

A mme e te: evidence for associative plurals in Abruzzese

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In Abruzzese, an upper-Southern Italo-Romance language, personal pronouns may occur in a construction that conveys collective meaning and is strictly associative. Ackema and Neeleman (2018: 91-98) maintain that associative plurals referring to the speaker or the addressee and their *permanent* associates are always formally distinguished from the standard plurals of these pronouns, which refer only to speaker or addressee and their *contextual* associates. I argue that Differential Subject Marking is used in Abruzzese to distinguish associative plurals from standard plural pronouns.

Associative plurals in Abruzzese have the fixed structure in (1).

- (1) *a mme e X*
DSM me and X

The first element is similar to the preposition *a* “to”, but is actually an oblique case marker, i.e. the overt realisation of DSM. The second element is always a first person singular pronoun in the oblique case, as in (2).

- (2) *Parlemə a mme e tte.*
Talk.IMP.1PL DSM me and you.SING
“Let’s talk, the two of us”.

Furthermore, after the conjunction *e*, the fourth element can either be a second person singular pronoun, a third singular pronoun, a personal name or a DP. As clearly showed by (4), the fourth element has to make reference to either a relative or a close acquaintance of the speaker, proving that this morpho-syntactic construction is indeed an associative plural.

- (3) *Ci semə itə a mme e essə/ Mmarijə/nu cumpagnə mé/*la maestra mé.*
CL.loc are.1PL gone DSM me and her/him/Mary/ a friend my/the teacher my
“(S)he/Mary/a friend of mine/my teacher and I went there together”.

This is a remarkable example of associative plurals since it lays in between a purely syntactic way to express associative plurals, found for example in Dutch (Ackema and Neeleman 2018: 97), and a dedicated morphological form for associative pronouns reported for Haruai (Ackema and Neeleman 2018: 98). More specifically, Abruzzese employs DSM to mark associative plurals. According to Woolford (2008: 17), a subject is differentially marked if it bears different case, agrees differently or surfaces in a different position than other subjects. In associative plurals in Abruzzese, subjects are differentially marked since they surface in the oblique case and are preceded by what seems a preposition, namely *a*. However, the fact that *a* is an overt case marker and not a preposition is proved by sentence (4), in which *a tte e essə* co-occurs with a PP referring to the beneficiary and introduced by the preposition *a* without any problem of grammaticality or interpretability.

[*Ta ricurdə qəlu vasə?*]

[Do you remember that vase?]

- (4) *Iə lə semə regalətə a mme e te, a Mmarijə.*
CL.dat CL.acc are gifted DSM me and you, to Mary.
The two of us gifted that vase to Mary.

Woolford (2008: 17) also argue that DSM is usually related to some property of the subject. The use of DSM in Abruzzese is restricted to first person singular. Thus, the property underlying DSM in Abruzzese is currently a [+auth] feature. Thus, the possibility to have DSM (and associative plurals)

in Abruzzese is restricted to subjects that are found highest in the Animacy Hierarchy (Silverstein 1976, Corbett 2000).

One last striking characteristics of associative plurals in Abruzzese is that they can only have a strict collective interpretation, making them compatible only with verbs referring to joint activity, as showed by (5)-(8). Interestingly, Görgülü (2011) reports a similar collective interpretation for Turkish associatives.

(5) *Ballema/ magnema a mme e tte.*
Dance IMP.1PL/eat IMP.1PL DSM me and you
“Let’s dance/eat together, me and you”.

(6) **Emə starnutitə a mme e tte.*
Have.1PL sneezed DSM me and you.
“The two of us sneezed”.¹

(7) **Stemə stanghə a mme e tte.*
Stay.1PL tired DSM me and you
“The two of us are tired”.

(8) *?*Semə vicchjə a mme e tte.*
Are.1PL old DSM me and you.
“The two of us are old”.

Summarising, associative plurals in Abruzzese are worth investigating because they are formed combining a morphological strategy (DSM) and a fixed syntactic structure, supporting Ackema and Neeleman’s (2018) observation that associative plurals of pronouns have to be distinct from standard plural pronouns. They are also interesting typologically since collective readings have not previously been reported in Romance.

References

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¹ It is possible to sneeze at the same time, but not *jointly*: this is why a verb like “sneeze” is semantically incompatible with associatives in Abruzzese.