

# DIFFERENTIAL OBJECT MARKING IN ABRUZZIAN ROMANI, BETWEEN INDO-ARYAN HERITAGE AND ITALO-ROMANCE PATTERNS

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This study examines Differential Object Marking (DOM) in Abruzzian Romani, a Romani variety spoken in Abruzzo and Molise, and shaped by prolonged contact with southern Italo-Romance dialects. Even though DOM is a Proto-Romani feature still preserved in many dialects, Abruzzian Romani displays innovative strategies to mark the DOM. Marked objects are thus realized through two strategies: the preposition *ka* with nouns, and locative case marking with personal pronouns. The analysis reveals a pattern replication of Italo-Romance DOM, extended to common nouns and pronominal forms, with significant variation between the two analysed subcorpora. The findings suggest an ongoing grammaticalization process, with DOM marking spreading to new categories, including interrogatives, indefinites and demonstratives.

*Keywords:* Romani, Italo-Romance, Differential Object Marking, Language Contact

## 1. Introduction

The following paragraphs focus on the DOM strategies attested in Abruzzian Romani<sup>1</sup>, which is a diaspora New Indo-Aryan variety belonging to the Romani group.

Spoken for several centuries in Southern Italy, Abruzzian Romani is the most widely spoken dialect within the broader group of Southern Italian Romani varieties, which also includes closely related dialects such as Calabrian Romani. Southern Italian Romani is notoriously difficult to classify from a dialectological perspective: it shares certain structural innovations typical of South Balkan Romani varieties, and, at the same time, it retains some archaic traits, such as the absence of the German lexical stratum that characterizes the Sinti varieties spoken in Northern and Central Italy (for discussion, see Scala 2023, 79–82). Besides, it clearly shows features resulting from interference with co-territorial Italo-Romance varieties (Soravia 1977, 89–90; Scala 2015; Scala 2018; Scala in press).

This complex linguistic picture has led scholars to hypothesize that the first speakers of this variety arrived on the central Adriatic coast following a migratory route independent

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from that of the Romani speakers who settled in Northern Italy. Their arrival is generally dated between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, likely in connection with the Ottoman invasion of the Balkans. Such an early dating is consistent with the first attestation of a variety that can be reliably identified as Abruzzian Romani, namely the Romani insertions in *Signorina zingaretta*, a work by Florido de Silvestri printed in Viterbo in 1646 (Piasere 1994). As it will be shown, this dialect displays some differential object marking strategies which are innovative in comparison with the ones attested in the Romani group.

From a typological perspective, differential object marking (DOM) refers to the typologically frequent phenomenon (Sinnemäki 2014) whereby certain direct objects receive a special marking in comparison with the other objects of the same system. The broad theoretical discussion on this phenomenon (Bossong 1985; Comrie 1989; Croft 1988 among others) seems to point to the fact that such strategies arise to mark non-prototypical or particularly salient objects that need to be differentiated to avoid ambiguity. Crosslinguistically, DOM seems activated by syntactic-semantic properties such as definiteness, specificity, and animacy (Bossong 1985; Comrie 1989, 128; Aissen 2003), which are usually associated with subjects. Further studies have led Næss (2004) to link DOM to a high degree of affectedness of the object by the verbal event, while Dalrymple and Nikolaeva (2011) and Iemmolo (2010) also individuate topicality, the topic role played by an object, as a main factor activating the DOM.

As we will see in detail in the following paragraphs, Romani has special case marking for DOM, which involves the animate nouns only. Abruzzian Romani, which lacks nominal inflection now, seems to have reinstated DOM through contact with Southern Italo-Romance varieties, where DOM is particularly frequent (Ledgeway 2023a; 2023b), in a process involving strategies and syntactic classes not originally included in Romani DOM. In what follows, Section 2 presents the morphological profile of Romani with particular attention to nominal and pronominal case marking; Section 3 presents and discusses in detail the distribution of Abruzzian Romani DOM, tracing the possible origins of the attested patterns; concluding remarks are offered in Section 4.

## 2. Differential object marking in Romani

Romani displays nominative-accusative alignment and morphological expression of case. Like other New Indo-Aryan languages, nominal inflection in Romani has a layered structure (Matras 1997; Masica 1991) and it features 7 case values<sup>2</sup>. This system opposes a nominative stem to an oblique stem. Except for consonant-final noun classes – where the nominative singular is realized by the lexical morpheme alone – nominative and oblique stems exhibit an inflectional suffix usually referred to as the Layer I morpheme. Layer I morpheme encodes gender (masculine or feminine), number (singular or plural), and case (nominative or oblique). Subjects and objects are encoded by the simple nominative and

<sup>2</sup> The case values are instead 8 if we also consider the vocative, which is formally different from the other cases and thus seldom treated apart in morphological descriptions.

oblique bases, respectively. The oblique form, descending from the Middle Indo-Aryan genitive, is used for the animate direct and indirect object. Literature refers to it either as “accusative” or as “independent oblique” (Matras 2002, 85–87). This accusative form takes an additional agglutinative suffix, referred to as the Layer II morpheme, to specify one of the other 5 case values. Layer II morphemes encode case only and they can carry dative, locative, comitative/instrumental, ablative, and genitive meaning. Genitives display a further final ending, marking agreement in gender, number, and case with their nominal heads.

Table 1 and 2 represent respectively the paradigm of the classes of masculine nouns in consonant and feminine nouns in *-i* in the variety of Ajia Varvara (Igla 1996, 26–29):

Table 1 - *Inflection of masculine nouns in consonant in the Romani dialect of Ajia Varvara*

	<i>rom</i> ‘man’ (m.)		<i>gav</i> ‘house’ (m.)	
NOM	<i>rom</i>	<i>romá</i>	<i>gav</i>	<i>gavá</i>
ACC	<b><i>romés</i></b>	<b><i>romén</i></b>	<b><i>gav</i></b>	<b><i>gavá</i></b>
DAT	<i>romés-ke</i>	<i>romén-ge</i>	<i>gavés-ke</i>	<i>gavén-ge</i>
LOC	<i>romés-te</i>	<i>romén-de</i>	<i>gavés-te</i>	<i>gavén-de</i>
ABL	<i>romés-tar</i>	<i>romén-dar</i>	<i>gavés-tar</i>	<i>gavén-dar</i>
COM	<i>romés-sa</i>	<i>romén-sa</i>	<i>gavés-sa</i>	<i>gavén-sa</i>
GEN	<i>romés-k-o</i>	<i>romén-g-o</i>	<i>gavés-k-o</i>	<i>gavén-g-o</i>

Table 2 - *Inflection of feminine nouns in -in in the Romani dialect of Ajia Varvara*

	<i>romní</i> ‘woman’ (f.)		<i>čhurí</i> ‘knife’ (f.)	
NOM	<i>romní</i>	<i>romná</i>	<i>čhurí</i>	<i>čhurá</i>
ACC	<b><i>romná</i></b>	<b><i>romnén</i></b>	<b><i>čhurí</i></b>	<b><i>čhurá</i></b>
DAT	<i>romná-ke</i>	<i>romnén-ge</i>	<i>čhurá-ke</i>	<i>čhurén-ge</i>
LOC	<i>romná-te</i>	<i>romnén-de</i>	<i>čhurá-te</i>	<i>čhurén-de</i>
ABL	<i>romná-tar</i>	<i>romnén-dar</i>	<i>čhurá-tar</i>	<i>čhurén-dar</i>
COM	<i>romná-sa</i>	<i>romnén-sa</i>	<i>čhurá-sa</i>	<i>čhurén-sa</i>
GEN	<i>romná-k-o</i>	<i>romnén-g-o</i>	<i>čhurá-k-o</i>	<i>čhurén-g-o</i>

As the tables show, for some nouns there is no specific encoding for the accusative, which is expressed by the nominative form (e.g. nom. / acc. *gav*, *čhurí*), while other words display such difference. The difference in paradigm is linked to the animacy status of the nouns involved: animate nouns exhibit a dedicated oblique form to mark the object, while inanimate nominal objects are encoded by the nominative. Such behaviour is illustrated by the following examples in Russian Roma dialect (Database of Romani Dialects, RUS-003<sup>3</sup>, Pskov):

<sup>3</sup> The data from the Database of Romani Dialect will be accompanied by the alpha-numeric sequence which is assigned to the specific dialect in the Database.

- (1) a. *o kxér býstro melaljól* (phrase n. 926)  
 the house.NOM/ACC rapidly get\_dirty:3SG  
 [The house gets rapidly dirty.]
- b. *me dykxjóm o kxér dro vész* (n. 567)  
 I see:PFV:1SG the house.NOM/ACC in:the forest  
 [I saw the house in the forest.]
- c. *me ni magú te krasináv o kxér*  
 1SG.NOM NEG can COMP paint:1SG the house.NOM/ACC,  
*o gadžó krasinél les pal mánde* (n. 929)  
 the man.NOM paint:3SG 3:SG.M.ACC for 1SG:LOC  
 [I can't paint the house, the man paints it for me.]
- (2) a. *odová manúš džindjá syr te ukerés o instrumjénto* (n.837)  
 that man.NOM know:PFV:3SG how COMP repair:2SG the instrument.NOM/ACC  
 [That man knew how to repair the instrument.]
- b. *me dykxjóm manušés kaj gejá pir e úlica* (n. 461)  
 1.SG.NOM see:PFV:1SG man:ACC that go:PFV:3SG on the street  
 [I saw a man that was going down the street.]

In the example, the form *kxér* [house] is the subject of (1a), but the direct object of (1b, 1c). In the three occurrences, the word *kxér* is in its nominative form. The animate noun *manúš*, instead, is in the nominative in (2a), whereas when it has the role of object it is encoded by the accusative (2b).

According to Elšík (2000, 12), it is not necessary, for the classes described above, to posit two distinct nominal classes for consonant-final masculine nouns. Rather, it is sufficient to treat nouns with animate and inanimate referents as belonging to the same class, which is subject to restrictions determined by the semantic feature of animacy.

With respect to inflection, personal pronouns exhibit a very similar behaviour to nouns: they take the same agglutinative case affixes (Layer II), and some also display the split between a nominative base, used for the subject, and an oblique base, used independently for the object, and further marked with Layer II for the remaining cases. The following table exemplifies the inflection of third third-person singular pronoun in Ajia Varvara Romani (Iglá 1996, 37–38):

Table 3 - *Third-person pronouns in the Romani dialect of Ajia Varvara*

	M	F	PL
NOM	<i>vov</i>	<i>voj</i>	<i>von</i>
ACC	<i>les</i>	<i>la</i>	<i>len</i>
DAT	<i>lés-ke</i>	<i>lá-ke</i>	<i>lén-ge</i>
LOC	<i>lés-te</i>	<i>lá-te</i>	<i>lén-de</i>
ABL	<i>lés-tar</i>	<i>lá-tar</i>	<i>lén-dar</i>
COM	<i>lés-sa</i>	<i>lá-sa</i>	<i>lén-sa</i>
GEN	<i>lés-k-o</i>	<i>lá-k-o</i>	<i>lén-g-o</i>

Unlike nouns, however, pronominal paradigms are unaffected by animacy. In the second person and in the first-person plural, where inanimate referents obviously never occur, nominative and accusative forms typically coincide (e.g., French Piedmont Sinti *tumin dikjén les* [you saw him] vs. *me dikjóm tumin* [I saw you]). In the first-person singular (and, in some particularly conservative dialects, also in the second-person singular), the paradigm has separate forms for nominative and accusative. Significantly, also the third-person pronouns, which represent the only context where animacy-constrained DOM could potentially occur, display a split between nominative and accusative forms, and the objects are always encoded by the accusative form, regardless of the animacy status of the referent. An example of this behaviour can be seen in (1c), where the noun *kxer* is resumed by a third-person pronominal form in the accusative case, and despite the referent being animate, the oblique pronoun *les* is used. The following example, however, shows that the same pronoun is also used for animate referents:

- (3) *jov man na dykxjá, me les na dykxjóm*  
 (RUS-003, n. 349)  
 3SG.M.NOM 1SG.ACC NEG see:PFV:3SG 1SG.NOM 3: SG.M.ACC NEG see:PFV:1SG  
 [He didn't see me, I didn't see him.]

In the example presented here, we also observe that both the first- and third-person pronouns display distinct forms for subject and object functions.

### 3. DOM in Abruzzian Romani

The analysis proposed in this study relies on data drawn from the Database of Romani Dialects (DRD), specifically from recordings of the questionnaires relating to varieties IT-007 and IT-010, both representing Abruzzian Romani and collected in Campobasso. All the direct objects of the samples were extracted and coded, following in part the protocol proposed by Kozhanov and Seržant (2025), according to several criteria: the marking strategy employed, the syntactic class of the object, animacy and definiteness features, semantic domain, governing verb, and verb valency. Additional references for the analysis include the description and linguistic material offered by Ascoli (1865) and Soravia (1977).

#### 3.1 Nominal inflection of Abruzzian Romani

The nominal case system is now lost in almost all old-settlement Romani varieties of Italy, yet pronominal inflection is still preserved almost universally. Regarding nominal inflection, these varieties generalise the nominative form. The encoding of syntactic functions relies primarily on constituent order and prepositions, as illustrated in the following example, which includes a sentence in Arli (a Balkan variety spoken in North Macedonia) and two sentences conveying the same content in Abruzzian Romani and Lombard Sinti. The example reproduces sentence n. 502 from the Database of Romani Dialects [I know the mother of those four girls]:

- (4) a. Arli, MK-005 (Kumanovo, North Macedonia)  
*me dʒan-áva e daj-á*  
 1SG.NOM know:1SG the.OBL mother-SG.F.ACC  
*odól-e štár-e čhaj-én-ger-e*  
 that:PL-OBL four-OBL.PL girl-OBL.PL-GEN-OBL.PL
- b. Abruzzian Romani, IT-007 (Campobasso, Italy)  
*me pindžikará k-i ddá də klá štárə ččavuré*  
 1SG.NOM know:1SG to-ART.F.SG mother of those four boy:PL
- c. Lombard Sinti, IT-011 (Piacenza, Italy)  
*me pindžaráva i daj da dóla star čjá*  
 1SG.NOM know:1SG ART.F.SG mother of those four girl.PL

Disregarding the use of the word for [boys] instead of [girls] in IT-007 (4b), it is possible to observe that Abruzzian Romani and Lombard Sinti employ analogous nominal inflection strategies, characterized by the absence of case marking and the use of prepositions. Furthermore, in Abruzzian Romani, the object ‘mother’ is introduced by *ki* ‘to:ART.F.SG’, an element formed by the preposition *kə* (cf. Romani *ke/ka/kaj* [to], see Matras 2002, 91) and the singular feminine definite article *i*. This results in a construction that could be literally translated as [I know to the mother of those boys].

Object marking through this prepositional construction is entirely absent in other Romani varieties and appears to be an innovative feature of Abruzzian Romani. Furthermore, in Abruzzian Romani, when the object is a personal pronoun, it is sometimes expressed by a clitic object pronoun, which is then doubled by a tonic pronoun in the locative case. This behaviour can be observed in the following example, which corresponds to sentence n. 353e [he didn’t see us] from the DRD, translated respectively into Abruzzian Romani, Lombard Sinti, Arli, and Russian Roma:

- (5) a. Romani d’Abruzzo (IT-007):  
*jóvə na dikkjé=nčə amméntə*  
 3SG.M.NOM NEG see:PFV:3SG=1PL.ACC 1PL:LOC
- b. Lombard Sinti (IT-011)  
*jo na míga dikjás mi*  
 3SG.M.NOM NEG NEG see:PFV:3SG 1PL.ACC
- c. Arli (MK-005)  
*ov na dikhljá amén*  
 3SG.M.NOM NEG see:PFV:3SG 1PL.NOM/ACC
- d. Russian Roma (RU-003)  
*jov amén na dykxjá*  
 3SG.M.NOM 1PL.NOM/ACC NEG see:PFV:3SG  
 [He didn’t see us.]

While in Abruzzian Romani the object is doubled by a pronoun in the locative case, no such doubling occurs in the other varieties, where a single pronoun in the accusative form is

employed. To the best of our knowledge, the object-marking strategy adopted in Abruzzese Romani constitutes an innovation specific to this dialect.

The DOM configuration observed in this variety, as exemplified in the data presented so far, does not appear to be explainable as an internal development. Rather, it emerges in a dialect that is in close contact with Southern Italo-Romance varieties, which characteristically exhibit differential object marking. In particular, the use of prepositional object constructions with *kə* [to] seems to represent a case of pattern replication of the DOM found in co-territorial Italo-Romance varieties, where the object is introduced by the preposition *a* [to] (< AD), the same preposition employed in dative and locative constructions. As we shall see, the use of locative-case object doubling may likewise be traced back to contact-induced phenomena.

### 3.2 DOM in Southern Italo-Romance varieties

Before examining in detail the distribution of DOM in Abruzzian Romani, it is necessary to provide a brief outline of the differential marking of the object, which is typically present in all Southern Italo-Romance varieties (Rohlf's 1969, 7–9; Loporcaro 2009, 131; Ledgeway 2016, 268), but also occurs in central varieties (Rohlf's 1969, 8; Loporcaro, Paciaroni 2016, 237, 244)<sup>4</sup>. The conditions under which DOM applies in southern Italo-Romance varieties show a very high degree of variation, which depends on syntactic and semantic factors (Manzini, Savoia 2005, II, § 4.9; Ledgeway 2023a; 2023b). Ledgeway (2023a; 2024b) offers a comprehensive description of DOM systems in these varieties, identifying four main types of distribution of the marking, which are also considered consecutive diachronic stages in Italo-Romance varieties. For reasons of space, a simplified overview of Ledgeway's grouping proposal is provided here:

- (6) a. Personal split:  
1/2 pronouns > 3 pronouns [+human]
- b. Pronominal split:  
1/2/3 pronouns [+human] > Wh-pronouns > Q-pronouns (+ specific > - specific)
- c. Head-Phrasal split:  
[+animate] D-Head > [-animate] D-Head
- d. Animacy/specificity split:  
[+human] nominal > [-human, +animate] nominal (definite > indefinite) > [+animate] > + specific > -specific

In reference to the first type, in dialects with personal split, DOM is applied only to first and second-person pronominal objects. This marking can also be extended to all third-person pronouns that feature the [+human] feature (including deictics). In agreement with Iemmolo (2010), DOM in pronouns originates from the movement of pronominal elements to the higher left periphery of the sentence through topicalization, as suggested by the fact

<sup>4</sup> Under more limited conditions, DOM occurs also in Northern Italo-Romance varieties and in Northern Standard Italian (Rohlf's 1969, 8; Benincà 1988; Berretta 1989; Iemmolo 2010).

that this position is the only one allowed in varieties with very limited DOM, restricted to pronominal forms (cf. Italian: *a me questa cosa non convince* [DOM me this thing doesn't convince = this thing doesn't convince me]). Proceeding to type (6b), DOM is then extended to the entire class of personal pronouns and Wh-pronouns ('who') and human Q-pronouns ('all', 'someone', 'no one'), with DOM initially affecting only those elements marked with the [+specific] feature. Once extended to all [+human] pronouns, DOM involves all elements that can function as head of the determiner phrase (DP), namely the previously mentioned pronominal elements, proper names, and kinship terms (type 6c). Initially, DOM marks only animate elements in the higher left periphery, then all animate elements in any position, followed by inanimate elements that lend themselves to anthropomorphization (e.g. place names). Finally, in addition to the aforementioned classes, in the varieties with (6d) distribution DOM is progressively extended to all nouns following a hierarchy such as human > human and [+definite] non-human animate > animate (irrespective of definiteness) > [+specific] animate and inanimate.

Turning to the coterritorial varieties of Abruzzian Romani, the available material for Molisean is very limited. Manzini and Savoia (2005, II, 506) present data from the Roccasicura (Isernia) dialect, where a distribution like the one in (6d) is observed. Specifically, the dialect exhibits an animacy split and optionally marks all [+human] objects (7a–c) and all definite animate objects (7d), excluding DOM for indefinite animate objects (7e):

- (7) a. *ɛjə ca'matə (a) (k)'kirə/nə vaʎʎu:nə*  
 I call.PTCP DOM that a boy  
 [I called that/a boy.]
- b. *(a) 'ki si ca'ma:tə?*  
 DOM who be.2SG called  
 [Who did you call?]
- c. *'ɛj 'viʃt (a) 'moʎʎə-mə*  
 have.2SG see.PTCP DOM wife-my  
 [Have you seen my wife?]
- d. *ɛjə ca'matə (a) (r)ə 'kəʋnə.*  
 have.1SG call.PTCP DOM the dog  
 [I called the dog.]
- e. *ɛjə 'viʃtə nə 'kəʋnə.*  
 have.1SG see.PTCP a dog  
 [I saw a dog.]

The example set does not include usage with pronouns. The same source shows another set of data related to the Miranda (Isernia) dialect, which, despite the limited sample, seems to also belong to the (6d) type. However, we are unable to determine the conditions for DOM with pronouns and non-human, animate indefinite elements (Manzini, Savoia 2005, II, 505):

- (8) 'sɔngə ca'ma:tə (a) 'patrə-tə / a ru wəl'kɔnə / a nu wəl'kɔnə  
 be.1SG call.PTCP DOM father-your / DOM the child / DOM a child  
 [I called your father/the child/a child.]

Abruzzese presents somewhat more data. Specifically, the description by Finamore (1893, 19, 28), based on the variety of Lanciano (Chieti), reports a situation that can be classified as (6a) type, with DOM also occurring on [+human] proximal demonstratives (9c), but not on distal ones (9d):

- (9) a. *Vù a mmé?*  
 want.2SG DOM me  
 [Do you want me?]  
 b. *Sind' a mmé!*  
 Listen.IMP.2SG DOM me  
 [Listen to me!]  
 c. *Vid' a ccuštù!*  
 See.IMP.2SG DOM this[+hu]  
 [Look at this!]  
 d. *Chiamè cullù*  
 call that[+hu]  
 [Call that one!]  
 e. *Sì vište Lujise?*  
 be.2SG see.PTCP Luisa  
 [Have you seen Luisa?]

Other varieties of the eastern Abruzzese area (Pellegrini 1977), such as the varieties of Canosa Sannita and Torricella Peligna (Manzini, Savoia 2005, II, 505, 515), exhibit DOM restricted to personal pronouns and demonstratives (10). Meanwhile, varieties of eastern Abruzzese (Pellegrini 1977), such as that of Arielli (D'Alessandro 2017, later in Ledgeway et al. 2019), Colledimacine (Manzini, Savoia 2005, II, 505, 515), and varieties from the Aquila area, such as that of Cagnano Amiterno (Manzini, Savoia 2005, II, 505, 515), show a distribution restricted to first and second person (11):

- (10) Canosa Sannita (Chieti, see Manzini, Savoia 2005, II, 505):  
 a. 'ji 'camə a t'te / a v'vo / (a) kku'lu  
 I call.1SG DOM you.SG / DOM you.PL / DOM that.one  
 [I call you (sg./pl.)/that one.]  
 b. 'ji 'camə 'fratə-tə  
 I call.1SG brother-your  
 [I call your brother.]  
 c. 'kwillə 'camə killi 'femmanə  
 that.one call.3SG those women  
 [That one calls those women.]

- (11) Arielli (Chieti, see D'Alessandro 2017, 8; Ledgeway 2023a, 186)
- a. *Seme viste a te/ a mu/ (\*a) jisse/ (\*a) quille/ (\*a) Marije.*  
 be.1PL see.PTCP DOM you.SG/ DOM us / DOM him / DOM that.one / DOM Maria  
 [We have seen you/us/him/that one/Mary.]
- b. *Isse/ Quille/ Marije le/li seme viste*  
 him / that.one / Maria him/her= be.1PL see.PTCP  
 [We saw him/that one/Mary.]
- Colledimacine (Chieti, see Manzini, Savoia 2005, II, 505)
- c. *a ca'matə a m'me/ a n'nu*  
 have.3SG call.PTCP DOM me / DOM us  
 [He called me / us.]
- d. *a ca'matə 'kwikkə/ 'frattə tuə*  
 have.3SG call.PTCP that.one / brother,your your  
 [He called that one / your brother.]
- e. *ki ji ca'matə*  
 who be.2SG call.PTCP  
 [Who did you call?]

### 3.3 The distribution of DOM in Abruzzian Romani

The following paragraph will discuss the distribution of DOM in Abruzzian Romani. As previously mentioned, marked objects are signalled by the preposition *kə* [to] or, if pronouns, by the locative case. The following table presents the general numbers of the phenomenon in the two DRD corpora (IT-007 and IT-010), recorded by two speakers in Campobasso (Molise). All cases of DOM involve objects of transitive verbs, with a structure that features an agent-like subject and a patient-like object, while ditransitive verbs (Malchukov et al. 2010) and, in general, trivalent verbs are not affected by the phenomenon. The two central columns display the percentage values for the marked objects observed in each class relative to the total number of marked objects, and the percentage of marked objects in each individual class relative to the total number of objects in that class:

Table 4 - *DOM in Abruzzian romani: an overview of the numbers of the phenomenon*

<i>POS and semantic features</i>	<i>Marked objects</i>	<i>Percentage of the total of marked DOM</i>	<i>Percentage of the total tokens of the same syntactic-semantic type</i>	<i>Total of tokens of the same syntactic-semantic type</i>
<b>Nouns</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>373</b>
Nouns [+animate]	24	57.1	27.9	86
Nouns [-animate]	2	4.8	0.7	287
Nouns [+definite]	25	59.6	9.3	269
Nouns [-definite]	1	2.4	0.1	104
Nouns [+animate][+definite]	23	54.8	39	59

<i>POS and semantic features</i>	<i>Marked objects</i>	<i>Percentage of the total of marked DOM</i>	<i>Percentage of the total tokens of the same syntactic-semantic type</i>	<i>Total of tokens of the same syntactic-semantic type</i>
Nouns [+animate][-definite]	1	2.4	3.7	27
Nouns [-animate][+definite]	2	4.3	0.9	210
<b>Pronouns</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>28.2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>172</b>
Pronouns [+an]	12	28.2	10.4	115
<b>Demonstratives</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>8</b>
Demonstratives [+an]	1	2.4	25	4
<b>Indefinites</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>11.7</b>	<b>17</b>
Indefinites [+an]	2	4.8	25	8
<b>Interrogatives</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>14.3</b>	<b>7</b>
Interrogatives [+an]	1	2.4	100	1
<b>[+an]</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>95.2</b>	<b>18.6</b>	<b>214</b>
Total of objects in the corpus: 578				
Total of marked objects: 42 (7.3%)				

Approximately 7.3% of the elements functioning as the object of a transitive bivalent verb receive a specific marking. In general terms, the percentage of marked nominal and pronominal objects relative to the total of each object class is similar (7%). When considering the individual items in each row of the table, and particularly the percentage of cases relative to the total number of objects of the same type (third column), we observe that none of these items reaches 100% of occurrences. This indicates that the phenomenon of DOM in Abruzzian Romani is optional and, from a first glance at the numbers, it suggests that we are dealing with an ongoing change.

The numbers provide further insight when analyzing the individual parts of speech and some of their semantic features. In fact, approximately 60% of the occurrences consist of nouns (a percentage very similar to the overall occurrence of nominal objects in the sample). Among these, the number of animate nouns receiving differential marking appears to be particularly significant. Almost all nouns receiving DOM are animate, with approximately 30% of the animate nominal objects in the corpus exhibiting DOM. The feature of definiteness also seems to have some relevance, as many of the animate nouns that receive marking are also definite. However, when examining the row indicating inanimate, definite nouns with DOM (thus, the nouns marked solely for definiteness), it emerges that the two cases identified represent only 0.9% of the total inanimate definite objects recorded in the corpus. Inanimate, indefinite nouns also appear to be underrepresented in the corpus, with only one case out of 27 occurrences. The next paragraph will compare the distribution of DOM in the two corpora, which shows some variation.

## 3.3.1 IT-010 and IT-007: a comparison

The distribution of DOM differs in the two corpora. In general, the phenomenon of DOM seems to involve IT-007 to a greater extent. Both corpora, as previously mentioned, mark animate and definite nominal objects, as seen in the following examples:

- (12) a. IT-007, IT-010, n. 368 [+human, +definite]  
*čummedé kə tri ppénə*  
 kiss:IMP.2SG DOM your:F.SG sister  
 [Kiss your sister!]
- b. IT-007, n. 915 [+human, +definite]  
*u džukwélə merója [...] ammuččikenélə kə li kaddžá pašé mméndə*  
 the dog my bite:3SG DOM the guys near 1PL:LOC  
 [My dog bites the gadžé [coming] near us.]<sup>5</sup>
- c. IT-010, n. 916 [+human, +definite]  
*sa li ddávěssə svejina ku mur čavó a li sétta*  
 all ART.PL day wake:1SG DOM my son at ART.PL seven  
 [Every morning I wake up my child at seven o'clock.]
- d. IT-007, IT-010, n. 776 [-human, +animate, +definite]  
*u ddátə ammarjá ku ggráštə*  
 the father kill:PFV:3SG DOM horse  
 [The father killed the horse.]

In the previous example, kinship terms appear along with human and animate, non-human nouns. Among these three semantic types, in both varieties, kinship terms more frequently receive DOM (IT-007: approximately 87.5% of kinship terms, IT-010: 50%). In IT-007, the other semantic types are also well represented (DOM applies approximately to 60% of nouns referring to definite human referents and to 44% of definite non-human nouns), while in IT-010 they show a lower incidence (applying to 33% of definite human nouns, and 12% of definite non-human animate nouns)<sup>6</sup>.

As shown in the following examples, inanimate and/or indefinite objects do not receive DOM:

- (13) a. IT-010 n. 570 [+human, -definite]  
*adikkjómə ni kaddžó ta čénə pašé ke ni negóccja*  
 see:PFV:1SG a gadžo that stay:3SG near to a store  
 [I saw a gadžo standing near a store.]
- b. IT-010, n. 610 [-animate, +definite]  
*adikkjómə u kkerə kuá ke appinnjánə ammángo*  
 see:PFV:1SG the house this that tell:PFV:2SG 1SG:DAT

<sup>5</sup> The term *kaddžó* (M.SG), *kaddži* (F.SG; more frequently *gadžó*, *gadži*) is a very common word among Romani dialects. It refers to a human being which is not part of the Roma or Sinti community.

<sup>6</sup> Disregarding the parameter of definiteness, which, as already mentioned, co-occurs in almost all nominal objects in the corpora, the percentages decrease to 39% of nouns referring to human referents and 33% of animate non-human nouns in IT-007, and to 20% of human nouns in IT-011. The [-human] animate nouns are less numerous in the latter corpus, and they are all definite.

- [I saw the house you told me about.]  
 c. IT-010, n. 568 [-animate, -definite, +specific]  
*adikkjómə ni kkérə ddžungaló andr i ddísə*  
 see:PFV:1SG a house strange in the village  
 [I saw a strange house in the village.]  
 d. IT-007, n. 380 [+animate, -definite]  
*jóvə dikkjá ni ppururó*  
 3.SG.NOM see:PFV:3SG a old\_man  
 [He saw an old man.]  
 e. IT-007, n. 370 [-animate, +definite]  
*pánd u vuddárə*  
 close.IMP.2SG the door  
 [Close the door!]

However, while this trend has no exceptions in IT-010, IT-007 presents three occurrences of DOM with nouns that exhibit only one of the two co-occurring semantic features that would trigger it (n. 625, 884, 991, two of which involve the word *čibbə* [tongue] or [language], that appears only three times in the corpus):

- (14) a. *ni mmúrsə ččummeddjá ki nirumrí angjalə ki li vústə* [+animate, -definite]  
 a man kiss:PFV:3SG DOM a woman on to the lips  
 [A man kissed a woman on the lips.]  
 b. *lórə ningajé kə kulá ta*  
 they drive\_away:PFV:3SG DOM those that  
*na xxavénə ki ččibbə* [-animate, +definite]  
 NEG understand:3SG DOM tongue  
 [They drive away those that do not understand the language.]

(14b) also shows a demonstrative with a human referent marked by DOM. The instances of unexpected DOM occurrences can be explained in two ways: either the model followed by the speaker of IT-007 already extends DOM to all objects, a possibility not foreseen in Ledgeway's (2023a; 2023b) analysis of nouns with inanimate referents, or the speaker is extending the object-marking rule to elements not accounted for by the model, creating an innovation that would need to be further investigated.

Another shared feature between the two varieties is DOM with [+animate] personal pronouns, which are doubled by the clitic followed by the locative. However, while IT-010 only shows this phenomenon in two cases (accounting for approximately 5% of animate pronominal objects of the IT-010 corpus), IT-007 exhibits it in the remaining 10 (16% of the IT-007 animate pronominal objects):

- (15) a. IT-010, n. 353e  
*jo na dikkjá=nčə amménda*  
 3SG.NOM NEG see:PFV:3SG=1PL.ACC 1PL.LOC  
 [He didn't see us.]
- b. IT-010, n. 349  
*me dikkjómmə=lə jo na dikkjá=mmə*  
 I see:PFV:1SG=3.ACC<sup>7</sup> 3SG.M.NOM NEG see:PFV:3SG=1SG.ACC  
 [I saw him, he didn't see me.]
- c. IT-007, n. 607  
*na dikkjémmə=lə alléštə*  
 NEG see:PFV:1PL=3.ACC 3:SG.M:LOC  
 [We didn't see him.]
- d. *jóə čummidinnjá=llə partuprələ ke li vúštə*  
 3SG.F.NOM kiss:PFV:3SG=3.ACC on to the lips  
 [She kissed him on the lips.]

The details of this phenomenon, which is rather peculiar to Romani, will be addressed later.

Returning to the comparison between the two corpora, a very significant feature is that only IT-007 extends prepositional DOM to demonstratives, indefinite pronouns, and interrogatives. In all the instances, the referent designated by these pronouns is human. With demonstratives, DOM is present in one case out of two (already shown in 14b). With indefinites, the corpus shows DOM in two out of four cases (one example in 16a), while with interrogatives, the only element with a human referent in the corpus is marked with DOM (16b):

- (16) a. n. 582  
*jóə ppinnjá mməngə ta*  
 3SG.F.NOM tell:PFV:3SG 1SG:DAT that  
*na pindžikarəsənə kə nniktə dandrə kja ddisə*  
 NEG know:3SG:PST DOM nobody in this village  
 [She told me that she didn't know anyone in this village.]
- b. n. 521  
*me na ddžaná=llə ku k'ónə avivinélə andrə kwa kkérə*  
 1SG.NOM NEG know:1SG=3.ACC DOM who live:3SG in this house  
 [I don't know who lives in this house.]

In this last example, moreover, the object is doubled by the clitic and subsequently resumed with DOM, which in turn becomes the subject of the following sentence, employing a doubling strategy similar to that observed with objects consisting of personal pronouns.

The detailed examination of these two corpora allows us to make a few observations. As mentioned in the previous sections, these object-marking strategies are foreign to other varieties of Romani and most likely originate from centuries of contact with the southern Italo-Romance varieties of the same territory, a model that is known to have profoundly influenced the lexicon and the phonology of Abruzzian Romani (Scala 2015; Scala 2018;

<sup>7</sup> In this dialect, the accusative form has lost number and gender marking for the third person.

Scala 2023). We do not have information about the history of the speakers or the varieties they have been in contact with, and, as stated earlier, there is a lack of detailed studies on the phenomenon of DOM microvariation in the Abruzzese and Molisan areas. However, the distribution of DOM in Abruzzian Romani appears to stem from a model in which nominal objects can be marked when they are animate and definite. The most plausible model for what is observed in Abruzzian Romani seems to be the type in (6d) highlighted by Ledgeway (2023a; 2023b), which shows a split based on animacy and/or specificity, rather than a restricted extension to certain syntactic classes. Furthermore, the distribution observed in IT-010 and IT-007 suggests, in an opposite direction to Ledgeway's proposal for the diachrony of DOM in Italo-Romance varieties, that there is no basis to posit an origin of Abruzzian Romani DOM in topicalization strategies. Instead, the comparison between IT-010 and IT-007 seems to point to an origin of DOM in nominal objects (kinship terms and common nouns), i.e., elements of the comment that need to be differentiated because, in addition to having a high degree of referentiality or individuation, they hold a certain semantic prominence as animate/human compared to other more prototypical patient-like elements functioning as objects.

In IT-007, the phenomenon extends to replicate DOM even for other inherently human elements, such as first- and second-person pronouns, the indefinite *nikkatə* [nobody], and the interrogative *kʷónə* [who]<sup>8</sup>. DOM applies also to other elements which are not inherently human, such as third-person pronouns and demonstratives, marking only those elements which point to a human referent. Through strategies unknown to other Romani dialects, DOM in IT-007 thus precisely encompasses the syntactic classes illustrated by Ledgeway for the southern Italo-Romance varieties.

If the difference between the two corpora may be interpreted diachronically, as proposed here, one might ask why the nominal class serves as the entry point for the introduction of new DOM strategies in Abruzzian Romani. If DOM applies to 'non-prototypical' patients in order to avoid ambiguity, nouns may be most in need of such disambiguation, because they constitute an open class in which features related to the distinction between a patient- or agent-like participant, such as animacy and individuation, depend on semantic properties of the individual lexeme or on other elements in the syntactic surroundings, rather than being inherent to the class itself as happens in first- and second-person pronouns (where animacy and definiteness are implied) or in third-person pronouns and demonstratives (inherently definite). Another factor that may have favored nouns as the primary locus of DOM replication may be attributed to the frequency of DOM in the model language. Nominal and, especially, pronominal objects are obviously very frequent in discourse; nonetheless, in southern Italo-Romance varieties with the (6d) DOM pattern, every nominal object presenting the activating semantic features may (or must) exhibit DOM. With pronominal objects, however, DOM occurs only in marked constructions where the pronoun is expressed in its tonic form, while elsewhere objects are typically expressed by

<sup>8</sup> Triggerred by the presence of the back vowel in *ku*, the interrogative pronoun in the example exhibits the propagation of /u/ (*konə* > *kʷónə*), as a result of the borrowing of a phonological rule from Abruzzese (Scala 2015; Scala 2018, 167–168).

the clitic form of the pronoun (e.g. Colledimacine *jə 'vetə* vs. *jə 'vetə a n'nu* [he see us], cf. Manzini, Savoia 2005, II, 158). Therefore, it is plausible that Romani speakers in contact with Molisean were more frequently exposed to nominal DOM, than to pronominal DOM, and thus they initially replicated a structure for DOM from the context in which they encountered it most often.

### 3.3.2 The use of locative case with DOM and the replica of the deep case

As already mentioned, object marking through the preposition *kə* ([to]) in Abruzzian Romani constitutes what seems to be a pattern replication of the strategies in the southern Italo-Romance varieties of the same territory, where the marked object is indicated by the preposition *a* (< AD), used in a dative and locative function. Abruzzian Romani personal pronouns select instead a different DOM strategy, involving the doubling of the object via the locative case. These two strategies are part of the same trend of marking the direct object, but it is necessary to determine whether they can be framed within the same contact phenomenon.

As seen in (16b), it is possible in this variety to double object marking using a clitic and a second prepositional construction with *kə*. In (16b), doubling occurs with an interrogative pronoun, but examples of object doubling can also be found with nouns:

- (17) IT-010, n. 353d  
*jəjə na ddikkjə=llə ki llakli*  
 3SG.F.NOM NEG see:PFV:3SG=3.ACC DOM girl  
 [She didn't see the girl.]

The doubling of the direct pronominal object (but also of the indirect object) is not unknown in the southern Italo-Romance varieties of the same territory, as noted by Finamore (1983, 22):

- (18) *me ci= á mésie a mmé e 'n ávetre*  
 me there= have.3SG put.PTCP DOM me and an other  
 [He put me and another person there.]

However, it remains to be explained why the locative case marks the pronominal direct object in Abruzzian Romani. In Romani, in fact, accusative forms can also function as indirect objects, a role that is also expressed by the dative (e.g., *penela man/mange* [he tells me]), while the locative case is generally used to indicate destination or as a prepositional case (Matras 2002, 88–89). One might therefore expect the dative case to be the one used to mark the direct object instead.

In Abruzzian Romani, there seems to be an overlap between the dative and locative cases, and, in the corpus, both are used for the role of the recipient. This is certainly true for nouns, where, similarly to what happens in Romance varieties, both the recipient and destination are encoded by the same preposition *kə*:

- (19) *iméja pučjóm̄m̄a allákk̄a ki rráni bbari kwa imparinél̄a*  
 1SG.NOM ask:PFV:1SG 3:SG.F:DAT to:ART.F.SG lady big that teach:3SG  
*ku ččavuró pinnjóm̄m̄a ta ma vél̄a ku xuslebbé*  
 to:ART.M.SG child ask:PFV:1SG if want come:3SG to:ART.M.SG marriage  
 [I asked her, to the lady that teaches the child (the teacher), I asked if she wants to  
 come to the marriage.]

As shown in the example, the recipient is expressed by the preposition *k̄a* and by the dative in the case of the pronoun *allákk̄a*. Similarly, in the pronominal inflection, we find signs of syncretism between the dative and locative, favouring the latter, in the occurrences from both corpora:

- (20) a. *me ddinnjóm̄m̄=l̄a allénd̄a* (IT-007, n. 854)  
 1SG.NOM give:PFV:1SG=3.ACC 3:PL:LOC  
 [I gave it to them.]  
 b. *addinnjóm̄m̄=l̄a allénd̄a* (IT-010, n. 854)  
 give:PFV:1SG=3.ACC 3:PL:LOC  
 [I gave it to them.]  
 c. *tu ppinnján̄a ammánd̄a kwá ddžijáne* (IT-007, n. 535)  
 2SG.NOM tell:PFV:2SG 1SG:LOC where live:PFV:2SG  
 [You told me where you lived.]

In other texts in Abruzzian Romani, it is also possible to observe occasional overlap, as seen in Morelli and Soravia (1998, 149):

- (21) *astí pinel amand*  
 have tell:3SG 1SG:LOC  
 [He has to tell me.]

Moreover, it seems that the locative case competes with phrases introduced by *k̄a* in other contexts as well. For instance, in the corpus, adverbial prepositions with a locative meaning always require the preposition *k̄a* with nouns and the locative case with pronouns, as in the following example:

- (22) a. *jóv̄a na ma vél̄a palár̄a ammánd̄a* (IT-007, n. 426)  
 3SG.M.NOM NEG want come:3SG behind 1SG:LOC  
 [He doesn't want to come behind me.]  
 b. *jój̄a perés̄an̄a palár̄a k̄a ni róm̄a* (IT-007, n. 647)  
 3SG.F.NOM walk:3SG:REM behind to a man  
 [She walks behind a man.]

These characteristics suggest that, in addition to the destination, the recipient may also be expressed by the locative case and that, for this reason, the encoding of pronominal DOM, through pattern replication, is carried out via the locative. At this point, it seems plausible to hypothesize that in Abruzzian Romani, the replication of the Italo-Romance pattern

does not only involve the use of the preposition *kə*, which corresponds to the Italo-Romance *a* and marks nominal objects. Instead, it seems that Abruzzian Romani has replicated the deep case (Fillmore 1968) of the marked objects in Italo-Romance: in the southern Italo-Romance varieties, the coding reserved for the recipient (the third argument of the prototypical trivalent verb) is also used to express the marked object (the second argument of the prototypical bivalent verb). Thus, in Abruzzian Romani, the coding dedicated to the recipient would also have been extended to the marked object, namely *kə* with nouns and with the other elements that no longer have case inflection, and the locative with pronouns, which still retain it.

#### 4. Conclusions

The analysis of DOM in Abruzzian Romani reveals that this variety exhibits highly innovative structural features compared to the general Romani panorama. DOM in Abruzzian Romani is realized through two main strategies: the use of the preposition *kə* [to] with nouns and other word classes that do not display case inflection, and the use of object doubling via the locative case with personal pronouns. The prepositional DOM in this dialect likely constitutes a pattern replication of southern Italo-Romance DOM, which is marked by the preposition *a* [to]. Abruzzian Romani DOM thus appears to be a further contact-induced innovation prompted by the prolonged contact with southern Italo-Romance varieties, which has also resulted in innovative changes at other linguistic levels. Since DOM is extended to common nouns and not restricted to pronominal elements, it seems that the Italo-Romance model might be one based on the specificity and animacy of the referent, similar to type (6d) described by Ledgeway (2023a; 2023b). The data highlight an optional marking, with a significant frequency in nominal contexts where the object is animate and definite. However, the comparison between the two subcorpora (IT-007 and IT-010) suggests varying degrees of extension of the phenomenon: while IT-010 shows DOM only with nouns and occasionally with pronouns, IT-007 displays greater productivity and a tendency to extend DOM both to categories not foreseen in the replicated model, such as nominal elements lacking one of the two semantic features necessary for DOM activation, and to additional syntactic classes usually marked by DOM in southern Italo-Romance varieties with (6d) patterning, such as interrogatives, indefinites, and third-person pronouns and demonstratives with a human referent. The asymmetry between the two Romani subcorpora might also indicate an ongoing process that has not yet fully stabilized in Abruzzian Romani. The fact that IT-010, the most conservative corpus with respect to DOM, primarily involves nouns (especially kinship terms) suggests that this class may have been the starting point for the replication of DOM. DOM would then extend to personal pronouns, as begins to happen in IT-011, and then to the other elements mentioned earlier, as is the case in the more innovative IT-007.

Furthermore, if the novel use of the locative case seems to be the result of a syncretism that enables it to mark the recipient, the use of locative-inflected forms in object pronouns suggests that the reproduction of DOM strategies from southern Italo-Romance varieties

affects not only the superficial forms (with pattern replication of the Italo-Romance prepositional nominal objects through the use of the Romani preposition *kə*), but also the deep structure of the semantic case. The marked object, in fact, is encoded with the same grammatical resources reserved for the recipient: the preposition *kə* for elements that lack case inflection, and the locative for those that possess it.

### *Abbreviations*

ACC	accusative
ART	article
DAT	dative
DOM	differential object marking
F	feminine
IMP	imperative
LOC	locative
M	masculine
NOM	nominative
OBL	oblique
PFV	perfective
PST	past
PTCP	participle
SG	singular

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