The case of Italian nominal plural: diachrony and synchrony
Nicola Lampitelli, University of Paris VII, UFR de Linguistique
(nicolalampitelli@gmail.com)

[0] Intro

This work stems from both the traditional historical linguistics (Ernout, 1953; Beneveniste, 1984; Väänänen, 1963; Rohlfs, 1969 among others) and the general theoretical framework of Distributed Morphology (DM) (Halle & Marantz, 1993; Marantz, 1997; Embick & Noyer, 2004 among others).

I aim to demonstrate that the Italian noun plural marker is one single item for both masculine and feminine genders and that its phonological form is /i/. I aim to demonstrate that it originated from Latin plural accusatives.

[1.0] The data: Latin and Italian nouns

(1) Latin nouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Declension</th>
<th>Singulars</th>
<th>Plurals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
<td>M F</td>
<td>M F N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOM</td>
<td>poeta</td>
<td>rosa</td>
<td>lupus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ACC</td>
<td>poeta</td>
<td>rosae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>gloss</td>
<td>poet</td>
<td>rosae</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(gender predictability for decl. I and II) (no gender predictability)

(2) Italian nouns:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Singulars</th>
<th>Plurals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“-a group”</td>
<td>“-o group”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M F</td>
<td>M F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOM</td>
<td>poeta</td>
<td>rosa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ACC</td>
<td>poet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>gloss</td>
<td>poet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(gender predictability for decl. I and II) (no gender predictability)

There is only one F noun in this group: *mano-mani* (hand(s)).
[1.1] Some general remarks on nouns:

(3) Declensions IV and V have disappeared and they were absorbed by declensions I, II and III.
(4) The Italian system is slightly simpler than Latin one:
   a) No more syntactic cases
   b) Neuter agreement disappeared
(5) Format of Italian nouns = [... V#] ; $V_{sg} = a, o, e$ $V_{pl} = e, i$
(6) Plural isogloss, discussed here, in Romance; West: $Pl = [s]$ / East: $Pl = [i]$.
   The classical hypothesis explains this isogloss using the distinction ACC/NOM for [s]
   and [i] plurals, respectively.

[1.2] The morphological hypothesis (MH) & the phonetic hypothesis (PH)

(7) MP: Rohlfs (1969); Meyer-Lübke (1985); Tekavčić (1972) and others have always
    claimed that Italian plural nouns derive from Latin plural nominatives:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>decl.</th>
<th>gen.</th>
<th>LT</th>
<th>IT</th>
<th>IT gen (gloss)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>rosae</td>
<td>rose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>lupi</td>
<td>lupi</td>
<td>M wolves</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(8) PH: Reichenkron (1939); Äbischer (1960 & 1961); Maiden (1996) have claimed that a
    different hypothesis is conceivable for Italian feminine [-e] plural: the base would be
    Latin declension I accusative:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>decl.</th>
<th>gen.</th>
<th>LT → IT gen. (gloss)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>rosās → rose</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

They all postulate the following phonetic evolution, that is vocalisation of the fricative
$s \rightarrow Š \rightarrow i$

(9) Analogy is needed to reinterpret data in 10.a, 10.d and 10.e (Cf. Rohlfs, 1969;

[1.3] MH and PH compared

(10) Latin → Italian following MH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>decl.</th>
<th>singular</th>
<th>gen plural</th>
<th>gen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a]</td>
<td>I poetam</td>
<td>M poetae</td>
<td>*poete (analogy) → poeti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b]</td>
<td>I rosam</td>
<td>F rosae</td>
<td>→ rose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c]</td>
<td>II lupum</td>
<td>M lupī</td>
<td>→ lupi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d]</td>
<td>III ducem</td>
<td>M ducēs</td>
<td>→*duce (analogy) → duci</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e]</td>
<td>III pacem</td>
<td>F pacēs</td>
<td>→*pace (analogy) → paci</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(12) Latin accusatives used as nominatives (Väänänen, 1963:84; Tekavčić, 1972:47;

a] hic quescunt duas matres duas filias ([CIL] III, 3551; Budapest, Hungary)
   Two mothers and two daughters rest in peace here
b] filios et nepotes memoria patri posuerunt ([CIL] VIII, 7476; Cirta, Algeria)
   The sons and the nephews built in the memory of the father
c] et animas eorum sepulta sunt in inferno (Carta di Arborea, Italy)
   And their souls are buried in the hell

(13) We also have one examples from archaic Latin (V-I centuries B.C.):

a] quot laetitias insperatas modo mi inrepsere in sinum (Atellan by L. Pomponius)
   How many un expected nice things took hold of my heart
Crossing diachrony and synchrony: the case of Italian nominal plural

Lat. → It. following PH

Table:  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decl</th>
<th>Sing</th>
<th>Gen</th>
<th>Plural</th>
<th>Gen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a)</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>poetam</td>
<td>poetās</td>
<td>poetai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b)</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>rosam</td>
<td>rosās</td>
<td>rosai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c)</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>lupum</td>
<td>lupōs</td>
<td>lupoi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d)</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>ducem</td>
<td>ducēs</td>
<td>duci</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e)</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>pacem</td>
<td>pacēs</td>
<td>pacei</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(15) As you can see in (14), two forms need an explanation:

a)  decl I M Pl ACC poetās → poetai → *poete instead of grammatical [poeti]
This form is phonetically correct, but it is agrammatical in modern Italian.

b)  decl II M Pl ACC lupōs → lupoi *→ lupi
This form need a phonetic interpretation, because how could the diphthong -oi → -i?

(16) PH as expressed in Reichenkron (1939); Äbischer (1960 & 1961) and Maiden (1996) gives a partial explanation about the origin of Italian plural marker.

(17) Arguments for a phonetic evolution s → i

a)  Monosyllabic Latin words as nōs ‘we’, vōs ‘you (pl)’ and post ‘after’ gave the following words in Italian, respectively: [noi] ‘we’, [voi] ‘you (pl)’ and [poi] ‘after’. This is a clear example of the evolution s → i.

b)  2nd singular person in verbs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conj</th>
<th>Latin (gloss)</th>
<th>Italian (gloss)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>cantās</td>
<td>canti you sing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>vidēs</td>
<td>vedi you see</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>legīs</td>
<td>leggi you read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>dormīs</td>
<td>dormi you hear</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(18) I reject MH because:

a)  It stems from the idea that Pl NOM is the base of Italian plurals (this is in contradiction with the majority of Romance languages;

b)  It needs to use an analogical process to justify the unique modern plural [i].

(19) I accept PH because:

a)  It stems from the idea the Pl ACC is the base of Italian plurals, unifying Romance nominal system origins;

b)  It explains a larger number of noun types comparing to MH.

c)  The output stage of PH represents the underlying modern Italian nominal forms as you can see below (cf. [2]).

[2] An organic and unified one hypothesis:

I recall the general theoretical framework of Distributed Morphology (henceafter DM) (Halle & Marantz, 1993; Embick & Halle, 2003; Embick & Noyer, 2004 and Marantz, 1997 among others), the Theory of Elements ([KLV], 1985 & 1990) and the general theoretical framework of CV syllable type (Lowenstamm, 1996 & (to appear)).

(20) I accept PH and I claim that M plurals too derive from declension II Pl ACC -ōs.

(21) I call this hypothesis organic because it provides an organic and unique evolution for the entire system of modern Italian plurals.

(22) The change between Latin and Italian reflects a change in the syntactic structure:
The steps of syntactic evolution: from Latin to Italian nouns

1) case/num node hosts accusative and plural marker; it is provided by a syllable CV.
2) n hosts the gender, as in Kihm (2002) and Lowenstamm (to appear); it bears a syllable CV.
3) Th bears the information about the declension. Via an agreement operation with n, a vowel appears (the so called thematic vowel).
4) once case is lost, the syllable associated to the node case/numP is lost too. No more place exist for the plural marker.
5) the syllable CV in nP is also lost, this means that the thematic vowel can’t any more be associated to the structure.
6) the declensions disappear following the general tendency of the majority of romance language. But Italian maintains a double distinction in the expression of gender (expressed by {i-ii} in 28.b). This mirrors the situation in modern Italian as shown in 3:
   -group {i}: -a for F and -o for M (rosa/lupo)
   -group {ii}: -e for both genders. (duce/pace)
7) in the structure shown in 23.b, the information {1} and {2} have no template to be associated to. This is information is provided by the root.
8) the most important topic of Italian nouns is that their nP have a free V (underlined) that hosts all the morphological operations on nouns (group marker, gender and number).
[2.2] The theory explains the data

(24) **STEP 1: Latin plural accusatives**

a] \( \text{lupōs} \) Decl I, M, Acc, pl  
\( \text{case/numP} \)  
\( \text{ACC} \)  
\( \text{n} \)  
\( \text{ThP} \)  
\( \text{CV} \)  
\( \text{CV} \)  
\( \text{output:} \ [\text{lupōs}] \)

b] \( \text{rosās} \) Decl. II, F, Acc, pl  
\( \text{case/numP} \)  
\( \text{ACC} \)  
\( \text{n} \)  
\( \text{ThP} \)  
\( \text{CV} \)  
\( \text{CV} \)  
\( \text{output:} \ [\text{rosās}] \)

(25) **Intermediate forms**

They are \([\text{lupoi}]\) and \([\text{rosai}]\): the structures in 24a and 24b explain both forms. Actually the structure doesn’t change from \( \text{lupōs} \to \text{lupoi} \) and from \( \text{rosās} \to \text{rosai} \) respectively.  
(This is the output stage of PH, as explained above in 19)

(26) **STEP 2: Loss of Case and Thematic Vowels (ThP disappears)**

a]  
\( \text{numP} \)  
\( \text{num} \)  
\( \text{n} \)  
\( \text{CV} \)  
\( \text{CV} \)  
\( \text{output:} \ [\text{*lup}] \)

b]  
\( \text{numP} \)  
\( \text{num} \)  
\( \text{n} \)  
\( \text{CV} \)  
\( \text{CV} \)  
\( \text{output:} \ [\text{*ros}] \)

(27) **STEP 3: Italian plural nouns**

a] \( \text{lupi} \) group \{i\}, M, pl  
\( \text{numP} \)  
\( \text{num} \)  
\( \text{n} \)  
\( \text{CV} \)  
\( \text{CV} \)  
\( \text{output:} \ [\text{lupi}] \) because \([\text{*lupī}]\)

b] \( \text{rose} \) group \{i\}, F, pl  
\( \text{numP} \)  
\( \text{num} \)  
\( \text{n} \)  
\( \text{CV} \)  
\( \text{CV} \)  
\( \text{output:} \ [\text{rose}] \)
b] The information about the group is hosted in Spec\(\sqrt{\text{P}}\), all the others nodes being already occupied.

c] The free V position in the root template is the site of the association of group/gender vowel and plural marker. The parametric choice of Italian is that any operation on nouns must occupies this position, otherwise no association is possible.

d] [KLV]'s (1985; 1990) Theory of Elements explains why /A.I.=[e] and why in a language such Italian, the operation /o.I.=[œ/ø] is not allowed. Front rounded vowels don’t exist in Italian vocalic system. Plural marker wins the competition with group/gender vowel.

[3] Diachrony and synchrony together

(28) For crossing diachrony and synchrony, I mean the comparison between STEP 3 (cf. 27) and modern Italian nouns structure.

Following [KLV] (1985 & 1990) and Lowenstamm (1996), I represent both the diachrony and the synchrony as it follows.

(29) **Rose-type plural nouns**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diachrony</th>
<th>Synchrony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>√ {i} ACC/Pl</td>
<td>√ {1}-- [+F] Pl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r o s a</td>
<td>r o s a i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CVC+CV(<em>n)+CV(</em>{case/num})</td>
<td>CVC+V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a]</td>
<td>a]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diachrony</th>
<th>Synchrony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>√ {1} Pl</td>
<td>√ {1}-- [+F] Pl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r o s a i</td>
<td>r o s a i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CVCV</td>
<td>CVC+V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b]</td>
<td>b]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diachrony</th>
<th>Synchrony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>√ CVC+V</td>
<td>√ {1}-- [+F] Pl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r o s a i</td>
<td>r o s a i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[rose]</td>
<td>[rose]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c]</td>
<td>c]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(30) **Lupi-type plural nouns**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diachrony</th>
<th>Synchrony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>√ {II} ACC/Pl</td>
<td>√ {1}-- [-F] Pl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l u p o s</td>
<td>l u p o i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CVCV+CV(<em>n)+CV(</em>{case/num})</td>
<td>CVC+V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a]</td>
<td>a]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An important question arises now: do roots without group specification exist in Italian? If so, these nouns should have -i on the plural. These roots actually exist, such as √POET yielding poeta (sg) - poeti (pl) M (poet(s)).

Diachrony                       Synchrony

| \( \sqrt{} \) {\( \{\} \) ACC/Pl} | \( \sqrt{} \) {\( \{\} \) [-F] Pl} |
|                               |                               |
| poet                        | poeti                          |
| poetas                      | poeti                          |
|                           |                               |
| a]  CVCVC+CV+CV+CV_case/num  | a]  CVCVC+V                  |

\( \sqrt{} \) Pl                       \( \sqrt{} \) [-F] Pl

|                               |                               |
| poet                        | poeti                          |
| poet s                      |                               |

\( \sqrt{} \) [-F] Pl                       \( \sqrt{} \) [-F] Pl

|                               |                               |
| poet i                      | poet i                         |
|                           |                               |
| c]  CVCVC+V                | c]  CVCVC+V                   |

d]  [poeti]                      c]  [poeti]                    

[4] Conclusions

I explained why the form lupos gives lupi in Italian by means of DM.

Diachrony confirms the hypothesis that the plural marker is one single item, that is /i/.

The change is syntactic and not phonetic. The structure obliges the language to have just a vocalic marker to pluralize.
[5] References


----- (1990), Constituent structure in phonology, Phonology Yearbook 7, 2:193-231.


