

The Ripano dialect: towards the end of a mysterious linguistic island in the heart of Italy

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1. Introduction

The Ripano dialect is a Romance dialect spoken in the small village of Ripatransone. Ripatransone is located in the province of Ascoli Piceno in the Italian region of Marche, a few kilometres above the coasts of San Benedetto del Tronto. According to the 2004 census, approximately 4,335 people live in this village. Demographically the population is divided as it follows: (i) 18% of the population is over the age of 70; (ii) 24.5% of the population is between the age of 50 and 60; (iii) 27.5% of the population is between the age of 30 and 40 and; (iv) the remaining 30% of the population is 29 years old and younger.

The dialect is part of the family of South Central Italian dialects and more specifically it belongs to a group of dialects spoken in the geographic area located between the Aso River to the north and the Tronto River to the south. The two main regional dialects for this area are Piceno, spoken in its Fermo variety, and Abruzzese, spoken in its Teramo variety.

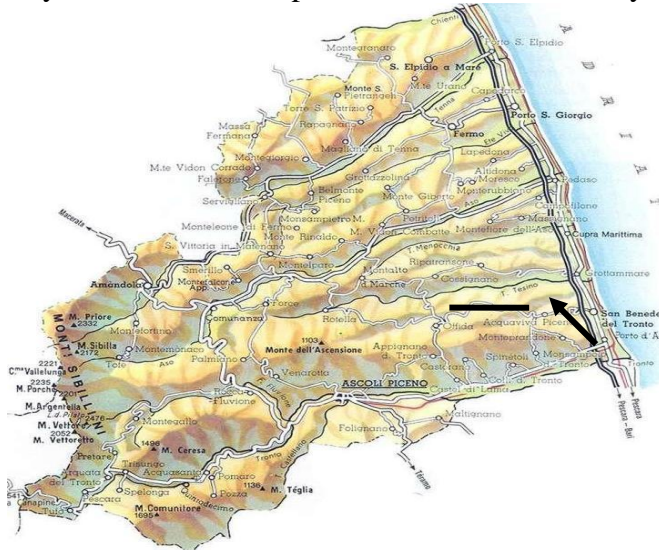


Fig. 1: Regional Map

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Although Ripano shares many grammatical features with other South Central dialects, the peculiarities of its verbal agreement system have made Ripano a true linguistic island in the heart of Italy and across all the Romance dialects. While in the majority of Romance languages the subject and the finite verb agree for person and number, Ripano, to my knowledge, is the only Romance language showing subject-verb agreement not only in number and person, but also in gender. Moreover, differently from other Romance languages, Ripano finite verbs have the possibility to agree in gender and number either with the subject or with the object of the clause, depending on the type of predicate. These two grammatical features make Ripano unique in Italy.

Unfortunately, however, the peculiarities of Ripano are gradually disappearing from the language. In the last 30 years, Ripano has been undergoing two different language contact phenomena: (i) dialect convergence towards one of the main regional dialects of that area, i.e., the Abruzzese dialect and (ii) Italianisation, i.e., the influence of Standard Italian on Ripano with the consequent attrition of Ripano grammatical features and their replacement by Italian.

The convergence towards the Abruzzese dialect, which is explicit in the adoption of morpho-phonological features of Abruzzese, has triggered the simplification of Ripano's agreement system. As a consequence, Ripano has gradually lost its status as a linguistic island while assimilating more into a wider spoken regional dialect as well as into Italian.

As this essay will demonstrate, the effects of dialect convergence have accelerated the process of Italianisation of Ripano. In the specific case of agreement, the amount of language variation expressed through variants due to dialect convergence leads young speakers of Ripano to reanalyse Ripano agreement morphology according to the morphological features of Italian. Unsurprisingly, according to my data, the process of Italianisation is especially active among the younger generations of speakers age 40 and below, whose linguistic competence ranges between a variety of codes depending on the context of use – 'pure' dialect, regional dialect, regional Italian and standard Italian. The wide variety of linguistic codes and language variation, together with the influence of Italian from the media, schools and institutions are the primary triggers of Italianisation in Ripano. Consequently Ripano is no longer

the main language of communication among younger generations of speakers and is slowly dying out.

The linguistic impact of dialect convergence and Italianisation on Ripano is manifested in two intertwined phenomena: (1) dialect levelling (Auer 1998a, Berruto 1998, 2005) and (2) ‘koinisation’. Dialect levelling consists of the elimination of salient linguistic features of Ripano in favour of the adoption of linguistic features from Abruzzese and Italian. Koinisation is an effect of dialect levelling and it implies the formation from Ripano of a regional or sub-regional variety of the dialect (Sobrero 1996, Berruto 2005).

In the first part of this essay, after a brief overview of the current Italian sociolinguistic situation, I will discuss the process of dialect convergence and how it is affecting Ripano phonology and morphology. In the second part of this paper, I will give a brief overview of the most salient grammatical aspects of the Ripano nominal and verbal systems paying particular attention to the agreement system. Then, I will illustrate how the process of dialect convergence is affecting the Ripano peculiar agreement system. Finally, I will discuss the actual status of Ripano as a language spoken among older and younger generations.

2. An overview of the Italian sociolinguistic situation: the standard/dialect dichotomy

By the word ‘dialect’ I refer to a language variety that is spoken in a geographically limited area but is structurally related to a standard variety. In the case of the Ripano dialect, the standard variety the dialect relates to is Italian. As stated in Berruto (2005:82), the word *dialect* means something different depending on the contexts in which it is used. For instance, Italian dialects differ from English of England dialects because the structural differences between Italian dialects and Italian are much greater than those between the English of England and its dialects. In this regard, Pellegrini (1975) demonstrates that at the phonetic, phonological and morpho-syntactic level of analysis, the linguistic difference between Standard Italian and the dialect of Lucania is greater than the linguistic difference between Italian and Spanish. Berruto, (2005) following Coseriu (1980), defines Italian dialects as being partly autonomous languages with their own history, all born around the same time from the different transformations of Latin. At one point in its history one of these dialects, the Florentine dialect, became the national

language, for literary and political reasons. Today, however, Standard Italian and the Florentine dialect are two distinct lects.

The sociolinguistic situation in Italy is quiet complex. Standard Italian is the official language. The standard corresponds to the Italian variety spoken by the media and taught in school grammar books. However, the contact between the national language and the dialects, according to Berruto (1990, 2005), is responsible for the following phenomena: (a) dialectisation or regionalisation of Italian; (b) Italianisation of dialect; (c) koineisation and (d) hybridisation. These phenomena are the product of the language-dialect contact and generate different language and dialect varieties as represented in (1) below.

Standard Italian ...x.... Regional Italian ...y... Regional Koiné/dialect ...z... ‘pure’ Dialect
 → → Italianisation of the dialects →→ ←← Regionalisation of Italian ←←

Fig. 2: dialect and standard in contemporary Italy

The schema in Figure 2 has to be interpreted as a continuum. Several linguistic variants and lects (e.g., x, y and z) lie in between the four major linguistic variants represented in Figure 2. By Regional Italian, Pellegrini (1975) understands the variety of the Italian language spoken in certain geographical regions. Regional Italian maintains certain linguistic features of the dialects of that area, e.g., words, expressions, intonation and phonological features. However, all these features are for the most part phonologically assimilated into Italian. According to Pellegrini (1975), there are at least six regional varieties of Italian: Northern, Central (which is a variation of the regional Italian spoken in Tuscany), Roman, Southern, deep Southern and Sardinian.

Berruto (2005) defines Regional Italian as a ‘low diastratic variety’ which differs from the standard on several linguistic levels of analysis. Dialect-Italian bilingualism leads to the formation of linguistic variants that are dialect-marked at the lexical, morphological, syntactic and/or phonological level. On the other hand, Regional Koinè represents the dialect variety spoken or understood in a large geographical area, for instance in a region. Usually, for economic, political, and or cultural reasons, the dialect of an urban centre acquires the status of regional variety. A number of intermediate dialects and regional varieties of Italian are present in the continuum as represented by the following examples in (2) taken from Telmon’s Italian-Dialect continuum (1993, 119).

In (2), the sentence ‘I ate too much, now I am full and I need/must take’ is rendered in eight different ways, each way representing one degree of the linguistic continuum from the standard Italian to the ‘purest’ version of the Abruzzese dialect. Looking at Table 1, the example in (a) belongs to Standard Italian; the example in (b) is representative of Regional Italian; the examples (c-e) are expressions of different degrees of Regional Koinè; the examples in (f-g) are indicative of lects in between the dialect and Regional Koinè; finally, the example in (h) expresses the ‘purest’ form of the Abruzzese dialect.

a:	ho	mangiato	troppo	ora	sono	sazio	e devo	prendere
b:	ho	mangiato	troppo	adesso	sono	abboffato	e devo	pigliare
c:	sono	mangiato	troppo	mo	ssó	abbottato	e ho da	pigliare
d:	ssó	magnato	troppo	mo	ssó	abbottato	e tengo a	pigliá
e:	sto	magnato	troppo	mo	sto	abbottato	e tengo a	pigliá
f:	ʃto	magnate	troppe	mo	ʃto	abbottate	e teng a	pigliá
g:	ʃto	magnète	troppe	mo	ʃto	abbottète	e teng a	pigliá
h:	ʃtɛŋgə	ma`ŋɛ:tə	`trɔppə	mo	ʃtɛŋgə	ab:o`t:atə	e `tɛŋ a	pi`lá

Table 1: Telmon’s illustrative Italian-Dialect continuum

At the linguistic level, the above examples show syntactic, morphological, lexical, and phonological differences between the different varieties spoken along the continuum. For instance, at the syntactic level, it is interesting to note the contrast between the use of the auxiliary verb ‘avere’ in (a-b) ‘to have’ with transitive verbs like ‘to eat’ and the use instead of the auxiliary ‘sono’ ‘to be’ and its dialectal variety ‘sso’ in (c-d) or the verb ‘sto’ with the variant ‘ʃto’ ‘to stay’ in the Koinè and in some dialect varieties in between the Koinè and the ‘pure’ dialect as in (e-f-g). Notably, the ‘pure’ dialect uses its own auxiliary verb `ʃtɛŋgə. Similarly, at the lexical level, represented in (1), it is possible to observe an example of the lexical variation along the continuum relative to the verb phrase ‘must take’.

- 1a. devo prendere
- 1b. devo pigliare
- 1c. ho da pigliare
- 1d. tengo a pigliá
- 1e. teng a pigliá

Socio-economic factors, age, education and geographical factors govern the collocation of each speaker along the continuum. However, it is extremely difficult to set rigid linguistic boundaries along the continuum given that speakers do possess similar linguistic competences in the different varieties and they alternate codes or mix them depending on the communicative situation, the social context and the geographical location.

In the next section, I describe the process of dialect convergence and of Italianisation in Ripano, the effects of which are completely modifying Ripano syntax and morphology.

3. The Process of Dialect Convergence in Ripano

The process of dialect convergence usually involves two dialects or languages, a source language and a target language. During this process, the target language is affected overall. According to Auer et al. (2005) and Siegel (1985:367), the process of dialect convergence may lead to the assimilation between two dialects: the dialect converging towards another dialect shows an increased number of similarities with the source language becoming more homogeneous with the source language.

Linguistic convergence may be caused by the speakers' desire to reduce the differences between their speech and that of the source language resulting in a 'dialect loss', i.e., the gradual process of abandoning its own dialect or variety in favour of another dialect or language variety. Such a gradual process may lead to the conformation of the target dialect' with the source dialect. Although I agree with Berruto (1989, 2005) that convergence implies 'a mutual approximation of two language varieties' (2995:82), I will primarily focus on the unilateral convergence of Ripano towards Abruzzese. Unilateral convergence, according to Berruto (2005:82), presupposes a difference in prestige and in social status between the two dialects in contact. In the case of Ripano, Abruzzese in the variety spoken in Teramo is the language of prestige. Teramo is a fairly large urban centre, the main city of the entire Teramo province, and it is located approximately 50 kilometres from Ripatransone.

Finally, Trudgill's (1986) claim that the process of dialect convergence may lead to simplification and to the reduction of features, especially in a quantitative type of variation, turns out to be true in the case of Ripano. In other words, the process of dialect convergence has changed Ripano syntactic and morphological structure by reducing linguistic features and consequently simplifying its grammar. More specifically, the homogenisation of Ripano and Abruzzese has rendered Ripano agreement morphology void and affected the subject-verb, object-verb agreement system.

As described above, there are two regional dialects related Ripano's geo-linguistic area, Piceno, in its variety spoken in Fermo, and Abruzzese, in its variety spoken in Teramo. Lüdtke (1976:79) points out several phonological and morphological differences between these two dialects. The most salient differences are found in the vocalic system and in the grammatical gender system as illustrated by Table 2 below.

	stressed vowels	final unstressed vowels	gender
Piceno (Femano)	4	a, e, i, o, u	masculine/feminine/neuter
Abruzzese (Teramo)	3	schwa [ə]	masculine/feminine
Ripano	5	a, e, i, o, u, [ə]	masculine/feminine/neuter

Table 2: Linguistic features of local dialects

At first glance, the Ripano dialect shares many grammatical features with the dialects of the Piceno area, i.e., Ripano has three genders and multiple final unstressed vowels, though Ripano counts with five stressed vowels (Harder 1988:98) rather than four. However, in Ripano as indicated by Parrino (1967:156), Lüdtke (1976), Mancini (1988) and Harder (1988:100), final unstressed vowels have undergone the phonological process of vowel reduction to schwa [ə]. Such a reduction is the result of the process of dialect convergence towards Abruzzese.

Because of the salient morphological position of final unstressed vowel, final unstressed vowel reduction affects the intra-system of Ripano, deleting gender/number information from lexical items. As I describe in the next

section, in Ripano gender and number are vocalic morphemes suffixed to a large variety of lexical items: nouns, verbs, adjectives, determiners, adverbs and Wh-words. The reduction of all final vowels to schwa has as a consequence the loss of the gender/number information from most of the lexical items, in particular from verbs, nouns, adverbs and adjectives. Such a loss makes the entire agreement system of the language unstable fostering a considerable degree of linguistic variation with regards to agreement.

According to my data, at present, there are three intra-dialect variations for agreement: (1) the original form of the dialect, (2) an intermediate variant with [ə] and [a] alternation in certain genders; and (3) a more recent variant that applies final vowel reduction in all contexts with the consequent complete loss of gender and number information. Quantitatively, the three intra-dialect variations for agreement are spread among the dialect speaking population unevenly. Ripano speakers show a lot of variation in their speech because of the possibility to alternate more than one variant. Looking at the age of the informants in Ferrari's data collections (2000, 2008) together with the 2004 census data, it is plausible to quantify the approximate percentages for each one of the three intra-dialect variations as it follows. (i) The original form of the dialect is used among speakers age 70 and older, i.e., approximately 18% of the population. (ii) The intermediate variant is found among dialect speakers age 50 and above. Speakers age 70 and above alternate both original and intermediate variants in their speech. It follows that the percentage of speakers using this intermediate variant is approximately 42.5% of the population. (iii) Finally, the third variant is used as an alternative to the intermediate variant only by dialect speakers between the age of 50 and 60, which are the 24.5% of the population.

In the next sections, I analyse and compare the forms of subject-verb, object-verb and determiner-adjective-noun agreement as produced in three different varieties of the language spoken in Ripatransone.

4. An overview of the Ripano nominal system: before, during and after dialect conversion

In this section, I present three sets of data relative to Ripano nominal and verbal systems. Firstly, I introduce the data of the most conservative version of Ripano as spoken by senior citizens and as codified by Alfredo Rossi (2008), an almost 90 year-old teacher, who dedicated his life to the conservation, divulgation and preservation of the dialect. The data here used are part of Rossi's Ripano-Italian dictionary and grammar (2008), Rossi's poem books (1997, 1999), Ferrari's (2000 and 2008) collection, Harder (1988), Mancini (1988) and Lüdtkke (1976). Secondly, I present agreement data relative to the variety of Ripano that has undergone dialect convergence with the Abruzzese dialect. These data are taken from Harder (1988) and Mancini (1988).

The Ripano nominal system is a three gender system: masculine, feminine and neuter. Gender is obligatory for purposes of nominal and verbal agreement. Determiners, adjectives, pronouns, feminine nouns, finite and non finite verbs and adverbs are all marked for gender/number. Nouns are obligatorily preceded by a definite or an indefinite article. In Ripano, in fact, there are no bare nouns. The data in (2) show different endings on the determiner depending on the gender and number.

- | | | |
|-----|----------------------|--------------------|
| 2a. | l-u / n-u vestit- ə | masculine singular |
| | The/ a dress | |
| 2b. | l-i vestit- ə | masculine plural |
| | The dresses/dresses | |
| 2c. | l-e / n-e cas-e | feminine singular |
| | The/ a house | |
| 2d. | l-a cas-a | feminine plural |
| | The houses/house | |
| 2e. | l-ə / n-ə leñ- ə / a | neuter |
| | The/ a/ wood | |

In Ripano, gender and number agreement markers are for the most part found on the determiners, with the only exception being the feminine singular nouns. Masculine and neuter nouns usually end with the indistinct vowel schwa [ə], although, in Harder (1988), data show that older speakers alternate schwa and

[a] as the final ending for most of nouns. Given the obligatory presence of the determiner in ‘pure’ Ripano, gender and number information of nouns are recovered through the presence of the determiner. Therefore, in its conservative form Ripano determiners are clearly marked for gender and number as illustrated in the following table.

mas.sg.	mas.pl.	fem.sg.	fem.pl.	neuter
l-u	l-i	l-e	l-a	l- ə

Table 3: Traditional Ripano gender and number marking

One sign of dialect convergence towards Abruzzese is the possibility in certain speakers to use the indistinct vowel schwa [ə] as a feminine plural ending on both noun and determiner. According to Rossi (2008:19), in the most conservative form of Ripano, the plural feminine form is always [a], however, data of Harder (1988) and Mancini (1988) show how speakers alternate between the final vowel [a] and the indistinct final vowel schwa [ə], as illustrated in the following examples.

- 3a. Lə frəkin-a (Harder, 1988:112,134-135)
 The(f.pl) girls (f.pl)
 The girls
- 3b. Lə por-ə frəkin-a
 The(f.pl) poor (f.pl.) girls (f.pl)
 The poor girls
- 3c. Lə per-ə è bbon-a
 The(f.pl.) pears(f.pl) is good(f.pl.)
 The pears are good
- 3d. Lə femmən-ə trist-a
 The(f.pl.) women (f.pl.) sad (f.pl.)
 The sad women

In all the examples in (3), the determiner is always marked by the indistinct final vowel, whereas nouns alternate between [a] and [ə] depending on their syntactic position and syntactic construction.

Within the Ripano nominal system, the [a]/[ə] alternation for feminine nouns represents an innovation that assimilates feminine plural nouns and neutral singular nouns into one class having identical endings. Consequently, according to Harder's data, there is no distinction between feminine plural and neuter in the presence of an adjective, as illustrated by the comparison between the examples in (3b-d) and the following example (4).

- | | | |
|----|------------------|-------------------------|
| 4. | So maññat-u | lə peʃ ʃə fresca |
| | have eaten-(m.s) | the(n) fish(n) fresh(n) |
| | I ate fresh fish | (Harder, 1988:136) |

The singular neuter noun-adjective sequence in (4) shows the same final endings as the feminine plural nouns examples in (3b-d). Disambiguation between the two genders may occur only at the syntactic level via subject-verb agreement given that neuter nouns cannot pluralise. However, as we will see, even the verbs are affected by dialect convergence. The presence of the final indistinct vowel on finite verbs deletes gender information and makes it impossible to establish agreement, at least overtly. Consequently, in out of the blue contexts, i.e., contexts without any contextual or pragmatic clues, subject-verb or object-verb agreement becomes impossible to recover.

Finally, the merging of feminine plural and neuter nouns into one class is demonstrated by the following data relative to the pluralisation of a small group of neutral nouns. In Ripano, many mass nouns are neuter. However, mass nouns such as 'fish', 'beer' and 'water' can also have a count reading, when the speaker, for instance, wants to underline that he/she is eating just one fish, or drinking just one beer. As Harder describes (1988:136), when a mass noun is used as a count noun, it changes its gender from neuter to masculine as illustrated in the following examples in (5a-d).

- | | | |
|-----|------------------|---------|
| 5a. | lə peʃ ʃə | |
| | The (n) fish (n) | [mass] |
| 5b. | lu peʃ ʃə | [count] |
| | The(m) fish (m) | |

- 5c. So maññat-u lə peʃ ʃə fritta
 Harder, 1988:136
 have eaten-(m.s) the(n) fish(n) fried(n)
 I ate fried fish
- 5d. So maññat-u nu peʃ ʃə frittū
 Harder, 1988:136
 have eaten-(m.s) a (m) fish(m) fried(m)
 I ate one fried fish

However, when the speaker wants to pluralise the count noun ‘fish’, he/she uses the plural feminine form instead of the plural masculine form, as illustrated in (6).

- 6a. Də stə peʃ ʃə nu sulu è frescu
 Of these (pl) fish (f.pl) one (m.sg.) only (m.sg.) is fresh (m.sg.)
 Of these fish only one is fresh
- 6b. Də stə peʃ ʃə solə doja/ə è fresca
 Of these (pl) fish (f.pl) two (f.pl.) only (f.pl.) is fresh (f.pl.)
 Of these fish two only are fresh (Ferrari 2000)

The examples in (6) show another example of the alternation between the indistinct vowel [ə] and [a] for feminine plural nouns. Notably, in this case, i.e., just one class, such alternation causes the merger between the morphology of feminine plural and neuter nouns.

The reduction of all noun endings to an indistinct vowel, with the exception of the feminine singular, and the merger of neuter and feminine plural nouns into one class are clear effects of dialect convergence. There is a lot of language variation among older generations of speakers age 50 and above even among purist speakers like Alfredo Rossi, who codified the language according to the ‘pure’ features of Ripano, yet, in his speech, accepts a certain degree of vocalic alternation.

5. Language Variation and the Italianisation of the Ripano Nominal System

Language variation and the need for contextual clues to disambiguate agreement information, I argue, is one of the reasons triggering the

Italianisation of Ripano in younger generations of speakers age 40 and below. The reanalysis of Ripano agreement system according to Italian morphology derived from the necessity to recover the loss agreement system due to the process of convergence. At the linguistic level, the process of Italianisation leads to a hybridisation of Ripano, i.e., as Berruto describes (2005:88), the grammar of Italian and of the dialect fuses to a certain degree yielding ‘the birth of mixed or fused lect’. The effects of this hybridisation are explained in this section after a brief introduction of the features of the Italian nominal system relevant to the analysis of Ripano.

The Italian nominal system is characterised by two genders: masculine and feminine. As described by Ferrari-Bridgers (2006), there are 11 possible final endings for nouns of both genders and gender assignment does not always depend on the type of final ending. Although there are more noun classes in Italian than in Ripano, I will focus on two in particular because of their relevance to the process of Italianisation of Ripano. The relevant noun classes in Italian are the class of masculine nouns ending in [o] in the singular and in [i] in the plural and the class of feminine nouns ending in [a] in the singular and in [e] in the plural as illustrated in (7).

- | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------------|--------------------|
| 7a. | il/un vestit-o
The/ a dress | masculine singular |
| 7b. | i vestit-i
The dresses/dresses | masculine plural |
| 7c. | l-a / un-a cas-a
The/ a house | feminine singular |
| 7d. | l-e cas-e
The houses/house | feminine plural |

With regards to masculine nouns ending in [o] and feminine nouns ending in [a], Ferrari-Bridgers’ (2006) quantitative analysis of two Italian noun databases with more than 4000 entries each shows that the majority of nouns in Italian belongs to one of these two classes.

The effects of Italianisation of Ripano due to the language contact between Ripano and Italian are visible in a morphological reanalysis of the Ripano final endings of nouns in accordance with Italian morphological features, as illustrated in data in (8).

- 8a. Lu sumaro
The-m.s. donkey
- 8b. sto come una cucchiara che sta sgrizza lu cemento contro lu muro
am like a (f.s.) spatula (f.s.) that is throwing the (m.s.) cement (m.s.)
against the (m.s.) wall(m.s.)
I feel like a spatula that is throwing the cement against a wall
- 8c. facemu nu casino
Make (imp. 1stm.pl) a (m.sg.) mess (m.sg)
Let's make a mess

These data comes from the speech of teens and young adults living in Ripatransone. The data are mostly taken from video recordings posted on U-Tube. I listened to different video recordings for approximately 40 minutes, posted on u-tube by RokkaRedBlack91. Rokka identifies himself and his other friends as Ripano citizens. They are high school and college students. The videos picture Rokka and his friends taking part in Ripatransone's festivals and events or just spending time together. The interaction between Rokka and his friends is natural, offering a perfect example of spontaneous data of speech of young generations of Ripano speakers.

A grammatical analysis of the data elicited in (8) indicates that Ripano has undergone the process of hybridisation. As a result, one can claim that a new 'Ripano lect' is already borne among young people. A few examples of language hybridisation are given in (9) below.

- 9a. lu somaro (the donkey)
- 9b. lu cemento (the cement)
- 9c. lu muro (the wall)
- 9d. una cucchiara (a spatula)

In the examples in (9a-c), the hybrid forms maintain the Ripano gender morphology on the determiner 'lu', but reanalyze the Ripano indistinct vowel [ə] of nouns into an [o] like Italian masculine singular nouns. On the other side, in the example in (9d), the Ripano marker for singular feminine nouns [e] is substituted by the Italian [a]. The same happens to the Ripano indefinite article 'ne', which becomes 'una'. However, at the lexical level the noun *cucchiara* is not Italian, but a hybridisation of the original Ripano form *cucchiare*, whose corresponding Italian word is *cazzuola* 'spatula'.

To sum up in the table below I compare Italian and Ripano nominal forms with the Ripano hybrid forms of determiners and nouns.

	Italian	Hybrid Ripano Forms	Ripano
m.sg	Il cement-o un mur-o	lu somar-o nu mur-o	lu- sumar-ə nu mur-ə
f.sg.	una spatol-a	una cucchiar-a	ne cucchiar-e

Table 4: Italian, Ripano and Ripano hybrid forms of nouns and determiners

As the data show, the Ripano hybrid forms have Italian masculine and feminine gender morphology on nouns of both genders and on feminine determiners; however, the masculine determiner is still in Ripano, which suggests that the process of Italianisation is not completed yet among younger speakers.

Finally, the degree of hybridisation of Ripano among younger speakers varies from speaker to speaker, but also from context to context. In the recordings here used, young people address each other alternately in Regional Italian or in Standard Italian. Hybridisations of Ripano words are seldom used.

6. The Ripano verbal system and the process of dialect convergence

Dialect convergence has a particularly weighty effect on the Ripano verbal agreement system, which is losing its unique characteristics due to the deletion of gender/number information. As noted by Egidi (1965), Parrino (1967), Ludkte (1974,76), Harder (1988), Manicini (1988) and Ferrari-Bridgers (2000), Ripano has historically represented an innovation within the dialect system of its immediate geographic area as well as amongst all the Romance languages. In Ripano, in all tenses, finite and non finite verbs agree with their subject or their object not only in person and in number, but also in gender. Grammatical gender markers on non-finite verbs are found quite commonly among Romance languages and dialects; but it seems that it is uniquely a peculiarity of Ripano to also mark finite verbs for gender as shown in Table 5:

Present tense	Mas.	Fem.	Neu.	
ia (m/f)	maññ-u	maññ-e		‘I eat’
tu (m/f)	maññ-u	maññ-e		‘you eat’
issu (m) / esse (f)	maññ-u	maññ-e	maññ-ə/a	‘he/it eats’
nojja (m/f)	maññe-m-i	maññe-m-a/ə		‘we eat’
vojja (m/f)	maññe-t-i	maññe-t- a/ə		‘you eat’
issi (m) /essa (m)	maññ-i	maññ- a/ə		‘they eat’
Imperfect	məññevu	məññeve	məññev-ə /a	‘I ate/it ate’
Perfect (AUX=BE)	so maññatu	so maññate		‘have eaten’

Table 5: Ripano finite verb gender marking

A brief comparison with the Italian and Spanish verb systems shows that gender agreement on verbs confirms the uniqueness of this peculiarity of Ripano. Italian and Spanish finite verbs agree only in person and number with the subject.

Italian		Spanish		
io(m/f)	mang-i-o	yo	com-o	‘I eat’
tu (m/f)	mang-i	tù	com-es	‘you eat’
lui (m)/lei (f)	mang-i-a	èl/ella	com-e	‘he/she eats’
noi (m/f)	mang-i-amo	notrosos/as	com-emos	‘we eat’
voi (m/f)	mang-i-ate	vosotros/as	com-èis	‘you eat’
loro (m/f)	mang-i-ano	ellos/ellas	comen	‘they eat’

Table 6: Italian and Spanish finite verb person and number marking

Looking back at the data in Table 5, one interesting feature of the Ripano verb agreement system is once again the possibility for feminine plural and neuter nouns to alternate [a] and [ə] as final endings, although conservative Ripano speakers, such as Rossi, use only [a] as the feminine plural maker.

A similar alternation was witnessed for the nominal agreement system and, as in the case of nouns, the indistinct vowel is an innovative feature of Ripano due to dialect convergence. The merging of neuter and feminine plural nouns into one class and the [a]/[ə] alternation on nouns and finite verbs have the effect of weakening another important peculiar feature of Ripano agreement

system: the possibility for a finite verb to agree in gender/number with either the subject or the object, depending on the verb type and other syntactic and pragmatic conditions. Obviously, similarly to the above data relative to nouns, if both feminine plural and neuter nouns have identical endings on nouns and on verbs, there is no way to disambiguate whether the verb is agreeing with the subject or the object of a sentence without contextual and pragmatic clues. In other words, in out of the blue contexts, it becomes impossible to determine agreement.

Although it is necessary to acknowledge that there is no consensus among different scholars on how Ripano agreement works, especially with regards the object-verb agreement, it is still important, to examine the rule governing subject-verb/object-verb agreement to better understand language variation among speakers.

All scholars agree that, in ‘pure’ Ripano, if the verb is intransitive or reflexive or found in predicative constructions, then the verb always agrees in gender with its subject as given in (10a-g).

- 10a- iss-u maññ-u
he (m.s.) eats (m.s.)
- 10b- l oma tir-u a kkambà
the man (m.s.) try(m.s.) to survive
- 10d- iss-u parl-u puoka
He (m.s.) speak-(m.s.) a little
- 10e- Mari-e è bell-e
Mary-(f.s.) is beautiful (f.s.)
- 10g- mə rəlav-e lə ma
me(f.s.) wash-(f.s.) my hand
I wash my hand

However, if the verb is transitive and it has a lexical object, the verb can agree either with the gender of the subject (11a-b) or with the gender of the object as indicated in (11c-f)¹.

¹ The Ripano data relative to subject-object-verb agreement are taken from Mancini (1988:13-15), Harder (1986) and Ferrari-Bridgers (2000).

- 11a li muratù porti nu mertyè
the (m.pl.) bricklayers bring(m.pl.) a hammer (m.s.)
- 11b le frəkine porte nu vəstiteə nuovu
The girl(f.s.) has(f.s.) a (m.s.) new dress
- 11c ia maññ-e le plənde
I (m.s.) eat(f.s.) the-(f.s.) polenta (f.s.)
- 11d le kundadin-e metə lə gra
the farmer(f.s.) sieves(n) the wheat(n)
- 11e so misti li dienda
(I) (m.s.) have put (m.pl.) my teeth (m.pl.)
I have put my teethe
- 11f so ngundrate ne femməne
(I)(m.s.) have met (f.s.) a woman (f.s.)
I have met a woman

The possibility for the verb to agree with both arguments depends on the discourse relevance the argument has in the utterance.

Ripano does not share this agreement feature with Italian. In Italian, transitive and intransitive verbs agree with the subject. The only exception is when there is an object clitic and the verb is in the perfect tense. In this case, the past participle agrees in gender and number with the clitic as illustrated in the following examples.

- 12a. Io mangio la mela
I(1st sg.) eat-1st.sg the apple
I eat an apple
- 12b. Io corro
I(1stsg.) run-1st sg.
I run
- 12c. l-a ho mangiat-a (la mela)
It (f.sg. clitic) have(1st sg.) eaten-f.sg (the apple -f.sg.)
I have eaten it

Interestingly, Ripano's double agreement system resembles that of Hindi. According to Mahajan (1990:75-77), in Hindi, the imperfective verb agrees with the subject in gender, but in case of a perfective verb, the subject is

marked by an ergative case and the verb agrees in gender with the object as in the following examples in (13) below.

- 13a. Ram (m) roTii khaataa thaa
 Ram(m) bread (f) eat(imper.m) be (pst m)
 ‘Ram habitually ate bread’
- 13b. Ram ne roTii khaayi
 Ram erg bread (f) eat (perfective)-femi
 ‘Ram ate bread’

In Ripano, there is no ergative case marking, but the transitive verb has the possibility to agree in gender and number with the object as well, though the difference between perfective and imperfective seems to play no role in Ripano.

Coming back to dialect convergence, Mancini’s data analysis (1988:12-13) relative to object-verb agreement in Ripano sharply disagrees with the analysis by other researchers as reported above. Mancini claims (1988:12-13) instead that object-verb agreement takes place only if the gender of the subject and the gender of the object are the same as in the examples in (14).

- 14a. so maññiatu lu presuttə
 Have eaten(m.s.) the(m.s.) ham(m.s.)
 ‘I ate the ham’
- 14b. le frekine e vvelute ne mele
 The(f.s.) girl(f.s.) has wanted(f.s.) a(f.s.) apple (f.s.)
 ‘The girl wanted an apple’

By contrast, according to Mancini, if the subject and the object have different genders, then the verb loses its gender marker and it ends with a final indistinct vowel [ə] as indicated in the examples in (15). Mancini defines the final indistinct vowel as a neutral ending, undifferentiated in terms of agreement.

- 15a. mezz-ə li keppu
 kill(?) the (m.pl.)turkeys
 ‘I kill the turkeys’
- 15b. so vist-ə ne bisse

- have seen(?) a(f.s.) snake(f.s.)
 ‘I saw a snake’
- 15c. maññ-ə le menestre
 eat(?) the(f.s.) soup (f.s.)
 ‘I eat the soup’
- 15d. mann-ə l-ə pera
 eat(?) the(f.pl.) pears (f.pl.)
 ‘I eat the pears’
- 15e. so maññat-ə l-ə pera
 have eaten(?) the(f.pl.) pears (f.pl.)
 ‘I ate the pears’

Although Ludke’s (1976), Harder’s (1988) and Rossi’s (2008) data disagree with Mancini’s data, it is also true that most of the data collected by the above scholars come from one source, i.e., the teacher Alfredo Rossi, whose literary scripts and personal vocabulary maintain the ‘pure’ version of the dialect, the one expressed through the data in (11) . As Mancini underscores, however, her data are not part of a written corpora but data of the spoken language of various Ripano speakers.

I interpret the widespread presence of the final indistinct vowel in the subject/object verb agreement system as further evidence of dialect convergence towards the Abruzzese dialect. As the data in (15) show, the effects of dialect convergence through the presence of the indistinct vowel [ə] are evident in the impossibility to determine the directionality of agreement, i.e. subj-verb or obj-verb agreement, and in the loss of all gender information on the verb. In other words, dialect convergence triggers a language levelling process that simplifies the Ripano agreement system. Unfortunately, Ripano loses its most interesting features and resembles one of the widespread Regional Koinès (all variants of the Abruzzese dialect) in its structure, as those depicted in the examples in (2) above, for instance.

7. The process of Italianisation in the Ripano verbal system

The necessity to mark agreement as required by both Ripano and Italian grammar and the degree of speaker variation as result of dialect convergence are the salient factors that triggered the Italianisation process of the Ripano verbal system. As mentioned to earlier, the process of Italianisation consists in a reanalysis of the verb final endings and agreement system according to the features of the Italian grammar.

All the data from the younger generations of Ripano speakers in my possession show that high school and college-age speakers use a regional variety of Italian with regards to the verb agreement system. There are only a few interspersed examples of regional koinè words and a few Ripano forms. However, there is absolutely no evidence of subject-verb or object verb gender agreement as indicated in the following examples in (16) below.

- 16a. Regà simo pronti?
Kids(m.pl.) are (1st pl) ready (m.pl.)
'Kids, are we ready?'
- 16b. fa vedè un attimo
(you sg.) let me (2nd sg.) see a second
'Let me see (it) for a second'
- 16c. come ti pijja la serata?
How does to you take(3rd sg) the evening
'How is the evening going for you?'
- 16d. siamo orgogliosi di essere Ripani
We are proud (m.pl) to be Ripani
'We are proud to be Ripani'

The data in (16) show a continuum of forms ranging from regional koinè to Standard Italian. Examples of regional koinè are the forms: *regà* 'kids', *simo* 'we are', *vedè* 'to see' and *pijja* 'take'. The form *vedè* is a Ripano form, while *pijja*, *simo* and *regà* (in Ripano respectively *pijju*, *semi/scemi* and *frekini*) belong to the regional koinè. All the other words are from standard Italian and completely conform to the standard in sentence (16d). Most importantly, all the sentences show subject-verb agreement with the verb agreeing with the subject in person and number just as in the case of Standard Italian.

From the above data, one can conclude that young generations of speakers have possibly only a passive competence of Ripano dialect. In their speech, both the nominal and the verbal systems show signs of hybridisations or complete substitution with Italian forms. This hybridisation or substitution is especially evident in those parts of the grammar where speaker and language variation alter the syntactic structure of the language, making impossible to recover agreement information.

8. Summary and Conclusion

The above investigation has clearly revealed the effects that the process of dialect convergence has on the grammar of Ripano. The adoption of a simple phonological feature such as the final vowel reduction of all unstressed vowels to a [ə] has triggered a fair amount of changes to the entire Ripano nominal and verbal agreement system. Because of convergence, Ripano has lost its status as a peculiar linguistic island and has become more homogenised to the main dialect of the area, Abruzzese.

Moreover, I argued in favour of the claim that the effects of dialect convergence have triggered a process of Italianisation of Ripano especially among younger generations of speakers. The fair amount of language variation due to the process of dialect convergence has given rise to an unstable agreement system. The necessity to establish agreement in Italian and in Ripano, together with the presence of Regional Italian and the Standard in everyday life, have contributed to an Italianisation of Ripano and its consequent levelling. The data of younger speakers of Ripano reflect the process of Italianisation of the dialect. Looking at the data in (16), it is possible to conclude that Ripano, in the form codified by Rossi (2008), is not the language of the younger generations of speakers any longer.

Though it is true that many areas of Italy are experiencing a re-birth of their dialect (Berruto 2007, Sobrero 2003) used by the speakers as a new communicative tool for lexical and expressive varieties, the same cannot be said to be true for Ripano. As the data and the analysis suggest, Ripano in its 'pure' form will soon literally die out. Once older generation of speakers die, their language will disappear with them. Unfortunately, the influence of Standard and Regional Italian, together with an increased mobility of young people who move to bigger urban settings for study and work, make it impossible for a rebirth of the language of Ripatransone.

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