

The mass/count distinction and metaphony in Asturian and Central-Southern Italian dialects

Michela Russo

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9840-7081>

Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3

<https://ror.org/05b5c0584>

Structures Formelles du Langage (SFL)

UMR 7023, CNRS / Université Paris 8

Abstract: This study examines how phonology and morphology interact in the expression of the mass/count distinction in Asturian, with particular focus on metaphony, and offers a comparative perspective with Central-Southern Italian dialects. It traces the historical evolution of indefiniteness markers in Romance languages following the loss of Latin case-marking—especially the neuter—and shows how this loss gave rise to new morphophonological strategies for encoding indefiniteness. Crucially, the study argues that in these Romance varieties, neuter indefiniteness and mass reference have converged into a single grammatical category, expressed through distinct inflectional patterns and phonological processes. In particular, neuter is realized as the absence of metaphony, in contrast to the metaphonic alternations that characterize count (typically masculine) singular forms. This convergence provides insight into how phonological alternations can serve as markers of syntactic and semantic distinctions in the nominal domain. A key focus is on the role of metaphony, a phonological process triggered by final high vowels, which plays a crucial role in signaling gender and number contrasts. The study challenges traditional phonological views by showing how metaphony has become a syntactic and morphological marker. Metaphony in Asturian interacts with inflectional morphology, marking masculine singular and contributing to the distinction of plurality within the mass/count opposition. This article identifies specific morphophonological patterns that differentiate mass nouns from masculine and feminine nouns based on metaphonic vowel alternations and agreement patterns in noun phrases. The findings suggest that mass/count distinctions are lexically grounded but implemented through syntactic and phonological processes. Additionally, the parallel developments in Asturian and Italian dialects indicate a convergent evolution of morphophonological strategies to express plurality and indefiniteness. This cross-linguistic comparison highlights the interdependence of phonology and morphology in shaping grammatical categories in Romance languages.

Keywords: Asturian, Italian dialects, locality, mass/count distinction, metaphony

Corresponding author/ Autora de correspondencia: Michela Russo | michela.russo@univ-paris8.fr

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La distinción ente nomes contables ya incontables y la metafonía n'asturianu y nes fales del centru y sur d'Italia

Resume: *Esti estudiu analiza cómo interactúen la fonoloxía y la morfoloxía na espresión de la distinción ente nomes contables ya incontables n'asturianu, con atención especial a la metafonía, y ufierta una perspeutiva comparativa coles fales del centru y sur d'Italia. Trázase la evolución histórica de los marcadores d'indeterminación nes llingües romances tres la perda de la declinación del llatín —sobre manera del neutru— y amuéscase cómo esa perda dio llugar a nueves estratexes morfofonolóxiques pa codificar la indeterminación. Lo más relevante ye que l'estudiu defende que, nestes variedades romances, la indeterminación en neutru y la referencia a nomes incontables confluyeron nuna única categoría gramatical, espresada per aciu de patrones flexivos distintos y procesos fonolóxicos específicos. En particular, el neutru realízase como ausencia de metafonía, frente a les alternancies metafónicas que carautericen a les formes singulares contables (xeneralmente masculines). Esta confluencia ufierta una visión sobre cómo les alternancies fonolóxiques pueden actuar como marcadores de distinciones sintáutiques y semántiques nel ámbitu nominal. Un enfoque clave ye'l papel de la metafonía, un procesu fonolóxicu desencadenáu poles vocales altes finales, que xuega un papel esencial na señalización de les oposiciones de xéneru y númberu. L'estudiu cuestiona les concepciones fonolóxiques tradicionales al demostrar cómo la metafonía pasó a desempeñar una función sintáutica y morfolóxica. La metafonía n'asturianu interactúa cola morfoloxía flexiva, marcando'l masculín singular y contribuyendo a la distinción de pluralidá dientro de la oposición ente nomes contables ya incontables. El trabayu identifica patrones morfofonolóxicos específicos que diferencien los nomes incontables de los nomes masculinos y femeninos basándose n'alternancies vocáliques metafónicas y patrones d'alcuerdu nes frases nominales. Los resultaos suxeren que les distinciones contable/incontable tienen base léxica, pero implémentense per aciu procesos sintáuticos y fonolóxicos. Amás, los desarrollos paralelos n'asturianu y nos dialeutos italianos indiquen una evolución converxente d'estratexes morfofonolóxiques pa espresar pluralidá ya indeterminación. Esta comparanza ente llingües sorraya la interdependencia ente fonoloxía y morfoloxía na configuración de les categorías gramaticales nes llingües romances.*

Pallabres clave: *asturianu, dialeutos italianos, distinción contable/incontable, llocalidá, metafonía*

1. Introduction

1.1. Scope and argument

This article examines the interaction between metaphony and the mass/count distinction in Asturian, and compares it with structurally similar phenomena in Central and Southern Italian dialects. The central claim is morphophonological: metaphony is not only a phonetic or segmental effect triggered by a final high vowel, but a grammatical alternation whose application is regulated by number, agreement, and the mass/count organization of the noun phrase. In Central Asturian, the contrast between mass and count reference is especially visible in the opposition between non-metaphonic mass forms and metaphonic masculine singular count forms. The same type of interaction is found, with different surface exponents, in several Italo-Romance dialects, where neuter/mass marking may be expressed by articles, demonstratives, clitics, final vowels, or syntactic doubling.

The Asturian evidence is therefore not a preliminary illustration but the empirical core of the paper. It shows how the traditional *neutro de materia* is better understood, in the present analysis, as a mass feature of number rather than as a third gender parallel to masculine and feminine (Loporcaro, 2018). This feature can override ordinary gender agreement: nouns that are formally masculine or feminine may take mass agreement on adjectives, participles, demonstratives, determiners and clitics when they are interpreted as unbounded substances, materials, or indefinite quantities. Conversely, count singular masculine nouns normally trigger metaphony. The opposition between mass and count is thus expressed at the interface of lexicon, syntax, and phonology: lexical semantics supplies the material/countable base, syntax computes number and agreement, and phonology realizes the contrast through metaphonic or non-metaphonic vocalism.

This approach follows the Asturian tradition that links metaphony and *neutru de materia*, especially Alonso (1958; 1962; 1972), Arias-Cabal (1992; 1999; 2005; 2022), Canellada (1996 [1944]), Fernández-Ordóñez (2006; 2007a; 2007b), García-González (1985; 1988), Menéndez-Pidal (1962² [1897, 1906]), Neira-Martínez (1978; 1991; 2005 [1955]), and Viejo-Fernández (2018). It also connects this tradition with recent work on Romance metaphony and non-myopic harmony (Calabrese, 2011; 2024; Calabrese & Russo, 2025; McCollum, 2024; McCollum, Baković & Mai, in press; Ritter & van der Hulst, 2024; Russo, 2002; 2007; 2022). The comparative part of the paper does not assume a direct historical borrowing from southern Italy into Iberian Romance. Rather, it argues that Asturian and Italo-Romance provide convergent Romance solutions to the refunctionalization of Latin neuter morphology after the loss of the old case system (see Formentin, 2010).

The geographical reference to Central Asturian is used here in a compact way. The data concern the central metaphonic area described in the literature, with Llena as the clearest case for the preservation of the /-o/ mass ending, and with relevant evidence from central and central-eastern varieties such as Bimenes, Llangréu, Ayer, Riosa, Sobrescobio, Siero, Mieres, Laviana, Morcín, Quirós, and Samartín del Rei Aurelio, together with eastern and Cantabrian continuations when these are needed for the history of the *neutro de materia* (see DGLA¹).

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. Section 1.2 establishes the Central Asturian metaphonic system, showing how metaphonic vocalism marks masculine singular count forms, whereas mass and plural forms remain non-metaphonic. Section 1.3 reanalyses the traditional *neutru de materia* as a number-related mass-agreement feature, rather than as a third lexical gender or as masculine agreement with feminine nouns; it brings together the /-o/ ~ /-u/ opposition, the blocking of metaphony in mass contexts, agreement on adjectives, determiners, pronouns and clitics—including the distinct behaviour of mass and masculine-count enclitics—and the non-myopic effects observed in proparoxytones. Section 2 extends this Asturian diagnostic to Central and Southern Italo-Romance. Section 2.1 develops the comparative framework in terms of metaphony, mass agreement and the grammar of plurality; Section 2.2 examines Central Italian systems such as Rieti and Macerata, in which mass/count distinctions are distributed across D°, N°, adjectives, demonstratives and clitics; Section 2.3 adduces medieval Central Italian evidence from demonstratives, Mass -o and Sabina metaphony; and Section 2.4 considers Southern Italo-Romance varieties in which the final-vowel contrast has weakened or been neutralized, while mass marking survives through articles, latent consonants and *Raddoppiamento Sintattico*. Section 3 concludes that Asturian and Central-Southern

¹ DGLA (2021), s. v. *negru* and *secu*.

Italo-Romance instantiate parallel Romance strategies for encoding the mass/count distinction at the syntax–morphology–phonology interface.

1.2. Central Asturian metaphony and the marking of count singulars

Metaphony is a vowel mutation process in which a stressed vowel is raised, or otherwise changed in quality, under the influence of a following high vowel, especially final /-u/ and, more rarely in the Asturian metaphonic area, final /-i/. Central Asturian has a five-vowel system /i, e, a, o, u/ in stressed and unstressed position. In the relevant varieties, final /-u/ triggers the raising of stressed vowels and is associated with masculine singular inflection. Thus the masculine singular may differ internally from the feminine and from the plural, where the metaphonic trigger is absent or no longer active. The process remains productive enough to affect inherited Romance diphthongs and even recent lexical material, a point already emphasized in the classic descriptions. Detailed dialectal and theoretical treatments include Alarcos-Llorach (1980a), García-Álvarez (1960; 1961) on Bimenes, Garvens (1960) on Cabrales, Rodríguez-Castellano (1959) on Asturias and Santander, Nuchi and Paster (2009) on Felechosa, Penny (2009) on Iberian metaphony, McCarthy (1984) on Montañés vowel harmony, and García-Arias (2003a; 2003b) on the historical Asturian vocalic system.

A simple illustration is the masculine singular form *pirru* ‘dog’, opposed to *perra* ‘bitch’ and *perros* ‘dogs’. In this type of paradigm the metaphonic root vowel marks the masculine singular, whereas the feminine and plural forms remain non-metaphonic. The same logic applies to diphthongal material such as *güivu* ‘egg’ from Latin ŌVU and *nuichi* ‘night’ from Latin NŌCTE, and to recent items such as *twittiru* ‘Twitter user’ reported in contemporary speech (María del Carmen Muñiz Cachón p.c.).² Because /-u/ is also the ordinary final vowel of many nouns and adjectives, metaphony becomes a way of distinguishing one member of the inflectional paradigm from the others: the root of the masculine singular may not be identical to the root of the feminine or plural forms.

The relevance of metaphony to the mass/count distinction is immediately visible in tripartite paradigms in which the same lexical base has a mass reading, a count singular reading, and a count plural reading:

(1) Mass/count and number in Central Asturian:

<i>pelo</i>	‘hair’	mass noun; indefinite quantity
<i>pilu</i>	‘a single strand of hair’	count noun; masculine singular
<i>pelos</i>	‘hairs’	count noun; plural

The form *pelo* refers to hair as an unbounded substance or quantity. The form *pilu*, with metaphony, refers to a single individuated strand. The plural *pelos* is countable but non-metaphonic. This three-way contrast is crucial because it shows that metaphony is not simply a reflex of the phonological string: it participates in the grammatical encoding of discontinuous number. The singular count form is metaphonic, whereas the mass form and the plural remain non-metaphonic. Arias-Cabal’s (1999; 2005, p. 124; 2022, p. 75ff.) discussion of *pelo*, *filo*, and

² Menéndez-Pidal (1962², p. 151) notes that metaphony also affects stressed diphthongs. Thus, <ue> surfaces as <ui>, as in <puirtu> ‘port’, <güisu> ‘bone’, and <pamuilu> ‘handkerchief’, whereas <ie> is reduced to <i>, as in <timpu> ‘time’, <sirru> ‘crag, peak’—the masculine counterpart of sierra— and <abirtu> ‘open’. Metaphony is also attested when the stressed vowel occurs in hiatus, as in <fuiu> ‘fire’.

fierro captures precisely this opposition between continuous number, or mass singular, and discontinuous number, or count. Non-metaphonic *pelo*, *filo*, and *fierro* denote substances or undifferentiated material; metaphonic *pilu*, *filu*, and *firru* denote individuated units. For the nominal-class distinction underlying this contrast, see also Bosque (1983).

The same pattern is found in two-term singular/plural paradigms in which metaphony characterizes the singular, while the plural keeps the non-metaphonic root (Arias-Cabal, 2005, p. 124; 2022, p. 75ff.):

(2) Singular metaphony and non-metaphonic plurals:			
SG (singular)		PL (plural)	
<i>vesu</i>	‘glass’	<i>vasos</i>	‘glasses’
<i>téladru</i>	‘drill’	<i>táladros</i>	‘drills’
<i>piíscu</i>	‘peach’	<i>piescos</i>	‘peaches’
<i>pegullu</i>	‘granary support’	<i>pegollos</i>	‘granary supports’

In Lléna, the raising of stressed /a/ before final /-u/ is particularly important. Menéndez-Pidal (1962² [1897, 1906], p. 332) observed that forms such as *xatu*, *gatu*, *zapatu* in other Asturian areas correspond to Lléna-type *xetu*, *guetu*, *zapetu*, where /a/ raises under the influence of final /-u/. This behavior is essential for the analysis because /a/-raising makes the internal root alternation especially visible; it is not limited to mid vowels. The basic raising pattern can be summarized as /a/ > [e], /e/ > [i], and /o/ > [u] before /-u/, with /-i/ also acting as a trigger in the more restricted contexts described in the Asturian literature.

Metaphony may also contribute to both gender and number contrasts. The following paradigms, after Arias Cabal, illustrate the raising of /e/ and /o/ before /-u/ in the masculine singular, while the plural and feminine forms remain outside the metaphonic environment (Arias-Cabal, 2005, p. 124; 2022, p. 75ff.):

(3) Metaphony in gender and number paradigms:	
/e/ > [i] before -u	/o/ > [u] before -u
<i>cistu</i> MSG [+ metaph.]	<i>palumbu</i> MSG [+ metaph.]
<i>cestos</i> MPL	<i>palombos</i> MPL
<i>cesta</i> FSG	<i>palomba</i> FSG
<i>cestes</i> FPL	<i>palombes</i> FPL

Menéndez-Pidal (1962², p. 151) also gives gender pairs in which the masculine singular is metaphonic and the feminine is non-metaphonic³:

(4) Asturian metaphonic alternation in gender pairs:		
MSG [+ metaph.]	FSG [- metaph.]	
<i>sentu</i>	<i>santa</i>	‘holy’
<i>guetu</i>	<i>gata</i>	‘cat’
<i>eltu</i>	<i>alta</i>	‘tall’

³ Among the forms given by Menéndez-Pidal (1962², p. 151) as examples of systematic metaphonic raising in the varieties of Lléna and Ayer are <sepu> ‘toad’, <reu> ‘tail’, <tseu> ‘side’, <kerru> ‘cart, wagon’, <kentu> ‘canto’ (the source does not disambiguate between ‘song’ and ‘stone/edge’), <pirru> ‘dog’, <diniru> ‘money’, <kisu> ‘cheese’, <putru> ‘foal’, and <tsu-bu> ‘wolf’. He further notes that raising also occurs in past participles, as in <puistu> ‘put, placed’, <fitsu> ‘done, made’, and <mateu> ‘killed’.

<i>ninu</i>	<i>nena</i>	‘child; boy/girl’
<i>díu</i>	<i>dea</i>	‘finger/toe’
<i>cordiru</i>	<i>cordera</i>	‘lamb’
<i>utru</i>	<i>otra</i>	‘other’
<i>tuntu</i>	<i>tonta</i>	‘foolish’

These examples show that gender distinction is marked through vowel alternations in metaphonic environments. In these paradigms, metaphony consistently applies in the masculine singular with /-u/, distinguishing it from the non-metaphonic plural and feminine forms. The adjective system is crucial because it shows that the alternation is not limited to nouns: the same adjectival root may oppose a metaphonic masculine singular to a non-metaphonic mass form, as in *nigru* ‘black.MSG’ versus *negro/negru* ‘black.mass’.

Form	Value	Metaphony	Function
<i>nigru</i>	MSG count	+ metaphony (/e/ > [i] before -u)	masculine singular agreement
<i>negra</i>	FSG count	- metaphony	feminine singular agreement
<i>negros</i>	MPL count	- metaphony	masculine plural agreement
<i>negras</i>	FPL count	- metaphony	feminine plural agreement
<i>negro</i> (Llana) / <i>negru</i> (eastern and central-eastern Asturian)	Mass	- metaphony	mass/neuter agreement; final vowel varies by area
<i>seco</i> (Llana) / <i>secu</i> (eastern and central-eastern Asturian)	Mass	- metaphony	mass/neuter agreement; final vowel varies by area

Table 1. Gender and number inflectional paradigm for adjectives in Asturian, highlighting metaphony and the dialectal realization of mass inflection: -o in Llana and non-metaphonic -u in eastern and central-eastern varieties.

This paradigm shows that metaphony applies only in the masculine singular form, while mass and plural forms do not undergo metaphonic alternation. With gender and number inflection following a consistent agreement pattern, marked by the final Latin accusative morphemes -u/-os for masculine and -a/-as for feminine (see Alonso, 1962, p. 113ff.; Arias-Cabal, 2005, p. 124; 2022, p. 75ff.; Viejo-Fernández, 2018, pp. 211–212), metaphony systematically applies in the masculine singular (-u) while remaining absent in the other inflectional forms:

- (5) /a/ > [e] / _-u: ‘black cat’
- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <i>cattu nigru</i> MSG | <i>guetu nigru</i> [+ metaph.] |
| <i>catta nigra</i> FSG | <i>gata negra</i> |
| <i>cattos nigros</i> MPL | <i>gatos negros</i> |
| <i>cattas negras</i> FPL | <i>gates negres</i> |

For mass agreement (*negro/negru*), mass nouns do not follow the same gender and number agreement pattern. They align with a distinct morphological structure, where adjectives remain non-metaphonic, as in the following examples:

(6) Mass agreement:

a. <i>carbón negru</i>	b. <i>lleña secu</i>
coal.Mass black.Mass	firewood.F.Mass dry.Mass
'black coal'	'dry firewood'

This paradigm shows that metaphony applies only in the masculine singular count form, while feminine, plural, and mass forms remain non-metaphonic. The surface realization of the mass ending is geographically differentiated. Lléna preserves the mass ending *-o*, as in *negro* and *seco*, whereas non-metaphonic mass *-u*, as in *negru* and *secu*, occurs only in eastern and central-eastern Asturian varieties, where historical mass *-o* has merged with *-u*. In these varieties, mass *-u* must therefore be distinguished from masculine count singular *-u*: although the two endings are segmentally identical, only masculine count *-u* triggers metaphony.

Since mass nouns in Asturian do not behave like masculine count singulars, *negru* is non-metaphonic: it follows the mass agreement pattern rather than the count masculine pattern, which would have the metaphonic form *nigru*. The constituent *lleña secu* 'dry firewood' also follows mass agreement: the adjective does not take the expected feminine *-a*, but marks mass status. Functionally, this construction replaces the old Latin neuter singular inflection *lignum siccum*, absorbing its role in the modern mass noun construction. As Arias-Cabal (1999, pp. 63ff.) suggested, the presence of metaphony in count singular nouns and its absence in mass nouns reflect a deeper grammaticalization of the phenomenon.

This contrast is central to the analysis of non-myopic metaphony. In a strictly local, or myopic, system, a final high vowel would be expected to trigger metaphony by adjacency. In Asturian and in Central-Southern Italian dialects, however, mass constructions systematically preserve non-metaphonic realizations, as in *negro/negru* versus *nigru* and *seco/secu* versus *sicu*. Metaphony therefore interacts with higher morphophonological structure, particularly the mass/count distinction, instead of being governed only by local phonological triggering. This is the sense in which the system is non-myopic, in line with recent discussion of myopic harmonies (Calabrese & Russo, 2025; McCollum, 2024).

In Lléna-type dialects, the */-u/* versus */-o/* distinction remains intact and clearly differentiates masculine count and mass nouns. In transition areas between eastern and western Asturian, */-u/* and */-o/* may merge into */-u/* (*secu*, *negru*, etc.). Nevertheless, according to Viejo-Fernández (2018, p. 214), an */-o/* suffix can still emerge, regardless of its origin, as in *quesu fresco* 'fresh cheese' instead of the expected metaphonic form *friscu*. The same opposition is seen in *pelo* 'hair as a mass' versus *pilu* 'a strand of hair', a defining contrast of Central Asturian.

(7) Metaphony, mass and syntactic agreement:

a. <i>pilu nigru</i>	b. <i>pelo negro</i>
hairstrand.MSG black.MSG [+ metaph.]	hair.Mass black.Mass [+ Mass]
'a black hair'	'black hair'

The noun phrase *pilu nigru* follows count noun agreement and triggers metaphony both in the noun and in the adjective. By contrast, *pelo negro* follows mass agreement: metaphony does not apply, and the non-metaphonic forms *pelo* and *negro* are preserved. Even where final */-o/* has weakened or merged with */-u/*, the metaphonic versus non-metaphonic root alternation allows speakers to maintain the mass/count contrast. The mass/count distinction is therefore lexical in origin, syntactically implemented through agreement, and phonologically visible through the application or blocking of metaphony.

1.3. The Asturian neuter as a semantic counter: the -u/-o opposition and feminine agreement

Beyond the count paradigms discussed in the preceding section, Asturian displays a second and decisive manifestation of the mass/count opposition: nouns that are morphologically feminine, or historically masculine, may combine with adjectives, determiners and clitics that do not agree according to ordinary gender, but according to a mass/neuter feature. The point is not an accidental use of masculine agreement with feminine nouns. It is a productive agreement strategy in which mass reference overrides gender agreement and blocks the metaphonic pattern expected in masculine count singulars. This is the phenomenon that the literature treats under the label *neutro de materia*, but here it is analysed as a number-related mass feature, not as a third lexical gender (Alonso, 1958, pp. 12–14; Arias-Cabal, 1999, pp. 13, 55–63; Canellada, 1996 [1944], pp. 31–32; Menéndez-Pidal, 1962² [1897, 1906], p. 330). Further morphological and syntactic analyses of the Asturian *neutro de materia* include Granda-Gutiérrez (1963), Neira-Martínez (1983), García-Fernández (1996), San Segundo-Cachero (2015), and Burner (2016).

In this sense, the term semantic counter is not a metaphorical label. Count morphology individuates a unit that can be counted, pluralized, and, in the masculine singular, undergo metaphony. Mass morphology does the opposite: it presents the noun as an unbounded substance or quantity, and the agreement system marks that interpretation on material outside the noun, especially postnominal adjectives, determiners and clitics. The mass feature is therefore comparable to a number value: it does not classify the noun once and for all, but determines how the nominal expression is counted or not counted in a given syntactic context.

Menéndez-Pidal (1962² [1897, 1906], p. 330) already observed that postposed adjectives may fail to show feminine agreement with feminine nouns when the noun is interpreted as a substance or an indefinite quantity. The contrast is clearest when the adjective follows the noun: the noun may retain its feminine form, while the adjective takes the mass ending -o or -u. This is the basis of the Asturian asymmetry illustrated in (6).

The positional contrast matters. Menéndez-Pidal (1962² [1897, 1906], p. 330) notes that an adjective immediately preceding a feminine noun may show ordinary gender agreement, whereas a following adjective can surface with the mass ending. His examples such as *chichi tarabatá* beside *chichi tarabatao* are therefore not marginal curiosities: they show that the postnominal adjective is one of the privileged places where the mass feature becomes visible. This is why the examples below must be read as agreement facts, not simply as lexicalized adjective forms.

(8) Feminine nouns with mass adjectival agreement in Lléna:

- a. *lleche cuaya-o*
milk.F.SG curdle-PST.PTCP-MASS.SG
'curdled milk'
- b. *mantega fresc-o*
butter.F.SG fresh-MASS.SG
'fresh butter'

Some other Asturian varieties realize mass agreement in -u; the -o and -u endings are therefore dialectally distributed and are not presented here as coexisting variants within a single local system.

The form *mantega fresco* is especially important because it preserves the non-metaphonic root vowel of *fresco*. The masculine count form would be expected to show metaphony, as in *friscu*. The Mass adjective therefore does not simply copy the masculine singular ending; it behaves as a distinct agreement exponent. This is the same contrast that later becomes crucial for the comparison with Central Italy: Mass -o is preserved as such in Lléna, whereas masculine count -u triggers metaphony (Alonso, 1958, p. 16; Arias-Cabal, 2005, pp. 123–124; 2022, p. 75ff.).

The same diagnostic applies to *seco* and *negro*. In a count masculine singular, the final masculine -u may trigger metaphony and yield forms such as *sicu* or *nigru*, depending on the lexical item and dialectal area. In Mass constructions, however, the adjective preserves the non-metaphonic vocalism: *negro*, *seco*, *fresco*. This is why the opposition between forms such as *pilu nigru* and *pelo negro* cannot be reduced to spelling or final vowel quality. The two noun phrases differ in the grammatical value assigned to the noun phrase: count singular vs. mass.

The same agreement appears in predicative contexts. The examples in (9) are retained because they show that the mass feature is not restricted to an isolated noun-adjective pair, but surfaces in full syntactic structures. For the present morphophonological argument, the relevant fact is that feminine nouns denoting substances or unbounded quantities may take mass agreement on adjectives and participles.

- (9) Feminine nouns and mass predicative agreement:
- a. *la ropa ta tendío, ta seco*
the.F laundry.F is.3SG hung.Mass is.3SG dry.Mass
'The laundry is hung, it is dry'
 - b. *la sidra ta frío*
the.F cider.F is.3SG cold.Mass
'The cider is cold'
 - c. *la lleña ye maderu seco pa echar al fuéu*
the.F firewood.F is.3SG wood.F dry.Mass for throwing into the fire
'The firewood is dry wood to throw into the fire'

In (9), the nouns *ropa*, *sidra* and *lleña* remain feminine in the nominal form and in the determiner, but the adjective or participle appears with mass agreement. The relevant agreement is therefore neither feminine nor ordinary masculine: it is the expression of an unbounded or non-count interpretation. This is also the interpretation adopted by the standard grammatical tradition: when the noun is non-countable, the postposed adjective agrees in the neuter/mass form, as in *el carbón duru ambura bien* and *fendieron la lleña seco* (Academia de la Llingua Asturiana, 2001, p. 323).

This also explains why predicative examples are important. In *la sidra ta frío* or *la ropa ta seco*, the mass agreement is not triggered by a locally adjacent final vowel in the noun. It is computed across the syntactic relation between the noun phrase and the predicate. The agreement target is the adjective or participle, but the feature that determines its form is the mass interpretation of the nominal expression.

The same pattern extends beyond Lléna and Central Asturian. Alonso (1958, pp. 13, 21–22) already noted that the Asturian-Santanderine area preserves scattered traces of this agreement. Since the geographical survey is not the focus of the present article, the evidence can be condensed into the set in (10). These forms show that -u and -o are both used as mass

agreement endings according to dialectal area: *blanc-u*, *cocí-u* and *tapecí-u* are not masculine adjectives, just as *sec-o* and *cieg-o* are not masculine adjectives in the relevant contexts. The eastern Cantabrian continuation is documented in detail by Fernández-Juncal (2000).

(10) Further mass agreement forms:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| a. <i>farina blanc-u</i> | ‘white flour’ |
| b. <i>la borona ye bien cocí-u</i> | ‘the cornbread is well cooked’ |
| c. <i>noche cieг-o</i> | ‘dark night’ |
| d. <i>la leña está sec-o</i> | ‘the firewood is dry’ |
| e. <i>noche tapecí-u</i> | ‘dark night’ |
| f. <i>la sidre nuev-u</i> | ‘the new cider’ |

The form *la sidre nuev-u* is useful because it makes the gender mismatch visible: *sidre* is feminine, but *nuevu* marks the mass interpretation. Canellada (1996 [1944], pp. 31–32) and Alonso (1958, pp. 13–14) already treated such forms as evidence for neuter/mass agreement rather than as ordinary masculine agreement. The same conclusion follows from the distribution of *-o* in L̩lena. Where L̩lena preserves the original opposition, mass adjectives can end in *-o*, while masculine count singular adjectives end in *-u* and may trigger metaphony. Thus, the opposition is not simply final vowel /o/ vs. /u/ in phonology, but mass *-o* vs. count masculine *-u* in morphophonology.

Historically, part of the system continues the Latin neuter domain, but in Asturian it has been restructured as a mass/count opposition. Former Latin neuters such as *lac* ‘milk’ and *lignum* ‘wood’ form part of the core, but originally masculine or feminine nouns with material semantics may also enter the mass agreement class. The examples in (11) therefore illustrate not a survival of lexical neuter gender alone, but a Romance reanalysis in which adjectives signal mass reference over and above the noun’s inherited gender (Alonso, 1958, p. 15ff.; Canellada, 1996 [1944], p. 31ff.; Neira-Martínez, 2005 [1955], p. 84).

(11) Mass agreement with nouns of different historical gender:

- | | |
|----|--|
| a. | <i>lleche cuaya-o</i> < Latin <i>lac</i> , originally neuter
milk.F.SG curdle-PST.PTCP-MASS.SG ‘curdled milk’ |
| b. | <i>pan sec-o</i> < Latin <i>panis</i> , originally masculine
bread.M.SG dry-MASS.SG ‘dry bread’ |
| c. | <i>agua rox-o</i> < Latin <i>aqua</i> , originally feminine
water.F.SG red-Mass.SG ‘red water’ |

This restructuring explains why the adjective, rather than the noun alone, is often the most reliable exponent of mass agreement. In L̩lena, the mass ending *-o* is particularly important because it remains distinct from masculine *-u*. Neira-Martínez (2005 [1955], p. 84) identifies this mass ending in adjectives and pronouns, and Alonso (1958, p. 14) notes the same contrast in the broader system of neuter forms. The examples in (12) show the crucial L̩lena evidence for mass *-o* in both masculine and feminine noun contexts.

(12) Mass adjectives in *-o* in L̩lena:

- | | | |
|----|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| a. | <i>ta negr-o l’arroz</i> | ‘the rice is black’ |
| b. | <i>café negr-o</i> | ‘black coffee’ |
| c. | <i>taba negr-o l’agua</i> | ‘the water was black’ |

- | | | |
|----|--------------------------|----------------------|
| d. | <i>lleña sec-o</i> | ‘dry firewood’ |
| e. | <i>barrí fueya sec-o</i> | ‘I swept dry leaves’ |
| f. | <i>pan sec-o</i> | ‘dry bread’ |

The same Llena pattern is confirmed by forms such as *yerba maúro*, *pan maúro*, *maíz espigao* and *nieve moyono*. The ending *-o* is the mass exponent, independently of the lexical gender of the noun. These forms establish the direct Asturian parallel with the Central Italian varieties discussed later, where a historical neuter/mass *-o* can likewise remain opposed to masculine *-u*.

- (13) Further Llena mass agreement in *-o*:
- | | | |
|----|----------------------|----------------|
| a. | <i>yerba maúr-o</i> | ‘mature herb’ |
| b. | <i>pan maúr-o</i> | ‘mature bread’ |
| c. | <i>maíz espiga-o</i> | ‘spiked corn’ |
| d. | <i>nieve moyon-o</i> | ‘wet snow’ |

The dialectal variation between *-o* and *-u* must therefore be formulated carefully. In Llena-type systems, *-o* is the primary mass ending and *-u* is the masculine count ending. In other Asturian varieties, historical mass *-o* may merge phonologically with *-u*. This merger does not eliminate the grammatical contrast. It creates two homophonous endings: a Mass *-u*, historically continuing or replacing *-o*, which does not trigger metaphony; and a masculine count *-u*, which does trigger metaphony. This is the central morphophonological fact behind the non-myopic analysis: the same surface vowel [u] may have different effects depending on whether it realizes mass or count singular morphology.

The contrast should be kept distinct from the ordinary phonetic history of final vowels. A form ending in *-u* is not automatically metaphonic, and a form ending in *-o* is not automatically outside the agreement system. What matters is whether the ending realizes the count masculine singular or the Mass value. This is the reason why forms such as *pelo/pilu* and *fierro/fierru* are so informative: in the Mass reading, *pelo* or *fierro* refer to an undifferentiated material; in the count reading, *pilu* or *fierru* refer to a discrete unit. Arias-Cabal (1999, p. 51ff.) treats these oppositions as rare but revealing cases of a three-way number contrast: mass, count singular, and count plural.

The contrast is also visible in determiners and pronouns, not only in adjectives. This point is essential for the later comparison with Central and Southern Italian dialects, where the mass/count opposition is often encoded in the article system. Asturian preserves comparable evidence in the opposition among demonstratives and pronominal forms such as *isti*, *esta*, *esto* and *lu*, *la*, *lo*, as well as in substantivized or quantificational structures such as *lo poco* and *poco pelo*. These forms show that the Mass feature is represented in the DP system and not merely on postnominal adjectives (Academia de la Llingua Asturiana, 2001, pp. 325–327; Alonso, 1958, p. 14; Arias-Cabal, 1999, p. 78; Bosque & Moreno, 1990; García-González, 1981, pp. 347–353).

The same Mass value that appears on adjectives in *pan seco* or *lleña seco* is therefore also visible in the left edge of the nominal expression and in pronominal reference. This is the Asturian counterpart of the determiner contrasts that will become central in the Italian section.

The same logic appears in the contrast between mass and count readings of a single lexical noun. The Cabranes pair in (14) is especially useful because the noun is feminine in both examples, while the adjective distinguishes mass from count reference.

- (14) Mass vs. count agreement with a feminine noun:
- a. *gústa-me semar la cebolla blanc-u* Mass NP
like-1SG.DAT plant.INF DEF.F onion.F white-Mass.SG
'I like to plant the white onion/onion as a substance'
 - b. *apúrra-me la cebolla blanc-a* COUNT NP
bring-3SG-1SG.DAT DEF.F onion.F white-F.SG
'Bring me the white onion'

Arias-Cabal (1999, p. 58) gives the same type of opposition with *una cebolla blanco*, mass agreement, vs. *una cebolla blanca*, count agreement. The contrast *la mazana madura* vs. *la mazana maduro* similarly separates the count apple from apple as a mass substance (Arias-Cabal, 1999, p. 71). These examples show that mass agreement is not bound to a particular noun or lexical class. It is a morphosyntactic feature that can be computed over the nominal phrase.

The point is not that *cebolla*, *mazana*, *pelo* or *fierro* are lexically mass in all contexts. Rather, the grammar allows the same lexical noun to be interpreted either as a bounded object or portion, or as an unbounded substance. The agreement morphology then makes that interpretation visible. A related, but not identical, contrast appears in forms such as *muzu* vs. *mozu* in Quirós: the metaphonic form *muzu* marks an individualized masculine singular (a specific 'young man'), whereas the non-metaphonic *mozu* can express a more generic or extensive reading (a general category of young men or a young person in a more abstract sense, Viejo-Fernández, 2018, p. 217). This reinforces the connection between metaphony and individuation, while also showing why generic non-metaphonic nouns must not be confused with true mass nouns: generic count nouns may pluralize, whereas mass nouns denote substances or unbounded quantities.

The clitic evidence also proves that the mass/count distinction extends beyond adjective agreement. In (15), the object clitic *-lo* agrees with the Mass object; it is not merely an adjective-like ending. This is why the phenomenon is relevant for the whole agreement system, including determiners and pronominal morphology (Arias-Cabal, 1999, p. 63).

- (15) Mass agreement with an object clitic:
- esi pan negr-o cómi-lo*
that.M bread.Mass black-Mass.SG eat.IMP.2SG-CL.Mass
'That black bread, eat it'

The contrast in (16) is even more revealing. The same noun *café* may be interpreted as a mass substance or as a countable portion, and the clitic realizes this difference. In the mass reading the clitic is *-lo*; in the count masculine reading it is *-lu*. The contrast is therefore pronominal and morphosyntactic, not just adjectival.

Arias-Cabal (1999, pp. 55, 63) gives further clitic contrasts of the same type, for instance *esi fierro negro pues usa-lo* with mass agreement vs. *esi fierru negru pues usa-lu* 'You can use that black iron' with count agreement, and *esa carne roxo cómi-lo* 'That red meat, eat it' with mass clitic agreement. These examples show that the mass/count opposition is not localized in the noun phrase but also controls agreement in the verbal-clitic domain.

- (16) Asturian pronominal clitics: mass vs. masculine count:
- a. *el café bebí-lo*

- DEF.M coffee.Mass drink.PST.1SG-CL.Mass
 ‘I drank the coffee’
- b. *el café bebi-lu*
 DEF.M coffee drink.PST.1SG-CL.M.SG
 ‘I drank the portion of coffee’

Masculine count clitics also interact with metaphony. Menéndez-Pidal (1962² [1897, 1906], p. 151) already noted that an enclitic masculine *-u* may trigger raising of the stressed vowel in the verbal host. The examples in (17) are diagnostic because they show that a final masculine *-u* can trigger metaphony outside the noun phrase, whereas mass *-o/-u* does not.

- (17) Metaphony triggered by masculine *-u* enclitics /a/ > [e] / _-u:
- a. *voy dexe-lu* ‘I am going to leave him’
- b. *mate-lu* ‘to kill him’

The determiner and clitic facts therefore support the same conclusion as the adjectival facts. In mass contexts, the ending *-o*, or its merged *-u* reflex in some varieties, is protected from the ordinary masculine metaphonic behaviour. In count masculine contexts, by contrast, *-u* can trigger metaphony. This opposition explains why a phonological account based only on the final vowel is insufficient: the relevant trigger is not the surface vowel alone, but the morphological status of that vowel within the mass/count system.

A final piece of evidence comes from proparoxytones. These forms are not part of the mass agreement paradigm, but they are important for the locality argument. In words such as *péxaru* ‘bird’, *ébrigu* ‘ábrego, southwest wind’, *téladru* ‘drill’ and *quécabu* ‘cácabu/cooking pot’, metaphony affects the stressed vowel even though an unstressed post-tonic vowel intervenes. Arias-Cabal (2005, p. 124; 2022, p. 75ff.) gives *péxaru* and *ébrigu*, and Menéndez-Pidal (1962² [1897, 1906], p. 151) already observed the same non-local effect in *quécabu*, noting that final *-u* can exert its influence even with an internal post-tonic vowel *-a-*. For the present argument, the diagnostic value of these forms lies not in the number of examples, but in the fact that metaphony is non-myopic: final *-u* affects the stressed vowel while the intervening post-tonic *-a-* remains non-metaphonized. This pattern is difficult to reduce to myopic vocalic harmony or purely phonological spreading, and instead supports the view that metaphony is a morphophonological process targeting the stressed nucleus under specific morphological conditions.

This proparoxytone evidence should not be conflated with the mass/count evidence, but it supports the same broader conclusion about locality. In mass contexts, a potential surface trigger may fail to produce metaphony because the morphology blocks it. In proparoxytones, conversely, metaphony may apply even when phonological adjacency is interrupted by an internal post-tonic vowel. Together, the two patterns show that Asturian metaphony is regulated by grammatical structure rather than by a simple adjacent-vowel mechanism.

- (18) Proparoxytones and non-myopic metaphony:
- a. *péxaru* ‘páxaru/bird’
- b. *ébrigu* ‘ábrego/southwest wind’
- c. *téladru* ‘táladru/drill’
- d. *quécabu* ‘cácabu/cooking pot, cauldron’

The relevance of (18) is that Asturian metaphony is not strictly myopic. It may apply across an intervening vowel in masculine count forms, but it is blocked in mass forms even when a final high vowel is present on the surface. The two facts are complementary: proparoxytones show that metaphony is not limited by immediate phonological adjacency, while mass adjectives and clitics show that metaphony is constrained by morphosyntactic structure.

For this reason, the Asturian mass marker should be analysed as a number-related feature implemented at the interface of lexicon, syntax and phonology. It is a semantic counter: it distinguishes bounded, countable individuals from unbounded substances or quantities. In the syntax, it is realized through agreement on adjectives, determiners and clitics; in the phonology, it determines whether metaphony applies or is blocked. *Ll*ena is crucial because it preserves the historical *-o/-u* contrast most transparently. The transition varieties are equally crucial because they show that after the phonological merger of *-o* and *-u*, the grammar still distinguishes Mass *-u* from masculine count *-u* through the presence or absence of metaphony.

The distinction is also important for the comparison with the Latin neuter. The Asturian system does not merely preserve old neuter nouns; it redistributes the inherited material into a new Romance opposition between bounded and unbounded reference. *Ll*ena is the most transparent case because mass *-o* remains visible beside masculine *-u*. In the transition varieties, however, the original formal difference may be partially hidden by the merger into *-u*. The grammar nevertheless continues to distinguish the two values by their metaphonic behaviour and by their agreement with determiners, adjectives and clitics.

This section therefore establishes the Asturian baseline for the comparison with Central-Southern Italian dialects. The relevant parallel is not merely that both areas have metaphony. It is that both can encode mass/count distinctions through a historically neuter *-o* opposed to masculine *-u*, through determiners and clitics as well as adjectives, and through the blocking of metaphony in Mass contexts. The comparative section can then ask whether the Italian data instantiate the same morphophonological architecture already visible in Asturian.

2. Central Asturian metaphony and mass/count agreement in comparative perspective: Central and Southern Italian dialects

The following section is not a second description of Asturian metaphony, which has already been established in §1. It isolates the Asturian facts that are decisive for the comparison with Central and Southern Italian dialects. The comparison rests on four parameters: (i) a metaphonic process triggered by final high vowels; (ii) its restriction to morphologically masculine/count singular contexts rather than to every surface */-u/*; (iii) the survival, especially in *Ll*ena, of a mass/neuter */-o/* distinct from masculine count */-u/*; and (iv) the extension of the same mass/count contrast to determiners, adjectives, pronouns and clitics.

For the purposes of the comparison, the relevant baseline is the Central Asturian metaphonic area, and especially the *Ll*ena-type system, where the opposition between count */-u/* and mass */-o/* is most explicit. Metaphony affects the stressed vowels /a, e, o/ within a five-vowel stressed system /i e a o u/. The main trigger is final */-u/*, although final */-i/* also has a raising effect in more restricted contexts (Alonso, 1962, p. 113ff.; Arias-Cabal, 2005, pp. 123–124; 2022, p. 75ff.; Menéndez-Pidal, 1962² [1897, 1906], §5, pp. 150–152). The changes needed for the comparison can be summarized as follows.

Target vowel	Metaphonic outcome	Examples	Comparative value
/a/	[e] before final /-u/	<blencu> ‘white.MSG’, <canséu> ‘tired.MSG’, <preu> ‘meadow’, <secu> ‘sack’; restricted [o]: <bloncu>, <plotu> (Alonso, 1962, p. 113ff.; Arias-Cabal, 2005, p. 123)	Shows that Asturian metaphony includes low-vowel raising/fronting, not only mid-vowel raising.
/e/	[i] before final /-u/ (and, more restrictedly, /-i/)	<cistu> ‘basket.MSG’, <friscu> ‘fresh.MSG’, <timpu> ‘time’, <sirru> ‘crag, peak’, <abirtu> ‘open’ (Alonso, 1962, p. 113ff.; Menéndez-Pidal, 1962 ² [1897, 1906], p. 151)	Provides the clearest parallel with Italian metaphonic raising in masculine/count contexts.
/o/	[u] before final /-u/ (and, more restrictedly, /-i/)	<cuxu> ‘lame.MSG’, <furnu> ‘oven’, <surdu> ‘deaf.MSG’, <palumbu> ‘dove.MSG’, <puirtu> ‘port’, <güisu> ‘bone’, <fuiiu> ‘fire’ (Alonso, 1962, p. 113ff.; Menéndez-Pidal, 1962 ² [1897, 1906], p. 151)	Confirms that final high vowels are phonologically active, but only in the relevant morphosyntactic domain.

Table 2. Metaphonic changes in Asturian before final /-u/ or /-i/.

The crucial point is not the phonological raising in itself, but its grammatical distribution. In masculine count singulars, final /-u/ triggers metaphony; in feminine and plural forms it does not. Thus <palumbu> contrasts with <palombos> and <palomba>, and <cistu> contrasts with <cestos> and <cesta>. Gender and number are therefore not lost: they are marked both by the inflectional ending and, in masculine count singulars, by the internal vowel. The plural forms <palos>, <pelos>, <lobos>, etc., remain non-metaphonic, which shows that metaphony is not simply the automatic effect of any following back vowel, but a property of a specific inflectional environment (Alonso, 1962, p. 113ff.; Arias-Cabal, 2005, p. 124).

The most important Asturian fact for the comparison with Italian dialects is the /-u/ vs. /-o/ opposition. In Lléna, masculine count /-u/ is metaphonic, while mass/neuter /-o/ is non-metaphonic. This is the contrast illustrated by <pilu nigrú> ‘a black hair, a single strand’ vs. <pelo negro> ‘black hair, an unbounded mass’, and by adjectival pairs such as <nigrú> masculine count vs. <negro> mass. The /-o/ ending is therefore not a minor phonetic residue: it is the overt mass/neuter exponent that blocks the metaphonic pattern expected in masculine count forms (Arias-Cabal, 2005, p. 124; 2022, p. 75ff.; Viejo-Fernández, 2018, pp. 211–214). The Italian comparison developed below relies precisely on varieties in which a comparable neuter/mass /-o/ is preserved in the article, the adjective and/or the noun.

The same contrast is not confined to noun endings. Asturian also encodes mass/count in determiners and pronouns: <lu>, <la>, <lo> and the demonstrative series <isti>, <esta>, <esto>; in substantivized adjectives and quantificational structures such as <lo poco> ‘the little amount’ and <poco pelo> ‘a little hair’; and in object clitics, where <lo> marks mass as opposed to masculine count <lu> (Academia de la Llingua Asturiana, 2001, pp. 325–327; Alonso, 1958, p. 14; 1962, p. 113; Arias-Cabal, 1999, pp. 63, 78;). These facts justify treating mass/count as a morphosyntactic agreement category, not merely as a lexical property of nouns or as a phonological alternation in final vowels.

Finally, the surface form /-u/ cannot be treated uniformly. In transition areas where historical /-o/ and /-u/ have merged as /-u/, a final /-u/ may still function as mass rather than masculine count. In such cases the expected metaphonic outcome is blocked: Viejo Fernández notes forms such as <quesu fresco> ‘fresh cheese’ instead of the metaphonic masculine-count form

*<friscu>, alongside the Central Asturian contrast <pelo> mass vs. <pilu> count (Viejo-Fernández, 2018, p. 214). The diagnostic to be carried into §2.1 is therefore not simply whether a final high vowel is present, but whether the final vowel belongs to a masculine/count agreement domain or to a mass/neuter one. Section 2.1 applies this diagnostic to Central and Southern Italian dialects, where the mass/count opposition can likewise be distributed across articles, demonstratives, adjectives and, in some areas, nominal endings.

2.1. Metaphony, mass agreement, and the grammar of plurality: insights from Central-Southern Italian dialects

The diagnostic established in the preceding section can now be applied to Central and Southern Italo-Romance. The point of the comparison is not to revive a direct colonization explanation for the Asturian facts: Menéndez-Pidal (1956 [1926], §§52–55; §55bis, p. 303) proposed structural links between Ibero-Romance and Southern Italian, and Alonso (1962, p. 105ff., 1972, pp. 147–213) later extended the comparison to the *neutro de materia*, but the evidence does not require a direct historical transfer. What is relevant for the present argument is instead a Romance-internal convergence: in both Asturian and Central-Southern Italian dialects, the mass/count opposition may be distributed across D°, Num°, the noun, adjectives, demonstratives and clitics, and metaphony is sensitive to that distribution. The wider Romance reanalysis of inherited neuter and number morphology is discussed by Hall (1965; 1968), Penny (1970), Lüdtke (1965; 1970; 1988; 2003), Kihm (2007), Zamboni (1998), Lorenzetti (2011), and Russo (2009).

The Asturian baseline is therefore crucial. In Llena-type systems, masculine count singulars are associated with /-u/ and internal metaphony, whereas mass/neuter forms preserve /-o/ and non-metaphonic agreement. Central Italian dialects give an especially close parallel when /-o/ is preserved in the article, adjective and/or noun; Southern Italian gives a complementary parallel when final vowels have been neutralized but the Mass article leaves another morphophonological trace. The comparison thus clarifies the grammar of plurality in a broad sense: count singulars, plurals and mass singulars are not merely semantic classes, but distinct agreement configurations.

For this reason, the Asturian facts function as the control case for the Italian comparison. The three-way Asturian contrast <fierro> mass SG, <fiirru>/<fierru> count MSG and <fierros> count PL shows that plurality and individuation are encoded together with metaphony and final-vowel morphology (Arias-Cabal, 1999, p. 60; 2005, p. 124). Likewise, <el fierro vieyo> ‘the old iron’ (Mass) vs. <el fierru vieyu> ‘the old piece of iron’ (Count) shows that the same contrast extends to adjectival agreement (Arias-Cabal, 1999, p. 71).

2.2. Central Italian: the distribution of mass agreement across D, N, demonstratives and clitics

In the Central Italian area, mass nominals occur principally in two contexts: with substantivized adjectives and with adjectives or demonstratives modifying mass nouns. The crucial variation concerns the locus of the mass exponent. In some varieties the mass/count contrast is expressed mainly in the determiner; in others it is also visible on the noun or adjective. This is exactly the parameter that makes the Italian evidence useful for the Asturian comparison.

Rieti represents the first configuration. Here the opposition is primarily encoded in the article: *lo* marks mass reference, while *lu* marks masculine count reference. The noun may end in *-u* and may undergo metaphony in both mass and count uses; this does not erase the mass distinction, because the feature is carried by the determiner, demonstrative or clitic. The following contrasts are therefore decisive (Campanelli, 1896, p. 36; Lorenzetti, 1993, p. 177):

Rieti:

- lo turcu* ‘corn, maize’ (mass) vs. *lu turcu* ‘the Turk’ (count)
- lo feru* ‘iron, material’ (mass) vs. *lu feru* ‘a specific iron object’ (count)
- lo piummu* ‘lead, material’ (mass) vs. *lu piummu* ‘a piece of lead’ (count)
- lo piagne* ‘crying, the act of crying’ (mass)
- lo siccu* ‘dryness’ (mass) vs. *lu siccu* ‘that dry one’ (count)

Rieti is especially important because it shows that mass agreement is not necessarily identical with the absence of metaphony on the lexical noun. The Sabino-Ciociarian metaphonic system raises all mid vowels by one degree before final */-i/* and */-u/*: mid-close */e, o/* become *[i, u]*, while mid-open */ɛ, ɔ/* become *[e, o]*. Thus Rieti has forms such as *[lu 'feru]* and *[lo 'feru]* from */ɛ/* > *[e]* before */-u/*, and *[lo 'piummu]* from stressed */o/* > *[u]* before */-u/*, while a form such as *[mɔro]* ‘I die’ remains non-metaphonic before final */-o/*. What distinguishes mass from count is the agreement paradigm: Campanelli (1896, p. 36) notes mass demonstratives and pronouns <ésto, éssu, éllu> opposed to count <ístu, íssu, íllu>, as well as mass proclitic/enclitic <lo, -lo> opposed to Count <lu, -lu>. His example <ésto, éssu, éllu séme> denotes an indeterminate quantity of seeds, whereas <ístu, íssu, íllu séme> denotes a single grain (Campanelli, 1896, p. 36).

Macerata and the Central Marches represent the second configuration, much closer to L̩lena. Here the mass/count distinction may be visible not only in D°, but also in the nominal or adjectival ending: mass */-o/* contrasts with masculine count */-u/*. Thus <lo scuro> means ‘darkness’ (mass), while <lu scuru> refers to ‘the shutter’ (count); <lo fero> denotes iron as a material, whereas <lu feru> denotes a specific iron object. The same contrast appears in demonstratives: <quistu> and <quillu> can refer to a specific masculine count entity, while <questo> and <quello> refer to an abstract or mass entity. In Latium, prenominal demonstratives show the same opposition, for instance *[kesto] pane* ‘this bread’ (Mass) vs. *[kistu] cane* ‘this dog’ (count), and Lorenzetti (1993, p. 177) records the Castelli Romani contrast <chisto> masculine count vs. <chesto> mass. In these systems, as in L̩lena, */-o/* is not a residue with no grammatical force: it is the overt mass/neuter exponent that prevents the masculine Count metaphonic configuration.

The Marchigiano evidence is also independently supported by the dialect of Servigliano, where Camilli (2002 [1929], pp. 220–271) documented Count/Mass distinctions in a Central Italian variety whose metaphonic system is relevant for the same comparison; Breschi (1994, pp. 471–515) likewise provides a regional perspective for the Marches. This indicates that the modern examples are not merely sporadic lexical survivals, but instantiate a broader Central Italian agreement pattern in which mass reference is grammatically encoded across several positions within the nominal domain, including the article, the noun ending, the adjective and the demonstrative. The demonstrative facts are particularly revealing because they show a tripartite system rather than a simple masculine/feminine opposition. Masculine count forms have the metaphonic internal vowel, feminine forms are non-metaphonic, and mass/neuter forms pattern with the non-metaphonic series while retaining their own semantic value. This

is the same type of diagnostic used in Asturian for <lu>, <la>, <lo> and <isti>, <esta>, <esto>: mass is not a lexical label attached to a noun, but an agreement value that can be read in determiners, pronouns, adjectives and clitics⁴. For complementary regional descriptions of the Marches and Italia Mediana, see Balducci (2000) and Vignuzzi (1997; 2010).

This comparison also avoids an over-simple equation between *mass* and *non-metaphonic noun*. In Llena, mass nouns and mass adjectives such as <pelo negro> are non-metaphonic because the mass /-o/ agreement domain blocks the masculine count pattern <pilu nigru>. In Rieti, by contrast, the noun may be metaphonic because final /-u/ has generalized on the noun, but the mass feature remains visible in D°, demonstratives and clitics. In Macerata, the closer Llena-type pattern is preserved: mass /-o/ and Count /-u/ are opposed in the determiner and/or noun. These are not contradictory facts; they are different distributions of the same mass/count opposition at the syntax-phonology interface. The comparison is therefore structural, not a claim that every Italo-Romance non-count noun behaves exactly like an Asturian mass noun: lexical feminine non-counts may retain feminine agreement, whereas the forms discussed here are the Romance neuter/mass exponents that alternate with masculine Count morphology.

2.3. Medieval Central Italian: demonstratives, mass -o and Sabino metaphony

The medieval evidence shows that the distribution just described is not a recent innovation. In the *Ritmo su Sant'Alessio*, a Central Marchigiano text from the second half of the thirteenth century, metaphony triggered by final /-u/ and /-i/ is already active, and the distinction between masculine count demonstratives and mass/neuter demonstratives is visible in the same paradigm. Formentin (2007, pp. 95ff., 102–105) notes the metaphony of /e/ in demonstratives and the one-degree raising of mid-open vowels in forms such as those in (19)–(20). The process is the Sabino-Ciociarian type: /e, o/ raise to [i, u], while /ɛ, ɔ/ raise to [e, o], as in the well-known series tectu > ['tittu] 'roof', ursu > ['urzu] 'bear', pectu > ['pettu] 'chest' and novu > ['novu] 'new' (Lorenzetti, 1993, p. 173; Vignuzzi, 1994, p. 336). For an earlier discussion of a medieval neuter adjectival form, see Alarcos-Llorach (1980b).

(19) Sabina metaphony in demonstratives (*Ritmo su Sant'Alessio*, XIII c.; Formentin, 2007, pp. 102–103)

/e/ > [i] / _-u:

<i>quistu</i> MSG	'this' (v. 232)	[+metaph.]
<i>questa</i> FSG	'this' (vv. 60, 62, 141, 236)	[-metaph.]
<i>quillu</i> MSG	'that' (vv. 34, 71, 100, 189)	[+metaph.]
<i>quella</i> FSG	'that' (vv. 180, 184, 198, 216)	[-metaph.]
<i>questo</i> MASS	'this' (v. 47)	[-metaph.]
<i>quello</i> MASS	'that' (v. 112)	[-metaph.]

⁴ It is important to observe that in much of Italia Mediana, the masculine /-u/ triggers the palatalization of a preceding /-l-/, resulting in forms like <gliu> [ʎu] or [ju] instead of /lu/. In contrast, the /-o/ of the neuter/mass form does not cause palatalization, maintaining a clear phonological distinction between the two categories (see Vignuzzi, 2010).

(20) Sabina metaphony applied to mid-open vowels (*Ritmo su Sant'Alessio*; Formentin, 2007, pp. 102–105)

/ɛ, ɔ/ > [e, o] / _u, _i

<i>anellu</i>	‘ring’	(v. 172)
<i>bellu</i>	‘beautiful’	(v. 256)
<i>bonu</i>	‘good’	(v. 90)
<i>novu</i>	‘new’	(v. 100)

The important fact is the coexistence of regular Sabina metaphony with mass/neuter forms in *-o*. The text preserves *-u* and *-o* largely according to their etymological and grammatical distribution, as also shown by first-person singular forms and indeclinables such as <como> ‘how’ and <quando> ‘when’. Mass forms such as <quello> preserve the non-metaphonic /-o/ form, while some lexical mass nouns appear with *-u*, for instance <argentu> ‘silver’, <auru> ‘gold’ and <tuttu> ‘everything’ (Formentin, 2007, pp. 104–105). This is precisely why the analysis cannot be reduced to a local phonetic rule: the same surface ending may participate in different grammatical configurations, and mass reference is diagnosed by the agreement system as a whole.

(21) Medieval metaphony and mass agreement in the Central Marches (*Ritmo su Sant'Alessio*):

- a. <Quistu mundu m'è fallente> (v. 232) MSG
Quist-u mund-u m' è fallente
 DEM.MSG world-MSG 1SG.DAT be.3SG.PRS failing.PTCP
 ‘This world is failing me’
- b. <Tuttu questo adoperava> (v. 47) MASS
Tuttu questo adoperava
 Q DEM.MASS use.3SG.IPFV
 ‘All of this was used’

The contrast between <quistu mundu> and <tuttu questo> is the medieval counterpart of the modern alternation between masculine count demonstratives and mass/neuter demonstratives. It also provides the direct bridge to Asturian: the same kind of distinction that opposes <pilu nigru> to <pelo negro> in Lléna is here realized through the demonstrative and the mass/neuter ending⁵.

The *Ritmo cassinese*, from the Cassino area, confirms that the same architecture extended across the median-southern area. Neuter/mass forms such as <lo audire>, <lo mello>, <quello ke sactio> and the mass object clitic <lo> preserve a determiner or clitic exponent distinct from masculine count forms; see the examples in (22) (Formentin, 2007, pp. 21, 134; Vignuzzi, 1994, p. 336):

⁵ As reported by Formentin (2007, p. 109), the article <lu> appears consistently in the Sant'Alessio text, with the exception of <lo enditiu> (v. 90). Notably, <lu> also occurs in a bisyllabic form, <ellu fante> (v. 72). Additionally, it appears in contracted preposition + determiner sequences, such as <de lu> (v. 14) and <per lu> (v. 243) (ib.; see also Russo & Ulfsbjörninn, 2021). <lu> (instead of <lo>) is also present in enclitic constructions, as seen in <falume> ‘fammelo/do it for me’ (Formentin, 2007, p. 109, n. 43).

(22) *Ritmo cassinese*, XIII c.:

- a. <lo audire> [2] b. <lo mello> [86]
lo audire lo mell-o
 DEF.MASS listen.INF DEF.MASS ADJ.MASS
 ‘to listen to it’ ‘the best’
- c. <quello ke sactio> [13] d. <lo> Mass object clitic [19, 55, 74, 94]
quello ke sactio, e.g. *credotello* (tibi + illud)
 DEM.MASS PRON V.1SG.PRS
 ‘what I know’

The neuter/mass value is visible in invariable non-metaphonic forms, where the metaphonic configuration associated with masculine final -u is absent. In the *Ritmo Cassinese*, we find the non-metaphonic form <ioso> from deorsum, which also appears, as reported by Formentin (*ib.*) in the *Scongiuro Cassinese*. These examples further confirm the non-myopic nature of metaphony, demonstrating that it does not operate purely at the phonological level but is influenced by morphosyntactic factors. The *Ritmo cassinese* also exhibits the *Sabina* metaphonic pattern: all mid vowels raise by one degree before final /-i/ and /-u/. Vignuzzi (1994, p. 336) and Formentin (2007, pp. 72–73) describe alternations such as masculine <novu> with raised [o] vs. feminine <nòva> with /ɔ/, and masculine <apértu> vs. feminine <apèrta> with /ɛ/. The relevant forms are summarized in (23).

(23) *Sabina* metaphony in the *Ritmo cassinese*:

/ɛ, ɔ/ > [e, o] / __{-u, -i}; /e, o/ > [i, u] / __{-u, -i}	
<i>celu</i> (v. 96) ‘sky’	<i>quistu</i> MSG (v. 25) ‘this’ vs. <i>questa</i> FSG (v. 21)
<i>tempu</i> (v. 72) ‘time’	<i>quillu</i> MSG (v. 36) ‘that’ vs. <i>quella</i> FSG (v. 74)
<i>bonu</i> (v. 43) ‘good’	<i>quello</i> MASS (v. 13) ‘that’
<i>bostru</i> (v. 2) ‘your.PL’	<i>bui</i> (v. 60) ‘you’, from Latin <i>vōs</i>
<i>occlu</i> (v. 37) ‘eye’	<i>siniuri</i> (v. 1) ‘lords’

This textual evidence is also useful for evaluating the older colonization hypothesis. One of the phonological arguments invoked by Menéndez-Pidal (19564 [1926], §§52–54)⁶ was the assimilation of the cluster -nd-. In the *Ritmo cassinese* this assimilation is absent, and in the Sant’Alessio text it is only sporadic: <etnizia> ‘sign, evidence’ (v. 206) <indiciu, <munnu> ‘clean, pure’ (v. 256), <quano> ‘when’ (v. 197), and derivatives of inde such as <nne> (v. 7) and <annanti> ‘advancing’ (v. 45). Formentin (2007, p. 106) observes that forms preserving -nd-, such as <mundu>, are much more frequent, and that etymological opacity may have

⁶ See Menéndez-Pidal (19564 [1926], §55bis, p. 303): “aparece completa y clara la solución dada en la primera edición de estos Orígenes [...]: en los Orígenes se estima que el paso de mb > m, nd > n, ld > l, así como el de nt > nd, nk > ng, lt > ld, ocurrido a la vez en el Sur de Italia y en España, no es cosa fortuita, lo cual es evidente [...] es natural y plausible la hipótesis de que el latín de España continúa una pronunciación venida del Sur de Italia, algo así como el francés del Canadá conserva usos normandos”. My translation: “The solution presented in the first edition of *Orígenes* appears fully developed and clear: in *Orígenes*, it is argued that the changes mb > m, nd > n, ld > l, as well as nt > nd, nk > ng, lt > ld, which occurred simultaneously in southern Italy and Spain, are not a mere coincidence—something that is evident. It is therefore natural and plausible to hypothesize that the Latin spoken in Spain continues a pronunciation that originated in southern Italy, much in the same way that Canadian French preserves Norman linguistic features”.

facilitated the sporadic emergence of assimilation, suggesting that the phenomenon was already present in spoken language but had not yet fully generalized in writing. This weakens a direct transfer account but strengthens the comparative argument: the shared phenomena are better understood as parallel Romance strategies for preserving mass/count distinctions after the restructuring of Latin neuter morphology.

The modern dialectal evidence confirms the continuity of these strategies. AIS (Jaberg & Jud, 1928–1940) map 1451 documents a Reatino-type mass DP with mass article <lo> plus mass noun in -u, for instance [mɛ:te lo 'gra:nu] 'he/she reaps an amount of wheat' at point 557, Esanatoglia (Macerata). The same map also shows a Maceratese-type pattern at point 567, Muccia (Macerata), where mass <lo> combines with a noun in -o, as in <lo grano> 'an amount of wheat'. The first pattern recalls Rieti, where mass is concentrated in D°; the second recalls Llena, where mass /-o/ is also visible in the nominal/adjectival morphology. The AIS material therefore links the medieval texts, modern Italo-Romance dialects and Central Asturian within a single comparative parameter: whether mass is realized in D°, N°, adjectives, or more than one of these domains.

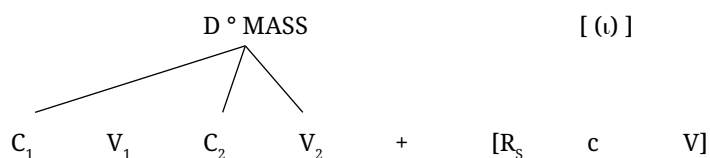
The alignment between the *Marche* dialects and Asturian suggests a broader Romance-internal evolution where the loss of the Latin neuter was compensated by new morphosyntactic strategies to express mass/count distinctions. The combined evidence suggests that both in Asturian and Italian dialects, the evolution of the Latin neuter inflection led to a structurally distinct mass/count opposition, rather than a direct continuation of the classical three-gender system. This development, which emerged as an internal Romance innovation, manifests through various but systematically coherent strategies, reflecting different distributions of morphophonological features at the syntax-phonology interface. These findings also align with data from older texts, such as the *Ritmo su Sant'Alessio* and the *Ritmo Cassinese*, highlighting a broader Romance phenomenon in which neuter/mass markers (*lo*, *-o*) have been consistently maintained across different time periods and dialectal variations. The *Ritmo su Sant'Alessio* and *Ritmo Cassinese* provide historical evidence of the neuter/mass distinction in medieval Central Italian dialects, reinforcing the idea that the Asturian neuter system is part of a larger Romance pattern. The shared features between medieval and modern Italian dialects and modern Asturian dialects, such as *lo* as a mass determiner and the maintenance of a distinct morphological category for mass nouns, suggest a continuity in how Romance languages have historically handled mass/count distinctions.

2.4. Southern Italo-Romance: loss of final vowel contrast and compensatory mass marking

Southern Italo-Romance provides a third configuration. The relevant area extends from the southern Marches and Umbria to the Campanian-Lucanian-Apulian zone (Formentin, 2007, p. 79). Here the older distinction between masculine and neuter articles has often survived even where final /-u/ and /-o/ are weakened or neutralized. The historical background is the differentiation of Latin *illūm* and *illūd* in the Romance article system (Bertoni, 1916, §104; Merlo, 1906–1907, vol. 30, pp. 11–25, 438–454; vol. 31, pp. 157–163; Rohlf, 1966–1969, §419). In several southern dialects the mass article [(l)o] is analysed as continuing a form such as **illoc* < *ille* + *hoc*, with partitive or Mass value (Formentin, 1994a, pp. 40–93, 196–233; 1994b, pp. 99–117; 2007, p. 79; Russo, 2002, pp. 117–150; 2022, pp. 94–129). For a regional survey of Abruzzo and Molise, see Vignuzzi (1992).

This is crucial for the comparison with Asturian transition areas. When the final-vowel opposition is weakened, the mass/count distinction does not necessarily disappear; it may be displaced to another morphophonological position. In Neapolitan, the mass article can trigger *Raddoppiamento Sintattico* (RS), or syntactic doubling, because it contains a latent final consonant -C associated with the mass determiner⁷. The masculine count article lacks this latent consonant and therefore does not trigger the same initial gemination (Russo, 2021, pp. 179–224; 2022, pp. 94–129; Russo & Ulfsbjorninn, 2021, pp. 101–158).

- (24) Neapolitan mass article: underlying structure:
 (D ° MASS) [(l)o] + [RS CV] (this template follows *Lateral Phonology*)
 The [RS CV] unit represents a latent mass consonantal position, activated when the article combines with a [+Mass] nominal.



The examples show that the mass/count distinction can survive even after the loss of final /-u/ vs. /-o/. Neapolitan [o 'vri:tə] ‘a piece of glass’ and [o b'britə] ‘glass as material’ both continue Latin VĪTRUM, but only the Mass DP shows the initial geminate licensed by the mass article. The structural distinction between mass and count categories is consistently maintained across Italian dialects through latent consonants, RS (syntactic doubling), or other morphophonological strategies, such as metaphony—i.e., internal affix variation, where the mass exponent is non-metaphonic. Thus, the RS position (C) serves as an underlying phonological slot for this latent mass marker, which is only realized when triggered by syntactic licensing in mass DP contexts. The same mechanism is visible in [o l'lattə] ‘the milk’ vs. [o 'ka:nə] ‘the dog’: the former contains a Mass article with a latent consonant that resyllabifies as initial gemination, while the latter contains a masculine Count article without that Mass consonantal slot. The diachronic persistence of the relevant Neapolitan exponents is also documented in Loise De Rosa’s *Ricordi* (Formentin, 1998). The latent consonant results in onset gemination of the following word, as illustrated in the Neapolitan example below; see the DM (= Distributed Morphology) representation following Embick (2010) in (25).

⁷ On RS, see Marotta (2011); Russo & Ulfsbjorninn (2021).

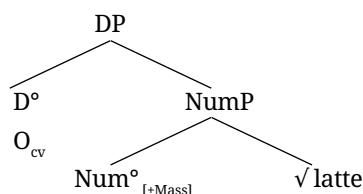
(25) Mass and syntactic doubling in Neapolitan – Geminates ($\emptyset_1$ -l) = [ll] are syntactically licensed by an upper syntactic head specified SG [+Mass]:

D° MASS = /o_c/ + *latte* > [o l'lattə] ‘the milk’

D° MASC = /o/ + *cane* > [o 'ka:nə] ‘the dog’

Mass D° licenses RS/gemination; masculine Count D° does not.

D° mass = illoc CVCVcv [ocv llattə]



Computation of D° Mass: Neapolitan [o l'lattə] ‘the milk’ versus [o 'ka:nə] ‘the dog’

The identification of the neuter noun relies on specific grammatical strategies involving the indefinite mass article, such as the application of Syntactic Doubling, which results in an initial geminate ([oc l'lattə] ‘the milk’). The resyllabification of the latent consonant is triggered by D° mass articles positioned to the left of a lexical category marked as [+Mass], which are analyzed as syntactic heads due to a cliticization effect (see Russo, 2022).

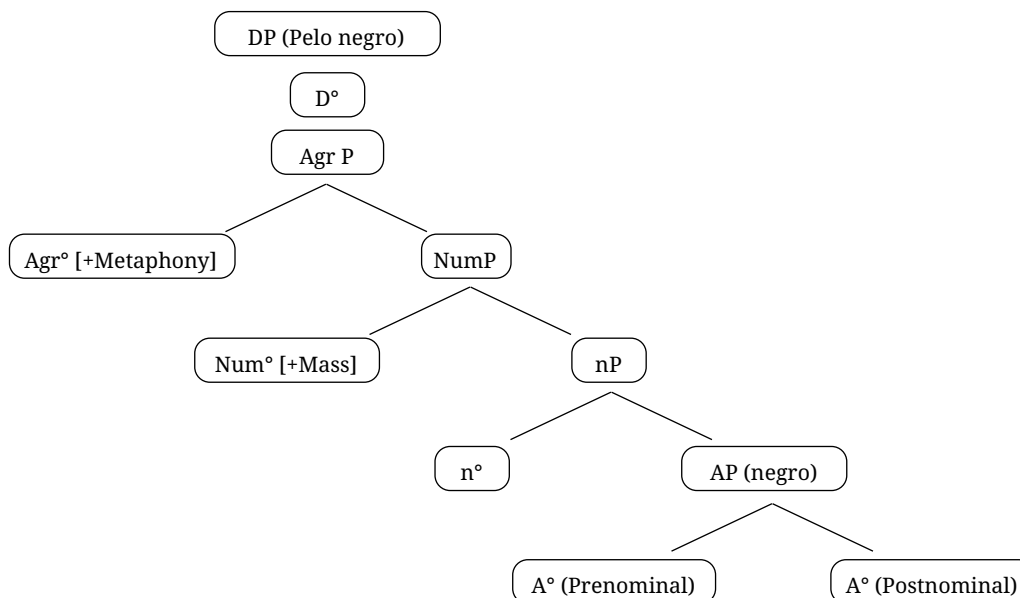
The Neapolitan configuration is morphophonologically different from L̩lena, but grammatically parallel. In L̩lena, mass is often visible as /-o/ and as non-metaphonic adjectival agreement: <*pelo negro*> contrasts with count <*pilu nigru*>. In Neapolitan, the final-vowel opposition has been neutralized, but Mass is still grammatically visible through the article and its latent consonant. In both systems, the mass/count opposition is implemented by syntax and phonology together, not by the lexicon alone.

This DM tree, based on Embick’s rules and principles, concerns the computation of D° Mass. The presence of /oc/ indicates an underlying latent consonant, which is activated in syntactic doubling environments. This distinction suggests that D° actively interacts with NumP, selecting different agreement strategies for mass and count nouns, rather than merely inheriting a feature from NumP. In Asturian, the mass/neuter distinction is generally entrusted to the adjective. In <Ta l’arroz negro>, *arroz* is interpreted as a mass noun, so the adjective <negro> appears in the neuter/mass form, not in the metaphonic masculine form. In <Xuan yera niciu>, *niciu* is a count adjective, showing metaphonic masculine singular agreement. The mass vs. count contrast is signaled through adjective morphophonology. Italo-Romance varieties and Asturian show that the mass/count distinction can also be realized on postnominal adjectives, as in <pelo negro>; see also (26):

(26) Mass agreement in Asturian:

[DP *pelo* [Num° *negro*]] ‘black hair, hair as a mass’

Compare Count: *pilu ngru* ‘a black hair, a single strand’.



In (26) D° [+Mass] ensures *pelo* is a mass noun. AgrP (Agreement Projection) blocks metaphony, keeping *negro* and *pelo* non-metaphonic. NumP controls mass agreement, maintaining the mass vs. count distinction. Postnominal adjective *negro* remains non-metaphonic, reflecting mass agreement in Asturian. *Negro* functions as part of the morphosyntactic system marking mass agreement, not merely as a descriptive adjective.

The grammar of indefiniteness illustrates how the shift from phonologically conditioned to morphologically determined metaphony reinforces the idea that this process functions as a grammatical mechanism rather than a mere phonological sound change. This evidence supports a non-local model of feature spreading, in which metaphony is not a purely assimilative process but instead interacts with morphosyntactic heads such as Num° and D°, rather than applying indiscriminately across all phonological environments.

The parallel can now be stated precisely. Central Asturian and Central-Southern Italian dialects share three possible strategies for maintaining the mass/count distinction after the loss or reanalysis of Latin neuter morphology: (i) preservation of a mass/neuter /-o/ opposed to masculine count /-u/, as in Llena and Macerata-type dialects; (ii) relocation of the contrast to D°, demonstratives and clitics, as in Rieti; and (iii) compensation through a latent mass consonant and syntactic doubling after final-vowel neutralization, as in Neapolitan. These strategies differ in phonological implementation, but converge on the same morphosyntactic result: the mass value is structurally distinguished from the ordinary masculine count configuration—even where metaphony remains visible on the noun, as in Rieti. Metaphony must therefore be analysed as non-local, i.e. as a process regulated by agreement structure rather than by an adjacent high vowel alone.

3. Conclusion: non-myopic metaphony and the grammar of mass/count distinction

Asturian and Central-Southern Italian dialects challenge the traditional assumption that metaphony operates strictly as a phonological process governed by locality. In masculine singular nouns, metaphony affects the tonic vowel, altering /a, e, o/ > [e, i, u], triggered by a post-tonic /-u/. In Asturian mass constructions, however, the masculine-count metaphonic configuration is systematically blocked; in the Italo-Romance systems compared here, the same distinction may instead be displaced to D°, clitics, or syntactic doubling. This pattern suggests that metaphony is not simply a phonological rule but rather a morphophonological process that depends on higher syntactic and morphological constraints. Metaphony in Central Asturian is not just a phonological alternation but has been morphologized, with its evolution closely tied to morphosyntactic structure. Specifically, the mass/count distinction in Asturian interacts with metaphony in a non-local way: metaphony is expected to apply in the presence of final -u, yet it does not in mass nouns. This is a crucial piece of evidence that metaphony is constrained not just by adjacent phonological material but also by morphosyntactic properties.

Asturian shares structural similarities with central and southern Italian dialects, particularly in how mass nouns interact with metaphony. Mass agreement blocks metaphony in Asturian, not because the phonological trigger (/u/) is absent, but because the morphosyntactic structure of mass nouns prevents its application. This reveals non-local behaviour: metaphony does not apply blindly at a local phonological level but is constrained by morphosyntactic factors (McCollum, Baković & Mai, in press). The mass/count distinction in Romance is not exhausted by lexical classification: lexical semantics supplies the material/countable base, while syntax computes the relevant number and agreement values and phonology realizes them. Plurality is therefore not determined exclusively in the lexicon but is shaped through morphosyntactic and phonological processes. This is particularly evident in non-myopic metaphony, which directly demonstrates the interplay between phonology and morphosyntax, as seen in the systematic blocking of metaphony in mass constructions. This provides strong evidence for a morphophonological approach to metaphony, in which mass/count distinctions actively shape phonological alternations. In these languages, metaphony is morphophonologically regulated, not simply phonological, as it depends on the syntactic features of Num° (Number) and D° (Determiner). The interaction between mass nouns and metaphony provides further evidence that vowel alternations are not purely phonological but conditioned by morphosyntactic structure.

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