculine singular agreement:

(11) Verbicaro

- a. $\begin{array}{c} \text{agree (-PPG)} \\ \text{[DP } \emptyset \text{ [N '}\gamma\text{att}\emptyset\text{]] (-PPG, +PL)} \\ \text{cat.M/FPL} \\ \text{'cats'} \end{array}$
- b. $\begin{array}{c} \text{agree (+PPG)} \\ \text{[DP } su/\emptyset \text{ [N '}\gamma\text{watt}\emptyset\text{]] (+PPG, -PL)} \\ \text{this.M/the.MSG cat.MSG} \\ \text{'this/the (male) cat'} \end{array}$
- c. $\begin{array}{c} \text{agree (-PPG)} \\ \text{[DP } si/I \text{ [N '}\gamma\text{att}\emptyset\text{]] (-PPG, +PL)} \\ \text{these.M/F the.M/FPL cat.M/FPL} \\ \text{'these/the cats'} \end{array}$

The determiners *u* ‘the’ and *su* ‘this’ (11b) are phonological triggers of propagation and, at the same time, functional elements which set singular agreement.

The insertion of the numerals ‘eight’ and ‘a hundred’, which phonologically can trigger propagation, opens up more complex patterns. These numerals do set the number of the DP on plural (12a,b). However, if the overall DP denotes a singular referent as in (12c,d), propagation happens between the numeral and the following nominal.

(12) Verbicaro

- a. $\begin{array}{c} \text{agree (-PPG)} \\ \text{[DP [Num '}\sigma\text{tt}\emptyset \text{ [N '}\text{kan}\emptyset \text{]]] (-PPG, +PL)} \\ \text{eight dog.M/FPL} \\ \text{'eight dogs'} \end{array}$

⁵ Cf. standard Italian *una dozzina* ‘a dozen’, *un centinaio* ‘a hundred/about a hundred’, *un migliaio* ‘a thousand/a thousand or so’ etc.

- b. $\begin{array}{c} \text{agree (-PPG)} \\ \text{[DP [Num 'tʃiəntə} \quad \text{[N 'tavələ]]} \text{]} \text{ (-PPG, +PL)} \\ \text{a.hundred} \quad \text{table.MPL} \\ \text{'a hundred tables'} \end{array}$
- c. $\begin{array}{c} \text{agree (+PPG)} \\ \text{[DP a} \quad \text{[Num 'tʃiəntə} \quad \text{[N 'lɪwɪrə]]} \text{]} \text{ (+PPG, -PL)} \\ \text{the.FSG} \quad \text{a.hundred} \quad \text{lira.FPL} \\ \text{'the (coin of) one-hundred liras'} \end{array}$
- d. $\begin{array}{c} \text{agree (+PPG)} \\ \text{[DP a} \quad \text{[Num 'ɔttə} \quad \text{[N 'lɪwɪtrə]]} \text{]} \text{ (+PPG, -PL)} \\ \text{the.FSG} \quad \text{eight} \quad \text{liter.MPL} \\ \text{'the (jug of) eight liters'} \end{array}$

In the singular DPs (12c,d) the feminine singular determiner does not match in gender and number with the following noun, i.e. ‘liras’ (FPL) and ‘liters’ (MPL), therefore the morphological agreement is not given. The reason is that the numeral and the noun in (12c,d) behave like compound nominals that modify a silent feminine singular head noun, i.e. in (12c) ‘coin’ and in (12d) ‘jug’ or ‘bottle’. The feminine singular determiner, therefore, agrees with an elliptical head noun and it’s the only element that grammaticalizes the overall gender (and number) of the DP. In (12a,b) the number of the DP is conveyed by the agreement between the determiner and the head noun. Contrastingly, in (12c,d) agreement between the determiner and the numeral-noun is blocked and the head noun is elided. The only means that conveys the morphological number is propagination.

3. Unexpected patterns driven by internal vowel alteration. Northwestern Calabrian dialects offer further evidence on the integration of Ablaut phenomena within the grammar of agreement. Both propagination and metaphony reveal unexpected patterns what ultimately suggest that an integrated approach encompassing phonological and morphosyntactic analyses is needed to obtain an optimal interpretation.

3.1. PERVERSIVE PROPAGINATION. In the dialects of northwestern Calabria, including Verbicaro and Orsomarso, propagination shows a pervasive type of spreading. Namely, it can spread from a masculine singular article onto the following nominal, like a pre-nominal adjective and, in turn, onto the next following, like a noun. In cases like (13) the spreading can occur even though it should not be allowed between the second nominal in the row and the third:

- (13) a. /nu 'granne 'tavulu/ > [nʊ 'grwannə 'twavələ] (Verbicaro)
a.MSG big.MSG table.MSG
‘a big/great table’
- b. /u 'kane 'janku/ > [ʊ 'kwanə 'jwanjkə]
the.MSG dog.MSG white.MSG
‘the white dog’

In (13a), as the phonological form shows, propagation is expected between the masculine singular indefinite article and the following element, i.e. the adjective /' granne/ 'big, great', whereas it should be ruled out between the adjective and the following nominal element, i.e. the noun /'tavulu/ 'table', as the original final vowel of the adjective, -/e/ is not a propagation trigger. Nonetheless, as shown in the phonetic realization, the noun too displays the outputs of propagation which, therefore, overextend beyond the licit phonological environment /nu 'granne/. In (12b) as well, propagation is etymologically unjustified between the noun /'kane/ 'dog' and the post-nominal adjective /'janku/ 'white'. Yet, the third element of the sequence is affected by propagation triggered by the first element, i.e. the masculine singular definite article.

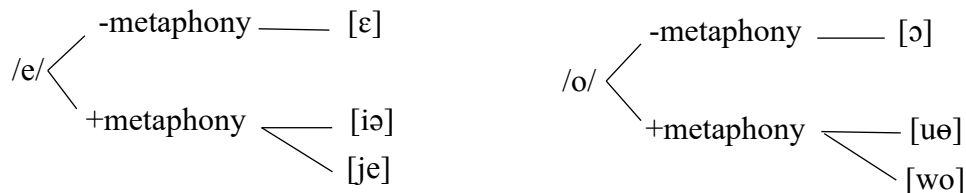
In what follows I will establish a parallel between the outcomes of propagation and another phenomenon involving Ablaut, i.e. metaphony.

3.2. METAPHONY AND ITS GRAMMAR. I shall briefly depict metaphony and its morphological usage in the dialects of northwestern Calabria, in particular in the dialect of Verbicaro, and show how metaphony plays a noteworthy role in the domain of the morphological and syntactic agreement.

Several dialects of northwestern Calabria display metaphony, i.e. a type of partial or total assimilation of stressed low-mid vowels due to the effect of unstressed high original vowels -/i/ or -/u/ in a contiguous syllable. In these varieties three possible outcomes of metaphonic assimilation are attested: falling diphthongs, rising diphthongs, and secondary reduction thereof in monophthongs (Savoia and Maiden 1997).

In the dialect of Verbicaro metaphony affects tonic /e/ ([ɛ]) and /o/ ([ɔ]) and results in raising or falling diphthongs.⁶

(14) Verbicaro



In Romance stem vowel alternations express morphological information about gender, number, and person (Calabrese 2011; Ledgeway 2016:250; Loporcaro and Paciaroni 2016:231-232; Schmid 2016:476-478). The morphological relevance of metaphony is also observed in the dialects of northwestern Calabria where, consistently with the rest of the upper southern Italian dialects, final atonic vowels merged in schwa, with the only exception of -/a/ that in some varieties escapes the centralization. In the dialect of Verbicaro the final atonic vowel is either -[a] or -[ə]:

(15) -[a] ~ -[ə]

The convergence in schwa of the nominal endings blurs most of the morphological distinction of number and gender features and leaves out -/a/ which typically is the mark of feminine singular nominals:

⁶ The tonic vowel system of the dialect of Verbicaro is made of five vowels /i e a o u/ (Silvestri 2009).

(16) Verbicaro

- a. [kwa'trarə arra'ddʒatə]
 kid.MSG/FPL/MPL angry.MSG/FPL/MPL
 'angry boy /angry girls/ angry boys'
- b. [kwa'trara arra'ddʒata]
 kid.FSG angry.FSG
 'angry girl'

In the dialect of Verbicaro, metaphonic diphthongization in nominals marks morphological distinctions of gender and numbers and conveys morphosyntactic oppositions on adjectives (Table 2) and past participles (Table 3).⁷

	masculine	feminine	masculine	feminine
singular	'spiərtə / 'spjertə	'spertə	'luəŋŋə / 'lwəŋŋə	'ləŋŋə
plural		'spertə		'ləŋŋə
	'smart'		'long/tall'	

Table 2. Metaphonic diphthongization in adjectives (*spiərtə* 'smart', *luəŋŋə* 'long, tall')

	masculine	feminine	masculine	feminine
singular	a'piərtə / a'pjertə	a'pertə	'skuəttə /	'skəttə
plural		a'pertə	'skwəttə	'skəttə
	'opened'		'overcooked'	

Table 3. Metaphonic diphthongization in past participles (*apiərtə* 'open(ed)', *skuəttə* 'overcooked')

(17) Verbicaro

- a. 'yattə 'spiərtə
 cat.MSG/PL smart.MSG/PL
 'smart (male) cat/smart (male) cats'
- b. 'yatta 'spertə
 cat.SG smart.FSG
 'smart (female) cat'
- c. 'yattə 'spertə
 cat.FPL smart.FPL
 'smart (female) cats'

The examples (17) show that the distinction between masculine plural (17a) and feminine plural (17c) is marked through metaphonic diphthongization. Metaphony echoes propagation in that both express morphological alternations in the nominals.

3.3. METAPHONIC DIPHTHONGIZATION AND PAST PARTICIPLE AGREEMENT. Metaphonic diphthongization plays a major role in the morpho-syntax of the past participle and gives rise to a rare pattern of agreement. In the dialects of northwestern Calabria in transitive predicates which include analytic past tenses the past participle does not agree with the direct object if the past participle form is either of the weak type or of the strong non-metaphonic type (Loporcaro and Silvestri 2011). This pattern of agreement reflects the general behavior of most Romance languages.

⁷ The same is observed in other Upper Southern Italian dialects (Tuttle 1985b; Fanciullo 1988, 1994; Maiden 1991, 2016; Loporcaro 2011).

(18) Verbicaro

- a. ['rɪta 'a la'vatə / *la'vata na bə'ttwɪʝa]
Rita has washed.PPT.MSG a.FSG bottle.FSG
'Rita washed a bottle.'
- b. ['rɪta 'a 'bɪstə / *bɪsta na kwatra'rɛdɖa]
Rita has seen.PPT.MSG a.FSG little.girl.FSG
'Rita saw a little girl.'

In (18) the past participles [la'vatə] 'washed' and ['bɪstə] do not agree with the feminine singular direct objects [na bə'ttwɪʝa] 'a bottle' and [na kwatra'rɛdɖa] 'a little girl', respectively (and neither do they agree with the feminine singular subject). The past participles display the default masculine singular morpheme -/u/ which historically became -[ə].

The pattern of agreement in transitive clauses like (18) radically changes when the past participle is of the strong metaphonic type.⁸

(19) Verbicaro

- a. ['piətrə a 'kɔtta / *'kuəttə na mələn'dʒana]
Pietro.MSG has cooked.PPT.FSG a.FSG eggplant.FSG
'Pietro cooked an eggplant.'
- b. ['piətrə a 'kɔta / *'kuətə dd'atʃəna]
Pietro.MSG has picked.PPT.FSG the.FSG-grapes.FSG
'Pietro picked some grapes.'

In (19) the past participles, which display metaphonic diphthongs, agree with the feminine singular direct objects. Such pattern departs from the common agreement schemes we find in Romance in transitive clauses. The availability of two different patterns of verb-object agreement in the same dialect is due to the integration of metaphony in the morphosyntax of the past participles.

(20) Verbicaro

- a. ['rɪta 'a 'bɪstə na kwatra'rɛdɖa] (-metaphony)
Rita has seen.PPT.MSG a.FSG little.girl.FSG
'Rita saw a little girl.'
- b. ['piətrə a 'kɔtta na mələn'dʒana](+metaphony)
Pietro.MSG has cooked.PPT.FSG a.FSG eggplant.FSG
'Pietro cooked an eggplant.'

The metaphonic diphthongs on the past participles match the morphological features of the direct object and become a signal of transitivity. The result is a participle-object agreement pattern, which is not what is expected in the grammar of the Italo-Romance varieties spoken in northwestern Calabria.

4. Southern Italian dialects revealed at the interfaces. Propagation is among the phonological phenomena that in southern Italian dialects rightfully need to be reinterpreted as a

⁸ Such patten belongs to an older variety of the language (Loporcaro and Silvestri 2011).

manifestation of complex interactions between the perceptual-articulatory level and the structural domain. The occurrence of propagation and its apparent optionality reveal that a co-mapping between phonology and (morpho)syntax is necessary to unveil the nature of the phenomenon itself. Propagation is a means through which northwestern Calabrian dialects grammaticalize Number. Parallely, another phenomenon of vowel alternation, i.e. metaphonic diphthongization, when occurring in (strong) past participles in analytic past verb forms, brings out a pattern of verb-object agreement that is quite uncommon in transitive clauses in Romance. The adoption of a view that assesses both the phonological mechanisms of propagation and the related syntactic patterns provides a more principled interpretation of what in the traditional Italian dialectology has been treated as merely phonological. Propagation has to be fully ascribed as a phenomenon of the phonology-syntax interface, i.e. a module of the grammar that in southern Italian dialects proves empirically wealthy as the interpretation of metaphony as a phenomenon of the syntax of the predicate confirms.

The discussion of only two phenomena concerning vowel alteration reveals their involvement in the structural configurations like the grammaticalization of Number in the DP as well as the participle-object relations within the VP. Only by interconnecting all the domains that phenomena like propagation affect can an adequately explanatory account be attempted to further investigate the reality of the linguistic interfaces.

References

- Ascoli, Graziadio Isaia. 1873. *Saggi ladini* (Archivio glottologico italiano 1). Rome: Loescher.
- Biberauer, Teresa & Roberta D'Alessandro. 2006. Syntactic doubling and the encoding of voice in Eastern Abruzzese. In Donald Baumer, Davdi Montero & Michael Scanlon (eds), *Proceedings of the 25th West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics*, 87–95. Somerville MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project.
- Calabrese, Andrea. 2011. Metaphony in Romance. In Marc van Oostendorp, Colin Ewen, Elizabeth Hume & Keren Rice, *The Blackwell companion to phonology*, 1–31. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Cardinaletti, Anna & Lori Repetti. 2008. The phonology and syntax of preverbal and postverbal subject clitics in northern Italian dialects. *Linguistic Inquiry* 39(4). 523–563.
<https://doi.org/10.1162/ling.2008.39.4.523>.
- Chomsky, Noam. 2001. Derivation by phase. In Michael Kenstowicz (ed), *Ken Hale: A life in language*, 1-52. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Chomsky, Noam & Morris Halle. 1968. *The sound pattern of English*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Cruschina, Silvio, Ledgeway Adam & Eva-Maria Remberger. 2016. The dialects of Italy at the interfaces. In Silvio Cruschina, Adam Ledgeway & Eva-Maria Remberger (eds.), *Italian dialectology at the interfaces*, 1–40. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Fanciullo, Franco. 1988. Lucania. In Günter Holtus, Michael Metzeltin & Christian Schmitt (eds.), *Lexikon der Romanistischen Linguistik IV*, 669–688. Tübingen: Niemeyer.
- Hauser, Marc, Noam Chomsky & Tecumseh Fitch. 2002. Faculty of language: What is it, who has it, and how did it evolve? *Science* 298. 1569–1579.
<https://doi.org/10.1126/science.298.5598.1569>.
- Ledgeway, Adam. 2016. The dialects of southern Italy. In Adam Ledgeway and Martin Maiden (eds.), *The Oxford Guide to the Romance languages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 246-269.
- Loporcaro, Michele. 1988. *Grammatica storica del dialetto di Altamura*. Pisa: Giardini.

- Loporcaro, Michele. 2011. Morphological complexity without abstractness: Italo-Romance metaphony. *Poznań Studies in Contemporary Linguistics* 47, 177-202.
- Loporcaro, Michele & Tania Paciaroni. 2016. The dialects of central Italy. In Adam Ledgeway and Martin Maiden (eds.), *The Oxford Guide to the Romance languages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 228-245.
- Loporcaro, Michele & Giuseppina Silvestri. 2011. Vocalismo finale atono e morfosintassi dell'accordo participiale in due varietà generazionali del dialetto di Verbicaro (provincia di Cosenza). *Revue de Linguistique Romane* 75(297/298). 325–356.
- Maiden, Martin. 1991. *Interactive morphonology: Metaphony in Italy*. London: Routledge.
- Maiden, Martin. 2016. Inflectional morphology. In Adam Ledgeway & Martin Maiden (eds.), *The Oxford guide to the Romance languages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Masutti, Vania & Giuseppina Silvestri. 2015. The phonology-syntax interface in Romance: Comparing liaison and propagation. Presentation at Going Romance, Nijmegen.
- Masutti, Vania & Giuseppina Silvestri. 2016. Liaison and propagation between phonology and morpho-syntax. Presentation at 24th Manchester Phonology Meeting.
- Rizzi, Luigi & Leonardo Savoia. 1993. Conditions on /u/ propagation in southern Italian dialects: A locality parameter for phonosyntactic processes. In Adriana Belletti (ed.), *Syntactic theory and the dialects of Italy*, 252–318. Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier.
- Rohlf, Gerhard. 1966-9. *Grammatica storica della lingua italiana e dei suoi dialetti*. Torino: Einaudi.
- Savoia, Leonardo & Martin Maiden. 1997. Metaphony. In Martin Maiden & Mair Parry (eds.), *The dialects of Italy*, 15–25. London: Routledge.
- Schmid, Stefan. 2016. Segmental phonology. In Adam Ledgeway and Martin Maiden (eds.), *The Oxford guide to the Romance languages*, 471–483. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schirru, Giancarlo. 2008. Propagginazione e categorie nominali in un dialetto del Molise. In Alessandro De Angelis (ed.), *I dialetti meridionali tra arcaismo e interferenza*, 291–309. Palermo: Centro di Studi Filologici e Linguistici Siciliani.
- Schirru, Giancarlo. 2013. La propagginazione in un dialetto della Valle di Comino. In Francesco Avolio (ed.), *Lingua e dialetto tra l'Italia centrale e l'Italia meridionale*. Roccasecca: Arte Stampa.
- Selkirk, Elisabeth. 1984. *Phonology and syntax: The relation between sound and structure*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Silvestri, Giuseppina. 2009. La metafonìa nel dialetto di Verbicaro-Cosenza. *L'Italia Dialettale* 70. 169–226.
- Silvestri, Giuseppina. 2018. Word-final schwa licensed by prosody and syntax: evidence from southern Italian dialects. *Rivista di Grammatica Generativa: Research in Generative Grammar* 39. 1–27.
- Silvestri, Giuseppina. 2021. Two case-studies of vowel insertion in Italo-Romance and the reality of the phonology-syntax interface. Talk given at the workshop Epenthesis and Beyond, Stony Brook University.
- Tuttle, Edward. 1985(a). Assimilazione “permansiva” negli esiti centro-meridionali di /a/ tonica. *L'Italia Dialettale* 98. 1–34.
- Tuttle, Edward. 1985(b). Morphologization as redundancy in central Italian dialects. *Romance Philology* 39. 35–43.
- Vincent, Nigel. 2016. A structural comparison of Latin and Romance. In Adam Ledgeway & Martin Maiden (eds.), *The Oxford guide to the Romance languages*, 37–49. Oxford: Oxford University Press.