

Acquisition, variation, change: On the definite article and kinship nouns in Italian*

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1. Introduction

It is a basic tenet of much modern linguistic inquiry into historical change, dialectal variation and acquisition that such phenomena should be properly understood and analysed in relation to each other. The view of generative grammar (above all formulated in work of Lightfoot 1979, 1991) can essentially be summarised as follows: in early childhood, the speaker develops a competence of his/her mother tongue, on the basis of an input of the language spoken in the child's environment in combination with a pre-existing, universal language system. The fact that the input can be highly variable on the one hand, and ambiguous on the other, enables the child to build a language-specific competence, and hence a grammar, to some extent different from that of its elders. A principled explanation as to why historic change applies (the diachronic perspective) must therefore be based on a theory of how language develops in the individual (the acquisitional perspective). This in turn must consider the fact that the spoken language to which the child is exposed is variable (the dialectal perspective).

It is our aim to contribute to the understanding of these phenomena, and the way they interact, through the study of a particular morphosyntactic pattern of Italian, namely the omission of the definite article in expressions of possession with so-called *kinship* nouns. The expressions in question are of the kind *mia madre* "my mother", which in Italian lacks the definite article otherwise used before the possessive pronoun as in, for instance, *la mia casa* "my house".

This paper is part of a work in progress. Its aims are limited to some empirical observations, generalisations, and an overall discussion of the relation between acquisition, dialectal variation and change.

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Firstly, we will see how in 14th century Florentine syntax a certain variation emerges with regard to definiteness in DPs with possessive pronouns (henceforth referred to as possessive DPs). The morphosyntactic patterns of this variation are not unlike those attested among modern Italian dialects. Basically, in the course of the 14th century, kinship nouns come to form a new morphosyntactic noun class. Our main claim will be that some universal property of language must be the prerequisite for this change. More precisely, in order for a new morphosyntactic class to be created in the language, the corresponding or underlying semantic or cognitive category must be a pre-existing one.

Secondly, this claim will be supported by some observations of Italian child data, where similar, or related, morphosyntactic variation is seen to emerge spontaneously, as it seems, to some extent independent from the input. The child data, however, will call for a further discussion on the nature of the underlying semantic category. It may be that *kinship* does not have theoretical status as such but is the result of the interaction of some other categories, such as *inalienability* and *uniqueness*.

2. Possessive pronouns, kinship nouns, and morphological definiteness

In the modern Italian variety described as ‘standard’, the definite article is omitted with nouns denoting a family relation, or ‘kinship’ nouns, preceded by a possessive pronoun (in the singular) (e.g. Renzi 1988):

- (1) *mio fratello*
my brother
- (2) **il mio fratello* cfr. *Il mio libro ...*
the my brother the my book

That is to say, the sequence [POSSESSIVE PRONOUN + COMMON NOUN] is normally preceded by the definite article, as in *il mio libro* ‘my book’, whereas the sequence [POSSESSIVE PRONOUN + KINSHIP NOUN] is normally indefinite.

This exceptional pattern is attested when the head noun is singular. With a plural head noun, as in (3), the N is treated as any common noun. Furthermore, if the possessive is 3rd person plural, the definite form is again mandatory, as in (4):

- (3) *i miei fratelli* cfr. **miei fratelli*

	the my brothers		my brothers
(4)	<i>il loro fratello</i>	cfr.	* <i>loro fratello</i>
	the their brother		their brother

Interestingly, this state of affairs is not at all unique for Italian, but morphosyntactic variation of a similar kind is attested also among Scandinavian varieties as shown in the survey of Delsing & Egerland (2002). For instance, in central Swedish as opposed to standard Swedish, the possessive pronoun is always prenominal with common nouns, as in (5), but is postnominal with kinship nouns (at least when the possessive is unstressed). In the latter case, the head noun obligatorily appears in the indefinite form, as in (6). Furthermore, this construction is possible only if the head noun is singular (7) and if the possessive pronoun is singular (8):^{1 2}

(5)	<i>min bil</i>	cfr.	* <i>bil(en) min</i>
	my car		car(-the) mine
(6)	<i>bror min</i>	cfr.	* <i>brorn min</i>
	brother mine		brother-the mine
(7)	* <i>bröder mina</i>	cfr.	<i>mina bröder</i>
	brothers mine		my brothers
(8)	* <i>bror vår</i>	cfr.	<i>vår bror</i>
	brother ours		our brother

In languages like standard Italian and central Swedish, then, the group of kinship nouns constitutes a morphosyntactic nominal class. The salient morphosyntactic feature of this class is the lack of morphological definiteness with possessive pronouns, as in (1) and (6). This is typically the case when

- i. the possessor (the possessive pronoun) is singular, and
- ii. the possessee (the head noun) is singular.

¹ By 'central Swedish' we intend, as in Delsing & Egerland (2002), Swedish varieties spoken in eastern and southern Svealand and northern Götaland.

² By a 'plural possessive' we intend a 4th, 5th, or 6th person possessive pronoun: *our*, *your*, and *their*.

The omission of the definite article hence correlates with number in two different ways. In central Swedish, the kinship construction in question is not possible at all in the plural. According to descriptions of ‘standard’ Italian, however, the omission of the article is possible when the possessive is plural, but correlates with the person category in the sense that omission is only possible in the 4th and 5th person, not in the 6th person:

- (9) (**la*) *nostra madre* / (**la*) *vostra madre* / *(*la*) *loro madre*
 the our mother / the your mother / the their mother

Similar phenomena are attested in several Italian varieties, though some morphosyntactic properties vary for partly independent reasons. In particular, in south Italian dialects such as *catanzarese* (Calabria) and *sammartinese* (Molise), the possessive is enclitic on the head noun as in (10)-(11) (Manzini & Savoia, 2000):

- | | | | | |
|------|------|----------------|------|--------------------|
| (10) | cat. | <i>mammata</i> | cfr. | * <i>a mammata</i> |
| | | mother-your | | the mother-your |
| (11) | sam. | <i>patrete</i> | cfr. | * <i>a patrete</i> |
| | | father-your | | the father-your |

In such varieties as well, the omission of definiteness is known to correlate with semantic categories such as plurality and deixis. A plural enclitic possessive, such as the hypothetical *na* occasionally attested elsewhere (cfr. AIS, I, 18 *i nostri nipoti*), does not exist in either of these dialects, but the full stressed form is used and the expression is obligatorily definite as in (12)-(13):

- | | | | | |
|------|------|------------------|------|-----------------------|
| (12) | cat. | * <i>mammana</i> | cfr. | <i>a mamma nostra</i> |
| | | mother-our | | the mother ours |
| (13) | sam. | * <i>patrene</i> | cfr. | <i>e patre nostre</i> |
| | | father-our | | the father ours |

If the head noun is plural, the *catanzarese* system again recurs to the full stressed form with obligatory definiteness, as in (14). In a dialect of the *sammartinese*-kind on the other hand, the enclitic possessive is actually available but the nominal expression is obligatorily definite, (15):

- | | | | | |
|------|------|--------------------|------|---------------------|
| (14) | cat. | * <i>figghimi</i> | cfr. | <i>i figghi mei</i> |
| | | sons-my | | the sons mine |
| (15) | sam. | <i>i cuggineme</i> | cfr. | * <i>cuggineme</i> |
| | | the cousins-my | | cousins-my |

Hence, morphological definiteness in these systems is omitted iff both the head noun and the possessive are singular. Across Italian dialects, the properties i-ii above are strong tendencies though exceptions and variations are known to exist (e.g. Penello 2003, and for a detailed survey, Manzini & Savoia, 2005).

It should be remembered as well that some central varieties lack all distinctions between kinship nouns and common nouns (e.g. Rohlfs 1968 § 432). This is the case in Florentine, where the article is obligatory also with kinship nouns, regardless of number, as in (16)-(17) (from AIS, I, 13 *tuo fratello*; *i tuoi fratelli*):

- (16) *i tu frathello*
the your brother
- (17) *e thu frathelli*
the your brothers

Rather than an analysis of the phenomenon in itself, our aim is to shed some light on its developmental aspect concentrating on standard Italian, by which one commonly understands the Tuscan variety. Our present concern is stated in (18):

- (18) **The problem of change:** How does the morphosyntactic category of *kinship* emerge?

The question is two-fold: by *change* in (18) we intend on the one hand the historical or diachronic aspect of language change (*how does a language acquire such properties in the course of history?*), and on the other the individual aspect of acquisition (*how does the individual acquire these patterns in his/her mother tongue?*).

First, we will show how a morphosyntactic variation similar to the one under discussion emerged in Old Italian during the 14th century. We will argue that the appearance of the morphosyntactic category implies a pre-existing semantic or cognitive category, thus in

principle independent from morphosyntactic patterns. Then, we will turn to Italian child data, arguing that the premises for a change of the historical kind are indeed present in the children's spontaneous productions.

3. Diachronic change

In Latin as well as Old Nordic there is no morphological definiteness. The morphosyntactic distinctions we have just seen are Romance and Scandinavian innovations (e.g. Perridon 1989; Börjars 2003; Castellani Pollidori 1966; Renzi 1997; Giusti 2001). As for Scandinavian, the morphophonological distinction between kinship nouns and common nouns is a fairly recent one and emerges out of a previous situation of variation where possessives can be both pre- and postnominal and DPs including possessives can be both definite and indefinite (Bergman 1999; Delsing & Egerland 2002, 115-116).

At the earliest stage of Italian, corresponding to the 13th century, the definite article (deriving from ILLE) has already developed (e.g. Renzi 1997, Vanelli 1998). However, there is no obvious correlation between the omission of the article and the kinship category, as explicitly noticed by Giusti (2002, forthcoming) and Penello (2003). To the extent the definite article can be dropped, its omission rather correlates with independent phenomena like for instance whether the expression is governed by a preposition.

During the following century, however, some variation in Florentine texts indicates that a morphosyntactic kinship category is emerging with some characteristics familiar from modern Italian dialects. A search of the OVI database reveals some such tendencies: the survey is restricted to 'narrative' texts in prose from the Florentine area dating from 1300 to 1400.³ Furthermore, only occurrences where the possessive pronoun is pre-nominal are counted. Appositional and predicative occurrences of [POSSESSIVE + N] are excluded. The corpus survey reveals five major tendencies, although one of them actually emerges only in one text. The results are given in 3.1-3.5 below.

3.1 Kinship nouns with the definite article (modern Florentine system)

To begin with, in a consistent part of the corpus the definite noun phrases are highly predominant over non-definite ones. The usage in these texts looks like the modern Florentine system, where in fact the definite article is mandatory also with kinship words. In this part of

³ The interest of narrative texts is due to the fact that it is only in such environments where we can expect to find alternations between 1st and 2nd person possessives, namely in dialogues. The 2nd person possessive in particular is quite infrequent in other kinds of texts.

the corpus, hence, there is no evidence for a particular morphosyntactic kinship category. This holds true for Boccaccio's narrative work except the *Decameron*. The results corresponding to the most common kinship nouns (*madre* "mother", *padre* "father", *fratello* "brother", *sorella* "sister", *figliuolo* "son", and *figliuola* "daughter") are given in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

[1338], <i>Filocolo</i> (in Antonio Enzo Quaglio (ed.), <i>Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio</i> , vol. I, Milano, Mondadori, 1967, pp. 61-675.)						
[1341], <i>Teseida delle nozze d'Emilia</i> (in Alberto Limentani (ed.), <i>Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio</i> , vol. II, Milano, Mondadori, 1964, pp. 253-664.)						
[1342], <i>Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine (Ameto)</i> (in Antonio Enzo Quaglio (ed.), <i>Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio</i> , vol. II, Milano, Mondadori, 1964, pp. 678-835.)						
[1344], <i>Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta (L')</i> (Franca Ageno (ed.), Parigi, Tallone, 1954.)						
[1348], <i>Ninfale Fiesolano (Il)</i> (incenzo Pernicone (ed.), Bari, Laterza, 1937, pp. 219-349.)						
[1355], <i>Corbaccio (Il)</i> (Tauno Nurmela (ed.), Helsinki, Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1968.)						
madre, padre, fratello, sorella, figliuolo, figliuola	mio/mia		tuo/tua		suo/sua	
	+ article	- article	+ article	- article	+ article	- article
	92	14	74	7	49	3

The same observation goes for a further group of three texts covering the entire century. The only kinship nouns frequent enough to allow for some generalisation are *madre*, *padre*, *figliuolo*, *figliuola*, given in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2

Anonimo [1300], <i>Tristano Riccardiano (Il)</i> (in Ernesto Giacomo Parodi (ed.), <i>Comm. testi di lingua</i> , Bologna, Romagnoli-Dall'Acqua, 1896.)			
Anonimo [1400], <i>Novella d'un barone di Faraona</i> (Francesco Zambrini (ed.), Lucca, Fontana, 1853.)			
Anonimo [1355], <i>Novelle del codice Panciatichiano 32</i> (in Guido Biagi (ed.), <i>Le Novelle antiche dei codici Panciatichiano-Palatino 138 e Laurenziano-Gaddiano 193</i> , Firenze, Sansoni, 1880, pp. 133-204.)			
madre,	mio/mia		tuo/tua
			suo/sua

padre, figliuolo, figliuola	+ article	- article	+ article	- article	+ article	- article
	12	3	4	1	27	3

That is to say, the largely predominant pattern in these texts is the one illustrated in the examples (19)-(21), where the sequence POSSESSIVE + KINSHIP NOUN is indeed introduced by the definite article, as would have been the case in modern Florentine:

(19) *I' òe nome Galeotto, lo sire dele Lontane Isole, a ccui egli àe*
my name is Galeotto, lord of the faraway islands, for whom he has
morto lo mio padre e la mia madre.

killed **the my father** and **the my mother**

(*Tristano Riccardiano*; 63.113)

(20) *... ed ecco venire messagio, che venìa di Gierusalem, co lettere,*
and here comes the messenger, who came from Jerusalem, with letters
come lo suo padre era morto e passato di questa vita.

how **the his father** was dead and passed from this life

(*Novella d'un barone*; 1.17)

(21) *... il suo padre era vecchio che non tenea piue corte, anzi avea*
the his father was old and no longer held court, in fact (he) had
incoronato il suo figliuolo Salamone...

crowned **the his son** Salomo

(*Novelle del codice Panciatichiano*; 138.135)

3.2 Kinship nouns without the definite article in the singular (modern standard system)

In the *Storia del San Gradale* a quite different pattern is attested, namely one in which the indefinite form is distinctly more frequent than the definite one, as is clear from Table 3.3.

Table 3.3

Anonimo [1325], <i>La storia del San Gradale. Volgarizzamento toscano dell'Estoire del Saint Graal</i> . (Marco Infurna (ed.), Padova, Editrice Antenore, 1999.)						
madre, padre, figlio/figliuolo, figlia/figliuola	mio/mia		tuo/tua		suo/sua	
	+ article	- article	+ article	- article	+ article	- article
	-	15	-	-	5	30

That is to say, what we see in Table 3.3 is rather similar to the modern standard, disregarding the fact that second person possessives are not attested at all. The fact that this is a translation from French calls for an additional comment. One could suspect that the definite article in such environments is missing because of influence from the source language. However, definite articles are not generally dropped in the sequence POSSESSIVE + N. The noun *marito* “husband” occurs twice with a possessive pronoun, both times preceded by the article, as in (22). Nouns like *cavallo* “horse” (23) and *viso* “face” (24) are generally preceded by the article as well. The indefinite form is found in what could be fixed expressions introduced by a preposition like *a mia magione* “to my home” (24) and *in sua vita* “in his life” (25):⁴

- (22) ... *dinazi ch'ela sapese certanità se 'l suo marito fosse morto o vivo,*
before that she knew certainly if **the her husband** was dead or alive
chéd ela l'amava sopra tutte criature.
because she him loved over all things (Storia San Gradale; 34.42)
- (23) *Quando Sarafe vidde che si fugeano senza ritornare, sì torna*
when Sarafe saw that they fled without coming back, (he) turns
il collo del suo cavallo e si lascia corere ...
the head of **the his horse** and goes away (Storia San Gradale; 182.155)
- (24) *E quand'e' n'ebe asciugato il suo viso, sì la invilupò*
and when he [with it] had dried **the his face** (he) it wrapped up and
e sì la mi rendeo, e io la ne portai a mia magione. E quand'io la disvilupai,
(he) it to-me gave back and I it brought **to my home**. And when I it unfolded
sì vi trovai la figura di Gesù Cristo...
(I) there found the image of Jesus Christ
(Storia San Gradale; 38.46)
- (25) ... *che neuno uomo mortale no potreb'essere degno per cosa ch'egli avesse fatto*
that no man mortal not could be worthy for thing that he had done
in sua vita, se Idio per sua grazia no glil'otriase.
in his life, if God **by his grace** not to-him it helped
(Storia San Gradale; 93.98)

⁴ The indefinite examples of (24)-(25) are slightly similar to modern Italian fixed expressions such as *a casa sua* and *in vita sua*, with the interesting difference that the possessive in the *San Gradale* is actually prenominal.

Among the texts of the corpus, the *San Gradale* thus is the one that most resembles the modern standard system.

3.3 Person split systems: omission of the article with the 1st and 2nd person singular

In some texts of the corpus, there is a tendency to distinguish between different possessives with regard to the realisation of the definite article. This pattern is most obvious in the *Decameron*, Table 3.4, and furthermore for the words *madre* and *padre* in a number of texts listed in Table 3.5.

Table 3.4

[1370], <i>Decameron</i> (ed. critica secondo l'autografo hamiltoniano, Vittore Branca (ed.), Firenze, Acc. della Crusca, 1976.)						
madre, padre, fratello, sorella, figliuolo, figliuola	mio/mia		tuo/tua		suo/sua	
	+ article	- article	+ article	- article	+ article	- article
	6	24	2	8	19	4

Table 3.5

Anonimo [1300], <i>Novellino (Il)</i> (Guido Favati (ed.), Genova, Bozzi, 1970.)						
Lancia, Andrea [1316], <i>Eneide volgarizzata (Compilazione della Eneide di Virgilio fatta volgare per Ser Andrea Lancia notaro fiorentino, Pietro Fanfani (ed.), «l'Etruria», I, 1851, pp. 162-88, 221-52, 296-318, 497-508, 625-32, 745-60.)</i>						
Anonimo [1350], <i>Tavola ritonda o l'Istoria di Tristano (La)</i> (<i>La Tavola Ritonda o l'Istoria di Tristano</i> , Filippo Luigi Polidori (ed.), Bologna, Romagnoli, 1864.)						
Pucci, Antonio [1362], <i>Libro di varie storie</i> (Alberto Varvaro (ed.), AAPalermo, s. IV, vol. XVI, parte II, fasc. II, 1957) [anno accademico 1955-56], pp. 3-312.)						
Pucci, Antonio [1388], <i>Contrasto delle donne (Il)</i> (Antonio Pace (ed.), Menasha, Banta, 1944.)						
Pucci, Antonio [1388], <i>Guerra tra' Fiorentini e' Pisani (Delle poesie di Antonio Pucci, vol. IV, Ildefonso di San Luigi (ed.), in Delizie degli eruditi toscani, t. VI, Firenze, Cambiagi, 1775, pp. 189-266.)</i>						
Anonimo [1388], <i>Esopo toscano (Esopo toscano dei frati e dei mercanti trecenteschi, Vittore Branca (ed.), Letteratura universale Marsilio, 1989.)</i>						
Sacchetti, Franco [1400], <i>Trecentonovelle (Il)</i> (Vincenzo Pernicone (ed.), Firenze, Sansoni, 1946.)						
madre,	mio/mia		tuo/tua		suo/sua	
padre	+ article	- article	+ article	- article	+ article	- article
	5	20	-	5	26	11

The tendency is to omit the definite article with POSSESSIVE + KINSHIP NOUN if the possessive is 1st or 2nd person, as in (26)-(29), whereas the article is more often realised when the possessive is 3rd person, as in (30).⁵

(26) *Ma voi dovete sapere che mio padre mi lasciò ricco uomo ...*

but you should know that **my father** me left rich man

(Boccaccio, *Decameron*; I.1.32)

(27) *Egli è piccol tempo che mio padre morì ...*

it is little time that **my father** died

⁵ It should be immediately recognised that the texts listed in Table 3.5, as is obvious from the figures, offer a quite limited number of occurrences. For some of them, this is only a weak tendency.

- (Sacchetti, *Trecentonovelle*; 16.39)
- (28) ... e ricordera'ti di dire a **tuo padre** che i tuoi figliuoli ...
and recall-will-to-you to say to **your father** that the your sons
(Boccaccio, *Decameron*; II.8.154)
- (29) *E perciò che tu somigli bene tuo padre, voglio che tu muoi per gli suoi peccati».*
and because that you resemble much **your father** (I) want that you die for the his sins
(*Esopo toscano*; 2.71)
- (30) *Or dicie lo conto che dappoi che T. fue cavaliere ed egli sì fecie*
now says the telling that after that T was knight and he did
la vendetta del suo padre molto alta mente ...
the vengeance of **the his father** very highly
(*Tristano Riccardiano*; 4.17)

The 14th century morphosyntax of possessives thus exhibits a pattern very familiar from modern dialects, namely a sort of *person split*: the realisation of definiteness correlates with the person feature of the possessive, separating 1st and 2nd person on the one hand from 3rd person on the other. For dialectal variation of this kind, see Manzini & Savoia (2000).

Moreover, there is also a strong tendency among these texts not to make explicit the possessive at all, in particular when it corresponds to 3rd person. Thus, instead of (*il suo padre* “(the) his father”, the definite form *il padre* “the father” is preferred in cases like (31)-(32).

- (31) *Disse il padre: «Io non voglio; tu non sai donde elle s'imbeccano!»*
said **the father**: I don't want; you don't know from-where they come
(Boccaccio, *Decameron*; IV.Introduzione.264)
- (32) *Il figliuolo rimase con questi ammonimenti, e 'l padre si morì.*
the son was left with these lessons and **the father** died
(Sacchetti, *Trecentonovelle*; 16.36)

3.4 Distinctions between kinship nouns (article omission with *figlia* as opposed to *figlio*)

There is some variation as for what precise nouns are included in the kinship category. On this point the survey is limited by the fact that only a few kinship nouns (above all *mother* and *father*) are sufficiently frequent in the corpus to allow for interesting generalisations. There is however a tendency in some of the texts to separate *figlio* “son” from *figlia*

“daughter”, in the sense that only the latter is treated as a kinship word with regard to definiteness. The former is used with the definite article as any common noun.

Table 3.6

Anonimo [1300], <i>Tristano Riccardiano (Il)</i> (Ernesto Giacomo Parodi (ed.), <i>Comm. testi di lingua</i> , Bologna, Romagnoli-Dall'Acqua, 1896.)		
Bosone de' Raffaelli da Gubbio [1333], <i>Fortunatus siculus o sia l'Avventuroso Siciliano</i> (Giorgio Federico Nott (ed.), Milano, Silvestri, 1833.)		
Anonimo [1350], <i>Tavola ritonda o l'Istoria di Tristano (La)</i> (<i>La Tavola Ritonda o l'Istoria di Tristano</i> , Filippo Luigi Polidori (ed.), Bologna, Romagnoli, 1864.)		
Boccaccio's work except for the <i>Decameron</i> (as listed in Table 3.1)		
	mio/tuo/suo/vostro	
	+ article	- article
figlio	10	2
figlia	1	14

This observation as well has its correspondence in modern dialectal variation. There seems to be an extensive microvariation as for what precise lexemes exhibit the properties of kinship nouns, in other words are included in the morphosyntactic kinship category. In the before-mentioned dialect of *catanzarese* nouns describing acquired relations are divided into those that count as kinship, such as *jenneru* “brother-in-law”, and those that do not, like *soceru* “father-in-law”, the latter having the morphosyntactic properties of common nouns in general.⁶

3.5 The plural possessive paradigm (article omission with vostro)

As for the plural possessives, a person split is again attested though different from the one known from the modern standard. Whereas in the modern standard prescription a distinction is made between 4th and 5th person (*nostro*, *vostro*) on the one hand versus 6th person (*loro*) on the other, in the 14th century corpus the 5th person is singled out with respect to the other two. The entire list of occurrences is given in Table 3.7:

⁶ In Central Scandinavian, curiously, a distinction is made between *dotter* “daughter”, which counts as *kinship*, and *son* “son”, which does not. Hence, the relevant dialects make a distinction between *dotter min* “daughter mine” and *sonen min* “son-the mine”.

Table 3.7

The entire corpus (fior., narr.)						
	nostro/nostra		vostro/vostra		loro	
	+ article	- article	+ article	- article	+ article	- article
madre	-	-	4	2	1	3
padre	2	2	4	6	6	2
fratello	2	-	4	4	5	-
sorella	1	-	-	1	-	-
figlio	-	-	-	-	-	-
figliuolo	4	-	5	2	4	-
figlia	-	-	-	5	-	-
figliuola	-	-	3	11	2	-
S:A	9	2	20	31	18	5

The pattern is illustrated by the examples (33)-(35):

- (33) *E Enea disse: Però che il die di domane è compimento d'annovale*
 and Enea said: because the day of tomorrow is the anniversary
del nostro padre, e qua guidandoci iddio venimo ...
of-the our father, and here guiding-us God we came
 (Lancia, *Eneide*; 5.244)
- (34) *... in questo luogo tra infinita moltitudine di cavalieri di vostro padre,*
 in this place between infinite multitude of knights of **your father**
di questo monte discendenti, e tre piccole schiere di Lelio ...
 from this mountain coming down and three small ranks of Lelio
fu asprissima battaglia, e io la vidi ...
 (there) was a hard battle and I it saw
 (Boccaccio, *Filocolo*; 5.88.663)
- (35) *E quegli a Giacobbe col grano andarono e raccontarono al loro padre,*
 and they to James with the corn went and told **to-the their father**
come il vicierè vole tutti e undici i fratelli insieme ...
 how the viceroy wanted all the eleven brothers together
 (Bosone da Gubbio, *Avventuroso Ciciliano*; 2.309)

Notice that in Table 3.7, the omission of the article with *vostro* is predominant because of the relatively high frequency of the sequence *vostra figliuola* ‘your daughter’. The lack of definiteness with *vostro* here could be related to ‘social deixis’, given that *vostro* generally is the 2nd person of courtesy and thus has a singular referent.

3.6 Summary and Discussion

The 14th century usage is not homogenous. ‘Subsystems’ are emerging, with properties more or less similar to those known from modern Italian dialectal or regional varieties. Consider again the premises for this change, as mentioned in the introduction: in the 13th-14th century usage, and hence in the input, nouns are freely used with or without the definite article. Nevertheless, at some point of the diachronic development, a new generation of language learners reaches the conclusion that kinship words do not require the article. Thus, a new morphosyntactic category is created, that is a nominal class distinguished by the lack of morphological definiteness. This case is an interesting illustration of the poverty-of-stimulus argument: if there is no morphosyntactic category of kinship nouns in the grammar of parents, say generation 1, the output of such a grammar is a language where definite and non-definite forms may be in free variation. For the children, or generation 2, to identify a morphosyntactic category in such an input, there must be an underlying and hence pre-existing *semantic* category to which the children have access. In other words, the morphosyntactic category is, and in fact has to be, created spontaneously.

This leads us to the issue of acquisition. As we shall see in the following section, similar morphosyntactic distinctions seem to emerge quite spontaneously in modern child language. The results, however, call for a further discussion on the notion of kinship and its theoretical status.

4 Acquisition

The omission of determiners in child language (and adult L2 acquisition) has been the topic of much research in the language acquisition field, but not particularly in relation to possessives.⁷ Child data from many languages show a period where the child to some extent

⁷ The acquisition of the mass-count distinction has been treated by for instance Chierchia (1994), Chierchia, Guasti & Gualmini (2000), and Gathercole Mueller (1997). It has been argued, going back to Piaget (1962), that the acquisition of class membership is generally difficult for children at the beginning.

omits these elements.⁸ It has recently been proposed that the acquisition of determiners goes through three stages (Chierchia et al., 2000):

- (36) a) no determiner
b) optional determiner
c) the determiner is present according to the target-language

At least in Italian child language data, nouns as well as the possessor are mostly singular in this determinerless stage (Bernardini, 2004). Recall the fact (section 2) that a salient morphosyntactic feature of the noun class *kinship* is the lack of morphological definiteness with possessive pronouns and that this is typically the case when:

- i. the possessor (the possessive pronoun) is singular, and
- ii. the possessee (the head noun) is singular.

A salient feature of early child language is thus the lack of morphological definiteness, or at least systematic marking of such definiteness. From the outset, the generalisations i-ii are thus not specific to possessive NPs of *kinship* nouns in Italian child language, but concerns the child's production of NPs in general.

In the following sections we will present a preliminary study of six normally developing Italian children who are exposed to a Tuscan variety of Italian of the western part of Tuscany (Pisa neighbourhood). The corpus was collected by a group of researchers at the Stella Maris Institute in Pisa (Cipriani, Pfanner, Chilosi, Cittadoni, Ciuti, Maccari, Pantano, Pfanner, Poli, Sarno, Bottari, Cappelliu, Colombo & Veneziano, 1989).⁹

Table 4.1 gives information about the six children, the socio economic status of the family, siblings, age, and number of files analysed.

⁸ See, among others Bottari, Cipriani & Chilosi (1993/1994), Bottari, Cipriani, Chilosi & Pfanner (1998, 2001), Chierchia, Guasti & Gualmini (2000), Granfeldt (2003), Gozzi (2004), Bernardini (2004), Kupisch (in press). As far as different aspects of the acquisition of possessives (pronouns/adjectives) in first language are concerned, we refer to Brown (1973), Antelmi (1997), and Penner & Weissenborn (1996).

⁹ The CHILDES database includes several corpora of Italian first language acquisition, but we limit our study to the CALAMBRONE corpus, since the variety of Italian spoken in this corpus (Tuscan) is comparable to the historical data of section 3.

Table 4.1 The Italian child data (Cipriani et al. 1989; MacWhinney 2000)

files of the CALAMBRONE corpus (Cipriani et al. 1989)
6 children with normal linguistic development, resident in the Pisa neighborhood
Raffaello , a first-born boy from a family of high SES, age 1;7.08 -3;3.00 (17 files);
Rosa , a second-born girl from a middle-low SES, age 1;3.00-3;3.23 (21 files);
Martina , the only daughter from a family of middle SES, age 1;7.00-3;0.00 (20 files);
Guglielmo , a second-born boy from a family of middle-high SES, age 2;1.00-2;11.00 (9 files);
Viola , a second-born girl from a family of middle SES, followed from 1;10.00 to 3;0.14 (10 files); and
Diana , a first-born girl from a family of middle SES, followed from 1;6.07 to 3;0.19 (10 files).

Legend: Age years; month. days

Cipriani *et al.* (1993) and Bottari *et al.* (1993/1994; 1998, 2001) have already studied these data for omissions of determiners, and one of their results is that determiners were more omitted than other functional elements. We limit our study of these data to how and when possessive noun phrases develop in relation to determiner omission and to the question of whether or not the lexical class of the noun has anything to do with the change from (37a) to (37b).

- (37) a. *mio asilo*
my kindergarten
- b. *il mio asilo*
the my kindergarten

Our analysis concerns the development of the morphosyntactic marking of definiteness in the sequence (ARTICLE +) POSSESSIVE PRONOUN + N. We are mainly interested in the following question:

- (38) Which are the possible triggers of change from a bare determiner system to the adult's system?

The following question lies implicit in (38): how do children establish that kinship nouns constitute a morphophonological noun class? To answer (38) we first consider the development of possessive NPs in each child (4.2). In 4.3, we will argue that the developmental patterns that are found may be collapsed into three general developmental

stages. Furthermore, in 4.4 the omission of determiners with possessive NPs are considered in relation to noun classes, and finally in 4.5 we make a comparison with the input (the mothers' utterances), in order to establish to what extent the children's productions correspond to the input.

4.2 *Individual systems: overgeneralisations and possible triggers*

The three general stages that we suggest in 4.3 are not only based on the chronological development of NP possessive per se, since this, as we will see below, might take different individual paths, depending on how many possessives that are registered in each session of each child, for instance. The three stages we will suggest are also based on the consideration of the child's age and MLU (mean length of utterances) and to which general developmental phase/stage the individual child's data belongs (cf. Cipriani *et al.* 1994). The general pattern of the possessive NP data of each child of the database is summarized as follows:

- Rosa: extensive data and more stages;
- Guglielmo: final stages;
- Raffaello: three stages;
- Martina: from second to third stage;
- Diana: no real stages, but general findings on omission pattern confirmed;
- Viola: stage 1 and 3 (only 3 possessives with NPs).

The summary of the six children's occurrences of [POSSESSIVE + N] shows that every child is not per se going through the three stages that we will suggest (except for Raffaello), for reasons of age, MLU, and the quantity of possessive NPs.

In what follows we will briefly consider the development of possessive NPs that is seen in each of the children of the CALAMBRONE corpus.

4.2.1 *Rosa (1;3-3;4)*

Rosa's data are the most extensive and the largest number of possessive NPs are found in her data. All Rosa's possessive NPs are listed in Table 4.2. in the chronological order in which they appear in her data.

Table 4.2 Rosa. Possessive NP development longitudinally

ROSA (age 1;3-3;4)	without determiner	with determiner
05 (2;?)	nonna mia	
11 (2;5.25)	casa mia	
	0w mio data [=tata]	
12 (2;6.29)	ov'è mamma mia?	&e e@p sua mamma
	mio babbo?	il suo babbo no
	0w mio Bi Ji [=Big Jim (toy-doll)]	
	0w sua mamma (x5)	
	0w suo babbo (x3)	
	in casa sua	
13 (2;7.26)		a@p mucche mia a@p mia maessa (x2) a@p maetta mia fa (x2)
14 (2;9.4)	0w mia pappa	
	0w mio piatto	
	0w tuo bicchiere [= mio]	
	petto (questo) potto tuo [= posto suo]	
15 (2;9.24)	0w mia patta [=pasta]	
	0w mio lino (x2) [=panierino]	
16 (2;10.14)		la tua fonte è gande, eh?
17 (2;11.12)	babbo mio	
18 (2;11.30)	0w mio babbo	
21 (3;1.29)	0w mio babbo (x3)	a@p mia mamma
	0w mia maglia	i@p mio babbo
	mamma mia, mi tieni que()?	a@p mia maetta (x2)
	in casa mia	
	è mico mio [=amico]	
	0w mia (a)mica	i@p mio papà
		i@p mio babbo

Legend: 0w= omission of word, here, the determiner.

x2, x3= found two times, three times, etc.

@p=morphophonologic placeholder of the determiner (Cipriani et al., 1993).

()= omitted part of word

[=xxx]= adult form of the word

The data of Rosa show evidence for the existence of various systems in periods. We do not observe the real end state of the Italian possessive system, because, in Rosa's last files, the determiner seems to appear optionally. Her data includes four different systems (see table 4.2). Each of these could constitute a possible grammar in the sense of Roeper (1999).

The first occurrences of the possessive are postnominal, in the first person, and combined with nouns such as for ex. *nonna* "granma" and *tata* "nanny". From the moment when the

third person singular form of the possessive is produced, we also find nouns preceded by a determiner. Note, however, that at this point (Rosa12) possessives in third person may also appear bare.

Since the determiner first appears along with the third person possessive, it seems to be the case that the third person feature on the possessive is the trigger for the insertion of a determiner in the possessive NP. The referents of the third person possessives are toy animals, children in books, or dolls. Furthermore, we attest what seems to be a confusion between first and second person, as in (39). This might suggest that the feature *person* initially includes only “*The speaker*”.

- (39) MOT: *è il tuo bicchiere?*
 is the your glass? = “is that your glass?”
 ROS: *0w tuo [=mio] bicchiere, sì*
 (the) your glass, yes = “my glass”

In (39), thus, Rosa uses the second person possessive to refer to herself. This observation should be put in relation to the fact that small children initially do have problems with taking the listeners perspective.¹⁰

4.2.2. Raffaello

In the data of the child Raffaello, the possessive is found five times together with nouns, which are all referring to singular objects and persons. Three nouns appear without determiners, two of which are not target-like (*0w mia bici; 0w sua mamma*).

Table 4.3 Raffaello. Possessive NP development longitudinally

Raffaello (età 1;7-3;3)	without determiner	with determiner
Raf10 (2;5.13)	va in camera mia	
Raf11 (2;6.13)	0w mia bici (Raf11)	
Raf12 (2;7)	no quello casa sua	
Raf13 (2;8)	0w sua mamma (Raf13)	
Raf16 (2;11.9)		questa è la sua stalla

¹⁰ Young children, below the age of three, are known to only take the speakers perspective. As a consequence, children may for ex. use the definite article instead of the indefinite, since they might presume that the listener share the same knowledge, a kind of ‘egocentric’ errors (for ex. Warden, 1976; Maratsos, 1976; Power & Dal Martello, 1986). This may cause referential ambiguities, as in (39).

The only context where determiners occur is when the possessive is in the third person, and this pattern is only found in the latest file.

4.2.3 *Martina*

In Martina's possessive noun phrase-data (age 1;7-3;0) we find three developmental stages of determiners: (a) no determiner, (b) optional determiner, and (c) determiners with singular nouns.

Table 4.4 Martina. Possessive NP development longitudinally

Martina, file, age	without determiner	with determiner
Mart11 (2;3.1)	casa mia (x2)	
Mart13 (2;4.13)		'l'al mio babbo (x2)
		la mia sèciola (x2)
		a mia casa
Mart16 (2;7.15)	0w mmio bimbo	la mia mamma
		la sua mamma
		il mio l'acqua

Observe that in the file (Mart16, age 2;7.15) where determiners are mostly present, the third person possessive is also present.

4.2.4 *Guglielmo*

In Guglielmo's data before the age of 2;9.6, only singular possessive NPs are found. Furthermore, (grammatical and non grammatical) bare possessives occur mostly when the possessive is in the first person, and the possessee is a singular noun.¹¹

¹¹ The early general stages in the acquisition of Italian as a first language, described by Cipriani *et al.* (1993) (of primitive and rudimentary stages), are not found in Guglielmo's data. His first file is classified as belonging to the 3rd stage (completion of the simple clause) (Cipriani *et al.* 1993: 53, 67).

Table 4.5 Guglielmo. Possessive NP development longitudinally

Guglielmo, file, age	without determiner	with determiner
Gug1 (2;1.1)	casa sua (x2)	la mi' palla (x2)
Gug4 (2;5.17)	0w mio piede	e@p mio asilo
Gug5 (2;7.25)		il suo babbo
		il treno tuo
		il mio ponte
Gug6 (2;9.6)	0w suo babbo	il mio pastore
		ai miei fratellini
		la sua mamma capra
		la sua mamma
		la moto sua
Gug7 (2;10.21)		la mia tuta
		il nostro fratellino
Gug8 (2;11.1)	è mamma mia	la sua cuccia
		il suo padrone (x2)
		con i suoi cani
		col suo padrone

The dropping of the definite article in Guglielmo's data seems to be determined by a semantic feature associated with some nouns: the nouns lacking the definite article are *babbo* "papa" and *mamma* "mother", as well as *piede* "foot" and *casa* "house". The appropriate property could be *inalienability*, though perhaps in an extended sense.

Other contexts where the possessive NP is not preceded by a determiner are found when the referent is familiar to the child, as was noted also in Rosa and in Raffaello (see tables x.3 and x.5). This could be considered an extended bare noun system based on the *alienable* – *inalienable* distinction. Nouns that are of inalienable possession to the child are bare whereas others may have the article (with the possessive pronoun).¹² A factor that also determines if possessives appear bare is if they are postnominal.

The extension of the (ungrammatical) bare noun system is thus conserved by alienability to apply even where the article is required in the adult system (i.e., with inalienable nouns, bare forms are used also when the article is required in the adult system). The extended bare noun system concerns in Guglielmo's case only one inalienable noun, namely, *piede*, "foot".

Furthermore, in Guglielmo's data, plural nouns, which are not frequent (with possessives) in the other children's data, never occur bare with the possessive. Furthermore, Guglielmo is also the only child who produces the typical Tuscan reduced form of the first person possessive (*la mi' palla*).

¹² We aim to test this on a larger scale in the future, not only considering *possessive* NPs. It is also reasonable to assume that the child has an *extended* vision of what is *inalienable*, but this too should be tested in further studies.

4.2.5 *Diana*

As Table 4.6 shows, Diana's data do not indicate a clear longitudinal development, because the third person possessive is found from early on, and the registrations end at a point where the determiner is missing with a plural possessive combined with a plural noun .

Table 4.6 Diana. Possessive NP development longitudinally

Diana, file, age	without determiner	with determiner
Dian03 (1;11.7)	è Memo 0w nome mio	
Dian05 (2;00.17)		era il suo compleanno grande
Dian08 (2;5.1)	0w mio babbo	
Dian09 (2;6)	bambina mio!	
	mio atello [=fratello]	suoi giocattoli
		li levo i@p ciuccio
	lascia mio mini pony	
	dov'è mio ciucci?	

The nouns appearing without the definite article in Diana's productions, hence, include kinship words such as *babbo* "daddy" and *fratello* "brother", along with *nome* "name", *bambina* "girl" and a toy (the *mini pony*).

4.2.6 *Viola*

Viola's data are restrained to two occurrences of possessive NPs, which nevertheless confirm the pattern of bare postnominal possessives at first and then the presence of the determiner with a prenominal possessive.

Table 4.7 Viola. Possessive NP development longitudinally

Viola, file, age	without determiner	with determiner
Viol03 (2;1.02)	babbo mio	
Viol09 (2;8.16)		quello mio foco

The noun used without the definite article is again *babbo*.

4.3 *General stages in the acquisition of the possessive NP*

In general, the possessive NPs seem to develop in three general stages in these Italian child data, which match the general pattern of omission of determiners of other studies (Chierchia et al. (2000)), as in (40). In the first stage, no determiner is used with possessive NPs and the nouns which are combined with possessives are generally KinN in the singular. The possessive pronoun is postnominal (0w=omission of word, here determiner):

- (40) Stage 1: *babbo mio*
 daddy my
- Stage 2:
- a. *il babbo mio/0w babbo mio* [postnominal; KinN]
 the daddy my/(the) daddy my
 - b. *il mio babbo/0w mio babbo* [prenominal; KinN]
 the my daddy/(the) my daddy
 - c. *il mio asilo/0w mio asilo* [prenominal; ComN]
 the my kindergarten/(the) my kindergarten
 - d. *l'asilo mio/0w asilo mio* [postnominal; ComN]
 the kindergarten my/(the) kindergarten my
- Stage 3:
- a. *il suo babbo/il suo asilo*
 the his daddy/the his kindergarten
 - b. *il babbo suo/l'asilo suo*
 the daddy his/the kindergarten his
 - c. *i suoi fratelli*
 the his(pl.) brothers

In the first stage the head noun of the possessive NP is above all a KinN (like *mamma* “mommy”, *babbo* “daddy”, *nonna* “granma”, and *fratello* “brother”, a noun describing something that is inalienably linked to the child *piede* “foot”, *nome* “name”), unique or otherwise intimately familiar to the child (*casa* “home”, *camera* “bedroom” as well as the some toys referred to in the dialogues (Big Jim, *Mini pony*). The possessive pronoun is in postnominal position. This stage of possessive NPs thus reminds us of the behaviour of Proper nouns in Italian (Longobardi 1994), at least superficially, since the determiner is not used if the possessive is postnominal. At this stage, furthermore, the possessive pronoun is always 1st person, *mio/mia*, for all of the children:

(41) *Dian03* (1;11.7)

MOT: *o canta [//] cantagli la canzoncina di Memo, Diana.*

or sing , sing him the little song of Memo, Diana

CHI: *è Memo, è Memo 0w nome mio...*

is Memo, is Memo (the) name mine...

(she starts to sing)

(42) *Martina11 (2;3.1)*

CHI: *sì, sì ah , bene do ado [/] do a ccasa mia, eh !*

yes, yes, oh, good I go to my place, ehi

MOT: *ci sei a casa tua, aspetta +...*

you are at your place, wait...

(43) *Rosa12 (2;6.29)*

CHI: *mamma # ov' è **mamma mia** .*

mommy, (wh)ere is mommy mine.

MOT: *ecco vengo !*

alright, I'm coming!

(44) *Raf10 (2;5.13)*

MOT: *cosa fai?*

what are (you) doing?

CHI: *va **in camera mia**.*

goes into my room

ALE: *resisti l'ultimo minuto.*

resist the last minute

In the second stage, more ComN are combined with possessives. By this stage and onwards, the possessive is mainly pre-nominal (as in Tables 4.2 – 4.7) and the determiner seems to be optional (a@p=proto-article (morpho-phonological placeholder, Cipriani et al. (1993).

Rosa21(3;3.23)

(45) a. INV: # *bellino*

nice

CHI: *non vedere nonna che è mia, **0w mia** [/] **mia maglia** .*

do not see granma, because it is mine, (the) mine sweater

Rosa21 (3;3.23)

b. MOT: *chi te lo ha fatto fare ?*

who has made you do it

CHI: ***a@p mia maetta** .*

a@p my teacher

The third person possessive, *suo* “his / her”, is not yet attested in the second stage. The two crucial changes of the possessive NPs that determines the transition to the third stage consist in the regular usage of second and third person possessives (*tuo, suo*) and the contemporary appearance of plural forms of the head noun (in concord with the possessive). At this stage, the adult, or target-like, system is established.

Gug8 (2;11.1)

(46) MOT: *i cani non dormono mica così.*

the dogs do not sleep like that

CHI: *allora, la sua cuccia sarebbe +...*

in that case, his bed would be...

MOT: *sarebbe !*

would be!

Gug8 (2;11.1)

(47) MOT: *in piedi .*

stand up/is standing

CHI: *+, e con i suoi cani che sono uno, si mette [//] si mettono a bisticciare, senti che non morde, Guglielmo !*

and with the his dogs which are one, they starts to, they start to argue, look, it does not bite, Guglielmo!

CHI: *hai sentito ?*

did you hear?

During these three general stages, hence, children appear to be using definite vs. non-definite forms as a result of different ways of categorising nouns. Firstly, the possessive pronouns are first attested with a group of nouns that express *kinship*, *uniqueness* and *inalienability*, as well as a *familiar* relation, at first in a rather narrow sense. The definite article is not attested at all at this stage. Secondly, when a larger number of nouns, and nouns of more kinds, start to appear in the child’s utterances, so does the article, but in an irregular fashion. Thirdly, the child reaches a target-like usage of the definite article only when it has developed 2nd and 3rd person possessives and plural head nouns.

What is then the relationship between the general lack of morphological definiteness in child language and the semantic category *kinship*? The data clearly suggest that a more complex array of semantic features is at play including, as we have mentioned, at least

uniqueness and *inalienability*. With time, the children single out kinship as the discriminating factor in a target-like fashion.

Moreover, the transition from the second to the third stage, in which the determiner is regularly present, is characterised by the appearance of plural nouns and possessives in the possessive NP, as well as third person possessives. This suggests that features such as plurality and deixis are of considerable importance in the development of morphological definiteness. For our present purposes, these observations will suffice.

4.4 *The input*

At this point, a further issue must be sorted out, namely the one concerning input. So far, the expression *target-like* has been used with implicit reference to a standard Italian system. Recall, however, that the children in question are exposed to a Tuscan variety where the usage of the definite article in these environments is known to be different from that of the standard. It is therefore necessary to ask to what extent these patterns of child language production actually correspond to the input.

Table 4.8 shows the result of a search on kinship nouns combined with the possessive in the speech of the mothers in the corpus. The kinship nouns produced by the mothers were grouped into those appearing with a postnominal possessive and those appearing with a prenominal possessive.¹³

Table 4.8 Possessive NPs with KinN in the mothers' utterances

Postnominal possessive		Prenominal possessive	
with determiner	without determiner	with determiner	without determiner
2	2	29	1
4		30	

As Table 4.8 shows, the possessive is generally prenominal in the mothers' speech. There are only a few occurrences of postnominal possessives. As for prenominal possessives, the definite article is generally present when the possessive is second and third person and the head noun is a KinN (*babbo* "father", *mamma* "mother", *cugino* "cousin"). The article is not present with the first person possessive.

¹³ Since the main interlocutors of the children in the transcribed recordings are the mothers, we have examined only their utterances, although other participants are also present sometimes in the transcribed recordings. We have excluded occurrences of the vocative and exclamations (*mamma mia!*).

- (48) a. MOT: *è anche **il suo babbo** che la +...*
it is also the his dad that ...
(File Dian03)
- b. MOT: *tutto bagnato perché è appena nato # dalla pancia **della sua mamma** #
guarda anche questi sono appena nati.*
all wet because he is just born (pause) from the belly of the his mommy (pause)
look also these are just born.
(File Gug4)
- c. MOT: ***il tuo cugino** come si chiama?*
the your cousin, what is he called?
(File Rosa09)
- d. MOT: *no, ma non l'ha picchiata **la sua nonna**.*
no, but she hasn't hit her, the her granma
(File Rosa16)
- e. MOT: *l'altro giorno ha fatto anche una frase, ipotetica a **mio padre** tipo: <se
te fai così io ti darò> ["].*
“the other day he made also a sentence, hypothetical, to my father, like,
if you do that I will not give you”. (the mother is talking about the child to
another adult present in the room)
(File Raf15)

Interestingly, the noun *mamma* is seen among those nouns with which the possessive is postnominal both with determiner, (49a), and without (49b).

- (49) a. MOT: *chi è che prendeva il latte **dalla mamma tua** # te lo ricordi ?*
Who is (i.e. was) it that took milk from the mommy your (pause) do
you remember that?
(File gug4)
MOT: *no, ma non **la mamma tua** [>] .*
no, but not the mommy your.
(File Raf10)
- b. MOT: *guarda, ti faccio tutta la famiglia !*
look, I make you all the family!

- MOT: *questa è mamma tua* .
 this is mommy your
- CHI: *no, quest()* .
 no, this
- c. RAF: *babbo*.
 daddy
- MOT: *cosa?*
 what
- RAF: *babbo mio*.
 daddy my
- MOT: *cosa babbo tuo?*
 what daddy your
- RAF: *no babbo Stefano*.
 no daddy Stefano
 (File Raf11)

The input of possessive NPs that the children are exposed to clearly shows that the distinction of first person from other persons of the possessive is crucial for the presence of the definite article. However, the children omit the determiner also with nouns that, in the adult's classification, do not belong to the class of *kinship*. The reason for this overgeneralisation of non-definiteness in possessive NPs is not only to be found in the input, since the mothers of these children quite exclusively use the determiner with the possessive in the pre-nominal position: the input alone could not explain why the children omit the determiner with prenominal possessives also in stage 2. Since the children apparently have very little evidence in the Tuscan input for omission of the article with KinN, the transitional system of stage 2 is thus spontaneously created.¹⁴

¹⁴ It could perhaps be argued that the transitional system emerges from the children's way to hypothesize possible grammars. Roeper (1999) suggests that the coexistence of two options, for example to omit vs. to supply the article, by hypothesising that two grammars coexist, one of which can be generated directly from Universal Grammar, if economical, in the sense of economy of representation without an input trigger under some default assignment. In this sense, the early instances of bare nouns could in fact be 'default referential' or default 'familiar'. A criterion that Roeper mentions as important for the rejection of such a grammar is *meaning explicitness*, i.e. how much of one's intention will appear explicit and how much will be left to inference? These two criteria, *economy of representation* and *meaning explicitness*, have opposite characteristics: one favours more, the other less elaborated structures. So Roeper expects the child to go through three stages, where economy rules in the first one, both in the second one, and *meaning explicitness* in the third one. If one grammar permits omission of the determiner, and the referent is contextually clear, then this contextual circumstance may influence the choice of grammar.

4.5 Summary

Summing up section 4, we have seen that children classify DPs in non-target-like ways apparently following semantic criteria such as inalienability, uniqueness, or familiarity. On the basis of such categories, children spontaneously create noun classes distinguished by precise morpho-syntactic properties. The development of morphological definiteness in these children seems to be guided by the subsequent appearance of deixis and number: a target-like usage of the article is reached only when the features *person* and *plural* are in place in the children's productions. Person and plural are the very two categories that are known to correlate with morphological definiteness on kinship nouns in modern Italian dialects, as well as in the 14th century Florentine data. Hence, the origins of dialectal variation and historical change lies in child language.

5. Final remarks

Historically speaking, dialectal systems where kinship nouns have specific morphosyntactic properties are seen to develop spontaneously from a previous situation of rather free variation. If it is really the case, as the data suggest, that children spontaneously create nominal classes with morphosyntactic properties that do not have a correspondence in the input, the emergence of such systems find a natural explanation. An apparently inevitable conclusion is that the semantic categories underlying the morphosyntactic ones are pre-existing, presumably innate. Since a correlation between morphological definiteness and functional features such as *person* and *number* is encountered in many Italian varieties, as well as in the child data, this correlation should have an innate basis too, the nature of which remains to be further explored. We conclude that the study of dialectal variation, historical change, and acquisition may benefit from each other and that further research along these lines is warranted.

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