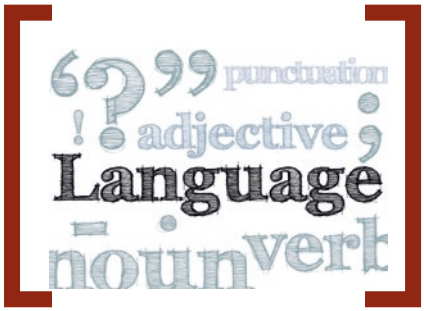
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Why do all the Romance languages, except Italian, form their plurals with an 's'?

Dr Chiara Cappellaro is a British Academy Research Fellow at St John's College, University of Oxford and specializes in historical Romance morphology.

They don't! 'Sigmatic' plurals (plurals adding '-s' to the singular of nouns, adjectives, articles, pronouns) are in fact characteristic of so-called 'western' Romance (Iberian Peninsula, western Occitan, written (but not spoken) French, Romansh, Friulian, Ladin and Sardinian), but Italian and Romanian do it differently. In 'eastern' Romance (Italian and associated dialects and Romanian and its dialects), plural number is marked by a vowel at the end of the word. Thus Italian and Romanian *casa – case* 'house(s)' and Italian *lupo – lupi*, Romanian *lup – lupi* 'wolf(ves)' vs Spanish *casa – casas* 'house(s)' and *lobo – lobos* 'wolf(ves)'.

There are many other pluralisation strategies:

(i) change in the stem vowel triggered by 'metaphony', as also happened in the history of English *foot/feet*. Thus in the Piedmontese dialect of northern Italy *gat* 'cat' – *get* 'cats' (<**geti* <**gati*). Metaphony is a harmonization process whereby stressed vowels ('a' in *gati* for instance) become more similar to the unstressed word-final vowel ('i' in *gati*).

(ii) change in vowel length: see *gardɛ̃* 'garden' – *gardɛ̃:* 'gardens' in the Norman dialect of Quettehou. Or even change in tone! See *vākɔ̄* 'cow' – *vākɔ̀* 'cows', *pɔ̄r* 'pig' – *pɔ̀r* 'pigs' in the dialect of Saint-Julien-de-Crempse.

(iii) zero ending, as in *lõna* 'moon' – *lõn* 'moons' in the Emilian-Romagnol dialect of Lugo, northern Italy.

But to go back to the original question: why does Italian not mark plurality with 's'?

The origin of 's' is undisputed. Romance nouns generally continue Latin accusative case-forms (the other case-forms having mostly disappeared), and in the plural of masculine and feminine nouns and adjectives this took the form *-os/-as/-es*, and marginally *-us*. Thus in the transition from Latin to Romance, word-final 's' emerges as the principal marker of 'plural'.

The origins of the vowel endings -i and -e in the plural are still debated. Some scholars assume that Italian -e in *rose* is the outcome of regular sound change from Latin accusative plural *ros-as* (*-as* >*-ai̯ > -e). This argument, however, cannot account for -i plural ending in words continuing Latin 2nd declension nouns such as Italian *lupi* < Latin *lupi*, since *-os* (e.g. *lupos)* could not have



developed to *-i*. The source of this *-i* is likely to be a survival of the Latin nominative plural *-i* in certain nouns, which was then analogically extended at the expense of forms continuing the accusative in *-os*.

To sum up, the difference in plural marking found in Italian and Romanian vs other standard Romance languages with 's' plurals like Spanish lies ultimately in two facts: (a) the different development of Latin word-final 's' in the Romance languages; and (b) the gradualness in the process of 'case' loss, which involved the coexistence of different case-forms of Latin nouns (mainly accusative but sometimes also nominative) and their competition for the same function, i.e. plural marking.

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