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Death and contact-induced rebirth of impersonal pronouns. A case study

Abstract: Abruzzese, a southern Italian variety spoken in the central Italian region of Abruzzo, makes use of an impersonal pronoun, *nomə*, which is the continuation of Latin *ŃMO* (D'Alessandro & Alexiadou 2006). *Nomə* is used both as an arbitrary 3rd person pronoun and as a generic pronoun. Its use was quite widespread in the Abruzzo and Molise regions until about 50 years ago; however, as a result of heavy contact with Italian, it has recently been almost completely abandoned, and appears to be used only by the older generation of speakers. Its function has also been reshaped, in that it mostly serves as a marker of plurality on verbs.

The loss of impersonal pronouns is a common trend in the European area, as witnessed by the typological study conducted by Giacalone Ramat & Sansò (2007). This typological trend, particularly combined with the significant decay of the dialects in favor of a generalized use of regional Italian, means that the creation of new impersonal pronouns is wholly unexpected. However, it appears that a new impersonal pronoun, *annə*, is in fact emerging in Abruzzese, and is almost entirely replacing *nomə* in most areas of Eastern Abruzzo. The development of this impersonal pronoun is following a rather unusual path, seeming to be the result of the re-adaptation of an auxiliary borrowed from Italian.

This paper examines the diachronic development of both pronouns, showing that they follow opposite paths. While *nomə* is grammaticalizing into a plural marker, *annə* is degrammaticalizing into an arbitrary pronoun.

Keywords: impersonal pronouns, generics, arbitrary, southern Italian dialects, Abruzzese

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The data were collected by means of a questionnaire and through direct observation of spontaneous conversations in which the author has actively participated, being a native speaker of the dialect. Unless otherwise stated, the examples are

from the dialect of Arielli (CH), which was selected principally because it is the author's native language, which made it easier to test and collect the data. Other varieties are discussed where relevant. 20 speakers were asked to both translate sentences into their native dialect and provide acceptability judgments. Of the informants, 11 speakers are from Arielli (CH), two are from Lanciano (CH), one is from Orsogna (CH), two are from Guardiagrele (CH), two are from San Valentino in Abruzzo Citeriore (PE), one is from Casalbordino (CH)¹. In addition, many Abruzzese grammars and old texts were consulted and will be referred to as required.

The following section provides a brief outline of the diachronic development of the "standard" impersonal pronoun *nomə*, while Section 2 introduces the diachrony of *annə*. Section 3 discusses some aspects of the syntax and phonology of *annə*, with some brief typological observations offered in Section 4. Section 5 contains the conclusions.

1 Synchrony and diachrony of *nomə*

Nomə, or *domə*, or *lomə*, or *omə* is an impersonal pronoun found across eastern and southern Abruzzo, and in parts of Molise. Its syntax has been thoroughly described in D'Alessandro & Alexiadou (2006). This paper will only illustrate and discuss its main features, particularly those that are relevant for our diachronic observations.

Nomə is a 3rd person plural weak pronoun, according to the classification proposed by Cardinaletti & Starke (1999). It usually appears between the auxiliary *a* and the participle in periphrastic tensed clauses, and before the finite verb in finite clauses, as shown in (1) and (2) respectively.

- (1) *A nomə magnitə.*
 HAVE-3RD *nomə* eaten-PL
 'They have eaten.'

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- (2) *Nomə magnə.*
 nomə eat-3RD
 ‘It is eaten/they eat.’

Nomə is derived from Latin HŌMO. Specifically, according to Giammarco (1985:404) (but see also Väänänen 2003:§297), it descends from late Latin (U)N(U) HŌMO. The alternative form *lomə* descends instead from late Latin (IL)L(U) HŌMO. Despite the fact that *lomə* is the continuation of an old demonstrative, there is no interpretational difference between today’s *nomə* and *lomə*: they are both indefinite and non-referential². *Omə* is also attested in the area. *Domə* is instead seemingly a phonological variant of *nome*.

As mentioned, and as illustrated in (1), *nomə* is plural. This fact cannot be directly inferred from finite verb inflection, because in most Abruzzese dialects the 3rd singular and plural forms of the verb are syncretic. In (2), for instance, the verb *magnə* could be both singular and plural. Participles, however, agree with the external argument of transitive verbs, if the argument is plural (D’Alessandro & Roberts 2010). As can be observed, in (1), the participle is plural, which means that the external argument (*nomə*) is plural.

This plurality is rather unexpected, considering that *nomə* continues a singular form (HŌMO). Besides, its French counterpart, *on*, triggers singular inflection, as illustrated in (3):

- (3) *On a bien mangé.*
 on has well eaten-M.SG
 ‘We have eaten well.’

² The terminology of impersonal pronouns is quite varied. Here, the term impersonal will be avoided. Pronouns will be described as referential or non-referential, and as arbitrary/existential or generic. In a sentence like (i), *pro* is arbitrary: it has an existential meaning, there is X, X is knocking at the door (i.e. it means ‘someone’).

- (i) *Bussano alla porta.*
 pro-3RD.PL knock-3RD PL at the door
 ‘Someone is knocking at the door.’

In (ii), *pro* is generic: given X, X lives in Holland, X cultivated flowers. Generic is used here to refer to what Cinque (1988) calls *quasi-universal*: it applies to most of the people of the reference set (it means ‘everybody’).

- (ii) *In Olanda coltivano i fiori.*
 in Holland pro-3RD.PL cultivate-3RD.PL the flowers
 ‘In Holland they cultivate flowers.’

Something similar to what originally happened to *nomə* is now happening to Brazilian Portuguese *a gente*, which is switching from an impersonal to a 1st plural interpretation. *A gente* is morphologically singular, but given its plural arbitrary interpretation (“people, some people, we”) it can trigger plural agreement, as in (4b) and (4d).

- (4) a. *A gente está cansado.*
 a gente is tired-M.SG
 b. *A gente está cansados.*
 a gente is tired-M.PL
 c. *A gente está cansada.*
 a gente is tired-F.SG
 d. *A gente está cansadas.*
 a gente is tired-F.PL
 ‘We are tired’ (from deBrito Pereira 2003:1)

Just like what is happening synchronically for *a gente*, the interaction of semantic/interpretational and syntactic factors caused *nomə* to become syntactically plural³.

In what follows, a short introduction to Abruzzese morphology will be outlined.

1.1 Some notes on Abruzzese verbal morphology

In Abruzzese, 1st and 3rd person singular, and 3rd person plural forms are synthetic, as you can see in (5).

- (5) *magnə* ‘I-eat’
 mignə ‘you-eat’
 magnə ‘(s)he-eats’
 magnemə ‘we-eat’
 magnetə ‘you-eat’
 magnə ‘they-eat’

³ In many languages, including standard Italian, impersonal pronouns get a 1st plural interpretation. In Standard Italian, as well as in Florentine, for instance, *Si va* (IMP. goes-3RD SG) means ‘We go’. This process is quite widespread in the world languages. We won’t address it here as it would take us too far afield. For a long discussion of the interpretation of arbitrary and impersonal pronouns, see D’Alessandro (2004a,b 2007).

This syncretism also holds for the auxiliary. Auxiliary selection in most varieties of Abruzzese is person-driven, which means that 1st and 2nd person subjects usually select BE, while 3rd person subjects select HAVE. Thus, while the difference in auxiliary resolves the ambiguity between 1st and 3rd person in the present perfect form (*passato prossimo*), because of the different auxiliary used, the ambiguity between the 3rd singular and 3rd plural form remains:

(6) <i>So jītā</i>	I-am gone	‘I have gone/I went’
<i>si jītā</i>	you-are gone	‘you have gone/you went’
a <i>jītā</i>	(s)he-has gone	‘(S)he has gone/(s)he went’
<i>semə jītā</i>	we-are gone	‘We have gone/we went’
<i>setā jītā</i>	you-are gone	‘You have gone/you went’
a <i>jītā</i>	they-have gone	‘They have gone/they went’

In a dialect where 3rd plural is not distinct from 3rd singular, a sentence like (7) is ambiguous:

(7) ?A	<i>Nnapulə</i>	<i>fa</i>	<i>la</i>	<i>pizzə</i>	<i>cchiù</i>	<i>bbonə</i>	<i>də</i>	<i>lu</i>	<i>monnə</i> .	
	at	Naples	make	the	pizza	more	good	of	the	world
	‘In Naples they make the best pizza in the world.’									

(7) has three possible interpretations: first as having a 3rd singular *pro* referential subject; second as having a 3rd person plural *pro* referential subject; and last, as having a 3rd person plural *pro* arbitrary subject. Because of “Jaeggli’s generalization” (Jaeggli 1986), according to which silent pronouns are usually preferred for arbitrary readings, the 3rd plural arbitrary interpretation will be preferred to the referential interpretation. In any case, this sentence is ambiguous when uttered out of the blue.

The explanation for the development of *nomə* into a plural can be found precisely in this ambiguity. As observed by Giammarco (1985), the construction ‘*nomə dicə*’ (‘they say’) does not reflect directly the singular Vulgar Latin *HOMO DICIT*. According to Giammarco (1973:71), “In the Adriatic area, final /n/ is lost: *kandə* ‘they sing’. The *singular* ~ *plural* opposition is reinstated through the use of the locution *ðmə: kandə* ‘sings’ ~ *ðmə kandə* ‘they sing’. This use is already documented in TVAD II 205⁴ (*multi pon om* ‘they pose themselves’). This expression is

⁴ *Testi volgari abruzzesi del ‘200* editi da F.A. Ugolini, Torino 1959: I Lamentatio; II Proverbia; III Orationes.

required because of the fall of final /n/ in 3rd pers. plur.: *ss'enganna l'omini* 'men make mistakes, lit. men deceive themselves', *campa* II 2012 'they escape', *lauda* II 206 'they praise', *queru* II I 'they ask'.^{5,6}

Thus, the convergence of the singular and plural forms of the finite verb, brought about by the apocope of the final syllable, which occurred in the old Abruzzese verbal paradigm, led to confusion regarding the number specification of *nomə*. The impersonal interpretation of a sentence like *nomə dicə* ('someone says/they say') caused the reanalysis of *nomə* as "people", which in turn determined its reinterpretation as plural. This semantic plural subsequently triggered plural agreement.

The same syncretism of singular and plural also gives rise to the more recent transformation of *nomə* into a plural marker, to which we will return later in the paper. For the moment, observe that not only is the occurrence of *nomə* not homogeneous, as already noted, but its function also shows considerable variation: some varieties use it only as a plural marker, some only as an arbitrary non-referential 3rd person pronoun, and some as a generic marker. *Nomə* can thus have different meanings, as illustrated in (8)–(10).

- (8) *Nomə va a Mmartə ma nən z'ambarə* [generic]
nomə go-3RD to Mars but not SELF-learn
a camba'.
 to live
 'People can go to Mars but they haven't learnt how to live yet.'
- (9) *M'a nomə tuzzilitə a la portə.* [arbitrary]
me-have-nomə knocked at the door
 'Somebody knocked at my door.'

5 Nell'area adriatica /n/ finale cade: *kandə* <<cantano>>, *sendə* <<sentono>>. L'opposizione *singolare* ~ *plurale* è ristabilita con la locuzione *òmə: kandə* <<canta>> ~ *òmə kandə* <<cantano>>. L'uso è già documentato in TVAD II 205 (*multi pon om* <<pongono, si pongono>>) espressione richiesta dalla caduta di /n/ finale della 3a pers. plur.: *ss'enganna l'omini* <<gli uomini si ingannano>>, *campa* II 2012 <<scampano>>, *lauda* II 206 <<lodano>>, *queru* II I <<chiedono>>.

6 An anonymous reviewer points out that another possibility is that Abruzzese, on a par with other Italian dialects, never developed a third person plural marker on the finite verb. The suffix *-no* has in fact a peculiarly nominal nature (see for instance the discussion in Manzini & Savoia 2005 on Tuscan *egli-no*, where *-no* clearly cliticized on a nominal element). Old Italian also did not always use the *-no*.

- (10) *Màrijə e Giuwannə a nomə jitə* [plural marker]
 Mario and John have-3RD nomə gone
a la candinə.
 to the pub
 ‘Mario and John went to the pub.’

(8) is a generic statement⁷, where *nomə* is a generic indefinite pronoun. (9) has an existential, arbitrary interpretation (there exists an *x*, *x* = some people, *x* has knocked at my door). Finally, in (10) *nomə* is solely a marker of plurality. The referent of *nomə* is unknown in all cases. In some varieties, only one of the three meanings is attested; meanwhile, the generic and arbitrary readings are found in speakers from older generations, while the plural marker function is used by the younger generations.

In (8)–(9), *nomə* is a pronoun. Its pronominal status is shown by the fact that for most speakers, it cannot co-occur with an overt DP. This means that these speakers do not accept the use of *nomə* in (10). Even when the overt DP is indefinite, these speakers do not accept its co-occurrence with *nomə*, as in (11):

- (11) #*Poca ggendə m'a nomə tuzzilitə a la portə.*⁸
 few people me-have-nomə knocked at the door
 ‘A few people knocked at my door.’⁹

Nevertheless, in contemporary uses, and in some older varieties, *nomə* can be found together with an overt definite DP (see 12), suggesting that it has been re-analyzed as a plural marker. An example of this is in (10), used by the younger generations in Arielli, while (12) illustrates the same usage, cross-generationally, in the dialect of San Valentino in Abruzzo Citeriore.

⁷ See endnote 3.

⁸ The # indicates that this sentence is ungrammatical only for those speakers that do not use *nomə* as a plural marker.

⁹ For those who do not accept (11), it is not a problem of number mismatch between *gendə* and *nomə*. *Gendə* often triggers plural agreement in Abruzzese, as in (i).

(i) *La ggendə jè mmittə*
 the people BE-3rd crazy-pl
 ‘People are crazy’

- (12) *L'amecezejə mɑ̃ mə nomə/noməmə docə ca so*
 the-friendship my me-DAT nomə/nomə=me-DAT say that am
stunatə
 out-of-tune
 'My friends tell me that I can't sing.'

In general, *nomə* is found more readily with an arbitrary non-referential interpretation, and sometimes with a pluralizer function. Each of the strates of the distribution according to age is reflected in some variety throughout Abruzzo. For instance, in the dialect of Arielli only the younger speakers use *nomə* as a plural marker, if at all, while the older generation uses it with its arbitrary, and more rarely generic, meaning. The plural use is found in all speakers of the dialect of San Valentino in Abruzzo Citeriore. We see here that the whole population speaking one dialect has the same use as only a part of the population speaking another dialect. This could be happening because the variety spoken in Arielli is more conservative, and the change is still taking place, while the variety of San Valentino has already completed its evolution.

It needs to be added that only some older speakers accept *nomə* as a generic pronoun. From the fact that those who accept an arbitrary interpretation almost always recognize a generic interpretation as possible, while the opposite does not hold, it can be assumed that the generic interpretation is the older. In general, in old Abruzzese texts, *nomə* is never found together with overt DPs.

The diachronic path proposed for *nomə* is hence:

- (13) generic > quasi-universal > arbitrary non-referential > pluralizer

In what follows, we will take a closer look at this path and show why existing patterns cannot be applied to *nomə tout-court*.

1.2 *Nomə* as a pluralizer

In many Abruzzese varieties, such as that of San Valentino exemplified in (12) and repeated here as (14), *nomə* can be a pure pluralizer, in that it can co-occur with overt DPs:

- (14) *L'amecezejə mɑ̃ mə nomə/noməmə docə ca so*
 the-friendship my me-DAT nomə/nomə=me-DAT says that am
stunatə.
 out-of-tune
 'My friends tell me that I can't sing.'

The last step of the diachronic development, changing *nomə* into a plural marker, is probably quite recent. There are no attestations of the use of *nomə* with overt DP in texts from the XIX c., suggesting, although not proving, that this use was not so widespread. There are however some more recent attestations in grammars from the 1950s, such as the following two examples from the dialect of Chieti, in Giammarco (1958):

(15) *Allore le tre ggiuvunette homme penzètte* [Teatino]
 then the three girls *nomə* thought-PAST
 ‘Then the three girls thought’

(16) *Homme decètte l’èldre ddu’*
nomə said-PAST the-other two
 ‘The other two said’

(15) and (16) are quite recent, and *nomə* (*homme* in the text) appears with full, definite DPs, suggesting that it is being used as a pluralizer.

The arbitrary use of *nomə* is still the most widespread in the XIX c., as witnessed by the occurrence of sentences like (17):

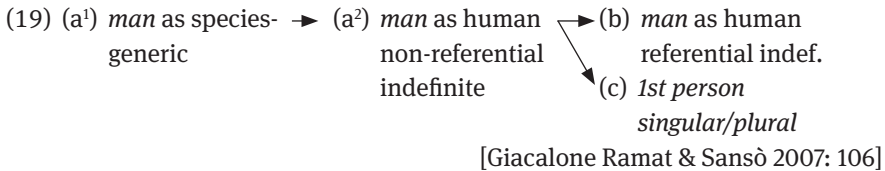
(17) *Bbèlla Manduche, ‘n ómme tòzzele.* [Ortonese]
 beautiful Manduca *nomə* knock
 ‘O beautiful Manduca, someone is knocking.’ (Finamore 1882: 6)

1.3 The diachrony of *nomə*

According to Egerland (2003, 2010), Van Gelderen (1997) and Welton-Lair (1999), categorial nouns develop into impersonal pronouns via the following steps:

(18) lexical NP > generic impersonal pronoun > arbitrary impersonal pronoun > referential pronoun

Giacalone Ramat and Sansò (2007:106), on the other hand, state that “the usage of *man* as a human referential indefinite subject is the most grammaticalized, while the development described in 1.4. [the development of *man* into a human referential definite pronoun, corresponding to a first person (plural or even singular) pronoun, A/N] is a somewhat heterogeneous process and is accordingly placed as an option which parallels the usage of *man* as a human referential indefinite but does not presuppose it”:



While both these diachronic patterns provide a good description of the first stages of the development of *nomə*, neither pattern covers the last part of its development, proposed in (13).

The plural marking use of *nomə* cannot be considered a direct continuation of either of the diachronic paths in (18) and (19), as *nomə* was never a referential pronoun, nor a 1st person plural, as will be shown below.

1.3.1 *Nomə* was never a referential pronoun

If *nomə* occurs in isolation, its interpretation is arbitrary or generic. In any case, it is non-referential. Consider (20): in this sentence *nomə* cannot be a referential pronoun. Only speakers that accept the use of *nomə* as a plural marker can interpret this sentence as having a definite referential subject. This referential subject, however, is *pro*, not *nomə*, which remains a plural marker. In general, (20) is interpreted as having an arbitrary and non-referential subject.

- (20) *Cə nomə vè*¹⁰
 there *nomə* come
 ‘Someone comes there/people come there’

We have been assuming throughout that when *nomə* co-occurs with an overt DP, it is a plural marker. In principle, it could also be a referential 3rd person plural pronoun. If this were the case, *nomə* should be able to occur in doubling structures, like that in (21). Subject doubling constructions with a full doubling pronoun are quite uncommon in Abruzzese. Nevertheless, we can find some cases of doubling, but purely when the subject is dislocated and topicalized, as in (21):

¹⁰ An anonymous reviewer points out that if *nomə* is a plural marker in (20) it should follow the verb. The point is that *nomə*, like *annə*, oscillates between a pronominal and a marker interpretation, and it is undergoing de-grammaticalization. This is the reason why its distribution is non-canonical.

- (21) [*Marijə e Giuwannə*]_i l'a purtitə jissə_i la sagnə
 Mary and John it-have brought they the pasta
 'It was Mary and John who brought the pasta'

These types of structure require a stressed pronoun. *Nomə* is weak though, and can never be stressed, as (22) shows.

- (22) **[Marijə e Giuwannə]*_i l'a *nomə*_i purtitə la sagnə
 Mary and John it-have nomə brought the pasta

In other words, *nomə* can never double the subject in this kind of construction because of its weak nature. This doubling test cannot help us in this regard, but can help us in another way. We have just established that (21) is a subject-doubling structure. Were *nomə* a definite pronoun, doubling the subject, it should not be possible to insert it into (21), as it would result in subject tripling, which is not found in southern Italian dialects, but only in varieties with subject clitics. However, it proves perfectly possible to insert *nomə* in (21), for those speakers who consider *nomə* a plural marker:

- (23) [*Marijə e Giuwannə*]_i l'a *nomə* purtitə jissə_i la sagnə
 Mary and John it-have nomə brought they the pasta
 'It was Mary and John who brought the pasta'

The fact that only those speakers who use *nomə* as a plural marker accept (23) and that no speaker accepts (22) suggests that *nomə* can never be a referential pronoun.

Last, the plural marker *nomə* can co-occur with indefinites or QPs, as in (11) above and in (24).

- (24) *Tutti quində nomə magnə li patanə*
 all nomə eat the potatoes
 'Everybody eats potatoes'

1.3.2 *Nomə* was never a 1st person plural

That *nomə* cannot have had a 1st person plural stage can be demonstrated on the basis both through empirical and theoretical observations.

First, empirically, attestations of *nomə* used as a 1st person pronoun are never found. Old Abruzzese texts are not very easy to find, but there is no trace

that *nomə* was ever used like French *on*, for instance. Its exclusive nature, shown among others in D'Alessandro & Alexiadou (2006), is naturally incompatible with an inclusive, 1st person plural, *we* reading. Moreover, there is no contemporary variety where *nomə* is found with a 1st person (inclusive) interpretation, either in the plural or in the singular.

From a merely theoretical point of view, moving from a non-referential indefinite stage to a 1st person plural stage means acquiring a plural feature and referentiality. This is obviously perfectly possible, and in fact it is precisely what happens in Germanic, according to Giacalone Ramat & Sansò (2007). According to G&R (2007), exclusiveness is not a semantic feature in itself. A 1st person plural pronoun is represented as [speaker; addressee; third party; plural].

Moving now from a 1st person stage to an only plural one would mean losing the [speaker] and [addressee] features. *Nomə* should have thus first acquired [speaker] and [addressee], becoming 1st plural, only to lose them again shortly after. This development would be quite unusual. Both the empirical and theoretical arguments seem to point to the fact that *nomə* developed directly from an arbitrary non-referential pronoun into a plural marker.

The diachronic development proposed for *nomə* is, once again, as follows:

- (25) full DP > generic pronoun > arbitrary non-referential pronoun > plural marker

Nomə is nowadays perceived as old fashioned by most Abruzzese speakers. Of those who do use it, as stated above, the older generation almost exclusively employs *nomə* as a pronoun, while among the younger generation, it is often used together with a full referential DP, as a plural marker for the verb. These younger generations also make extensive use of *annə*, a form which has entered the Abruzzese lexicon very recently. *Annə* is quite a striking example of “degrammaticalization” (Lehman 1995 [c1982], 1995, Giacalone Ramat 1998, Giacalone Ramat & Hopper 1998, Traugott & Heine 1991, Heine 2003, Hopper & Traugott 2003, Willis 2007, Norde 2009 and many others), in that, as will be shown below, it follows exactly the same diachronic pattern as *nomə*, only in the reverse order.

2 *Annə*: an emerging impersonal pronoun

2.1 *Annə*: early attestations

Recently (no more than 50 years ago) *annə* entered the Abruzzese lexicon: it is a new form, and not an original, old Abruzzese form. All the best-known Abruzzese

grammars from the last two centuries – Finamore (1880), Bielli (1930), Verratti (1968), Giammarco (1960, 1973, 1979) – give *a* as the sole form for the 3rd person plural HAVE in all Eastern Abruzzese varieties. *Annə* is most probably a borrowing from the Italian 3rd person plural form of the verb “to have”: *hanno*, adapted to Abruzzese phonotactics. It is largely used in two main dialectal poles in the Eastern Abruzzese area: the dialects of Pescara and of Lanciano, which, being “town/city” dialects, are closer to Italian.

There are rare attested exceptions to this generalization. In a *novella* (‘short story’) collected by Finamore in 1885, in the dialect of Vasto (CH), the auxiliary *annə* appears pervasively:

(26) *S’ann’ areunèite tande lazzaréune.* [Vastese]
 refl *annə* gathered many felons
 ‘Many felons gathered.’

(27) *Chiste j’ ànn’ attacchéte le mén arête*
 These him-DAT *annə* attached the hands behind
 ‘They bound his hands behind his back’ (Finamore 1885, II: 57)

This suggests that the form *annə* does not constitute an innovation across the whole Eastern Abruzzese area, as grammars state; instead, some parts of Abruzzo seem to have developed a specialized 3rd person plural form early on. There is some degree of alternation even in these dialects, it seems. In the same story, the form *ha* is also found for the 3rd plural:

(28) *e hanne mässe nu fèrr’a’bbruscenáj’ a lu feuche; e*
 and *annə* put an iron to heat at the fire and
ha cecate l’Ucchie – ‘m-brande
a blinded the Eye on forehead
 ‘And they put an iron bar in the fire to heat up; and they blinded the Eye on his forehead’ (Finamore 1885, II: 57)

Significantly, this use of *annə* as a (former) auxiliary is distributed along the coast of Abruzzo, starting from the south, where it is attested in old varieties, and moving up as far as Pescara. Lanciano, which is in between Vasto and Pescara, display a significant use of *annə*. The situation in the Lanciano dialect is quite telling, as it seems that a specialized form is developing for the 3rd plural of all finite verbs. This suggests that while *annə* was used as a plural auxiliary and has now extended to the whole verbal conjugation, other forms are acquiring a dedicated plural inflection, after losing it many centuries ago: *fannə*, *dicenə*, and so forth.

The need to disambiguate between 3rd singular and plural is once again, as in the case of *nomə*, the motivation for the introduction of *annə* in the Abruzzese vocabulary, and for its subsequent development into a plural marker, and then into a pronoun. *Annə* has developed very rapidly, possibly because of the combination of two factors: the disappearance of *nomə* and the extended contact between Abruzzese and Italian, which has become more intense in the last 60 years than it ever was before. It is worthwhile to follow its rapid development, not least because it seems to be the exact reverse of *nomə*.

2.2 From auxiliary to plural marker

Originally, *annə* seems to have entered Abruzzese as a plural auxiliary, as we just saw, to disambiguate between 3rd singular and 3rd plural HAVE, especially in those varieties in which *nomə* was perceived as old fashioned. As mentioned above, the 3rd singular and 3rd plural forms of the auxiliary are, in most Abruzzese varieties, identical (usually, *a*).

Identifying the exact period in which *annə* enters Abruzzese is not easy. Older Abruzzese texts, like the famous *Novelle Popolari Abruzzesi* (Abruzzese folk stories) collected by Finamore in the XIX century, do not usually feature an extensive use of the present perfect, with the simple past form is usually preferred. Notably, the simple past (*passato remoto*) has now almost completely disappeared from Eastern Abruzzese dialects, and is only preserved in the most conservative varieties. In any event, older Abruzzese grammars all give only one form for the 3rd singular and 3rd plural auxiliary. In the past tense, a sentence like (29) is ambiguous between a plural and a singular subject interpretation:

- (29) *L'a saputə da Marijə*
 it has known from Mary
 '(S)he has/they have learnt it from Mary' (D'Alessandro 2010:241)

For the speakers who use *nomə* as a plural marker, inserting *nomə* is an option. However, most people prefer to distinguish between (29), with a singular subject, and (30), with a plural subject, as follows:

- (30) *L'annə saputə da Marijə*
 it *annə* known from Mary
 'They have learnt it from Mary'

If the subject is overt, disambiguation is not a strong requirement, and in fact *annə* was probably first introduced in null subject sentences. From there, it could easily have been extended to sentences with overt DP subjects, especially given that other verbal paradigms started disambiguating between 3rd singular and 3rd plural.

Nowadays, a sentence like (31) is commonly uttered and accepted by most young speakers:

- (31) *Marijə e Pasqualə z'anne magnitə na vazzijə də sagnə*
 Mary and Pasquale SELF=annə eaten-pl a pot of pasta
 'Mary and Pasquale ate a pot of pasta'

Annə then changes from being an auxiliary to being a plural marker. Its non-auxiliary status is evident in sentences like (32), where it appears with a finite verb in the present tense.

- (32) *Marijə e Pasqualə z'annə magnə lə sagnə*
 Mary and Pasquale SELF=annə eat the pasta
 'Mary and Pasquale eat pasta'

Annə is clearly marking the plurality of the verb in (32), as the verb does not need an auxiliary. The next step is for *annə* to be reinterpreted once again, this time as a pronoun.

2.3 From plural marker to pronoun

If the plural marker *annə* occurs in a null-subject sentence like (33), its interpretation can be ambiguous between a plural marker and an arbitrary subject. The sentence can in fact be interpreted both as having a referential subject, in which case *annə* would be a plural marker; or as having an arbitrary subject, in which case *annə* could be either a plural marker or the subject itself.

As already discussed, sentences with a 3rd plural *pro* are preferably interpreted as featuring an arbitrary subject, especially if uttered out of the blue (Jaeggli 1986). The subject in (33) could be the arbitrary *pro*, but it could also be *annə*, an element that always accompanies an arbitrary 3rd person *pro*.

- (33) *Annə tuzzilitə*
 annə knocked
 'They/someone knocked'

Precisely because of this ambiguity and co-occurrence, *annə* begins to be re-analyzed as an arbitrary non-referential pronoun, following exactly the opposite direction to *nomə*. Today, *annə* can thus appear in any tense/mood/aspect form of the sentence, as shown by the following three examples:

- (34) *Annə fa*
 annə does
 'Someone does'
- (35) *Annə face'*
 annə did
 'Someone used to do'
- (36) *Annə 've fittə*
 annə had done
 'Someone had done'

If *annə* is a pronoun, the auxiliary *a* must be present in sentences like (37).

- (37) *Annə tuzzilitə*
 annə knocked-PL
 'Someone knocked'

The *a* auxiliary can be easily dropped in Abruzzese when adjacent to another vowel. *A*-drop in the present perfect is documented across the whole eastern Abruzzese area in the present perfect, exemplified in (38):

- (38) *Mo' (a) minutə*
 now (has) come
 'He has just come'

The reverse word order, with *annə* preceding the auxiliary, would not create *a* drop. We will return to this in Section 3, where the phonology of *annə* will be examined in more detail.

This reanalysis of *annə* as arbitrary pronoun is then enforced in the language, and *annə* can in fact appear in the present tense (compare this use to the use of *nomə* in Old Abruzzese in (19)):

- (39) *Annə tozzelə ma nisciunə j'aresponnə*
 annə knock but nobody them answers
 'Someone is knocking at the door but nobody answers'

It is a short step from here to the generic usage. (39) can also have an iterative reading, or a generic reading: ‘They keep knocking at the door but there’s nobody to answer’, or ‘people knock at doors, but nobody answers’. *Annə* can also be used as a generic non-referential pronoun:

- (40) *Li dinosaurə z’annə magnè la jervə*
 the dinosaurs SELF-annə ate the grass
 ‘Dinosaurs ate grass’

Sentences like (40) are not very common. *Annə* is still extending its use as a generic pronoun. This set of sentences suggests a clear diachronic path, which is exactly the reverse of that of *nomə*:

- (41) auxiliary > plural marker > arbitrary pronoun > generic pronoun¹¹

The last three stages co-occur in most varieties, suggesting that this change is very recent and is happening very quickly.

In some cases, *annə* still reveals its verbal nature, as is the case with periphrastic modals. Morphologically, it actually behaves very differently from other pronouns in the presence of periphrastic modals.

2.4 *Annə* with modals

Some modals in Abruzzese are periphrastic. ‘Must’ is expressed, for instance, as ‘have to’, just like in English. The paradigm of the present tense of *ave’da* (‘must’) in two varieties of Abruzzese is in (41)–(42). These forms are mostly interchangeable, i.e. most people mix the paradigms.

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|
| (42) <i>Aj’a purta’</i> | ‘I must bring’ | [general Adriatic Abruzzese] |
| <i>adi’ purta’</i> | ‘you must bring’ | |
| <i>ada’ purta’</i> | ‘(s)he must bring’ | |
| <i>avem’a purta’</i> | ‘we must bring’ | |
| <i>avet’a / adet’a purta’</i> | ‘you must bring’ | |
| <i>ada’ purta’</i> | ‘they must bring’ | |

¹¹ An anonymous reviewer points out that this development contradicts Van Gelderen’s (2011) analysis, according to which a head cannot become an XP. Grammaticalization, as also pointed out by Roberts and Roussou (2003), does in fact involve XPs developing into heads. The process proposed here is however one of *degrammaticalization*, which moves through the opposite path.

- | | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| (43) <i>dengh'a purta'</i> | 'I must bring' | |
| <i>di purta'</i> | 'you must bring' | |
| <i>da purta'</i> | '(s)he must bring' | |
| <i>dem'a purta'</i> | 'we must bring' | |
| <i>det'a purta'</i> | 'you must bring' | |
| <i>da purta'</i> | 'they must bring' | (Giammarco 1973:75) |

According to Hastings (2007), the form *ada'* does not directly correspond to Italian 'has to'. This becomes evident, according to Hastings (2007), from looking at the form *adi'*, which would need to be analyzed as *a+di* 'have + of'. *Ada'* is instead, according to him, the result of the incorporation of the preposition *da* into the *a* auxiliary (>*AT, HABENT and *ANT, HABENT), resulting in the new root *ad*. The vowel of the preposition was instead reanalyzed as a 3rd person ending, analogous to forms like *sta*, *fa* etc. This reanalysis was then extended to all verbal forms, resulting in *ada'* and *adi'*. On this account, the presence of the root *ad-* would then have created a whole new paradigm, extending over the original.

The combination of these modal forms with *nomə* highlights the fact that *nomə* is indeed a weak pronoun, as it occurs for instance in a position where full DPs cannot appear (44b):

- | | | | |
|------------------------|------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| (44) a. <i>L'anomə</i> | <i>da'</i> | <i>purta'</i> | |
| it-have nomə | to | bring | |
| | 'They/someone must bring it' | | |
| b. * <i>L'a</i> | <i>Giuwannə</i> | <i>e</i> | <i>Marijə da' purta'</i> |
| it-have | John | and | Mary to bring |

The situation with *annə* is more complex. There are two possibilities, in (45) and (46):

- | | | |
|----------------------|------------------------------|---------------|
| (45) <i>L'annə</i> | <i>da'</i> | <i>purta'</i> |
| it-annə | to | bring |
| | 'They/someone must bring it' | |
| (46) <i>L'adann'</i> | <i>a</i> | <i>purta'</i> |
| it have-to-annə | a | bring |
| | 'They/someone must bring it' | |

These two sentences might be exemplifying two different stages of the diachronic development of *annə*. If so, then in (45), *annə* would still be an auxiliary, hence

appearing before the verb in the verbal string. Its degrammaticalization would be reflected in (46): *annə* would be occupying a position lower than the auxiliary *a*. Following Roberts & Roussou (2003), grammaticalization consists in raising in the syntactic tree, usually moving from a specifier, XP position, to a higher head. Degrammaticalization is hence expected to result in a ‘downward’ movement along the syntactic tree, which is indeed what we seem to be observing in the shift from (45) to (46).

Annə usually precedes other modals:

- (47) *L'annə po/ vo/ sa fa'*
 it *annə* can/ want/ know do
 ‘They/Someone can, want(s) to, know(s) how to do it’

We have seen that the position of *annə* and that of *nomə* with respect to ‘must’ are not exactly the same. Their distribution with respect to one another is thus an interesting avenue of investigation.

2.5 *Anne nomə* or *nomə annə*

The combination of the two forms, *nomə* and *annə*, should be acceptable only in two cases: i. if both are plural markers, and ii. if one is a pronoun and the other is a plural marker. If *annə* and *nomə* are both full pronouns, they should not be able to appear in the same sentence.

Speakers were presented with the following two sentences:

- (48) *Annə nomə magnə lə patanə*
annə nomə eat the potatoes

- (49) **Nomə annə magnə lə patanə*
nomə annə eat the potatoes
 ‘They eat potatoes’

While (49) was generally excluded by everyone, (48) was accepted by some speakers. This might be due to the fact that *annə* is still considered as an auxiliary by some speakers, who can use it in contexts like (48). Alternatively, *nomə* could be a plural marker in (48). This would mean that those speakers who are more “advanced” in the use of *nomə* are also more “advanced” in the use of *annə*.

In summary, *annə* has moved from auxiliary to plural marker to arbitrary plural pronoun, and generic pronoun. Its distribution is similar to that of *nomə*, but does not overlap with it. In what follows, we will offer a description of the phonological and syntactic properties of *annə*.

3 The syntax and phonology of *annə*

Annə is a weak pronoun, according to the classification proposed by Cardinaletti & Starke (1999). Weak pronouns cannot be phonological phrases (Nespor & Vogel 1986, Selkirk 1984), they cannot bear sentence stress, nor can they appear in isolation. All these restrictions hold for *annə*. *Annə* cannot bear sentence stress (50), it cannot appear in isolation (51), and it usually is part of what Nespor and Vogel (1986) call ‘the clitic group’, (52):

(50) **L'a fittə annə*
it-have did-pl annə

(51) *Chi l'a fattə? *Annə*
who it-did annə

(52) *Jə-l'annə dicə*
him-it-annə say
‘They tell him’

Syntactically, *annə* exhibits all the features of a weak pronoun: it cannot appear in its theta-position (53), and it cannot appear in the same position usually occupied by full DP subjects, as illustrated by the contrast between (53) and (55) on one hand, and (54) and (56) on the other:

(53) **Ve' annə*.¹²
come-3rd annə

(54) *Ve' Giuwannə e Marijə*.
come-3rd John and Mary
‘John and Mary are coming.’

¹² This sentence is not ungrammatical in Abruzzese. *Annə* is also a proper name, corresponding to Italian *Anna*. (53) is grammatical in the interpretation ‘Anna comes’, which is however not what the meaning we are interested in here.

(55) *ANNə ve, no Pasqualə.
annə come-3rd, not Pasquale

(56) GIUWANNə E MMARIJə ve, no Pasqualə.
John and Mary come-3rd, not Pasquale
'It is John and Mary that are coming, not Pasquale.'

(D'Alessandro 2010:254)

It is very difficult to ascertain is the position of *annə* with respect to the auxiliary, given that *a* and *annə* start with the same vowel. As mentioned in Section 2.2, *a* tends to be elided when adjacent to other vowels. This suggests that *a* precedes *annə* in (57) and does not follow it. In (57), *a* could be elided, following the regular pattern of *a* deletion when it is adjacent to another vowel (58):

(57) A *annə magnitə* → *Annə magnitə*
a annə eaten annə eaten
'They ate'

As we saw above, *a* systematically disappears in Abruzzese when adjacent to another vowel in the present perfect:

(58) *Mo' magnatə*
now eaten
'He has just eaten'

(57) seems quite straightforward and sounds more natural, but it should be pointed out that there is no conclusive evidence for this *a* deletion. Recall that *a* deletion means that the auxiliary is still there even when *annə* comes with a past participle and has pronominal value.

The option in (59) must instead be excluded on the basis of phonological evidence.

(59) **Annə a magnitə*
annə have eaten

Should *annə* precede *a*, *a* would very likely be perceived as an Abruzzese epenthetic *a*, which is very commonly used with finite verbs (in specific syntactic contexts), as illustrated in (60):

- (60) *Magna magnə, z'a fittə lə djicə*
 eat eat self-have done the ten
 'While eating it has become quite late'

A-epenthesis is a very widespread phenomenon in Abruzzese, and takes place in some specific syntactic contexts. Its exact distribution and function are still unclear, but see two recent studies on the topic for further reference (Passino 2012, D'Alessandro & Van Oostendorp 2013).

We can conclude that if *a* is still there, which must be the case if *annə* is a pronoun, *a* precedes *annə*. Note that this position would also fit with the weak pronominal nature of *annə*, which must always precede an auxiliary.

As expected, *annə* follows negation.

- (61) *Nə l'annə fittə*
 not it=annə did
 'They didn't do that'

As shown above, *annə* can both precede and follow some periphrastic modals (61), but it usually precedes them (63); furthermore, *annə* probably follows the auxiliary (64) and precedes *nomə* (only for those who consider *nomə* a plural marker, in this case, (65)).

- (62) *L'annə da' fa / l'adanna fa*
 it=annə to do / it=have-to=annə do
 'They must do it'

- (63) *L'annə po/ vo/ sa fa*
 it annə can/ want/ know do
 'They/Someone can, want(s) to, know(s) how to do it'

- (64) *L'(a)annə fittə*
 it-have-annə done
 'They did it'

- (65) *?L'annə nomə dicə*
 it=annə nomə say
 'They say it'

The distribution of *annə* is hence as follows:

- (66) negation > object clitics > auxiliaries > *annə* > *nomə* > modals

4 Some typological considerations

As we have seen, *annə* started out as an auxiliary and developed into a generic/arbitrary pronoun. According to the typological survey carried out by Giacalone Ramat & Sansò (2007), this is not the general European trend. While Slavic languages make ever increasing use of impersonal pronouns and markers, Western European groups are tending to lose the use of these pronouns. Abruzzese is hence both following this tendency (with *nomə*) and going against it (with *annə*). There could be a variety of reasons for this: while most Italo-Romance varieties, for instance, entirely lack an impersonal/arbitrary pronoun, Abruzzese developed one early on, making it easier for speakers to replace it with another form, when this disappears. Abruzzese also has a specific morphological feature that facilitates the development of plural markers, and their reanalysis as pronouns, namely the syncretism of 3rd singular and 3rd plural. This syncretism might force the resolution of 3rd person verbal forms, as we saw repeatedly, particularly when there is a desire to clarify whether the reference is generic or arbitrary.

Finally, contact with Italian has facilitated the spread of *annə* from the varieties in which it was present early on, such as that of Vasto, as we saw. The similarity of this form with Italian *hanno* reinforced its spread and its introduction in the varieties where it was not present. Recall, though, that a sentence like (67) would be completely ungrammatical in Italian, as (68) shows:

(67) *Annə tozzələ*
annə knock
 ‘They knock’

(68) **Hanno bussano*
 have-3rd.pl knock-3rd.pl

To conclude, the combination of specific morphological paradigms, the Italian superstrate, and the decay of the old form, has allowed Abruzzese to introduce a new form in the lexicon, contrary to the general trend in Western Europe.

5 Conclusions

Abruzzese has recently witnessed the evolution of two generic/arbitrary pronouns: *nomə* and *annə*, which have followed the same path of development, but in the opposite direction. *Nomə*, the more archaic form, has recently developed into a plural marker, and is increasingly being abandoned by speakers because

it is perceived as old fashioned. In its place, stemming from the main “cultural” centers along the coast – Vasto, Lanciano, and Pescara – a new pronoun is developing, *annə*. *Annə* entered the lexicon most probably as a plural auxiliary, a loanword from Italian. It has almost immediately lost its verbal/auxiliary status to become a plural marker. Its co-occurrence with *nomə* in some areas is quite striking, as it highlights a perfect situation of language change in progress. While *nomə* has almost completely disappeared from the Abruzzese spoken by the younger generations, *annə* is taking over the pronominal function formerly fulfilled by *nomə*, and is nowadays widely used as an arbitrary pronoun. Its use as a generic pronoun, however, is still restricted, as expected.

Significantly, *nomə* and *annə* are evolving along a very clearly defined path, but in the opposite directions. *Nomə* goes from being a full DP to a generic pronoun, to an arbitrary pronoun, to a plural marker. *Annə* goes from being an auxiliary, to a plural marker, to an arbitrary pronoun, to a generic pronoun.

Will *annə* ever develop into a full DP? This appears quite unlikely, particularly because of the presence of a proper name, *Annə* (‘Anna’), in the Abruzzese lexicon. Will *nomə* ever become an auxiliary? It is obviously difficult to make these predictions, but if this form were not perceived as very old fashioned it could certainly stand a good chance of doing so, especially in those varieties that do not have *annə* at all.

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