

The preposition *ma* in the central Italian dialects

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1. Introduction¹

In this contribution I will focus on the functional preposition *ma* “to”, “in” (< Lat. IN MEDIO AD, cf. Rohlfs 1969: § 639) attested in a number of central Italian dialects and gallo-italic varieties of both Romagnolo and Northern Marchigiano area. *Ma* is the result of a complex process of grammaticalization of a nominal element, originally an adjective which underwent a process of nominalization in Latin. The case of *ma* is not an *unicum*. It is a well-known fact that several prepositions are the results of grammaticalization processes of nominal or adjectival elements. Furthermore, a number of prepositions in the Germanic languages and in Romance stem from Indo-European **medhyo* and Latin *mĕdio*, respectively.

The article is organized as follows: section 2 is dedicated to a general description of the phenomenon, its geographical distribution and the contexts of use which emerged from two main sources: the ASIt (Syntactic Atlas of Italy) data base and the AIS (Swiss-Italian Atlas). In section 3 I will focus on the etymological process involved in the grammaticalization of *ma*. In section 4 I will deal with cases of grammaticalization of *mĕdius*/**medhyo* in union with functional prepositions in the Romance and Germanic varieties, in particular historical and dialectal varieties of English. Section 5 concludes.

2. The preposition *ma* in the data-bases: the sources

The sources from which the data are drawn are mainly two. The first is the ASIt data base in which the gallo-italic varieties are very well represented, the latter is the AIS that provides a relevant number of occurrences for the central varieties. I am aware that this choice presents at least one problematic aspect. The project for the AIS started in 1911 and was published between 1928 and 1940, while the ASIt investigations for the Romagnolo varieties

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started in the 1990s and are still in progress for central Italy. There is, therefore, a considerable lapse of time between the two sources, which might play a role. In this regard, I would like to point out that the main aim of this article is a cross-dialectal inventory of the syntactic contexts of *ma* and a diachronic perspective is, for now, beyond the scope of the present contribution. A last remark must be made. Although gallo-italic dialects do not belong to the Central area from a linguistic point of view, they have been taken into consideration here for two reasons. Firstly, they present very clearly some prototypical contexts which it will be interesting to compare with those of central varieties; secondly, a description of the gallo-italic varieties will provide a more detailed picture of the geographical distribution of the preposition.

2.1. Contexts in the Gallo-Italic dialects: the ASIt data base

In the ASIt data base, *ma* is attested in a well-identified portion of the of the gallo-italic linguistic macro-area which covers Southern Romagna and Northern Marche, in particular, the administrative province of Pesaro and Urbino (PU). The locations investigated in the data base are: Rimini for the Romagnolo area and Isola del Piano, Montemontanaro di Montefelcino and Gradara for the Northern Marche.

In Northern Marchigiano varieties *ma* realizes the dative (1), the prepositional accusative (2) and forms the locative deictic adverbs (3):

- | | | | |
|-----|----|--|---------------------|
| (1) | a. | Ha raccomandet mi fiol mal profesor
has recommended my son to-the teacher
“He has recommended my son to the teacher” | Isola del Piano, PU |
| | b. | Si nisciun i l’avèssa ditt ma tu sia,
if nobody cl.subj. it had.subj. said to your aunt
en avrine ste probléma
not would have this problem
“If your aunt weren’t told, we wouldn’t have this problem” | Montemontanaro, PU |
| | c. | Te che t si on breu burdel, rispond ma la maestra
you that you are a good child answer to the teacher
“You, good boy, answer to your teacher” | Gradara, PU |

- (2) a. Salutme **ma** tu cugnèta Montemontanaro, PU
 greet-me to your sister-in-law
 “Give my regards to your sister-in-law”
- b. **Ma** chi ho da saluté? Gradara, PU
 to who have to greet
 “Whom do I have to give my regards to?”
- (3) a. Mo, tu ke si **mache**’, potrei veda tutt Isola del Piano, PU
 now you (that) are to-here can.fut see everything
 “You’re here, you’ll be able to see everything”
- b. Mò, tu ch si **machì**, podrè véda tutt Montemontanaro, PU
 now you (that) are to-here can.fut see everything
 “You’re here, you’ll be able to see everything”
- c. Perché o da gi **ma** là? Gradara, PU
 why have to go to there
 “Why do I have to go there?”

In the dialect of Rimini *ma* realizes the dative (4), as in the Northern Marchigiano varieties seen above, but does not form deictic adverbials (5)²:

- (4) Al voi presentè **ma** Giorgio
 cl.subj-cl.obj want present to Giorgio
 “I want to present him to Giorgio”
- (5) E basilghi l’è sempra crisù ben **iquè**
 the basil cl.subj is always grown well here
 “The basil has always grown well here”

² The prepositional accusative is not a possible construction in the dialect.

Interestingly, a very restricted use is attested in this dialect, which is not attested in the Northern Marchigiano dialects. *Ma* realizes locative PPs both stative (6a) and directional (6b):

- (6) a. Per avè pers e treno, a so custreta a ste **ma** chesa
 for have missed the train cl.subj am forced to stay at home
 “I was forced to stay at home because I had missed the train”
- b. Maria la si è vesta arrivè tot **ma** chesa a l'imprevis
 Mary cl.subj cl.refl. cl.obj. is seen arrive everybody to house suddenly
 “Maria realized that everybody was coming to her house at once”

It cannot be ignored, though, that in the data base all the examples of *ma* in spatial PPs contain the noun *casa* “home”. This noun prototypically belongs to a highly restricted subgroup of nominal elements that, with a certain degree of variation, show a peculiar behaviour in many Italian dialects, when inserted in spatial PPs. In several Venetan dialects, for example, the preposition *a* “to” can be omitted in directional and stative PPs involving nominals such as *casa* “home”, *scuola* “school”, *messa* “mass”, *lavoro* “work”³. It must be said that, in the dialect of Rimini, the use of *ma* with *casa* “home” seems to be optional and, in fact, alternates with the preposition *a* in at least three occurrences of the data base:

- (7) a. E tu amig l'è andè **a chesa** ir (...)
 the your friend cl.subj is gone to house yesterday
 “Your friend went home yesterday”
- b. A l'ho da purtè **a chesa**
 cl.subj cl.obj have PREP bring to house
 “I have to bring it home”

³ See Penello 2003: 220-251 for a very detailed description and analysis of the distributional properties of the preposition *a* “to/in/at” in a group of Venetan dialects. The author establishes a series of generalisations based on the possibility for the preposition to be omitted with the nouns *casa* and *scuola*, on one hand, and other common nouns, on the other. The author also discusses the distribution of the preposition with infinitival complements selected by *andare* “go” and aspectual verbs such as *cominciare* “begin” and *riuscire* “be able to”. See also Longobardi 1987 for the alternation between *a* and *in* with geographical names of islands, and Longobardi 1997 for the special behavior of the noun *casa*.

- c. E cred ad puteis purtè **a chesa**
 cl.subj believes PREP can bring to house
 “He believes to be able to bring it home”

Similarly, the directional PP *a scuola* “to school” (8) is not introduced by *ma*, but by the preposition *a*:

- (8) Giorgio l'è sicur ad vloil purtè lo, **a scola**, e burdel
 Giorgio cl.subj is sure of want take cl.obj to school the kid
 “Giorgio is sure that he wants to take the kid to school himself”

In this regard, it is noteworthy that Conti (1898: XII-XIII) confirms for the gallo-italic dialects of the Metauro area⁴ (northern Marche) a very similar pattern. The author observes that *ma* and the article-provided forms such as *mal*, *malla*, *mai*, *malle* are mainly used as dative prepositions. They are sometimes used in spatial PPs, both stative and directional, but only to introduce complements in which, crucially, the place is “localized or dependent on another” such as *parrocchia* “parish”, *casa* “home”, *campo* “field” and *stanza* “room”:

- (9) Gì, stè, èssa **ma** Che Còndi; **mal** foch; **mal** camp; **malla** piantèta; **mai** Trasann
 go stay be PREP Ca'Condi PREP fire PREP field PREP plantation PREP Trasanni

Conti also point out that, *ma* is not permitted if the spatial PP contains a name for places like villages, towns and cities. In these cases the preposition *a* is used instead: “A *Róma*, *a Fosombrón*, *a Fermignèn* and not *ma Róma*, *ma Fosombrón*, *ma Fermignèn*”.

2.1. Contexts in the Central Italian dialects (the AIS)

As far as the gallo-italic dialects are concerned, the data in the AIS are substantially consistent with the pattern described in section 2.1 with no major differences in the geographical distribution. As for the central dialects, the AIS displays three relevant facts:

- (i) *ma* has a variant form *me* [< in medio (Parrino, 1960 in Regnicoli, 1995)], which is attested at least in four locations Treia (MC), Esanatoglia (MC), Muccia (MC) and Orvieto (TR).

⁴ Conti (1898) points out that, though the Metauro area includes several dialects, he bases mainly on the dialect of Urbino.

(ii) *ma* and *me* are attested, with different distributional properties, in a wide portion of central Italy: in several dialects of central Marche, in particular of the Maceratese area, in Umbria (Pietralunga, PG and Orvieto, TR) and, more marginally, in Lazio (Montefiascone, VT) and in the Maremmano area (Seggiano, GR);

(iii) in the central dialects the use of *ma* in spatial PPs is not a restricted context as in the gallo-italic dialect of Rimini, on the contrary *ma* and *me* are widely attested as both directional and stative prepositions in all the dialects investigated (10-14):

(10) *Il fulmine / è cascato / sulla nostra casa*, “Lightning struck our house” (lit. Lightning fell onto our house).

- | | | |
|----|---|----------------------------------|
| a. | Na sporkitsia cascato ma la kasa | 612 Montefiascone, VT (n. Lazio) |
| b. | Um furminu kaska me na kasa | 557 Esanatoglia, MC (c. Marche) |
- (AIS, vol. II, carte 393-394-395)

(11) *Si rigovernano / le stoviglie / nell’acqua calda*, “To do the washing up in hot water”

- | | | |
|----|--|----------------------------|
| a. | Lavate le pyatte mel akwa kalla | 583 Orvieto, TR (Umbria) |
| b. | C’è da lavà li pyatti mell akwa galla | 567 Muccia, MC (c. Marche) |
- (AIS, vol. V, carte 946-947-948)

(12) *Riporre i vestiti / nella cassa*, “To put the cloths in the crate”

- | | | |
|----|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| a. | Posà le vestide ma la kassa | 612 Montefiascone, VT (n. Lazio) |
| b. | Metti li panni me la kassa | 567 Muccia, MC (c. Marche) |
| c. | Arponne i panni me ra kassa | 558 Treia, MC (c. Marche) |
| d. | Arponne li vestiti me la kassa | 557 Esanatoglia, MC (c. Marche) |
- (AIS, vol. V, maps 902-203)

(13) *Fare un buco / nel muro*, “To make a hole in the wall”

- | | | |
|--|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| | Fa um muzo me lu muru | 557 Esanatoglia, MC (c. Marche) |
|--|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
- (AIS, vol. V, carte 857-858)

(14) *Sospenderlo (il paiuolo) alla catena*, “To hang it (the kettle) to the chain”

- | | | |
|----|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| a. | Attaccalo ma la catena | 612 Montefiascone, VT (n. Lazio) |
| b. | (not translated) ma la catena | 546 Pietralunga, PG (Umbria) |
- (AIS, vol. V, carte 958-959)

I believe that Parrino (1960) is on the right track proposing two different etymological processes for *ma* and *me*. Although, as we will see later on, his assumption that the grammaticalization involves a Latin base IN MEDIO in which the preposition AD is absent can be formulated in more formal terms. Suffice to say for the moment that the variant form *me* is not to be considered here the output of a general treatment of low vowels in open syllables. If this were the case, in dialects, such as the Romagnolo, in which the vowel /a/ generally occurs as palatalized in this context, one would expect that the preposition *ma* were also palatalized, which is not (cf “*ma chesa*” in (6)). Strikingly, the dialects of Treia, Esanatoglia, Muccia and Orvieto, which, as we have seen, present *me* > IN MEDIO instead of *ma*, display the preposition (*me*) exclusively in spatial PPs and never for the dative⁵, for which the competing preposition is *a*, cf (15):

- (15) (*Togli il coltello*) *a codesto bambino*, “Take the knife away from the kid”, lit. to the kid
- | | | |
|----|---------------------|---------------------------------|
| a. | ... a llu fiyolu | 558 Treia, MC (c. Marche) |
| b. | ... a sto fiyyu | 557 Esanatoglia, MC (c. Marche) |
| c. | ... a qwelu munello | 567 Muccia, MC (c. Marche) |
| d. | ... a qwel bambino | 583 Orvieto, TR (Umbria) |

This group of varieties represent the counterpart of the gallo-italic dialects of the Metauro area (cf 2.1.), in which the dialects, which present *ma* > IN MEDIO AD, display the preposition (*ma*) mainly for datives, being the spatial context for *ma* either highly restricted (“localized places”) or not permitted. This pattern emerges not only the dialects observed by Conti (1898), but also in the gallo-italic varieties investigated more recently by the ASIt project. Isola del Piano, Montemontanaro and Gradara present *ma* for the dative, prepositional accusative (and deictics, see section 2.3. for the special treatment of the deictic context), but not for any other spatial contexts. Leave aside the deictic context for a moment, which will be discussed in the next section, and consider the summary table below:

	Dative	Prepositional accusative	Spatial	Deictics
Central dialects				
Treia	X	n/a	me	mellà
Esanatoglia	X	n/a	me	X

⁵ Balducci (1993: 165) observes that in Southern Marche *ma* is not used for datives.

Muccia	X	n/a	me	X
Orvieto	X	n/a	me	X
Seggiano	X	n/a	X	melà
Pietralunga	ma	n/a	ma ⁶	meki, melà, me lagiù
Montefiascone	ma	n/a	ma	mmellà, mme layò, mme lasù
Gallo-italic dialects				
Fano	ma	n/a	X	malà, ma lagiù, ma lasù
Mercatello	ma	n/a	ma	ma ki, malà, ma lagiò, ma lasò (ma li⁷)
Urbino	ma		n/a	maki malà
Isola del Piano	ma	n/a	X	machè
Montemontanaro	ma	ma	X	machì
Gradara	ma	ma	X	malà

Table 1

Three systems can be identified, cf. Table 2: (i) dialects which present *me* for spatial PPs, but not for datives (central); (ii) dialects which present *ma* for datives but not for spatial PPs (gallo-italic); (iii) dialects which present a mixed system: *ma* for datives and (marginally) for spatial PPs (central). Note that the following combinations are not attested: (iv) *ma* for spatial PPs and not for datives (v); *ma* for spatial PPs and *me* for datives; (vi) the opposite order of (v); (vii) *me* for both datives and spatial PPs and (viii) *me* for datives and not for spatial PPs:

	Dative	Spatial
I	X	<i>me</i>
II	<i>ma</i>	X
III	<i>ma</i>	<i>ma</i>
IV*	X	<i>ma</i>
V*	<i>me</i>	<i>ma</i>
VI*	<i>ma</i>	<i>me</i>
VII*	<i>me</i>	<i>me</i>
VIII*	<i>me</i>	X

Table 2

Note also that the gallo-italic dialects display a very solid pattern with very low micro-variation, being Mercatello the only variety which present *ma* in spatial PPs as well. As far as the central dialects are concerned, the degree of micro-variation is higher. On one hand, the sub-group of Treia, Esanatoglia, Muccia and Orvieto present a very consistent pattern, on the other, the dialects which present an intermediate system should be more finely investigated, being the relevant data rather restricted from a quantitative point of view.

⁶ In the variety of Pietralunga the occurrences of *ma* in spatial contexts are limited in the AIS to one example: *ma lu specchio* “in the mirror”, in “Look at oneself in the mirror” (AIS, vol. IV, maps 674-675).

⁷ Data drawn from Manzini & Savoia 2005.

2.2. *Ma in the deictics*

Within the domain of spatial contexts, the occurrences of *ma/me* in deictic expressions deserves, I believe, a separate discussion. As seen in the previous sections, the gallo-italic varieties display *ma* in deictic adverbials, datives and prepositional accusatives, but these same varieties do not display any relevant use of *ma* in other spatial contexts. On the contrary, in the central dialects, *ma* is widely attested in spatial contexts, but, in fact, the occurrences of *ma* in deictics do not seem so regularly attested as one would expect. Consider the following data drawn from the AIS maps which contain deictic adverbials:

(16) *Vorrei di questa qui / non di quella là*, “I’d like to have a bit of this one here, not of that one there”

Voy kwesta **me ki** / no kwela **me li** 529 Fano (PU)

(AIS, vol. VIII, carte 1519-1520)

(17) *Venite qui!*, “Come here!”

a. Nit **ma ki** 536 Mercatello (PU)

b. Nit **ma ki** 537 Urbino (PU)

c. Venite **me ki** 546 Pietralunga (PG)

(AIS, vol. VIII, carta 1609)

(18) *Andate là!*, “Go there!”

a. Git **malà** 529 Fano (PU)

b. Andet **malà** 536 Mercatello (PU)

c. Git **malà** 537 Urbino (PU)

d. Andete **melà** 546 Pietralunga (PG)

e. Gite **mellà** 566 Treia (MC)

f. Andate là/ andate **melà** 527 Seggiano (GR)

g. Va **mmellà** 612 Montefiascone (RM)

(AIS, vol. VIII, carta 1610)

(19) *Scendete laggiù!*, “Go down there!”

a. Scendet **ma** lagiù 529 Fano (PU)

b. Scindet **ma** lagiò 536 Mercatello (PU)

- c. Scendete **me** lagiù 546 Pietralunga (PG)
 d. Va **mme** layò 612 Montefiascone (RM)
 (AIS, vol. VIII, carta 1611)

(20) Salite lassù! “Go up there!”

- a. Muntat **ma** lasù 529 Fano (PU)
 b. Monte **ma** lasò 536 Mercatello (PU)
 c. Va **mme** lasù 612 Montefiascone (RM)
 (AIS, vol. VIII, carta 1612)

The deictic *qui* “here” is present in two maps of the AIS: in the combination “demonstrative + deictic” (vol. VIII, carte 1519) and in the combination “verb + deictic” (vol. VIII, carta 1609).

The occurrences in the Central dialects are highly restricted anyway. The only variety which forms the adverbial with *ma/me* is Pietralunga in the combination “verb + deictic *qui*” (), whereas the gallo-italic dialects of Mercatello and Urbino both display *ma* in the combination “verb+ deictic” and the dialect of Fano displays *me* in the combination “demonstrative + deictic”, but only in this context.

The picture changes for the deictic *là* “there” (18) and the complex deictic adverbials *laggiù* “down there” (19) and *lassù* “up there” (20). In these contexts, *me* forms the adverbials entering the combination “*me + là/laggiù/lassù*” in four central dialects: Pietralunga, Treia, Seggiano and Montefiascone. As can be observed in the table 3, the preposition shows up with different distributions: Montefiascone is the only central variety which regularly presents *me* in all the three contexts with *là*⁸:

	demonstrative+deictic: <i>questa qui, quella lì</i>	<i>qui</i> “here”	<i>là</i> “there”	<i>laggiù</i> “down there”	<i>lassù</i> “up there”
Central dialects					
Treia	X	X	mellà	X	X
Esanatoglia	X	X	X	X	X
Muccia	X	X	X	X	X
Orvieto	X	X	X	X	X
Pietralunga	X	me ki	melà	me lagiù	X
Seggiano	X	X	melà	X	X
Montefiascone	X	X	mmellà	mme layò	mme lasù
Gallo-italic dialects					
Fano	kwesta me ki, kwela me lì	X	malà	malà	ma lagiù
Mercatello	X	ma ki	malà	ma lagiò	ma lasò

⁸ Bianchi (1888) reports some occurrences of the preposition showing up in different combinations with deictics in Tuscan varieties: **mi-qui** (S. Sepolcro, AR), **emma-lì, me-lì, me-qui** (Arezzo); **unmi-qui** (Chiana area), **dimmellà** (Pitigliano, GR), data in Bianchi 1888 are drawn from Ascoli and Redi.

Urbino	X	ma ki	malà	X	X
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Table 3

A final observation: in the central dialects the preposition forming deictic adverbials is always *me*, whereas in the gallo-italic varieties it is always *ma*. The only exception is the gallo-italic dialect of Fano which presents *ma* with *là*, *laggiù*, *lassù*, but *me* with *questa qui* (...) *quella là*. It is to be noted, however, that Fano is also the only dialect in which *ma/me* is attested in this context.

3. Grammaticalization of *ma* and *me*

As anticipated in the introduction, the functional preposition *ma* is the result of a process of grammaticalization of the Latin nominal element *medio* (“middle”). In Latin *mēdius*⁹ is originally an adjective. Consider, for example, *in medio monte* (lit. “in middle mountain”) in which the noun *monte* “mountain” is modified by *medio* “middle”. In this case, two interpretations are possible: the first one is the attributive reading “in the central mountain”, the latter the predicative reading “in the middle of the mountain”. Interestingly, this adjectival use shows up in Old Italian at least until the 14th cent. In (21a-b) *mezzo* modifies the following noun, triggering in both cases a predicative interpretation, (O.It. *in mezza strada*, *in mezzo mare*, cf. Lat. *in media strada*, *in medio mari*):

21. a Ma tosto ruppe le dolci ragioni / un alber che trovammo **in mezza strada**
but soon broke the sweet reasons a tree that found in middle street
“But soon they ceased; for midway of the road a tree we found (...)”
Dante, *Commedia*, a. 1321, Purg. 22, v.131, 2, 385.3
- b. Né vaghezza di preda, né odio (...) mi fece partir di Cipri a dovervi
neither vagueness of prey nor hate me made leave of Cipri to must-you
- in mezzo mare** con armata mano assalire
in middle sea with armed hand assault

⁹ Pokorny (1959) distinguishes three combinations starting from the PIE base form **me-**:

- A me-**dhi** Sscr. *madhyah*, Gr. *mesos*, Lat. *medius*; cf also P.Gmc. *medjaz > O.N. miðr, O.S. middi, O.Fris. midde, O.H.G. mitti, Goth. midjis “mid, middle”.
- B me-**tà**: Gr. *μετά* “with”, “between”, but also “in the middle of”, “by means of”, “after”, “against” (cf also the prefix *meta*); Alb. *mjet* “up to”, “in the middle of”, “between”, “means, instrument”
- C me-**ghri-s** Arm. *merj* “by”, “next to”

“I was not a desire of plunder, nor enmity (...), that made me leave Cyprus to fall upon you here in this manner”

Boccaccio, *Decameron*, V, 1, 14th cent.

Rohlf's (1969: § 865) proposes that *ma* is the output of the grammaticalization of Lat. *in medio ad* (lit. “in middle to”), which is actually the combination of the nominal element *medio* in union with two functional prepositions (Lat. *medio* < PIE **medhio*). To my knowledge, Rohlf's (1969: § 865) does not refer to a historically attested form, but, interestingly, seems to take into consideration the diachronic evolution of the preposition. Some phonosyntactic and phonological facts seem to be consistent with his proposal. More precisely:

- anticipatory assimilation of the nasal /m/ of the root of *medio* to the preceding nasal /n/ of the preposition *in*: *in medio* < **immedio*;
- apheresis of the initial vowel /i/ of the preposition: **immedio* < **mmedio*;
- phonological erosion that produces a reduced form: **m(e)*;

I assume that the locative preposition *ad* is inserted at a certain point in the derivation, due to the phonological erosion which lead to a relevant degree of desemantization. I also assume that the preposition *ad* can be either lexicalized as in *m(e)+a(d)* → **ma**, or silent, not *absent* in the terms of Parrino (1960), as in *me + AD* → **me**.

On the basis of what has been observed so far, the lexicalization of *ad* could play a crucial role in the spatial/dative contexts. There seems to be a general tendency for *ma* (*in medio + ad*) to occur in both contexts, whereas *me* (*in medio+ AD*) seems to be strongly restricted to spatial PPs.

Though the examples are only few, it is noteworthy that both *ma* and *me* trigger phonsyntactic doubling, regardless of the status *ad*: *ce vae ma Vvetèrbe?*, “You’re going to Viterbo?” (Cimarra & Petroselli, 2008) and *me ccasa* “at home” (Parrino, 1960: 225 in Regnicoli, 1995: 7).

4. Lat. *medio* / PIEmedhio* and the prepositions: outputs**

Cross-linguistically the outputs of PIE **medhio* show a general tendency to combine with prepositions. In the next sections, we will see that Romance and Germanic languages show

several possible combinations of preposition + Lat. *medio* and PIE **medhio*, respectively. I will limit myself to some examples from Old French, Old Italian and Friulian for the Romance languages and the historical and dialectal varieties of English for the Germanic languages.

I assume that all the combinations which will be dealt with in the next sections undergo the same and one process of grammaticalization. It is nevertheless true that different languages shows up different intermediate stages of this process. It is not always the case that the process affecting the combination “preposition + *medio* (+ preposition)” grammaticalizes a new functional preposition. What seems to be certain is that the degree of phonological erosion of the nominal, together with the spatiality entailed by the preposition which has entered the combination, are associated to a gradual semantic shift of the construct. The semantic impoverishment involves a shift from the transparent meaning expressed by the preposition + “the middle point”, “the middle part” towards (→) a more general meaning in which the “middleness” or “centrality” is not spatially relevant.

4.1. Romance languages

I consider here, for the Romance languages, two possible combinations of “preposition + *medio*”: (i) *in* + *medio* (“in the middle point, in the centre” → “in”) and (ii) *per* + *medio* (“by means of” → through → among):

(i) *in* + *medio*

OFr *enmi* attested until 17th (22), arch. *emmi*, *emmy*; Prov *en miei*; “in the middle of”; OIt *in me*’ (23a), *in mei* (23b), *in mezzo* (23c) “in the middle of”; It *in mezzo a* “amid” but also “in the middle of”; Eng *immez* “in the middle of”; Cat *enmig de*, *al mig de*, Sp *en medio de*; Ptg *em meio a/de* “in the middle of”

22. Saint Thomas e li reis furent mult lungement **Enmi** le champ (...)
 “Saint Thomas and the king were for a long time in the middle of the field”
 Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence, *Vie de saint Thomas Becket*, p. 134, 12th cent.
23. a. quanti baci li die' in un istante / **in me'** la bocca, ed altro uom nessuno
 how many kisses her gave in a instant IN ME' the mouth
 “How many kisses I gave her in the mouth at once”
 Cecco Angiolieri, *Rime*, 39, v.12, 157.12, 13th cent.

- b. (...) e come sarei io **in mei** chi se io fossi perduto?
and how would be I IN MEI here if I were lost
“(...) and if that was the case, how should I be here?”
Boccaccio, *Decameron*, VII, 10, 14th cent.
- c. Più volte già per dir le labbra apersi; Poi rimase la voce **in mezzo** ’l petto
more times already for say the lips opened after stayed the voice IN MEZZO the chest
“Many times my lips have opened to speak, but my voice is stilled in my chest”
Petrarca, *Rime* 1, 20, 14th cent.

(ii) *per + medio*

OFr *par mi* (21a-b) “through”; Fr *parmi* “among” (21c); Prov *par miei* “through, in the middle of”; It *per mezzo di* “by means of”; OIt *per me*’ (22a) *per mei* (22b) “in the middle of, in front of”, *per mezzo* (22c-d) “through, in front of, against”; OTrev *per mez* “towards, against”; VGard *permez* “towards”; Friul *parmis* “beside, by, against” (21); OGen *purmé* “by means of”; Sp *por medio de*, Ptg *por meio de* “by means of”.

24. a. **par mi** cel ost funt mil grailles suner
PAR MI that army made thousand trumpets play
“Through that army they made a thousand of trumpets play”
Chanson de Roland, 11th cent.
- b. **par mi** les rues en vienent si granz torbes
“Huge crowds came through the streets”
La vie de Saint Alexis, 11th
- c. Elle erra **parmi** la foule
“She wandered in among the crowd”
<http://www.larousse.com/en/dictionaries/french-english/parmi>

25. a. (...) nella quale fue Filippo **per me'** il fegato di tale modo fedito (...)
 in which was Filippo PER ME' the liver of such way wounded
 “(...) in which Filippo was wounded in the liver in such a way (...)”
 Bono Giamboni, *Orosio*, Book 3, Chap. 13, p. 156: 12-14, 13th cent.
- b. come fu **per mei** Calandrino
 as was PER MEI Calandrino
 “(...) and coming to Calandrino (as he was in front of Calandrino)”
 Boccaccio, *Decameron*, VIII, 6, 14th cent.
- c. E quella con tutta la sua forza diede **per mezzo** il petto, e passolla dall'altra
 parte
 and to her with all the his strength gave PER MEZZO the chest and passed-it
 from-the other side
 “Then with his dagger he pierced through her breast”
 Boccaccio, *Decameron*, V, 8, 14th cent.
- d. **Per mezzo** i boschi e per strano sentiero Dunque ella se n'andò sola
 PER MEZZO of woods and for strange pathway thus she refl.cl. loc.cl.went alone
 “Thro' midst of woods and unaccustom'd track Therefore she went without
 companion”
 Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, XVI sec., 20, 104
26. a. **Parmis** de çhase al jere un biel zardìn
 PARMIS of house cl. was a beautiful garden
 “There was a beautiful garden beside the house”
- b. mi àn butât **parmis** lis bocis e lis tacis
 cl.dat. have thrown against the bottles and the glasses
 “They threw the bottles and the glasses at me”

4.2. Germanic languages: English

As for English, there are at least two combinations of prepositions and (outputs of) **medhio*: (i) the OE preposition *on* + *middan* (in the middle or centre of → near the middle of a place → among) and (ii) the Old Norse preposition *á* + the diminutive form *mid(d-le)*:

OE **mid** < PIE * *medhio*; PGmc **medjaz*, cf also OFr ***mīth***; MDutch ***met, mit*** (Dutch *met*); OS ***mid, mit, met***; OHGerm ***mit*** (German *mit*); OIcl ***með, meðr***; Norw ***med***; OSwed ***māþ, medh*** (Swed *med*); ODan ***mæth, met*** (Dan *med*); Got ***mīþ*** (*mid-* in the compound forms). Cf. also Welsh ***mewn*** “in”; Arm ***mēj*** “middle” but also “between”, “in”

(i) the grammaticalization of the O.E. preposition *on*¹⁰ and *mid(dan)* – the dative singular form of *midde* – develops the preposition *amid* from a preceding form *amidde* (ca.1200). Three steps can be identified in the process of grammaticalization:

- a) In the older stages of the language, *on middan* was followed by the genitive, as in Latin the nominalized form of *medio* could also be followed by the genitive, cf. “in medio montium”. In this stage *middan* is still a lexical element, a modifier of a silent noun as in *on þám middan DÁELE* “in the middle part”, *on þære middan STÓWE* “in the middle place”.
- b) At the end of the O.E. period *on middan* started to be followed by the dative (27). The switch from genitive to dative signals that the process has reached an advanced step in the path of grammaticalization. The relevant nominal/lexical content of *mid(dan)* is lost and the whole combination prep. + *middan* is now to be interpreted as an adverbial preposition:

27. Onmiddan ðám þýstrum
in-middle the.dat pl darkness.dat.p
Bd. 5, 12; S. 628, 19.

- c) From the 12th cent. onwards, the case system starts to collapse, the preposition, which had been undergoing constant phonological erosion, directly selects its complement:

¹⁰ The Old English preposition *on* has both a locative (“on, upon; up to, among; in, into, within”) and a temporal value (“in, during, at, on, about”); it may also mean “against, towards; according to, in accordance with, in respect to; for, in exchange for” (cf. http://home.comcast.net/~modean52/oeme_dictionaries.htm)

28. A certain part of his work must be done **amid** books
 1874 J. S. Blackie *On Self-culture* 42
 O.E.D. s.v. *amid* adv. and prep. B *prep.*, 3, b [Surrounded by, among (objects)].

The preposition *amidst* (29c) is a variant of *amid* + the genitive form *-s* attested since the 14th cent. (29a) and a parasitic *-t*, which has been acquired in adverbial contexts around 1560 (29b) and can be associated to the superlative form *-st*¹¹:

29. a. A man in a bot · in-**myddes** a brode water.
 1393 Langland *Piers Plowman* C. xi. 33
- b. Warne with a softe fyre burning **amidest** therof.
 1565 T. Stapleton tr. Bede *Hist. Church Eng.* 66
- c. **Amidst** his friends and vassals.
 1762 D. Hume *Hist. Eng.* (1806) III. 320
 OED s.v. *amidst*, adv. and prep., B *prep.*, b, γ

(ii) the grammaticalization of the O.N. preposition **á** “on, at, in, to, towards, by means of” + *milli*, the diminutive form of *mid(d)* (“middle”) develops the preposition *amelle* “amid, among, betwixt” in the dialectal varieties.

†**amelle** < ON *á milli, á millum*, “amid” for *á miðli; miðlum* dat. sing. and pl. of *miðil* or *meðal* “mid”, “middle”; cf. also OSwed *i mælli*, Swed (*e*)*mellan* “among” *mellan* “between”, Dan *imellem* “betweext”, *mellem* “between”, Norw *imellom* “between”¹²

¹¹ The same is valid for the aphetic corresponding forms *mid* and *midst*, which are now obsolete or restricted to a very formal register:

- i. a. Let me get right to the kernel Of the matter, as we relax mid bunting and frolic.
 1998 *Meat Trades Jnl.* 13 May 28/3 (OED s.v. *mid* prep2)
- b. Einstein had to struggle mightily to make time for his work midst the many competing demands on his time.

1993 H. Gardner *Creating Minds* iv. 119 (OED s.v. *midst*, n., prep., and adv., B prep. in the midst of)
 The superlative suffix *-st* is not to be strictly considered an adjectival superlative, but, rather, an element which establishes a relation between a referent and a series of elements. Similarly, also the comparative suffix **-ter* in *whether* establishes a relation between the *wh*-word and its set of two elements.

The OED observes that “There is a tendency to use *amidst* more distributively than *amid*, e.g. of things scattered about, or a thing moving, in the midst of others”, [OED s.v. *amidst*, adv. and prep.].

¹² The direct cognate of *amelle* is the now defunct preposition *i'melle* “amid, among” > O.N. preposition **Í** “in, within; among; during; into, onto” + **MILLI** (midd+le):

30. **Amell** them twa was sik a league.

1686 G. Stuart Joco-serious Disc. 59 OED, s.v. † amell(e, adv. and prep., B prep.

Several examples from Northern English varieties are reported in Wright's English Dialect Dictionary (1898-1906; henceforth EDD):

31. a. Now Jony found it not a hard ane **amell** them twa to drive a bargain,

Nhb.1, G. Stuart, *Joco-Serious Discourse*, 29

b. **A-mell** tweay (two) steauls (stools) the Tail may fall to'th grund,

n. & e.Yks., Meriton, *Praise Ale* (1684) 1. 90

c. They cam' **amell** seven and eight o'clock; 'chop in **amell**' direction to a colley or sheepdog; he fand it **amell** t'shaffs [sheaves];

n.Yks.x

d. *The form 'mellem' is, or was recently, used at Staithes, where the fishermen divide the fish 'mellem yan anoother.'*

n.Yks.2 ne.Yks.1

Though the preposition *amell* is no longer in use, it still survives in the compound *amell-doors* 'doors between the outer door and that of an inner room' (OED, s.v. †*amell*(e, adv. and prep.)). The EDD also reports the following compounds: *amell-times*, *amell-whiles* "intervals", *amell-way*, "in a middling way, as we say of a person's health" (n.Yks.1; n.Yks.2).

Conclusions

The distributional patterns identified in the gallo-italic and central varieties (Table 2) lead one to assume that *me* is specialized for spatial contexts, whereas *ma* for datives. The fact

(i) a. Lo swilk a couplyng is **ymel** [*Other MSS.* a-mong, be twene, bitwixe, ytwix] hem alle.
"Look, such a coupling is among them all"

c1405 (1390) Chaucer *Reeve's Tale* (Hengwrt) (2003) l. 251

b. Whenne the leves are dryede (...) and bakene **y-melle** the stones.

c1440 *MS. Linc. Med.* lf. 287 (Halliw.), OED, s.v. † i' melle, prep. and adv., A. prep. Amid, among

that the co-occurrence of dative *ma* and spatial *me* (cf. VI in Table 2) is not attested is not significant.

I assume that the basic difference between *ma* and *me* is, in fact, a question of degree of grammaticalization. *Me* is a *locative* preposition, but the degree of grammaticalization is, in one sense, lower if compared to that of dative *ma* with the functional AD lexicalized. The spatial contexts of *me* can be somehow associated to those of Old Italian exemplified in (23), in which the idea of “middleness” or “centrality” is still partly relevant.

The fact that a silent AD is assumed to be present for *me* as well would not contrast with what has been assumed so far, it would represent a further step along the path of grammaticalization. Note that the instance of syntactic doubling with *me* brought out by Parrino 1960 is with the noun *casa*, yet the Metauro dialects which present an unstable system – dative *ma* expanded to “localized places” – involve this special subgroup of nominals. According to the distribution of *ma* and *me*, these elements are located halfway between dative and spatial contexts.

Within the domain of spatial contexts, deictics deserve to be treated separately and are thus destined for future research, as they display unexpected patterns of distributions: dialects which present the preposition *ma* in directional/stative contexts, do not necessarily display *ma* in deictic adverbials. Similarly, dialects which present *ma* exclusively as a dative preposition, might display the preposition in deictic contexts.

Comparing the outputs of Lat. *medio* and PIE *medhio* in Romance and Germanic, and within Romance in central Italian dialects, we can see that different languages display different stages of the same and one process. The central Italian dialects are the only varieties which display a functional preposition (*ma*) as the output of a completed process of grammaticalization, whereas the Romance (and the Germanic) varieties, which have been considered here, display adverbial prepositions, which can be ideally located at intermediate points along the path of grammaticalization:

in mezzo (a) (OIt) → *in me(i)* (OIt) → *me* (dial) → *me+AD* (dial) → *ma* (dial)

lexical → → → → → functional

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