

Present Subjunctive in Italian without polarity or class features: A phonological analysis

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Background and data: Authors (xxx) rendered the long-standing problem of class features in Italian nouns moot by showing that a fully phonological analysis could insightfully account for the phenomena that were previously ascribed to class features. The literature abounds in work analysing Italian nouns (and verbs) in inflectional classes, see a.o. Acquaviva (2009), Lampitelli (2010, 2017), Napoli & Vogel (1990), Passino (2009), Thornton (2001). In fact, class features are not independently required in Italian grammar, they have no phonological or other morphological application, and they are invisible to the syntax (Acquaviva 2008). Authors' (xxx) analysis begs the question about the verbal system, since Italian would seem to have three verbal inflectional classes: *cant-a-re* 'sing-CL:1-INF', *ved-e-re* 'see-CL:2-INF', *dorm-i-re* 'sleep-CL:3-INF'. These classes are differentiated in distinct paradigms, though classes 2 and 3 (–ere and –ire) only marginally so: *ved-e* 'see-CL:2-3.SG.PRES.IND' vs. *dorm-e* 'sleep-CL:2.3.SG.PRES.IND'. Nowhere is the use of verbal class features more apparently necessary than in the formation of the present subjunctive. Since here the construction of the PRES SUBJ is apparently allomorphic for verb-class, moreover it appears at least superficially to be some sort of class polarity: Class I → Class III, Class II & III → Class I. In (1), the set of data INF contains the infinitive forms of each class, whereas PRES.SUBJ presents the entire paradigms of the present subjunctive. Finally, the table highlights the polarity effect between the infinitive and the present subjunctive.

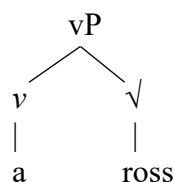
(1) Present Subjunctive

		Class I	Class II	Class III
INF		cant-a-re	ved-e-re	dorm-i-re
PRES SUBJ	1sg	cant-i	ved-a	dorm-a
	2sg	cant-i	ved-a	dorm-a
	3sg	cant-i	ved-a	dorm-a
	1pl	cant-iamo	ved-iamo	dorm-iamo
	2pl	cant-iate	ved-iate	dorm-iate
	3pl	cant-i-no	ved-a-no	dorm-a-no
INF > PRES.SUBJ		I → III	II → I	III → I
		a → i	e → a	i → a

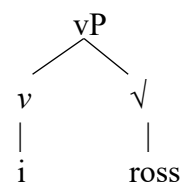
Aim: Since nominal class features have been shown to be redundant (Authors xxx), we will question the need for verbal class features also. To do so, we will provide a fully phonological account of the derivation of the present subjunctive in Italian.

Counteranalysis: Extending Fabregas' (2017) account of Spanish theme-vowels into Italian, we propose that what are traditionally thought of as a verb with a suffixal theme vowel are, in fact, composed of a root and a light verb type predicate. This allows us to remove class-features in verbs as an explanation for the root + theme vowel pairings. In other words, whilst class features are diacritics, v's are syntactically motivated. Their exponents, in turn, are derived in the phonology, as we show below. This has welcome consequences such removing the unnecessary polysemy of the root *rosso* 'red' for example: *rosso* (CL: I) *a-rross-a-re* 'to redden' vs. *rosso* (CL: III) *a-rross-i-re* 'to blush'. This opposition is shown in (2).

(2) a. *a-rross-a-re* 'to redden'



b. *a-rross-i-re* 'to blush'



Assuming *Element Theory* in particular (Harris & Lindsey 1995; Backley 2011), there is a phonological observation to be made that Class II and Class III are a natural class defined by headed |I| (see 3, I-headed classes as opposed to A-headed class; the exponents of theme appear in the column ‘Theme’). Italian has two contrastive front mid-vowels: /e/ vs. /ɛ/, both of which are an amalgam of |A| and |I| elements. Processes like unstressed vowel reduction show that the distinction is one based in headedness, with the open-mid vowels being |A|-headed, while the front close-mid vowel is |I|-headed. This renders it a natural class with /i/. The phonological characterisation of the subjunctive can therefore be analysed as a kind of derived polarity effect. We hypothesize that the subjunctive is expounded by both a headed |I| and headed |A| (column labelled ‘PRES.SUBJ’ in 3). If the light verb (‘theme vowel’) and the PRES.SUBJ have the same head, this is eliminated from the structure and the remaining element surfaces at the end of the derivation. This leads to the appearance of polarity (class-shift) between the ‘theme’ of the infinitive and the present subjunctive, as shown in the last column.

(3) The phonological derivation of the present subjunctive

Traditional Conjugation Class	Polarity	Theme { } = head	PRES SUBJ	Derivation	‘Class Shift’ INF > PRES.SUBJ
A-headed					
1	I → III	({A})	{A} {I}	$\begin{array}{c} \{I\} \\ \{A\} \text{---} \{A\} \end{array}$	a → i
I-headed					
2	II → I	(A, {I})	{A} {I}	$\begin{array}{c} \{I\} \text{---} \{I\} \\ A \quad \{A\} \end{array}$	e → a
3	III → I	({I})		$\begin{array}{c} \{I\} \text{---} \{I\} \\ \quad \{A\} \end{array}$	i → a

In our account, theme is the syntactic head taking (lexical) roots as complements (as in 2); its phonological exponents are what are traditionally seen as class markers. The theoretical advantage of such a phonological analysis over a class-based one lays in the fact that the latter requires ad-hoc diacritics, whilst the former sees class as the phonological exponent of a syntactic head, v.

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