

Gender Agreement in Italian Compounds with Capo-

Authors : Irene Lami, Silvia Micheli, Jan Radimský, Joost van de Weijer

Abstract : The present study examines gender agreement in Italian compounds with "capo-". Compounds containing "capo-" as the first element is highly productive in Italian and are attested from the earliest stages of the language, with "capo" indicating a prominent role in a group. This type of compound has become progressively more productive over time, establishing itself in the language to indicate human referents with a leadership role over someone or something belonging to both subordinate and coordinate compound categories. In light of the debates on the use of inclusive language, especially with regard to female professional titles in Italian, the gender agreement of the word "capo" is investigated, which in addition to social resistance, also encounters etymological resistance. Regarding the gender agreement of the word "capo-" as the first element of compounds, in addition to social and etymological resistances, morphological constraints must also be considered. In our experiment, 190 native informants were asked to match the gender of the given the word in a sentence, thinking of female referents. The results confirm a scalar hypothesis of gender agreement (i.e., titles traditionally attributed to women > titles traditionally attributed to men > the word "capo" in isolation > the word "capo-" as an element of subordinate compound > the word "capo-" as an element of a coordinate compound). A significant interplay with number marking is also shown, as words are inflected in gender when the trait +plural is present. Moreover, the results show that, contrary to what is prescriptively established, speakers do inflect the word "capo" according to gender, in limited instances, even when this is found as a compound element, even though to a lesser extent than words that only have social hindrances and not etymological or morphological ones. The results appear to show that, although a morphological obstacle is visible, sociolinguistic claims seem to be able to divert these obstacles. This study appears particularly suitable for replication tests over the next few decades, which, if society opens up further to claims of inclusiveness, could further corroborate this trend.

Keywords : compounds, gender inflection, Italian, morphology

Conference Title : ICLLL 2023 : International Conference on Languages, Literature and Linguistics

Conference Location : Bali, Indonesia

Conference Dates : October 23-24, 2023