

Crypto-variation and the phonology-lexicon interface in Italian velar palatalization

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Standard Italian displays a range of palatalization processes, which have on the one hand many exceptions and which are, on the other hand, restricted to lexical classes. Many inflected Italian nouns show the alternations in (1a), with [tʃ] before /i/ at a morpheme boundary and [k] before other vowels. In many nouns the process does not apply (1b). Verbs display two distinct patterns, the 2nd and 3rd conjugation classes show exceptionless palatalization triggered by following /i/ and /e/ (2a), and the 1st conjugation shows exceptionless non-application of palatalization in the face of a potential trigger (2b).

Celata & Bertinetto (2005) claim that plurals of nouns with a root ending in a dorsal are lexicalized. The question arising here, however, is which forms are lexicalised, the palatalising forms or the non-palatalising forms or all? Furthermore, how is this accounted for in representations? Do speakers access fully inflected forms or do they store different stem allomorphs and select the most suitable one according to phonological environment?

In this paper, I present the results of a nonce word test carried out with native speakers of Italian, testing the plural forms of nouns ending in dorsal consonants. Subjects were presented with a list of nonce words and they were asked to read each word aloud and then produce it in a carrier sentence which required plural formation. Around 50% of subjects realised the majority of elicited forms with palatalisation of the final stop (77.3%), following the pattern in (1a), while the other half of subjects realised 95.2% of plural forms faithful to the singular, i.e., without palatalisation (as in 1b).

The aim of this paper is twofold. First, I analyse the subpatterns as application and non-application, respectively, of the same palatalization process and explain the divergent group behaviour, i.e., consistent application (2nd and 3rd conjugation verbs), consistent non-application (1st conjugation verbs) and a mixed group that allows for lexical exceptions (nouns). The analysis is couched within the framework of Optimality Theory (OT; Prince & Smolensky 1993, McCarthy & Prince 1995, 1999). The differences in the lexical classes are handled here with one constraint ranking, making use of indexed constraints (Pater 2000, 2006) and paradigmatic faithfulness (Benua 2000, McCarthy 2003, Burzio 2000, 2004). Second, the results of the nonce word test show that native speakers handle lexical exceptions (as displayed in nouns) in different ways, by either generalising palatalization and marking the exceptions or by generalising non-application and treating application as the exception, which, in OT, corresponds to two different constraint rankings. The analysis is illustrated in (3) and (4) for speakers that do not palatalize in nonce words and speakers that do palatalize, respectively.

The results of the nonce-word test show that speakers of the same language can implement different grammars in the face of the same surface pattern, substantiating one of the typological peculiarities of OT, i.e., that different constraint rankings can converge on the same output. In conclusion, Italian shows two kinds of microvariation here, on the one side different behaviour of lexical classes and on the other side a hidden or cryptic kind of variation in the analysis of lexical exceptionality which reveals itself only in the face of novel forms. The former type of variation is analysed straightforwardly via constraint indexation and the latter via speaker-specific ranking. Time permitting I will show why a co-phonology account is less suitable to deal with these data.

- (1) a. amiko, amitʃi, amike 'friend_N/pl./fem.pl.'
 b. kwəkɔ, kwəkɪ 'cook_N/pl.'
 (2) a. diridzere, dirigo, diridzi, diridze 'direct_V inf./1/2/3sg.'
 b. legare, legi, lega, lego 'tie_V inf./1/2/3sg.'

(3) Underappliers

base: [amiko] /amik _x -i/	OO-FAITH _{fem}	PAL _x	OO-FAITH _N	PAL	IO-FAITH
☞ a. amitʃi			*		*
b. amiki		*!		*	
[amika] /amik _x -e/					
c. amitʃe	*!		*		*
☞ d. amike		*		*	
[kwəkɔ] /kwək _x -i/					
e. kwətʃi			*!		*
☞ f. kwəkɪ				*	
nonce: /prak-i/					
g. pratʃi			*!		*
☞ h. praki				*	

(4) Palatalizers

base: [amiko] /amik-i/	OO-FAITH _{fem}	OO-FAITH _{x(N)}	PAL	IO-FAITH
☞ a. amitʃi				*
b. amiki			*!	
[amika] /amik-e/				
c. amitʃe	*!			*
☞ d. amike			*	
[kwəkɔ] /kwək _x -i/				
e. kwətʃi		*!		*
☞ f. kwəkɪ			*	
nonce: /prak-i/				
☞ g. pratʃi				*
h. praki			*!	

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