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The Morphosyntax of Proper Names: Individuals, Sets and the Light Noun Hypothesis*

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Abstract:

This paper examines the morphosyntax of proper names, with a focus on Italian. We argue that the morphosyntax of proper names is not uniform. Rather, we show that a crucial distinction lies between names denoting individuals and those denoting sets: while the former types of names undergo Merge in D, the latter do not. Our data moreover challenge the hypothesis that names can involve light nouns in their structure, as recently argued by Moltmann (2022) for German.

Keywords: *Italian, Light Nouns, Morphosyntax, Proper Names, Sortal Nouns*

1. Introduction

This paper examines the morphosyntax of proper names, with a focus on Italian. Proper names *prima facie* appear to form a cohesive category characterized by shared morphological and syntactic features. The issue is more intricate, however, as names can be further classified based on the entities they denote. These categories encompass names of individuals (anthroponyms), which can be subdivided into given names, surnames, nicknames, and so forth, as well as names of places (toponyms), such as cities, countries, mountains, and forests. Names can also denote historical events, institutions, works of art, and various other entities. Crucially, upon closer scrutiny, these different types of names do not seem to adhere to a uniform morphosyntactic pattern.

The non-uniform morphosyntax of proper names has been recently discussed for German by Moltmann (2022). Based on

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a number of morphosyntactic diagnostics, Moltmann argues that the internal syntax of proper names in German falls into two major types: *type 1 names* (e.g. names of people, animals, etc.) combine with a light noun functioning as a classifier, whereas *type 2 names* (e.g., names of mountains, lakes, etc.) do not involve a light noun but rather combine with a (potentially silent) sortal noun. Moreover, type 1 names show further morphosyntactic distinctions, which according to Moltmann derive from the particular countability semantics (i.e., mass *vs.* count) of the light noun with which the nominal combines.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. On the one hand, we argue that the Italian data challenge Moltmann's proposal. In particular, we aim to show that while it is plausible to posit a (silent) sortal noun accompanying proper names in some cases, we do not find any evidence of light nouns. On the other hand, building on Franco and Lorusso (2019, 2022), we argue that a crucial morphosyntactic distinction can be made between names denoting individuals and those denoting sets (of individuals or entities). Individual proper names appear without an article, and it is in principle conceivable that they undergo N-to-D movement (as proposed by Longobardi 1994 and subsequent literature), while sets of individuals are unable to undergo N-to-D movement.

The paper is structured as follows. In section 2, we introduce Moltmann's (2022) analysis of German names as involving light nouns/sortals in their internal morphosyntactic structure. In section 3, we argue that such an analysis cannot be extended straightforwardly to Italian; more specifically, we show that while sortals could well be present in the structure of some proper names, some toponyms behave non-uniformly from a morphosyntactic point of view, in a way that is difficult to reconcile with the light noun hypothesis. After considering the case of plural proper names in section 4 and the further issues they raise for the light noun hypothesis, in section 5 we briefly outline a morphosyntactic analysis of proper names, where the major distinction is made between individual (names merged in D) and sets (names merged in N). Finally, section 6 concludes the discussion.

2. *Light nouns, proper names and the mass vs. count distinction*

In a recent paper, Moltmann (2022) argues that proper names in German (among other languages) fall into two separate classes characterized by a distinct morphosyntactic behavior. In particular, she distinguishes between *type 1* names, which encompass names for individuals, locations, houses, and so-called 'productive names' (names of time, numbers, etc.), and *type 2* names, which instead include names of mountains, lakes, temples and renowned precious stones. The major difference between type 1 and type 2 names is the impossibility for the former, but not for the latter, to combine with determiners in argument position (e.g. **the John* or **the London* vs. *the Hudson* or *the Parthenon*). From a formal point of view, Moltmann distinguishes the two types of names based on the presence of silent light nouns (Kayne 2005, 2010) in the internal structure of type 1 names; type 2 names are assumed to lack light nouns involving instead (silent/overt) sortal nouns.

According to Moltmann, moreover, the type of selected light noun (e.g., THING, PLACE, PERSON) accounts for notable variations of behavior within names of type 1, specifically between names of individuals and names of locations. In German, these types of names exhibit contrasts in the following two properties:

- i) Selection of relative pronouns: d-pronouns (*der, die, das*) or w-pronouns (*was, wo*).
- ii) Support for plural anaphora through a conjunction of proper names as antecedents.

For instance, in (1) (adapted from Moltmann (2022: 131-133), names of individuals select d-pronouns, as (1a-b), while names of locations select w-pronouns, as (1c-d).

- (1) a. Hans, der / *was
 Hans who / what
 ‘Hans, who’
 b. Maria, die / *was
 Maria who / what
 ‘Maria, who’
 c. Munchen, was / ???das ich sehr gut kenne
 Munich what / that I very well know
 ‘Munich, which I know very well’
 d. Ich liebe Italien, was / ???das dir ja auch gut gefällt.
 I love Italy what / that you PART too well pleases
 ‘I love Italy, which pleases you too.’

With respect to plural anaphora, in German (similarly to English), the conjunction of names of individuals can unproblematically function as the antecedent for plural anaphora (i.e., *sie* ‘they’), as illustrated in (2) (from Moltmann 2022: 133).

- (2) Anna mag Hans und Franz. Bill mag sie auch.
 ‘Anna likes Hans and Franz. Bill likes them too.’

In contrast, the use of German place names in conjunctions does not usually allow for plural anaphora, as in (3) (from Moltmann 2022: 134).

- (3) Ich kenne Berlin und München. Anna kennt ??sie / diese Städte auch.
 ‘I know Berlin and Munich. Anna knows them / those cities too.’

Moltmann argues that the above asymmetries ultimately derive from the semantic mass/count status of the nominals (see Moltmann 2022 for details). In particular, selection of *w*-pronouns and failure to support plural anaphora are attributed to the noncountable status of the nominal. In turn, the noncountable property is correlated with the semantic nature of the light noun with which the proper noun combines. Accordingly, the light noun “*PERSON* [...] *classifies as count, but not so THING, TIME, and PLACE*” (Moltmann 2022: 128). Moltmann thus argues that morphosyntactic behavior of toponyms is due to the presence of the noncountable silent light noun *PLACE*. By contrast, anthroponyms behave differently from toponyms as they combine with the countable *PERSON*. The syntactic and semantic differences between these type 1 names are illustrated in (4):

- (4) a. [[Hans [_{PERSON}]_{Nlight}]_{NlightP}]_{DP} *countable name*
 b. [[Berlin [_{PLACE}]_{Nlight}]_{NlightP}]_{DP} *‘mass’ name*

Type 1 names are distinguished from *type 2 names* (according to Moltmann’s taxonomy), which instead involve a different internal structure. Besides selecting for d-pronouns and supporting plural anaphora, type 2 names require an overt D in argument position (e.g., *the Hudson, the Parthenon*), a requirement that does not hold of type 1 names (e.g., *John, London*, which can be bare in argument position). Type 2 names are therefore assumed to lack a light noun, involving instead a full sortal noun which can be either silent or overt,

and an overt determiner that must agree with the sortal.¹ The examples below illustrate German names for mountains:

- (5) a. der Mont Blanc, der
 b. die Zugspitze, die
 c. das Erzgebirge, das

In type 2 names for mountains lacking an explicit sortal, the masculine definite determiner aligns with the masculine gender of the German sortal *Berg* ‘mountain’, as represented in (6), which according to Moltmann is a clear indication of the silence presence of the sortal. Comparable considerations are held to be valid for names of lakes, seas, etc.

- (6) a. der Fujiyama, der
 b. der Vesuv, der
 c. der Etna, der

Regarding the syntactic structure of type 2 names, Moltmann assumes that the full sortal noun, whether overt or silent, serves as the head of a compound, as illustrated in (7a) and (7b).

- (7) a. der [Fujiyama [Berg]_N]_{NP}
 b. der [Fujiyama [e]_{N|NP}]

Moltmann points out that the culture-specificity of the sortals in type 2 names make it difficult for the sortal to be regarded as a light noun. This may pose a challenge to the generalization that only light nouns, not full nouns, can remain silent without an antecedent (Kayne 2005). Still, there are more notable cross-linguistic challenges for this kind of syntax of proper names that we will emphasize in the following sections, primarily drawing on data from Italian.

Specifically, we will demonstrate that the light noun hypothesis cannot be maintained because: (i) we observe morphosyntactic variation within the same ‘class’ of proper names; (ii) light nouns are not strictly necessary in order to derive the countability property of the nominal; and (iii) plural proper names that signify sets of individuals/entities are treated as ‘collective’ noun phrases triggering plural agreement on the finite verb and requiring a definite determiner.

3. *This must not be the PLACE*

In this section we will substantiate our claim that a light noun such as PLACE cannot be involved in the morphosyntax of proper names by considering some empirical facts from Italian.

¹ Moltmann (2022) does not provide a full-fledged analysis of the contrast between type 1 and type 2 names with respect to the requirement for a D in argument position. She suggests, however, that the ability of type 1 names (as light DPs) to move to SpecD allows the determiner to remain unpronounced, as proposed for light DPs in general by Collins (2007). Note that in Standard German, personal names typically do not require an overt D. However, there exists a notable contrast between Southern (and Middle) Germany and Northern Germany in spoken (non-standard) German usage. In Southern regions, it is common to use the definite article with first names, almost as a standard practice, without any inherent emotive or expressive connotations. Conversely, in Northern Germany, the inclusion of the definite article with first names or last names is often linked to negative attitudes expressed by the speaker towards the referent (cf. Nübling 2017; Werth 2020; Helmbrecht 2022: 133).

Let us begin by taking into account the behavior of some toponyms which, according to Moltmann, select the silent light noun PLACE. The following examples (taken from Franco and Lorusso 2019) show that such toponyms behave non-uniformly with respect to the selection of locative prepositions. Specifically, toponyms associated with cities, villages and small islands select the preposition *a* ‘to’, as in (8), whereas toponyms associated with countries, large islands and continents select *in* ‘in’, as in (9).

(8) Gianni è/va *a*/**in* Pantelleria/Conversano/Siena
‘Gianni is/goes at/in Pantelleria/Conversano/Siena’

(9) Gianni è/va **a*/in Italia/Africa/Sicilia
‘Gianni is/goes at/in Italy/Africa/Sicily’

The generalization proposed by Rizzi (1988: 513, cf. Folli 2008: 210) to explain the facts in (8)-(9) is that “*a* is required with locations which can be conceived of as ‘pointed’ in our mental representation of their geographical nature”, while the adposition *in* is required elsewhere. What is crucial to note in the present context is that the items potentially necessitating PLACE classifiers do not exhibit a consistent morphosyntax. The examples in (10)-(13) provide further support for this claim. The relevant asymmetry, in this case, is with respect to the requirement for an overt D, further indicating that the relevant toponyms do not form a coherent class (cf. Franco and Lorusso 2019).

(10) *La/*Il Pantelleria/Milano/Firenze
the.F.SG/the.M.SG Pantelleria/Milan/Florence
‘Pantelleria, Milan, Florence’

(11) Il Portogallo / l’Italia / l’Europa / la Sardegna
the Portugal.M.SG / the.F.SG Italy / the.F.SG Europe / the.F.SG Sardinia’
‘Portugal, Italy, Europe, Sardinia’

(12) Ho visitato (*la) Pantelleria / *(il) Portogallo
Have.1SG visited the.F.SG Pantelleria / the.M.SG Portugal
‘I have visited Pantelleria/Portugal’

(13) (*la) Pantelleria ha una superficie di 83 km² / *(il) Portogallo ha una superficie di 92.212 km²
‘Pantelleria has an area of 83 sq km / Portugal has an area of 92.212 sq km’

Note that the names of places that require a D (countries, large islands, continents) are precisely those that select the preposition *in* (cf. 9), while those not requiring a D (cities, villages, small islands) are those that select the preposition *a* (cf. 8). This morphosyntactic evidence strongly indicates the existence of two distinct classes of names of places in Italian, as illustrated in (14).

(14) a. *a* {small island, cities, villages} > *D
b. *in* {countries, continents, large islands} > D

Franco and Lorusso (2019) argue that the names of places in (14a) function akin to proper names referring to individuals and suggest an N-to-D chain for their syntactic derivation, as proposed by Longobardi (1994, 2005, 2008).² By contrast, Franco and Lorusso (2019) claim that the locations in (14b) appear to convey a definite reading (without raising to D), wherein the article serves as a definite operator. When lacking the determiner (as in (10)), these locations denote the shared property among all individuals encompassed within the place and are interpreted roughly as a *set* (cf. also Franco and Lorusso 2022).

This state of affairs is hardly compatible with the idea of a light noun responsible for a count/mass distinction among proper names. Under Moltmann's analysis, we would have to posit the existence of PLACE solely for the structure of the toponyms in (14a), which would align with the characteristics of German type 1 names (i.e., those lacking an overt D, e.g., by N-to-D movement). On the other hand, given that the requirement for an overt D would align with the pattern of type 2 names in German, we would expect to identify a sortal noun to pair with the relevant toponyms (i.e., countries, large islands, and continents). However, this does not appear to be a possibility for Italian. Consider the examples in (15)-(17).

- (15) a. Il Portogallo è uno stato europeo
'Portugal is a European state'
b. *Lo stato Portogallo
c. Lo stato portoghese
'the Portuguese state'
- (16) a. L' Africa è un continente meraviglioso
The Africa is a continent wonderful
'Africa is a wonderful continent'
b. *Il continente Africa
The continent Africa
c. Il continente africano
The continent African
'The African continent'
- (17) a. La Corsica è un'isola del Mediterraneo
The Corsica an island of-the Mediterrean
'Corsica is an island in the Mediterrean Sea'
b. *L' isola Corsica
The island Corsica
c. L' isola corsa
The island Corsican
'The Corsican Island'

² In Longobardi's framework, proper names are first merged as part of a DP headed by an empty D, and subsequently undergo N-to-D movement. This movement is essential to prevent proper names, treated as bare nouns, from acquiring an existential interpretation. Longobardi posits that, in Italian, N-to-D movement can occur overtly, or the D field can be occupied by an expletive determiner. Regarding the rationale behind the movement of proper names, Longobardi (1994) postulates that it is prompted by an uninterpretable feature on D. Meanwhile, Longobardi (2005) argues that movement is driven by a semantic distinction—following Carlson (1977)—between the two types of nouns, specifically, between object-referring (proper) and kind-referring (common) nouns.

The examples above show that it is not possible to form a compound with a sortal noun ('country', 'state', 'continent', 'island', etc.) combined with a toponym, as in (15b), (16b), (17b). The only possibility in Italian is to employ an *ethnic adjective* derived by the proper name (cf. Alexiadou and Stavrou 2011, Franco 2017) which modifies the 'sortal' noun and agrees with it in ϕ -features. In other words, the sortal does not behave as in German type 2 names in that it cannot combine with the toponym, but instead requires a rather different syntactic structure.

We do not exclude the possibility that sortals may be associated with other kinds of proper names in Italian. Below we consider names of seas, lakes and colors as possible instances of names involving sortals.

In Italian, many names of seas and all names of oceans are formed by a compound-like structure including a (silent/overt) sortal noun and a 'proper' adjective (18a), matching the structures represented above in (15c), (16c) and (17c). This is confirmed by the fact that names of sea are usually formed by means of standard adjectival suffixes in Italian, as a comparison with (18b) illustrates. Further notice that with color adjectives the sortal noun for *sea* cannot be omitted (as in *Mar Nero*).

- | | | | | |
|------|----|---|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| (18) | a. | il (mar) Adriat- <i>ico</i> | / il (mar) Mediterran- <i>eo</i> | / il (mar) Balt- <i>ico</i> |
| | | the (sea) Adriatic | / the (sea) Mediterranean | / the (sea) Baltic |
| | | 'Adriatic sea, Mediterranean sea, Baltic sea' | | |
| | | il (mar) Eg- <i>eo</i> | / il *(mar) Rosso | / il *(mar) Nero |
| | | the (sea) Aegean | / the *(sea) Red | / the *(sea) Black |
| | | 'Aegean sea, Red sea, Black Sea' | | |
| | b. | grado alcol- <i>ico</i> | / vapore acqu- <i>eo</i> | / artista contemporan- <i>eo</i> ... |
| | | 'alcoholic degree' | / 'aqueous vapor' | / 'contemporary artist' |

Other names of seas are externalized as noun phrases by means of a *sortal noun – preposition – proper name* (person, place etc.) structure, as shown in (19a), which resembles so-called improper compounds of the type in (19b) (cf. Rugna and Franco 2022 for analysis).

- | | | |
|------|----|---|
| (19) | a. | Mare di Alboran, Mare di Sardegna, Mare di Amundsen, Mar di Marmora |
| | | Sea of Alboran, Sea of Sardinia, Sea of Amundsen, Sea of Marmora |
| | b. | casa di cura, succo di limone, carta di credito, botte di ferro |
| | | house of healing, juice of lemon, card of credit, barrel of iron |

The structures just depicted in (19) are extensively used in names of lakes, as in (20), though the structure noun-adjective (described for names of seas in (18a)) is also attested, as illustrated in (21).

- | | |
|------|--|
| (20) | Lago di Garda, Lago di Bolsena, Lago di Vico |
| | 'Lake of Garda, Lake of Bolsena, Lake of Vico' |
| (21) | Il lago Maggiore, il lago Superiore, il lago Nero |
| | 'The lake Maggiore, the lake Superior, the lake Black' |

Color names are also clearly accompanied by a sortal noun, as shown in (22).

- | | |
|------|---|
| (22) | Il (colore) viola, il (colore) rosa, il (colore) nero, il (colore) bianco, il (colore) celeste... |
| | 'The (color) purple/pink/black/white/blue...' |

Quite interestingly, the examples in (23) show that color names seem to be merged as adjectives in Italian. Indeed, the pattern of agreement of color terms, with the inflection *-e* and *-o*, match the standard agreement pattern of other Italian adjectives (cf. Grossmann and D’Achille 2019, Manzini 2020), while colors ending with *-a* are invariable in gender and number features. Hence, it is arguable that names of colors are merged as adjectives when they modify a silent sortal noun (i.e., *colore* ‘color’) in (22) above.

(23)	a.	maglione	ner-o	/	giacca	ner-a
		pullover.M.SG	black-M.SG		jacket.F.SG	black-F.SG
	b.	maglioni	ner-i	/	giacche	ner-e
		pullover.M.PL	black-M.PL		jacket.F.PL	black-F.PL
	c.	maglione	viola	/	giacca	viola
		pullover.M.SG	purple		jacket.F.SG	purple
	d.	maglioni	viola	/	giacche	viola
		pullover.M.PL	purple		jacket.F.PL	purple
	e.	maglione	arancione	/	giacca	arancione
		pullover.M.SG	orange		jacket.F.SG	orange
	f.	maglioni	arancion-i	/	giacche	arancioni
		pullover.M.PL	orange-PL		jacket.F.PL	orange.PL
cf.	g.	maglione	bell-o	/	giacche	bell-e
		pullover.M.SG	beautiful-M.SG		jacket.F.PL	beautiful-F.PL
	h.	macchina	veloce	/	macchine	veloci
		car.F.SG	fast		car.F.PL	fast.PL

As an interim summary, we may say that proper names in Italian can enter the syntactic derivation in different ways, depending on their class:

a) Place names split in two categories: individual-like places name (as person names) do not allow a determiner, being raised or directly merged in D, while set-like place names are merged as common nouns, requiring a definite determiner. No sortal nouns seem to be allowed with this latter kind of place names, weakening Moltmann’s proposal.

b) Proper names accompanied by a silent or overt sortal noun are merged as adjectives or PP modifiers in ‘improper’ compound-like structures.

4. Plural proper names: set of reference

As discussed above, Moltmann assumes that the mass/count distinction is provided by the semantics of the light noun with which a given name is combined. In this section, we aim to challenge this claim by considering the case of plural proper names. In particular, we argue that (i) some toponyms, arguably requiring PLACE under Moltmann’s analysis, show characteristics of pluralization; (ii) countability of proper names can be achieved by means of syntactic constructs; and (iii) plural proper names that signify sets of individuals/entities are treated as ‘collective’ noun phrases triggering plural agreement on the finite verb and requiring a definite determiner.

The claim that toponyms can show the characteristics of pluralization is certainly not novel in the literature (cf. *pluralia tantum* such as *the Pyrenees*, *the Philippines*, etc.). For instance, it is observed by van Langendonck (2007) that plural toponyms behave as *collectives*

from a morphosyntactic viewpoint,³ showing that when they occur in subject position in Dutch, the verb can agree with them in the singular as well as in the plural, as in (24) (cf. also Den Dikken 2001, Costa et al. 2001).

- (24) a. De Alpen **zijn** een gebergte.
 The Alps are a mountain range
 b. De Alpen **is** een gebergte.
 The Alps is a mountain range
 ‘The Alps are a mountain range’

With respect to cases like (24), Moltmann’s analysis could be salvaged by invoking the presence of different sortal nouns responsible for triggering either plural or singular agreement on the verb (i.e., a sortal noun akin to ‘mountains’ in (24a) vs. ‘mountain range’ in (24b)). Accordingly, the fact that (24a) involves plural agreement would not prove problematic for the hypothesis that toponyms may involve a PLACE light noun endowed with non-countable/mass properties.

Nonetheless, such an analysis is rendered less plausible if we consider examples like (25) from Italian. In particular, (25a) shows that, similarly to *de Alpen* ‘the Alps’ in (24a), the toponym *i Caraibi* ‘the Caribbean’ triggers obligatory plural agreement on the verb. However, (25b) casts doubt on the possibility that plural agreement could stem from the presence of a sortal noun, as the NP becomes ungrammatical if the toponym is combined with an overt sortal. As discussed for cases like (15)–(17) above, in this case as well the sortal becomes available once it is merged in a different structure, namely one involving an adjective derived from the toponym, as in (25c).

- (25) a. I Caraibi hanno / *ha un clima tropicale
 The Caribbean have / *has a climate tropical
 ‘The Caribbean has a tropical climate’
 b. *I Paesi Caraibi hanno un clima tropicale
 The countries Caribbean have a climate tropical
 c. I Paesi caraibici hanno un clima tropicale
 The countries Caribbean have a climate tropical
 ‘The Caribbean countries have a tropical climate’

Cases like (25) therefore show that toponyms presumably involving the presence of PLACE under Moltmann’s analysis can trigger plural agreement, contrary to expectations if PLACE is intrinsically noncount.⁴ Moreover, the assumption that PLACE is intrinsically noncount faces the challenge of accounting for cases like (26), where a toponym can be pluralized and/or be combined with a numeral (examples from van Langendonck 2007: 145).

³ From a syntactic viewpoint, collective nouns are characterized by their ability to govern either a plural verb phrase or, more broadly, to license plural anaphora (see Levin 2001). What sets collective nouns apart from plurals and mass nouns is that the entities they refer to are more than just the sum of their parts. A *team* is not simply a collection of individual team members; it represents a distinct entity in itself (cf. Jackendoff 1977; Landman 1989).

⁴ One could maintain the light noun hypothesis by making the assumption that (25a) does not involve PLACE but a different light noun with properties of countability. In the absence of strong evidence to this effect, however, such an assumption would of course remain a stipulation.

- (26) a. Two Londons.
b. ?There are two cities of London.

There is further evidence that the semantics of countability need not come from a light noun. As argued in the typological literature, proper names can be pluralized via so-called ‘associative plural constructions’. Associative plurals are predominantly observed in conjunction with personal names and kinship terms, and in certain languages, their usage may be confined to these contexts (Mauri and Sansò 2019: 603). As illustrated in Mauri and Sansò (2019), Italian makes wide use of the construction [*X e i suoi*] ‘X and his/her.PL’, in which a proper name is followed by the 3rd person possessive pronoun *suoi*. Consider the example in (27), taken from Mauri and Sansò (2019: 616).

- (27) Obama e i suoi, peraltro, non sono insensibili
Obama and the.PL.M his.PL moreover NEG be.3PL insensitive
alla questione sudanese
to-the.SG.F question Sudanese
‘Obama and his team, moreover, are not insensitive to the Sudanese question’

There are also cases of spatial adverbials developing into associative plurals. Mauri and Sansò (2019) provide again data from Italian, where the construction [*X e dintorni*], lit. [X and surroundings], is attested with its original spatial meaning, as exemplified in (28a) where X is a toponym, but also with an associative function for anthroponyms (28b) (the examples are adapted from Mauri and Sansò 2019).

- (28) a. possiamo abitare a Roma e dintorni
can. IPL live in Rome and surroundings
‘We can live in Rome and the surrounding area’
b. Berlusconi e dintorni hanno scoperto l’orrore dell’evasione fiscale
Berlusconi and surroundings have discovered the horror of evasion fiscal
‘Berlusconi and co. have discovered the horror of tax evasion’

Extensive crosslinguistic research has been conducted on the formation of associative plurals (e.g., Moravcsik 2003, Daniel and Moravcsik 2013, Mauri and Sansò 2019, 2023, Cinque 2018). The distinctive feature of the associative plural lies in its differentiation from the regular (or additive) plural, as it does not denote —as expected for plural proper names— multiple instances of the pluralized entity but signifies a *collective* associated with the pluralized entity.⁵

⁵ Mauri (2017) highlights that the collective suffix “-ame,” highly prevalent in contemporary Italian (cf. Poletto and Penello 2005, Franco et al. 2020), has more recently begun to affix to proper names, as demonstrated by the examples in (i) (excerpted from Mauri 2017: 321).

- (i) a. Dire che la Boldrini è uguale a Mastella, al figlio di Bossi o al berlusconame è una violenza ideologica che non porta da nessuna parte.
‘To say that Boldrini is the same as Mastella, as Bossi’s son or as all those persons having to do with Berlusconi (included Berlusconi himself) / Berlusconi & co. is an ideological violence that does not lead anywhere’.
b. [Penso] che la principale esigenza del Paese sia in questo momento liberarsi politicamente di Berlusconi e sradicare il berlusconame dalla società.

The pluralized entity itself is termed the ‘focal’ referent (Moravcsik 2003: 471), and the associated group typically pertains to the family of the mentioned entity, although the precise semantics of the construction are variable and contingent on the context. At any rate, what results is the possibility for plural proper names of referring to an *aggregate* (cf. Chierchia 2008, Manzini and Savoia 2017) of (weakly differentiated) parts, a collection of elements characterized by weak individuality (cf. Acquaviva 2008).⁶ What is relevant in the present context is that the particular semantics of countability of pluralized proper names does not seem to stem from a covert light noun but from a syntactic construct.

The collective/aggregate interpretation of pluralized proper names is coherent with Franco and Lorusso’s (2019) idea of a morphosyntactic distinction between individual vs. set proper names. Indeed, we can attribute a fixed reference to an individual (punctual) entity or encode a set of referents within a single denotation. This is what usually happens, for instance, with names of countries (which can be conceived as sets of cities, villages, mountains, rivers), independently of their number features (singular vs. plural).

That an individual *vs.* set distinction indeed operates within the morphosyntax of proper names is further evidenced by the case of musical group names in Italian. Such names signify a collection of individuals with a set reference (albeit with weak individuality). Moreover, they consistently require a plural definite regardless of the morphosyntactic characteristics of the lexical item(s) chosen to represent a fixed reference, whether in an argumental or non-argumental position. Consider the examples in (29). We find that a name of a German art school, an entity selecting a singular determiner and triggering singular agreement in number on the verb (cf. 29b), has been chosen to refer to a musical group from England. When referring to the group, the proper name takes a definite plural determiner and triggers plural agreement on the verb (29a).

- (29) a. I Bauhaus si sono formati a Northampton
 Det.PL.MASC Bauhaus REFL are formed in Northampton
 ‘The Bauhaus were formed in Northampton’
 a’. *Bauhaus si sono/è formato a Northampton
 Bauhaus REFL are/is formed in Northampton
 a’’. #Il Bauhaus si è formato a Northampton
 Det.SG.MASC Bauhaus REFL is formed in Northampton
 b. Nel 1926 il Bauhaus venne trasferito a Dessau
 In 1926 Det.SG.MASC Bauhaus was moved to Dessau
 ‘In 1926, the Bauhaus was moved to Dessau’

[I think] that the most important need for the country in this moment is to get rid of Berlusconi at the political level and to eradicate the way of acting and thinking that Berlusconi introduced from the society’.

According to Mauri, the derived noun “berluscon-am-e” mentioned above indicates two distinct types of sets. In (ia), “berlusconame” serves as a collective noun representing the set of individuals associated with Berlusconi, functioning similar to associative plurals. In (ib), the collective noun “berlusconame” encompasses a diverse set (an ad hoc category in Mauri’s terms), including “persons, situations, attitudes that share Berlusconi as a common denominator,” extending to encompass parties, lavish dinners, corruption, a specific manner of communication on TV, and more. In this scenario, the proper noun selected by “-am-e” in (ib) appears to allow for a potential kind-like interpretation, where kinds are understood as maximal sets of objects sharing a specific string of properties (cf. Carlson 1977, Chierchia 1998, Longobardi 2008, Zamparelli 2008, among many others).

⁶ Acquaviva (2008: 157) characterizes the notion of ‘weak individuality’ as the conceptual base for collectives/aggregates introduced by plurals in –a in Italian: ‘In sum, Italian plurals in –a are restricted to concepts whose reference contains elements perceived as equivalent to one another, which fits both the logical equivalence of units of measurement and the perceptual equivalence of weakly differentiated objects [...]’.

That proper names of group encode a collection of weak individual entities is confirmed by the examples in (31). Here a singular noun plus an adjective (agreeing with it in number) is selected from the lexicon to encode a fixed reference. The agreement pattern is the same as in (30), with a plural definite determiner and plural agreement features on the verb.

- (30) a. Ho visto i Massimo Volume / *il M. V /*MassimoVolume
 I.have seen Det.PL.MASC Massimo Volume / Det.SG.MASC / M. V.
 che si esibivano per la prima volta a Bologna
 that REFL perform for the first time in Bologna
 ‘I saw Massimo Volume performing for the first time in Bologna’
- b. Abbiamo parlato con i /*con il
 we.have talked with Det.PL.MASC / with Det.SG.MASC
 / *con M. V. del nuovo disco
 / with M. V. of-the new disc
 ‘We talked with Massimo Volume about the new album’

Note, moreover, that the same pattern is valid with acronyms as in (31) and that the plural determiner is sensitive to the biological gender (32) of the (majority of) the individuals included in the set of reference.⁷

- (31) I CCCP hanno pubblicato *Affinità e Divergenze* in vinile rosso
 The CCCP have published *Affinità e Divergenze* in vinyl red
 ‘CCCP released *Affinità e Divergenze* on red vinyl’
- (32) Le Lush per lungo tempo sono state sottovalutate ma i loro lavori
 Det.PL.FEM Lush for long time are been undervalued but the their works
 prodotti da Robin Guthrie sono fantastici
 produced by Robin Guthrie are fantastic
 ‘Lush were underrated for a long time, but their works produced by Robin Guthrie are fantastic’

The example in (33) is revealing, as it suggests that gender features are directly encoded within the proper lexical root, as well as the morphosemantic feature aggregate/collection. Musical bands are precisely like mountain ranges in denoting a proper collection/set of individual entities.⁸ Again, it is impossible to introduce a sortal noun in the derivation as shown in (33).

⁷ That biological gender is a relevant feature for collective names referring to human beings (as in the case of musical groups) is confirmed by the fact that plural agreement is the only grammatical way to encode, at the morphosyntactic level, group names like Marlene Kuntz (comprising men only), where the band name is actually a given name plus surname of a (fictional) female human being.

(i) I Marlene Kuntz sono un gruppo di Cuneo/*Marlene Kuntz sono/*è un gruppo di Cuneo
 The Marlene Kuntz are a group from Cuneo/Marlene Kuntz are/is a group from Cuneo
 ‘The Marlene Kuntz are a band from Cuneo’

⁸ A possible counterexample to our line of reasoning could be provided by names of constellations in Italian, which show a mixed behaviour. They are clearly sets/aggregates but we find items selecting a determiner and items occurring without it. Consider (i).

(i) Orione, Andromeda, l’orsa Maggiore, il leone, sono tutti nomi di costellazioni
 ‘Orion, Andromeda, Ursa Major, and Leo are all names of constellations’

The only grammatical solution when a sortal noun is employed is to introduce the proper plural name as a PP modifier, as in (33c). Note that the plural determiner is retained and appears morpho-phonologically attached to the adposition.⁹

- (33) a. *Il gruppo Bauhaus si sono formati a Northampton
The group Bauhaus REFL are formed in Northampton
b. *Il gruppo Bauhaus si è formato a Northampton
The group Bauhaus REFL is formed in Northampton
c. Il gruppo dei Bauhaus si è formato a Northampton
'The Bauhaus were formed in Northampton'

In short, the evidence provided above challenges the idea that light nouns can determine the countability/divisibility of proper names,¹⁰: assuming a light noun meaning [Person] for the examples in (29)-(33) should imply that [Person] could carry either individual count, as in the view of Moltmann, or collective/aggregate mass features. We take that as hint that proper roots can carry morphosyntactic (and morphosemantic) features on their own. Moreover, according to Moltmann, Type 1 names, accompanied by a light noun, do not require the definite determiner, as they can move to SpecD, allowing the determiner to remain unpronounced (cf. Collins 2007). In Italian, we observe a distinction between individual person names and collective person names, as the latter necessitate an obligatory definite determiner.¹¹

5. A theoretical model for individual and collective proper names

The view that roots are not born as 'bare' is coherent with Chierchia (1998), who "rejects the view whereby a mass noun is interpreted as a mereological whole or has an extension drawn from a domain of substances", and instead claims that the denotations of mass and count terms are essentially the same: "mass nouns come out of the lexicon with plurality already built in. This is the only way in which they differ from count nouns" (Chierchia 1998: 53). Crucially, we must assume that proper names are taken out from the lexicon as individuals or set/collection (of individuals) and this seems to be already specified before entering a derivation. This can potentially trigger a different morphosyntactic encoding for the two kinds of proper names. We may also envisage a different categorization for them, following Anderson (2003, 2005), Franco and Lorusso (2019) and Delgado (2019). Anderson for instance takes proper names

Actually, constellations can resemble an individual figure and some of them -as *Andromeda* or *Orione* in (i)- are named after a human(ized) mythological figures. This fact could account for the mixed behaviour of constellations.

⁹ It is possible to use a sortal noun with musical groups only when it is part of the proper denotation (in a compound like fashion), as in the examples below. In this case, agreement is set to the singular:

- (i) Il Quartetto Cetra debuttò/*debuttarono nel 1941
'The Quartetto Cetra made their debut in 1941.'

¹⁰ Note that it is possible to operate divisions/partition on a proper collective name, as shown in (i).

- (i) Tre (dei) Bauhaus hanno poi formato i Love and Rockets
Three (of-the) Bauhaus have then formed the Love and Rockets
'Three members of Bauhaus formed Love and Rockets.'

¹¹ Note that this distinction does not apply to English:

- (i) Talking Heads/*The Talking Heads were an American new wave band that formed in 1975 in New York City.
(ii) David Byrne is an American singer and songwriter.

with fixed reference as determiners. Following his insight, we assume that individual proper names can be encoded as D items directly hosted in D, at least when individual proper names are assumed to be *punctual* (like personal pronouns and demonstratives), in serving as “linguistic elements whose interpretation in simple sentences makes essential reference to properties of the extralinguistic context of the utterance in which they occur” (Anderson and Keenan 1985: 259).

Evidence that we are on the right track is shown by the partition Italian makes within names of places. The names that take the determiner can be divided/partitioned into ‘sub-sections’, showing that their reference is not individual/punctual. In (34a), for instance, the name of a country that selects a determiner is encoded as a ‘collective’ noun and it is possible to identify a part of it via modification. Conversely, names that do not select a definite determiner cannot be so modified, as illustrated in (34b). It is conceivable that a city name cannot be partitioned given its punctual nature; a sub-part of it is still a punctual entity in our mental representation and disallows the presence of a definite marker.

- (34) a. Il Portogallo settentrionale / il Portogallo del nord
 The Portugal northern / the Portugal of-the north
 ‘Northern Portugal’
- b. *La Roma meridionale / *la Roma del sud / Roma Sud
 The Rome southern / the Rome of the south / Rome south
 ‘South Rome’

Thus, we can assume that proper names without an article are hosted directly in a D position, following the aforementioned work of Anderson (2004) and Burnett (2008), who precisely show that it would be paradoxical to assume that a name should be merged in N and subsequently raised to D (as in standard generative terms, cf. Longobardi 1994, 2005, 2008; Borer 2005). Indeed, the standard view is that Proper names (cf. also Moltmann 2022, Franco and Lorusso 2019, 2022) originate at the level of N. To acquire definite, rigid designatory attributes, they undergo movement into D, thereby assuming a functional role akin to pronouns and demonstratives. The entity designated by the functional name ultimately hinges on the content it possessed when merged in N.

As shown in Burnett (2008), an *attributive* use of a proper name, contrary to its *referential* use require the presence of a determiner in English. Consider the examples in (35):

- (35) a. Chomsky entered the room. *Referential* use
 b. A/The Chomsky entered the room. *Attributive* use

Burnett proposes that the difference between *Chomsky* and *the Chomsky* in (35) parallels Donnellan (1966; 1970)’s distinction between the referential use and the attributive use of definite descriptions. As stated by Donnellan (*apud* Burnett 2008):

A speaker who uses a definite description attributively in an assertion states something about whoever or whatever is the so-and-so. A speaker who uses a definite description referentially in an assertion, on the other hand, uses the description to enable his audience to pick out whom or what he is talking about and states something about that person or thing [...] in the referential use, the definite description is merely one tool for doing a certain job— calling attention to a person or thing [...] in the attributive use, the attribute of being the so-and-so is all important, while it is not in the referential use”. (Donnellan, 1966: 285)

It is arguable that *althe Chomsky* in (35b) — indicating a brilliant linguist (or anarchist) resembling some Chomskian characteristics — is merged as a common noun (given the presence of a determiner) and does not undergo movement to D (given its attributive nature). Paradoxically, as outlined in Burnett (2008), the standard analysis would presuppose that the attributive name is created before the referential name (merged in D after movement). In other words, it would wrongly propose that speakers/hearers know what *althe Chomsky* is before they know who *Chomsky* is.

Thus, we assume that names can show up in different syntactic positions, depending on the entity they are taken to denote (e.g. individual vs collective/set-like) or the use (e.g. attributive/referential) we make of them. This view is in line with recent proposal in Delgado (2019), who assumes ‘polyreferentialism’ and category shifts for proper names in order to solve the problems of both a strict referentialist and a predicativist approach to proper names.¹²

To summarize, we find different ‘flavours’ of proper names. In Italian, we may find demonstrative-like individual denoting proper names merged in D, as illustrated in (36).

- (36) $[_{DP} [_D \text{ Gianni/Firenze }] \dots]$ *individual proper name, referential: Merge in D*

The same item can be used attributively, as in (37a) (cf. 35b for English). In this case, it is merged in N, as represented in (37b).

- (37) a. Tallin è la Firenze del Baltico/una piccola Firenze
 ‘Tallinn is the Florence of the Baltic/ a little Florence.’
 b. $[_{DP} [_D \text{ una/la }] \dots [_{NP} [_N \text{ Firenze }]]]$ *individual proper name, attributive: Merge in N*

Proper collectives/aggregates, either personal names or country/big island names are merged in N. In our mental lexicon, they are represented as collections/sets and are arguably inserted into a derivation as standard nouns. Possibly, the partitioning of a given set/entity for aggregate proper names is operated on by a DIV head (as in Borer 2005, but see Franco et al. 2020 for an alternative model for collective items), as represented in (38).

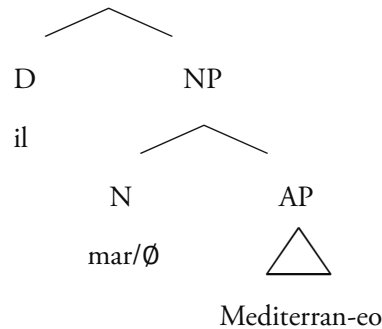
¹² In Delgado’s terms, polyreferentialism assumes that each bearer of a given name serves as a semantic referent of that name. Unlike contextualism, which suggests that names may potentially have different referents depending on the context of use, polyreferentialism posits that names inherently have multiple referents corresponding to each bearer of the name. This perspective contrasts with the *homonymy* view, which suggests that each bearer of a name corresponds to a separate name. Instead, polyreferentialism maintains that a single name can have multiple referents, corresponding to each of its bearers, without necessitating the proliferation of distinct names for each bearer. Delgado also addresses the issue of countability applied to proper names, resorting to the mechanism of ‘category shift’. Given that proper names can sometimes function as common (count) nouns (e.g. *few Alberts came to the party*), adjectives (e.g. *that’s a typical Maria attitude*), or verbs (*He looked like he was going to Hannibal Lecter me*) should not come as a surprise; it’s a natural occurrence that any comprehensive theory of proper names should address. However, once one acknowledges that names can change categories, the rationale for merging their *referential* and *predicative* uses diminishes. The question is: why should we try to unify these two distinct uses when each requires its own explanation? Moreover, according to Delgado, attempting to merge referential and predicative uses into a single category seems pointless. If proper names were treated as count nouns, for example, they would require a varied semantics to accommodate the different meanings they take on when changing categories. This presents a strong argument against the notion of uniformity advocated by predicativists (cf. Matushansky 2006, 2008).

Aggregate proper names, all uses:

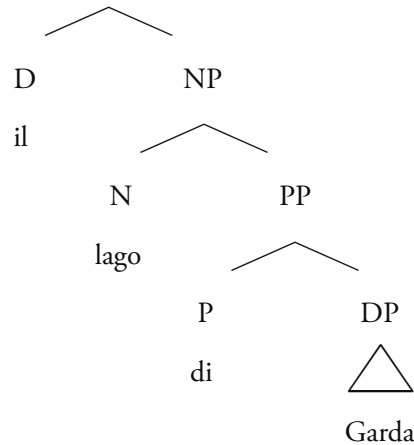
- (38) a. $[\text{DP } \text{il } [\text{D}^\circ [\text{DivP } [\text{Div}^\circ [\text{NP } [\text{N}^\circ \text{Portogallo}]]]]]]]$
 b. $[\text{DP } \text{i } [\text{D}^\circ [\text{DivP } [\text{Div}^\circ [\text{NP } [\text{N}^\circ \text{Bauhaus}]]]]]]]$

Finally, definite references can enter the derivation as modifiers of a silent or overt sortal noun, as we have seen above for seas, lakes or colors, as represented in (39) and (40).

- (39) Proper N-A names



- (40) Proper N-P-N names



Thus, we have seen that proper names are extracted from the lexicon as individual entities or sets/collections, a specification that appears to be established prior to derivation. This distinction may lead to a distinct morphosyntactic encoding for the different types of proper names. In Italian, the presence of a (possibly covert) sortal noun (such as “sea” or “lake”) may result in a syntactic structure where it is modified by an (ethnic) adjective or by a prepositional phrase (usually containing a toponym).

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we argued that the Italian data challenge Moltmann's analysis of proper names as involving light nouns. In particular, we observed that (i) there is morphosyntactic variation within proper names potentially belonging to the same class (e.g., toponyms) with respect to the availability of D; (ii) the countability property of the nominal can be derived via syntactic means, rendering the requirement for a light noun unnecessary; and (iii) plural proper names that signify sets of individuals/entities are treated as 'collective' noun phrases triggering plural agreement on the finite verb and requiring a definite determiner (in contrast with the assumption that light nouns are hardly compatible with the presence of a determiner).

On the other hand, we argued that the crucial morphosyntactic distinction lies between names denoting individuals and names denoting sets (or collectives/aggregates): coherently with Franco and Lorusso (2018), we analyzed names denoting individuals as being merged in D, while names denoting sets remain in N. Moreover, we suggested a possible structural distinction among proper names that modify sortal nouns, which in Italian could involve either an adjectival or a prepositional structure. Questions pertaining to these kinds of structures as well as their extension to different types of nominals in Italian (cf. Rugna and Franco 2022) are left open to future research.

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