

Ling 1 Fall 2020
Analysis Paper 2
Sample

1. Introduction.

I am a native speaker of (standard) Italian and I learned French when I was in high school. I studied French for 5 years and I travelled to French-speaking countries on a number of occasions and I spent there a few months. I am also a native speaker of a non-standard variety of Italian which spoken in the south of Italy.

In section 4 of this paper I am going to compare standard Italian and French.

2. Morphology.

Italian exhibits a very rich inflectional morphology, i.e. a great number of verb endings and noun endings. One specific verb ending is able to give several pieces of information: person, number, tense, and mood. For example, *-eremo* in example (1 a) indicates that the verb is a first plural person, the tense is future, and the mood is indicative. The verb ending *-endo* in example (1 b) tells us that the verb is a gerund and it is present, and no person is expressed by the ending.

- (1) a. *scriv-eremo*
 ‘We will write.’
- b. *rid-endo*
 ‘laughing’

As for the nouns, the endings are able to express gender and number. Specifically, one same ending can express these two pieces of information cumulatively. In the example (2 a) the ending *-a* tells us that the noun is both singular and feminine. In the example (2 b) the *-i* indicates that the noun is plural and, at the same time, masculine.

- (2) a. *finestr-a*
 ‘window’
- b. *girasol-i*
 ‘sunflowers’

Adjectives and other grammatical items, like demonstratives and articles, can express gender and number morphology too through dedicated endings. As we can see in the example (3 a) the indefinite article shows an ending *-a* that expresses feminine gender and singular number and, therefore, matches the gender and number of the noun ‘finestra’. The same can be said for the adjective ‘rotonda’. In example (3 b) the demonstrative ‘questi’ ends in *-i* and therefore agrees in gender (masculine) and number (plural) with the noun ‘girasoli’

- (3) a. una finestra rotonda
'a round window'
- b. questi girasoli alti
'these tall sunflowers'

Based on these examples one would be tempted to conclude that, on the one hand, in Italian the ending *-a* always signals a nominal element which is feminine and singular and, on the other hand, that the ending *-i* always expresses masculine plural. This assumption would be wrong. Italian morphology is way more complicated than that. For example, in (4 a) the noun ends in *-a*, but it corresponds to a masculine (singular) ending. In (4 b) we see an *-i* on the noun which, though, is morphologically feminine plural.

- (4) a. il pianista
'the piano player'
- b. le navi
'the ships'

How do we know, then, the gender and number of a noun in Italian, if the same ending is able to give as contrasting information? We have to look at the article preceding the noun.

3. Syntax.

Typically, in Italian noun phrases (NPs) we can see a word order like the following:

- (5) article/demonstrative - possessive - numeral - (adjectives-) noun- adjective(s)

The abstract order in (5) corresponds to the following examples:

- (6) a. i miei tre amici siciliani.
article possessive three noun adjective
'my three Sicilian friends'
- b. quelle tue belle sedie bianche
demonstrative possessive adjective noun adjective
'those beautiful white chairs of yours'

As we can observe, adjectives can precede or follow the noun. Elements like articles and demonstratives appear always before the noun. Also, if an article or a demonstrative occurs, the numerals follow them.

As for sentences, the default word order in Italian is S V (O). Yet, S and O can move in different positions and give rise to different interpretations of the sentence.

For example, let's see how many word orders are possible for the sentence 'Anna watches the cat.'

- (7) a. Anna guarda il gatto. (default word order)
 S V O
 b. Il gatto Anna guarda.
 O S V
 c. Anna il gatto guarda.
 S O V
 d. Guarda il gatto Anna.
 V O S
 e. Lo guarda Anna il gatto.
 (O) V S O

We can isolate 4 different word orders for the same sentence, other than the default one (7 a). The orders in (7 b-e) correspond to specific interpretations of the same sentence. In (7 b) the Object 'the cat' is the more relevant information of the sentence and the whole sentence can be interpreted like 'Anna watches THE CAT (not the dog).' The order (7 c) corresponds to a very similar interpretation as (7 b). The word order in (7 d) corresponds to the interpretation whereby Anna is a person that the speaker was already talking about. Therefore, the final position of the Subject here corresponds to an old piece of information. Finally, in (7 e) a new element appears, i.e. a pronoun 'lo' that corresponds to the Object 'the cat'. That type of pronoun in Italian has to be placed before the verb. (7 e) can be interpreted in two ways: 1. 'It is Anna who watches the cat', 2. 'What Anna does is watching the cat'.

4. Comparison about the grammar of possessives.

In Italian and in French the possessives can express gender (F(eminine) or M(asculine)) and number (S(ingular) and P(lural)) through their forms.

Here follow the forms of the first singular person of the possessive in both languages, i.e. 'my':

- (8) a. mia (F, SG), mio (M, SG), mie (F, PL), miei (M, PL) (Italian)
 b. ma (F, SG), mon (M, SG), mes (French)

The difference between Italian and French lies in the plural possessive: In French the same plural form express both M and F.

As for the mechanism of agreement, both languages behave in the same way: both French and Italian possessive agree with the noun of the NP in which they occur. For example, in (9 a) the nouns 'cani' / 'chiens' are M and PL and so are the possessive 'miei' and 'mes', respectively.

- (9) a. i miei cani (Italian)
 'my dogs'

- b. mes chiens (French)
 'my dogs'

One difference that it is important to highlight is that in Italian in a NP with a definite article the possessive follows the article. Contrastingly, in French if the possessive occurs, the insertion of the article is not possible.

5. Conclusions.

In this paper I showed that Italian has a rich inflectional morphology for both verbs and nouns. We have seen that other languages do not exhibit the same wide array of morphological endings, like English that has very few verb endings.

As for the syntax of Italian, I described the word order of the NP where adjectives can occur before and after the noun. As for the syntax, I showed as in a transitive sentence a default word order SVO can be altered for interpretative purposes. Finally, I compared Italian and French on the forms and the agreement mechanism of possessives. I can conclude that the two languages display a very similar morphology of possessives, but a different syntax.