The morphosyntactic interaction of kinship terms with evaluative morphemes in Italian

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Abstract:

In this brief paper, we address the interaction between evaluative morphology and kinship terms introduced by possessives in Italian, showing that the application of evaluative affixes influences the syntactic context in which kinship terms can be employed: they cannot be introduced by a bare determiner when evaluative morphemes attach to the lexical root. We argue that this (trivial) empirical observation has some clear consequences from a theoretical viewpoint: the fact that derivational morphemes, such as evaluatives, alter the syntactic environment in which a noun is couched supports the theory of grammar advanced in Manzini and Savoia (2007, 2011), who assume that Merge takes morphemes as its input and single morphemes are fully visible to the syntactic computation.

Keywords: *Determiners, Evaluative Kinship Terms, Morphology, Possessives, Proper Names*

1. Introduction: the empirical facts and some theoretical background

In Italian, there is an interesting asymmetry concerning the distribution of determiners and possessives when a kinship term is selected from the lexicon. With canonical kinship terms we may usually find sentences in which the determiner is (optionally) absent, as illustrated in (1a).[1] This is clear property of the set of kinship terms, given that (most) nominal items (including both common nouns and proper names) are obligatorily introduced by a D item in a corresponding syntactic position, as illustrated in (1b). The application of evaluative morphology on kinship terms (highlighted in bold below) yields interesting outcomes, given that the D item is now required, as illustrated in the examples in (1c).

[1] For this phenomenon, there is a full range of microvariation in the Dialects of Italy, which will not be considered in the present paper. The interested reader may refer to Cardinaletti and Giusti (2018), Baldi and Savoia (2019), Masi (2020), among others, for relevant data and analyses.

(1)   a.   (La) mia sorella/ (la) mia zia/ (la) mia nipote è andata al mare
                    'My sister/aunt/nephew(grandson) went to the sea'
        b.   *(Il) mio amico/*(il) mio Gianni/*(il) mio cane è andato al mare
                    'my friend/my Gianni/my dog went to the sea'
        c.   *(La) mia sorell**in**a/*(la) mia zi**ett**a/ *(la) mia nipot**in**a è andata al mare
                    'My younger sister/auntie /little nephew(grandson) went to the sea'

This is a trivial observation and is far from being novel. Longobardi (1994, 1996), Giusti (2015), Cardinaletti and Giusti (2018), among others, already have noticed the asymmetry between (1a) and (1c). Still, as far as I acknowledge, in the theoretical literature there are no attempts to formally explain the obligatory presence of D items in DP headed by kinship terms, once evaluative morphemes are attached to these nominal items. The aim of this brief paper is precisely to fill this gap providing a formal explanation for these facts.

Longobardi (1994 and subsequent literature) has shown that some classes of singular nouns in Italian can move leftward, triggering a N-to-D chain, raising from their base position to the one usually occupied by determiners, crossing over potentially intervening lexical items (e.g. possessive items). This is true, for instance, for many proper names and the item *casa* (home). In (2)-(3), it is possible to see that the determiner is absent only when the nominal item moves leftward.

(2)   a.   L'antica Roma fu la città più importante del Mediterraneo.
                    the ancient Rome was the most important city of the Mediterranean
        b.   Roma antica fu la città più importante del Mediterraneo.
                    Rome ancient was the most important city of the Mediterranean
        c.   *Antica Roma fu la città più importante del Mediterraneo.
                    ancient Rome was the most important city of the Mediterranean
                                                                                (Longobardi 2005: 9-10)

(3)   a.   La mia casa è bella
                    the my home is beautiful
        b.   casa mia è bella
                    home my is beautiful
        c.   *mia casa è bella
                    my home is beautiful

Interestingly, a subset of kinship terms behaves like proper names and the item 'casa', allowing N-to-D movement, as illustrated in (4) (cf. Longobardi 1994, 1996). Still, as shown in (1), they can appear, as least for some kinship terms, determiner-less also in their base position (as in (4a)).[2]

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[2] An anonymous reviewer asked how it is possible to account for the (micro)parametric variation attested in Romance. For instance, in Spanish, with possessive modification, determiners are not available independently of the presence of evaluative morphemes (e.g. (*la) mi hermana, my sister, (*el) mi gato, my cat, (*la) mi hermanita, my little sister, (*el) mi gatito, my kitty). For the sake of the present discussion, we may simply assume that Spanish possessives (like their English counterparts) are directly merged in D, blocking any other lexical item in such position.

(4) a. mio nonno è andato al mare
     My grandpa went to the sea
  b. nonno mio è andato al mare
     my grandpa went to the sea
  c. il mio nonno è andato al mare
     my grandpa went to the sea

Longobardi (1996) proposes an analysis for the whole set of kinship expressions in Italian, such as *mia sorella* 'my sister' in (1a), also likely to trigger N-raising, along with additional syntactic operations. He argues for a direct link between proper names and kinship terms and he basically assumes that determiners are "expletive" when they show up with items that are prone to N-to-D movement. In subsequent papers, Longobardi connects the movement of a noun to (a phonetically empty) D with the obligatorily cooccurrence of an overt or understood genitive argument (see Longobardi 2005, 2008), assuming that such entities rigidly refer to particular individuals, from a semantic viewpoint. Recently, Giusti (2015, cf. also Cardinaletti and Giusti 2018) argues that kinship terms modified by possessive items are substantially analogous to proper names, given that they are semantically interpreted as *rigid designators* (Kripke 1980). For this reason, both nominal classes lack definite determiners in Italian.[3]

Giusti (2015), Cardinaletti and Giusti (2018) specifically propose that rigid designators project reduced syntactic nominal structures in order to address the issue of silent Ds with kinship terms (and proper names). They assume that while common nouns project three different layers (the lexical NP, the modification field including a set of functional projections FP, and the referential layer DP) rigid designators only project two layers, namely the lexical NP and the referential DP. According to Cardinaletti and Giusti (2018: 141), the possessive adjective which signals the possessor of the designator is theta-interpreted and referentially interpreted in a SpecNP position, which is immediately lower than D, given the absence of a functional layer sandwiched between D and N. In (5), we outline a sketch of their model. In (5a), the kinship term shows up with a silent D. In (5b) the proper name moves to D, following the standard analysis of Longobardi (1994). The parallelism between the two classes of nominal items is supported by the fact, already highlighted in (4b), that a subset of kinship terms can raise to D, as in (5c).[4]

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[3] A close link between kinship terms and proper names is confirmed on typological grounds. For instance, Dahl and Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2001) assumes a rough hierarchy establishing that if any other kin terms are used like proper names, then those encoding ascending relations, and in particular direct ones, like 'father' and 'mother', will be used like proper names. Pham (2011) assumes that Vietnamese kinship terms have essentially the same distribution of D items (just like proper names). Stolz, Levkovych and Urdze (2017) show that in Faroese a special clitic marker (*sa*) developed that can only be suffixed to personal name and kinship possessors; if the possessor is a common noun or a place name, possession is canonically expressed via a prepositional phrase in that language (cf. also Schlücker and Ackermann 2017).

[4] Another parallel between proper names and kinship terms in Italian, as highlighted in Giusti (2015), is that they can appear without a determiner only when they are to singular. Consider the examples in (i):

(i) a. *(i) miei fratelli
      the my brothers
  b. *(i) Rossi
      'the Rossi family'

(5) a.   [$_{DP}$ Ø [$_{NP}$ mia sorella]]
               "my sister"
     b.   [$_{DP}$ Maria [$_{NP}$ mia ~~Maria~~]]
               "my Maria"
     c.   [$_{DP}$ mamma [$_{NP}$ mia ~~mamma~~]]
               "my mother"

We assume that an analysis of this kind is essentially correct, in spite of the fact that it cannot really dispense from an *expletive* nature for the determiner in contexts where proper names are left in their base position (cf. *(*il) mio Gianni* in (1b)). Still, we have to find an explanation for the fact that kinship terms cannot behave as 'rigid designators' when they bear evaluative morphology. Namely, we have to explain why it is impossible for *evaluated* kinship terms to appear determiner-less, as illustrated above in (1c). Actually, from a semantic point of view, it is not easy to immediately catch the difference between them: evaluated and "bare" kinship terms both seem to rigidly denote individuals, semantically.

In what follows, we will try to advance a morphosyntactic analysis capable of understanding the reason why the application of evaluative affixes influences the syntactic context in which kinship terms can be employed. In section 2 we will illustrate the analysis of evaluative morphemes advanced in Savoia *et al.* 2017 (cf. also Franco, Baldi and Savoia 2020). Section 3 will apply Savoia *et al.*'s theoretical model to the issue of evaluated kinship terms. Section 4 is devoted to introduce and examine potential counterexamples and other issues relevant for our analysis. The Conclusion follows.

2. The morphosyntax of evaluatives

Following Manzini and Savoia (2017a, 2017b), for Italian/Romance, we assume a nominal morphosyntax in which the first component is a category-less root √ (cf. Marantz 1997). Next to the root √ we find different types of morphemes, including derivational and inflectional ones. Inflectional morphemes generally follow derivational suffixes. The root is interpreted as a predicate, that has one open argument place (the R-role, cf. Williams 1994), which is ultimately bound by a determiner or quantifier operator (see Higginbotham 1985). Gender and number specifications — labelled as Class — apply to the argument x open at the predicate. We assume that they work as predicates themselves, restricting the content of the argumental variable, eventually topped off by a determiner/quantifier.[5]

Manzini and Savoia argue that the inflectional vowel of Italian occupies an Infl(ection) position embedding the root √ and the Class nodes, which encode gender ([feminine], [masculine], etc.) or number specifications ([singular], [plural], etc.). The content of the plural is represented as the relation part-whole [⊆], specifying that the *denotatum* of the predicate can be partitioned into subsets (cf. Manzini and Savoia 2011 and subsequent literature). A rough sketch of their model is represented in (6) for the nominal items *ragazz-o/i* 'boy/boys', *ragazz-a/e* 'girl/girls'.

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[5] In their framework, all lexical material is associated with interpretable contents; this proposal is not substantially different from the conception of Agree in Chomsky (2001), expressing an identity relation between features under locality (Minimal Search).

(6)   a.   [[*ragazz* √] [$_⊆$] [fem]/[masc] $_{Class}$] [$_⊆$] $_{Infl}$ -*a* -*e* -*i* -*o*]

Furthermore, following Borer (2003, 2014) and Savoia *et al.* (2017; see also Franco 2017), we take that the same lexical content can be expressed by inflectional and derivational morphemes (as well as stand-alone lexical items). For instance, in Romance, inflectional morphemes are able to introduce properties which usually are introduced by derivational tools, for example category change, size properties (e.g. *melo* 'apple tree'/*mela* 'apple'; *buco* 'hole'/*buca* 'pit', cf. Franco, Manzini and Savoia 2015; Franco, Baldi and Savoia 2020; Manzini 2020). *Vice versa*, derivational morphemes can introduce kinds of contents generally associated with inflection, as for instance gender specifications, which can be also introduced in Italian by the derivational suffix -*ess* (e.g. *maestr-o-maestr-a* 'male/female teacher' vs. *avvocat-o, avvocat-ess-a* 'male/ female lawyer').

For what concern evaluatives, in keeping with Savoia *et al.* (2017), we argue that they mostly express size / measure (Class) properties or the grade of physical or culturally-determined properties with reference to lexical roots, as in the examples in (7) where kinship terms bear diminutive/augmentative morphemes.

(7)   a.   sorell-in-a   /   fratell-on-e
                  sister-dim-Infl   brother-aug-Infl
                  'small/ younger sister'   'big/ older brother'

Evaluatives can be understood as (Class)ifying predicates that contribute to restricting the argumental variable of the root √, like gender and number layers (see also Percus 2011). Actually, it is possible to extend the analysis of adjectives in Parsons (1979) to evaluatives. For Parsons (1979: 157), adjectives in attributive positions are "operators on the predicate contributed by the noun … these operators can be further analysed in terms of conjunction with a predicate', whereby 'red box' can be translated as 'x is red and a box' ".

Given this, it is possible to follow Cinque (2010) in pursuing the idea that evaluative morphology is essentially intersective, namely it invariantly corresponds to the restrictive and intersective (or subsective) interpretation of adjectives,[6] giving rise to the interpretations in (8).

(8)   a.   *sorellina* λx[(sister)x & (little)x],   *fratellone* λx [(brother)x & (big)x]

Syntactically, we argue that an evaluative interpretation arises from a structure in which the evaluative morphemes embed the Class node and the root, as illustrated in (9) for diminutives and augmentatives.[7] The evaluative Class item merges with the root √ combined with
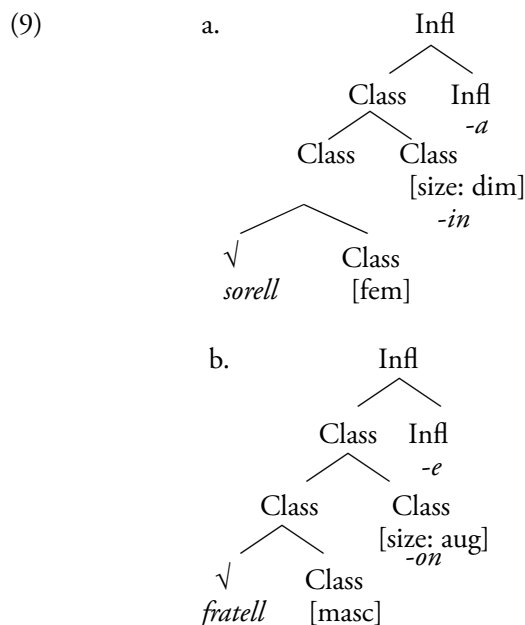
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[6] This interpretation is supported by the fact that diminutive morphemes can be attached to postnominal adjectives but not in pre-nominal ones in Italian, as illustrated in (i) (see Savoia *et al.* 2017).
     (i)   a.   *una grand-in-a casa/una casa grand-in-a
                     ᵃ big-dim house/a house big-dim
         b.   *una bell-in-a ragazza/una ragazza bell-in-a
                     ᵃ cute-dim girl /a girl cute-dim
Following Cinque (2010), pre-nominal adjectives have a non-restrictive reading (cf. also Partee 2007), while post-nominal adjectives have an intersective meaning because they restrict the denotation of the head noun with the introduction of further specifications on its range of reference.
[7] In (9) Dim/Aug are introduced as [Dim]Class/[Aug]Class, and so on in the case of the other evaluative class nodes, as for instance pejorative (e.g. *sorell-acci-a*, bad sister) and endearing (e.g. *zi-ett-a*, auntie) morphemes. For the ordering and mutual exclusions between evaluative suffixes, not strictly relevant for the present discussion, see the analyses in Cinque (2015) and in Savoia *et al.* (2017).

other Class specification (e.g. gender properties) below the inflectional/agreement layer Infl.[8] We assume a nominal structure in which inflectional and derivational morphemes enable a morpho-syntactic skeleton which provides different semantic (Class) interpretations.

(9)   a.   Infl
                                          ╱   ╲
                                    Class   Infl
                                  ╱   ╲   *-a*
                              Class   Class
                                         [size: dim]
                            ╱   ╲   *-in*
                          √   Class
                        sorell   [fem]

            b.   Infl
                                          ╱   ╲
                                    Class   Infl
                                  ╱   ╲   *-e*
                              Class   Class
                                         [size: aug]
                            ╱   ╲   *-on*
                          √   Class
                        fratell [masc]

3. The interaction of kinship terms with evaluative morphemes: an analysis

Given this theoretical background, in this section we will try to account for the impossible selection of determiner-less kinship terms modified by possessives, when they bear evaluative morphology. Longobardi (2005) noticed that the rigid denotation of an individual entity, from a morphosyntactic viewpoint, is a derivational property and not a lexical one. Namely, a 'rigid designation' cannot be predicted on the basis of the lexical features of a nominal item noun. It is determined through the syntactic module in a derivational fashion. Thus, proper names (and other rigid designators) are allowed to fill an empty determiner position only given certain syntactic context. For instance, Longobardi shows that in those contexts where proper names are treated like common nouns, pronouns (i.e. standard D items) are ungrammatical, as illustrated for restrictive relative modifications in (10) (cf. also Matushansky 2009):

(10)   a.   Il (simpatico) Gianni che conoscevo non esiste più`.
                  'The (nice) Gianni that I used to know no longer exists.'

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[8] Other recent proposals in the generative framework aim to relate the nature and morphemic status of evaluatives to the discussion on the internal structure of the noun, also in a cross-linguistic perspective, see, among others, Wiltschko (2006), Ott (2011), de Belder, Faust and Lampitelli (2014), Cinque (2007, 2015), Franco, Baldi and Savoia (2020). For instance, Wiltschko (2006) assumes that diminutive suffixes are 'light nouns', and specifically that they correspond to numeral classifiers. Ott (2011) proposes a detailed structure where the diminutives are analysed as 'numeral classifiers'. Both authors converge in identifying the diminutive suffix with a lexicalization of a nominal layer independent of the root.

b.   *Gianni (simpatico) che conoscevo non esiste più`.
    'Gianni (nice) that I used to know no longer exists.'
c.   *Il (simpatico) lui che conoscevo non esiste più`.
    'The (nice) he that I used to know no longer exists.'
d.   *Lui (simpatico) che conoscevo non esiste più`.
    'He (nice) that I used to know no longer exists.'

(Longobardi 2005: 16)

Crucially, when kinship terms are modified by intersective/subsective adjectives, they cannot appear determiner-less, as in (11) where the adjective *imbranata* 'clumsy' modifies the kinship term for sister.

(11)   a.   *(la)   mia   sorella imbranata   ha   cambiato   strada
            the   my   sister   clumsy   has   changed   road
            'my clumsy sister changed direction'

In the terms of Cardinaletti and Giusti (2018), if modifiers enter the derivation, the kinship term is no more a rigid designator and works as the head noun of a (standard) syntactic structure in which the functional field is projected. In such (canonical) structure the possessor moves from SpecNP to SpecPossP, roughly as illustrated in (12).

(12)   a. $[_{DP}$ la $[_{PossP}$ mia $[_{FP}$ sorella $[_{FP}$ $[_{AP}$ imbranata $]$ ... $[_{NP}$ ~~mia sorella~~$]]]]]$
            the   my   sister   clumsy
            'my clumsy sister'

Thus, both Longobardi and Cardinaletti and Giusti assume that it is impossible to select a lexical item as a rigid designator when it undergoes subsective/intersective/restrictive modification. Nevertheless, Cardinaletti and Giusti assumes that rigid designation is a lexical property of nominal items, while Longobardi claims that rigid designation arises derivationally, given certain syntactic environments.

As we have seen in the previous section, Savoia *et al.* (2017) argue that it is possible to treat evaluative morphemes as classifying morphemes that operate a [Size] restriction of the lexical root. This is a morphological operation, which is however visible at the level of syntax. Indeed, diminutives and augmentatives, as in (7)-(8), seem to work just like intersective adjectives, as in (13). This clearly blocks the possibility for kinship terms to act as rigid designators which allow an empty D position possibly filled via N to D movement.

(13)   a.   la mia sorellina ≈ la mia sorella piccola
            the my sister.dim the my sister little
            'my little sister/my younger sister'
    b.   il mio fratellone ≈ il mio fratello grande
            the my brother.aug the my brother big
            'my big brother/my older brother'

This pattern extends to all the other kinds of evaluatives in Italian. Pejoratives are a case in point, given that they seem to show that Longobardi is right in assuming that 'rigid designation' is shaped 'compositionally' by the morphosyntactic derivation (cf. also Baggio and Cairncross 2020 for a recent cartographic proposal which supports this view) and cannot be predicted

on the basis of the lexical features of a given nominal item. Consider for instance the case of the Italian pejorative suffix -*astr*- when it applies to kinship terms, as in the examples in (14). These lexical items, from a semantic viewpoint, seem to lexically work as rigid denotators, given that they encode particular specimen of the class of kinship terms. In (14), they can denote a daughter/son of one's step-parent by a marriage other than with one's own father or mother. In these contexts, it is not possible to retrieve a [size] interpretation for these evaluative morphemes and they are *prima facie* connected to a *denotatum* which is fully stored in the lexicon (i.e. a fossilized form).[9]

(14)   a.   sorell-astr-a   b.   fratell-astr-o
              step-sister, half-sister   step-brother, half-brother

Actually, such items are fully ungrammatical without a definite determined in the possessor construction we have outlined so far, as illustrated in (15), just like the examples we have provided for kinship terms bearing diminutive or augmentative affixes.

(15)   a.   *(la)   mia   sorellastra / *(il) mio   fratellastro
              The my step/half sister   / The my step/half brother

Thus, it seems that the morpheme -*astr* is still active from a morphosyntactic viewpoint, given that it behaves just like the other evaluatives introduced in the discussion so far. The Italian suffix -*astr* derives from the Latin morpheme -*aster*, which encodes resemblance/similarity (cf. Thomas 1940; Rohlfs 1968). The evaluative (pejorative) meaning of this suffix, according to Merlini Barbaresi (2004), comes from the fact that the nominal items bearing this morpheme are all characterized by qualities which are *similar* to those of the respective bases, but less precise, less perfect.[10] Consider for instance the examples in (16a) where the lexical items have a clear pejorative flavour and the items in (16b) in which they encode an approximate (i.e. less intense, less clear, etc.) version of the lexical base.

(16)   a.   poet-astr-o   >   poeta,   filosof-astr-o   >   filosofo
              bad poet   poet   bad philosopher   philosopher
        b.   ross-astr-o   >   rosso   sord-astr-o   >   sordo
              reddish   red   slightly deaf   deaf

We argue that the [approximate] value of the items in (16b) is shared by the kinship terms bearing the -*astr* suffix.[11] Thus, it is arguable to propose, for these nominal elements, an

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[9] Indeed, Merlini Barbaresi (2004: 292) precisely assumes that items like *fratellastro* 'step-brother, half-brother', *figliastro* 'step-son', *sorellastra* 'step-sister, half-sister' are fully lexicalized in Italian.
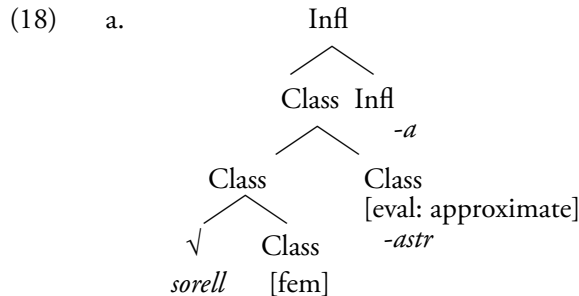
[10] Serianni (1988: 550) points out that the suffix -*astr* can also convey an endearing or playful meaning, as with items like *topastro* 'little funny rat', *giovinastro* 'youngster'.

[11] We can propose a similar 'approximate' value for the the (scarcely productive) evaluative suffix -*ign*, also employed with kinship terms, as in (i), which disallow an empty D as in (ii). The approximate (i.e less intense) value of this suffix is found with items like the one in (iii).

(i)   patr-ign-o,   matr-ign-a
       'stepfather'   'stepmother'
(ii)   *(la)   mia   matrigna /   *(il)   mio   patrigno
       The   my   stepmother /   The   my   stepfather

intersective/subsective semantics like the one represented in (17) and a morphosyntax like the one sketched in (18).

(17) a. *Sorellastra* λx[(sister)x & (approximate)x], *fratellastro* λx [(brother)x & (approximate)x]

(18)   a.   Infl

                                    ╱‾‾‾‾‾╲
                                Class Infl
                            ╱‾‾‾╲   *-a*
                       Class   Class
                    ╱‾‾╲   [eval: approximate]
                 √   Class   *-astr*
              sorell   [fem]

We argue that not only the outer node (Infl) of the nominal structure is recruited for the syntactic computation (e.g. for Agree operations), but also the Class layers of the nominal skeleton acting as predicates which restrict the referential properties of the root. In this precise context, they turn kinship terms, which are a set of nominal items sharing many features with proper names, into common nouns by applying a functional restriction on their reference. This, in turn, blocks the availability of an empty D position for kinship items. The fact that derivational morphemes of this kind alter the syntactic environment in which a noun is couched support the theory of grammar advanced by Manzini and Savoia (2007, 2011), who precisely assume that Merge takes morphemes as its input and single morphemes are visible to syntactic computation (in the terms of Cardinaletti and Giusti 2018, Class morphemes feed the functional field sandwiched between N and D, blocking rigid designation).

4. Further issues on possessives, kinship terms and evaluatives

In the previous section, we have sketched the main point of our analysis which addressed the interaction between evaluative morphology and kinship terms introduced by possessives in Italian, showing how the application of evaluative affixes influences the syntactic context in which kinship terms can be employed, blocking the availability of an unpronounced definite D. Now, we address some facts that can be considered as potential problems for our claims.

First, we have said that we are assuming that morphological (e,g. evaluatives) and syntactic (e.g. adjectives) modifiers block rigid denotation for kinship terms in the spirit of Cardinaletti and Giusti (2018). Actually, there is a potential counterexample involving the comparative (suppletive) form of the adjectives which exactly identifies [size] properties in Italian, namely 'minore' (smaller, younger) and 'maggiore' (bigger, older). Consider the examples in (19).

(19)   a.   Mia sorella minore è andata al parco
                      'My younger sister went to the park'

(iii) aspr-ign-o   *from*   aspro
      slightly sour   sour

b.   Mio fratello maggiore è andato al parco
            'My older brother went to the park'

In (19) we find that the kinship terms in the possessor construction have a modifier and still allow an empty D, *contra* what would be expected. We argue that items like 'sorella minore' and 'fratello maggiore' in (19) are treated like lexical compounds and cannot be syntactically rearranged. That is the reason why they are treated as lexical members of the class of kinship terms and can still work as rigid designators. This is confirmed by the fact that these constructions cannot be modified by intervening intensifiers or by other lexical material, as in (20).

(20)   a. *un   fratello molto   minore   (cf. e.g. un percorso molto minore)
             a   brother much   younger   'a much shorter path'
         b. *una sorella ben   maggiore   (cf. e.g. una fatica ben maggiore)
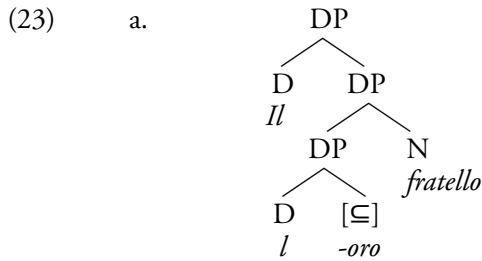   a   sister   much   older   'a far greater effort'

Furthermore, the items 'minore' and 'maggiore' are commonly recruited in Italian to form various other lexical compounds/multiword expressions, as shown in (21).

(21)   Orsa maggiore   panda minore   Si maggiore   …
         Ursa mayor   red panda   B major

A further note concerns the paradigm of possessives in front of kinship terms in Italian. Consider the data in (22)

(22)   sing   plur

         1st   mio padre   'my father'   nostro padre   'our father'
         2nd   tuo padre   'your father'   vostro padre   'your father'
         3rd   suo padre   'his/her father'   ??(il) loro padre 'their father'

According to our judgement, the third person plural possessive *loro* disallows the possibility of a bare determiner in the possessor – kinship term structure. The special properties of the pronoun *loro* have attracted great interest in the literature, starting from the work of Cardinaletti (1998), Cardinaletti and Starke (1999) concerning a fine grained typological of *strong* vs. *weak* pronouns in Italian. Here we do not enter into technical details and we just follow Manzini (2014; cf. also Manzini and Savoia 2015; Baldi and Savoia 2019, 2021) in assuming that 'loro' includes an inflectional oblique morpheme *-oro*, notated as the (possession) relation [⊆], taking, in genitive contexts, the pronominal/definiteness base *l-* to which it attaches as its internal argument and the head noun as its external argument. A possible representation is sketched in (23).

(23) a.

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                      DP
                     /  \
                    D    DP
                    Il   / \
                       DP    N
                      /  \  fratello
                     D   [⊆]
                     l   -oro
```

The other possessive items, introducing the participants in the speech act (1st/2nd person, ʿmio/nostroʾ, ʿtuo/vostroʾ) or the singular reference to a discourse anaphoric argument (3rd singular person *suo*) do not require the presence of a definite determiner, possibly because their interpretive content is able to exhaustively externalize the referential domain of DP.

Our sketchy idea is that the definiteness *l-* base (the same base found in Italian definite determiners, e.g. *il*, the.m.sg, *la*, the.f.sg, etc.) encoded in the pronoun ʿloroʾ triggers the spell-out of a higher D item topping off the structure, given the argumental nature of the lower D item in ʿloroʾ. Such lower argumental D requires an (overt) higher D fixing its referential properties (cf. Lekakou and Szendrői 2012; Franco, Manzini and Savoia 2015b). It is possible, in other words, that the lower D simply values the argument slot of [⊆], awaiting further quantificational closure (operated by the higher D). We leave this matter for future works.

5. Conclusion

In this brief paper we have addressed the interaction between evaluative morphology with kinship terms introduced by possessives in Italian, showing that the application of evaluative affixes influences the syntactic context in which kinship terms can be employed. We have argued that this (trivial) empirical observation has some interesting consequences from a theoretical viewpoint: the fact that derivational morphemes, such as evaluatives, alter the syntactic environment in which a noun is couched support the theory of grammar advanced by Manzini and Savoia (2007, 2011), who assume that Merge takes morphemes as its input and single morphemes are visible to syntactic computation.

Specifically, we have argued that it is possible to treat evaluative morphemes as classifying morphemes that operate a [Size/Approximation, etc.] restriction of the lexical root. This is a morphological restriction, which is however visible at the level of syntax. Indeed, diminutives and augmentatives seem to work just like intersective/subsective adjectives activating a functional skeleton sandwiched between the determiner and the noun. This blocks the possibility for kinship terms in possessive contexts to act as rigid designators allowing an empty D position, potentially filled via N to D movement.

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