# CURRENT ISSUES IN LINGUISTIC THEORY, 123

## Contemporary Research in Romance Linguistics

Edited by Jon Amastae, Grant Goodall,
Mario Montalbetti and Marianne Phinney

Offprint

# THE VERBAL COMPONENT IN ITALIAN COMPOUNDS

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## 0. *Introduction*

The only productive compound formation process in Italian involving verbs is that which creates nouns from a verbal form followed by a noun (e.g. *lavapiatti* "dishwasher", lit. "wash dishes". While the entire compound is a noun, these are exocentric forms since the noun that appears in the compound is not the head; it is an argument of the verb, typically the theme argument that would appear in direct object position.[1] There is controversy in the literature on Italian regarding the nature of the verbal element in these compounds, with the two main proposals being that it is (a) a third person singular present indicative form (e.g. Tollemache 1945, Merlo 1949, Varela 1989) and (b) a singular informal positive imperative form (e.g. Meyer-Lubke 1895, Migliorini 1946, Wagner 1946-47, Rohlfs 1969). In this paper, we argue that neither of these options is correct and that the form is an uninflected stem. This analysis not only solves the problem of the identity of the verbal element in the verb+noun compounds under investigation, but also provides insight into the nature of the singular informal imperative itself.

## 1. *Verb + Noun Compounds*

The problem of determining the nature of the verbal element of verb+noun compounds becomes clear when compounds involving each of the three conjugation classes are compared:

(1)  a.  conjugation I:        *lava+piatti* "dishwasher"
                                 (*lavare* "to wash")

    b.  conjugation II:       *spremi+limoni* "lemon juicer"

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[1] The type of V+N compound studied here is present to varying degrees of productivity throughout the Romance languages. We will therefore freely cite sources which discuss these compounds for any of the languages since their comments hold of Italian as well as of the other Romance language(s).

verb that appears in the verb+noun compounds. Scalise (1983) adopts a similar position, pointing out that some sort of phonological readjustment rule is needed to account for the fact that in the second conjugation verbs we find an *-i* instead of the theme vowel *-e*. Such a rule, which we will refer to as Vowel Raising, can be formulated as in (3). It applies to the nonlow theme vowels, raising *-e* to *-i*, and operating vacuously on *-i*. VR applies only to those theme vowels that are not followed by any inflectional material. This latter restriction is captured in the rule below by the requirement that if anything follows the stem (i.e. "Y") the result must still be a stem, as opposed to a full (inflected) lexical item.[4]

(3)  Vowel Raising

$$\begin{bmatrix} +syll \\ -low \end{bmatrix} \rightarrow [+high] / X\ ]_{V\ root}\ \text{—}]_{stem}\ Y\ ]_{stem}$$

It should be noted that "Y" in (3) can be either null, as in the case of the verbal component of the verb+noun compounds under consideration here, or a derivational affix (e.g. *leggere/leggibile* "to read/readable" *punire/punibile* "to punish/punishable").

Taking the stem as the verbal component of compounds has several advantages. First, it does not require inflection to occur internal to a compound. The form that appears is an abstract, purely morphological entity (Aronoff 1992) used in the word formation process in question, and as such it does not itself carry any inflectional markers, nor is it subject to inflection from the syntax. In addition, by taking the stem as the verb form of the compounds, we avoid the semantic incompatibilities observed with both the third person singular present indicative and singular informal imperative forms. Finally, while this analysis cannot itself predict the verb+noun word order, it is compatible with a historical analysis in which these compounds arose from phrasal units. While Latin and early Romance compounds typically exhibited the order noun+verb, consistent with the sentence final position of the verb (Oniga 1988, Klingebiel 1989), as the sentential word order changed in the direction of the verb preceding the direct object, the order of the verb and noun components of compounds changed. This historical observation does not, however, impose a phrasal synchronic analysis on the verb+noun compounds since synchronic and diachronic analyses of a given phenomenon often differ (Lightfoot 1979, Allen 1980:18).

[4] This rule is stated informally here since we are concerned with an accurate description of its application rather than issues of the formalism of morphophonological rules.

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It remains unexplained, however, why imperatives have identical phonological forms to those observed in compounds. We will argue in section 4 that this is not a coincidence, but rather is the consequence of the absence of inflectional markers on the singular informal positive imperative. It has the same phonological form as that of the uninflected stem of the compounds. Before turning to imperatives, however, we will consider several other issues involved in analyzing the stem as the verbal component in verb+noun compounds.

A number of second and third conjugation verbs show discrepancies between the root portion of the infinitive and that of other members of the paradigm. Among third conjugation verbs, the most common difference is that many verbs take the so-called *-isc-* augment in certain forms, not including the infinitive. If the root is identified as the portion of the infinitive before the theme vowel, the stem in such cases would not contain the augment. If it is correct that the stem, with the application of Vowel Raising where necessary, is the verbal component of the compounds in question, we would thus predict that compounds involving third conjugation verbs that take the augment should not show this augment in the compound. The only relevant case we found is *pulisciscarpe* "door mat" (lit. "clean shoes"), where the augment is, in fact, present. It should be noted that the augment is present also in both the third person singular present indicative and singular informal imperative forms. We propose that the augment is actually part of the stem of the relevant third conjugation verbs. It has been observed (Napoli & Vogel 1990, di Fabio 1990) that the presence of the augment is sensitive to stress and thus can be accounted for by a fairly general morphophonological rule. Specifically, *-isc-* appears in those verb forms where stress would otherwise fall on the root; where stress falls to the right of the root, the augment is absent, as seen in (4).

(4)

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *pulisco* | "I clean" | *puliamo* | "we clean" |
| *pulisci* | "you clean" | *pulite* | "you (pl) clean" |
| *pulisce* | "he cleans" | *pulivo* | "I was cleaning" |
| *puliscono* | "they clean" | *pulivrono* | "they cleaned" |
| *pulisca* | "(that) he clean" | *pulirò* | "I will clean" |

If the augment is inserted to avoid stress on the root (di Fabio 1990), this requires that the verbs that exhibit the augment be marked in some way to specify that they have this special behavior. If, however, the augment is part of the stem (Napoli & Vogel 1990), it is clear from this representation which verbs take the augment and which do not. For those that do, all that is needed, then, is a rule that deletes the augment when stress falls to its right. This automatically accounts for why the augment itself does not have the augment since stress is to the right of the root here, too. Furthermore, since it is our position that the stem

is the appropriate verbal form in compounds, it follows that the augment should appear in compounds of third conjugation verbs that exhibit it elsewhere.

A number of second and third conjugation verbs also exhibit differences between the root found in the infinitive and corresponding portion of the third person singular present indicative and singular informal imperative forms. In certain cases, the latter differ from each other as well. For example, in verbs like *venire* "to come", the relevant third person and imperative forms contain a diphthong (i.e. *viene* "he comes", *vieni* "come"), the so-called *dittongo mobile*. *Volere* "to want" has a diphthong in the third person form (i.e. *vuole* "he wants"), but a different consonant, the palatal lateral represented as *gl*, in the imperative (i.e. *voglia* "want!"). Such verbs would be particularly useful in evaluating the proposal that the verb form that appears in compounds is the stem consisting of the root and theme vowel. However, they tend not to be found in existing compounds. In order to see what forms would be used if such compounds did exist, we conducted an experiment in which subjects were asked to construct various verb+noun compounds, including ones with such verbs with variation in their roots.

3. *Novel verb+noun compounds*

Given the general productivity of verb+noun compounds, we expected that native speakers would be able to create new compounds from a verb and a nominal that could be its object. Thus, in order to gain further insight into the nature of the verbal component of these compounds, we had eighteen native speakers living in the Veneto region construct a series of novel compounds. One subject refused to respond to a majority of the stimulus items (described below) and another subject failed to understand the task. These subjects were dropped from the analysis, for a total of sixteen subjects. The subjects were given thirty-two stimuli, randomized differently for each person. The stimuli consisted of a question asking what the subject would call "a person or object that always does V to N", as illustrated in (5), where the verb and noun of interest are capitalized.

(5) a. *Come si chiama un oggetto che si usa per LAVARE il RISO?*
"What is an object used to WASH RICE called?"
(typical response: *un(a) lavariso* )

b. *Come si chiama un oggetto che si usa per PORTARE le LAMPADINE?*
"What is an object used to CARRY LIGHT BULBS called?"
(typical response: *un(a) portalampadine* )

The stimulus questions were constructed with the verb in question in the infinitive in order not to bias the selection of the form used in the compound.

In (6), the percentages are given for those responses that conform to the hypothesis that the relevant verb form for compounds is a stem consisting of the root and theme vowel, with the application of Vowel Raising for second conjugation verbs. These results exclude the verbs with major irregularities involving third person singular present indicative and singular informal imperatives; these are discussed separately. Conjugation II is divided into two categories depending on whether the stress of the infinitive falls on the root (IIa), or on the theme vowel, the vowel preceding the *-re* of the infinitive, (IIb).

(6) Conjugation I: 95.83%
Conjugation IIa: 94.89%
Conjugation IIb: 83.33% } combined: 89.11%
Conjugation III: 70.83%

These results show that in the vast majority of cases, the speakers created compounds in which the verb form was the root+theme vowel (with the necessary Vowel Raising), as predicted. Where this was not the case, subjects either refused to provide an answer or gave some other type of response, the most common being a noun+noun compound where the second noun was deverbal, as illustrated in (7). We give here the infinitive and noun of the stimulus, followed by a sample noun+noun response.[5]

(7) mangiare/fragole "eat/strawberries": *fragola mangiante*
godere/pace "enjoy/peace": *pace godente*
scrivere/lettere "write/letters": *lettere scrivitrice*

Of more interest are the second conjugation verbs that involve an alternation between forms with and without a diphthong. In both cases of this type, the subjects used the form with the diphthong in the compound, as shown in (8).

(8) tenere/nastri "hold/tapes": *tieninastri*
contenere/cottone "contain/cotton": *contienicottone*

It would appear in these cases that the verb form is not the stem as proposed, although of the other options considered above, the only one that would give the correct surface form is the imperative. Since this was ruled out earlier, another solution must be sought here. One possibility is that the stem in

5 Note that most responses of this type were not grammatical possibilities for Italian.

the verbs in question contains a diphthong, along the lines of the -isc- augment, and that this diphthong is reduced to a simple vowel under the appropriate circumstances, typically when there is no stress on the relevant syllable. This would account for why the diphthong remains in the forms in the compounds (i.e. the syllable is stressed) and why it is absent in the infinitive (i.e. the syllable is unstressed). There are other deviations in the paradigms for these verbs, and other verbs, but these will have to be treated more idiosyncratically as needed. It seems, then, that we find confirmation of our proposal in the behavior of second conjugation verbs when they are used to form novel compounds.

Only three third conjugation verbs were tested, all of which exhibit the -isc- augment. While 70% of the responses contained the stem with the augment as proposed above, eleven of the fourteen responses that did not have this form had a form consisting of the root without the augment followed by the theme vowel. In several cases, the subjects first gave a response without the augment and then corrected it to include the augment. What does this mean about the verb form in these compounds? It cannot be either of the other options mentioned above since both the third person and the imperative forms contain the augment. At first glance, it might appear to support an analysis of the augment according to which the augment is inserted as needed but is not part of the basic verb form (di Fabio 1990). According to our proposal, where the augment is part of the stem, it is predicted that the augment should show up in the compounds. In fact, neither di Fabio's proposal nor ours accounts for these forms, since in both cases it is predicted that the augment should appear in the compounds to prevent stress from appearing on the root of the verb. Since almost 30% of the responses do not contain the augment, however, we do not attribute this finding to errors or difficulty with the task. We suggest that those speakers who do not use the augment are enforcing the rule regarding the presence of the augment more strictly than those who do use it.

Recall that on our analysis the augment is deleted when the main stress of a word falls to the right of the root. In the case of compounds, there are two roots, and each has some degree of stress. The primary stress of the entire compound, however, is on the second member, so in some sense it is to the right of the verb. Now, since the main stress is not on the verbal root, it is no longer necessary for the augment to be present. Thus, it appears that both solutions are consistent with our analysis where (a) the stem (i.e. root+theme vowel) is the verbal form used in compounding and (b) for those verbs taking the -isc- augment, the augment is part of the stem. The difference lies only in the degree of stress needed to keep the augment: primary stress of

the individual members of the compound or primary stress of the entire compound.

Six verbs with major irregularities in their paradigms were also examined: dire "to say", dare "to give", volere "to want", avere "to have", sapere "to know", bere "to drink". What these verbs have in common is that neither their third person singular nor their singular informal imperative is phonologically related in the usual way to the infinitive. Also, in the case of the three verbs consisting of only two syllables, if the -re suffix and the vowel preceding it are removed there is only a consonant left—a phonologically deficient root (and in the case of dare and dire, an unfortunate conflation). Thus, there is no way to form the type of stem we are claiming is the form of the verb used in verb+noun compounds.

The results with these verbs are precisely what might be expected in such a situation: a relatively large number of refusals to provide responses as well as idiosyncratic responses involving two nouns (as in (7) above) and several responses involving full infinitives. While the most popular form seemed to be something like the third person singular, in many cases this could not be distinguished from other members of the verbal paradigms. Since there is no reason to believe these are actually inflected forms, what might be determining the choice of a form homophonous to the third person singular form is the fact that this is in some sense the least marked form. The only verb in this category worthy of individual consideration is bere. Although the infinitive form does not contain a v, almost all the members of the paradigm (except the future and conditional, forms arguably related to the infinitive) do, as if the root were bev-. What we propose is that the stem is, in fact, bev- plus the theme vowel -e. Thus, instead of the majority of the paradigm appearing irregular for having the v, the forms that are seen as irregular are those without it, including the infinitive. Given this analysis, bere behaves further like a regular second conjugation verb with respect to verb+noun compounds.

In sum, the results of our investigation into the formation of novel verb+noun compounds confirms our proposal that the form of the verb used in these compounds is the stem consisting of the root plus theme vowel. In several cases, the experiment revealed more subtle patterns than are observed in presently existing compounds. For example, this led us to propose a revision of the representation of the stem of verbs with diphthongs that alternate with simple vowels (i.e. the so-called dittonghi mobili) and to distinguish two degrees of stress in relation to the presence or absence of the -isc- augment. The Vowel Raising rule proposed in the previous section was also found to hold consistently for the novel compounds.

## 4. Implications for the imperative

We have argued that the verbal form in verb+noun compounds is a stem. Since the form used for the singular informal positive imperative is phonologically identical, we propose that it, too, is a bare verbal stem. While we have arrived at this position on the basis of phonological considerations, it is supported by independent syntactic evidence.

Three different formal imperatives have been identified in the traditional literature on Italian, although their sense is hortative.[6] For the verb *parlare* "to speak" these are *parli* "(you sg) do speak", *parlino* "(you pl) do speak", *parliamo* "let's speak". These forms all correspond to present subjunctive forms and we consider them to be hortatives rather than true imperatives. Furthermore, unlike the imperatives discussed below, they consistently take proclitics and show no syntactic or morphological behavior that would identify them as true imperatives. Since they also bear no special relationship to the verb+noun compounds we are concerned with, we will not consider them further here.

In addition to the formal imperatives, three informal imperatives have been identified in the traditional literature on Italian. One is the first personal plural and has the same form as formal imperative seen above (e.g. *parliamo* "let's speak"). Another is the second person plural (e.g. *parlate* "(you pl) do speak"). Both of these forms remain the same whether or not they fall within the scope of the negative *non* "not" (e.g. *non parliamo* "let's not speak", *non parlate* "don't (you pl) speak"). They are also both phonologically identical to the corresponding present indicative forms for all verbs. Rivero (1988), in a study of Balkan verbs, and Kayne (1991), among others, argue that this phonological identity is evidence that the imperative paradigm is suppletive and that the indicative is being used in place of the missing imperative forms. This is the position we will adopt here as well, although it does not directly affect the rest of our analysis.

The remaining informal imperative, and the one of concern here, is the second person singular. This imperative has two forms: (a) the form we identified above in relation to the verb+noun compounds as the verbal stem and (b) a form that is phonologically identical to the infinitive. These forms are used in positive and negative imperatives, respectively. They are illustrated below for each conjugation.

(9) CI:     *Parla!*     "Do speak"
          *Non parlare*     "Don't speak"

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6 We represent the hortative sense in the English translations of the second person singular and plural forms with "do".

CII:     *Spingi,*     "Do push"
        *Non spingere*     "Don't push"
CIII:     *Finisci*     "Do finish"
        *Non finire!*     "Don't finish"

An immediate question is why the positive and negative second person informal imperatives have different forms. According to Kayne (1991), the negative form is not actually an imperative. Instead, it is a regular infinitive that follows a phonetically null modal in the imperative form. The latter is presumably identical to the positive imperative form of the modal, a point we cannot test, since both modal forms would be phonetically null. In support of his analysis Kayne observes that both proclitics and enclitics can appear with these negative imperatives:

(10) a. *Non gli parlare*     "Don't speak to him"
     b. *Non parlargli!*     "Don't speak to him"

Normally in Italian tensed verb forms take proclitics and all other verb forms take enclitics (including the unconjugated form *ecco* as in *eccolo* "here it is"). Thus with the infinitive we expect only enclitics, not the structure with the proclitic in (10a). When a modal is followed by an infinitive in Italian, however, if the infinitive has a clitic argument, this argument may appear either encliticized to the infinitive or procliticized to the modal as a result of Clitic Climbing. If the negative imperative has a phonetically null modal, we can account for the proclitic possibility by claiming that the clitic has climbed onto the null modal, resulting in a structure in which the clitic is in proclitic position with respect to the infinitive. This would be the result regardless of whether the clitic in question was proclitic or enclitic to the modal as in (11). The former is the expected case, while the latter has been added only to cover all imaginable situations.

(11) a. *Non gli* [null modal] *parlare!*
     b. *Non* [null modal] *gli parlare!*

Zanuttini (1991) takes a different position, arguing that the second person informal positive imperative, the form we are claiming is a bare stem, is the only true imperative form. All others, including the second person informal negative imperative, are substitutions into a suppletive paradigm, where the "surrogate" forms are really subjunctives (for the formal imperatives), indicatives (for the informal plural imperatives) or infinitives (for the second person singular negative informal imperative) (cf. especially p. 73). Zanuttini

then claims that all of the surrogate forms are attached (after Head Movement) under a Tense Phrase node in the verbal hierarchy, where subjunctives and imperatives are marked [+tense] and infinitives [-tense]. The one true imperative, on the other hand, is not generated under a TP node. Thus, it is marked neither plus nor minus tense; it simply lacks a tense feature, precisely what is predicted if it is a bare verbal stem, as we are proposing. Zanuttini argues further that the negative head *non* selects a TP as its complement, so *non* can never be cliticized to true imperatives since they have no tense feature. A surrogate form that bears a tense feature is thus required in the negative.

Both Kayne's and Zanuttini's analyses fail to account for the fact that even the surrogate informal imperatives can take either enclitics or proclitics in the negative, but only enclitics in the positive, as shown in (12) and (13). (The starred forms are grammatical as present indicative forms, but not as imperatives, the case that interests us here.)

(12) a. *Non parliategli*     *Non gli parlate*     "Don't (you pl) speak to him"
     b. *Parlategli*          **Gli parlate!*       "Don't (you pl) speak to him"
                                                    "(You pl) do speak to him"

(13) a. *Non parliamogli*     *Non gli parliamo*    "Let's not talk to him"
     b. *Parliamogli*         **Gli parliamo*       "Let's not talk to him"
                                                    "Let's talk to him"

It is not possible to posit a null modal in the negative imperatives here, as was done in the other cases, since the verb form is not one that could follow a modal.

While the details of Zanuttini's analysis are complex and not without problems, what is crucial here is that the second person singular informal positive imperative is a form entirely without tense features. No other morphologically free verbal form has this property. Instead, this is a property typical of verb stems. This property also follows from our analysis of the homophonous verb form found in verb+noun compounds and our claim that the relevant surface forms are bare verbal stems, devoid of any inflection.

Finally, the fact that the theme vowel endings of the stems in the imperatives exhibit Vowel Raising (like those in the compounds) is predicted by the formulation of the Vowel Raising rule itself. That is, the rule applies to forms in which the theme vowel is not followed by any inflectional material, and this is precisely the case, as we have shown, for the imperatives in question.

## 5. Conclusions

We have examined the productive word formation rule of Italian that creates compounds of the form verb+noun.[7] The phonological shape of the verbal component of these compounds led us to propose that this element is a bare stem consisting of a verb root and its theme vowel. A rule of Vowel Raising was shown to be necessary as well as to arrive at the final form for second conjugation verbs. This analysis not only accounts for the forms observed in the compounds, it allows us to avoid the problems that arise if the verb form is analyzed as an inflected form. In addition, since the verbal component of the compounds in question is phonologically identical to the singular informal positive imperative form of the verb, we have proposed that the latter consists of the same bare (root+theme vowel) stem, an analysis that is independently motivated on the basis of syntactic properties of imperatives.

While our study has focused on Italian, a number of the sources we cite discuss the corresponding compounds in other languages. It appears that certain aspects of our analysis of Italian may provide insight into other Romance languages, where many of the facts are quite similar, as well as into other languages that are not necessarily related to Italian.

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7 Pier Marco Bertinetto (personal communication) has pointed out the Dressler and Thornton (1991) have independently addressed some of the issues raised here. Their article was not available to us, however, when we wrote this paper.

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