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Within the canonical approach to inflectional morphology, the properties that identify a canonical paradigm are well known (Corbett 2007: 9). For example, all cells are expected to display the same stem, but each cell should exhibit different inflection. Deviation from canonicity involves non-canonical phenomena like suppletion, syncretism, and defectiveness for instance. As observed by Thornton (in press), canonical paradigms are expected to exhibit a further property, i.e. UNIQUENESS OF REALIZATION or the expectation that each cell be filled by a single inflected form. Deviation from this canonical property determines the non-canonical phenomenon labelled OVERABUNDANCE (multiple forms realizing the same cell). Examples of this phenomenon include the two English past tenses *burned* and *burnt*, Latin *fecērunt*, *fecērunt*, *fecēre* ‘do:3PL.PRF.IND’, and Italian *apparve*, *apparse*, *apparì* ‘appear:3SG.PRF.IND’ (Thornton, *ibid.*). Canonical (best) instances of OVERABUNDANCE will involve two or more forms (cell-mates) that realize the same cell in a lexeme’s paradigm and can be used interchangeably (Thornton, *ibid.*). Canonical cell-mates that are completely interchangeable are almost non-existent, but degrees of canonicity can be established.

This paper is concerned with OVERABUNDANCE in the paradigmatic structure of stressed third person pronouns – a phenomenon that has gone practically uninvestigated, especially in the context of the Romance languages. Based on Italo-Romance data, I claim that diachronic maintenance of highly canonical cell-mates (cell-mates that according to the criteria of canonicity proposed by Thornton are located closer to canonical OVERABUNDANCE) correlates positively with lower frequency and lower salience, i.e. with lack of the linguistic data a speaker needs either (i) to establish contrast between forms that are competing for the same cell as a cognitive principle like the Principle of Contrast (Clark 1987) would predict, or (ii) to know which one to discard.

I focus in particular on standard Italian which shows multiple pronominal forms for the third person (subject):

	m.sg.		f.sg.		m.pl.		f.pl.
I	<i>egli esso</i>	<b><i>lui</i></b>	<i>ella essa</i>	<b><i>lei</i></b>	<i>essi</i>	<b><i>loro</i></b>	<i>esse</i> <b><i>loro</i></b>
II	<i>egli esso</i>		<i>ella essa</i>				

Table 1

*Lui*, *lei*, *loro* (in bold) are used in everyday conversation, are both anaphoric and deictic, and can be used in all syntactic functions. While *egli*, *ella*, *esso*, *essa*, *essi*, *esse* are stylistically marked [+Formal], are extremely infrequent and syntactically constrained; moreover, they are not acquired at an early stage by native speakers of Italian as part of their basic vocabulary.

Level II in the table above shows cell-mates (two or more forms that realize the same cell) that do not contrast in style, i.e. *egli esso* and *ella essa*. While *egli esso* contrast in reference,

*esso* having undergone an almost complete semantic specialization as [-Human] and *egli* as [+Human], *ella essa* can be both used with human antecedents. Therefore, with human reference and in formal contexts they are near-synonyms. According to the criteria of canonicity<sup>1</sup> proposed by Thornton (ibid.), the f.sg. *ella essa* are more canonical cell-mates than their masculine counterparts.

I provide data on the frequency of *egli esso* and *ella essa* collected from Leone 2003 for the decades 1940s-1990s, and from Stoppelli-Picchi 2001 (*LIZ*) for the centuries 1400-1900, and I show that *ella essa* consistently appear with a significant lower frequency than *egli esso*. I claim that maintenance of a higher degree of canonical OVERABUNDANCE in *ella essa* with respect to *egli esso* correlates positively with such lower frequency. As mentioned above, the parameter of frequency reflects in my analysis a lack of the linguistic data a speaker needs to establish contrast between forms that are competing for the same cell or to know which one to discard.

I finally highlight and discuss the existence of a parallel between the maintenance of highly canonical OVERABUNDANCE and the emergence of defectiveness. It has been argued in fact (see Albright 2003, 2006 with reference to Spanish defective verbs for example) that paradigm gaps arise due to ‘speaker uncertainty’, in words which are typically low frequency and unfamiliar and for which linguistic data are lacking. Speakers know that ‘an inflected form must stand in a certain relation to another inflected form, but the language does not provide enough data to be certain of what that relation should be’ (Albright 2006: 2).

## REFERENCES

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<sup>1</sup> The criterion of no conditions > conditions (> = ‘more canonical than’); in this case, no semantic condition > semantic condition.