



*a* results from the vocalization of *l*, explained through the Theory of Elements (cf. Backley 2011). For the Sicilian domain, however, **I propose that the allomorph *a* is not derived from *l*, but is the singular feminine form generalized to all genders and numbers.** From a historical point of view, this may be explained as the result of a reanalysis involving an inverse application (from phonetic to phonologic structure) of vowel degemination. Thus, since a string like *ni vulev[a]ncora* (of-it wanted.3sg more ‘he wanted some more’) could be interpreted as *ni vulev/a/ /a/ncora*, then [a]nciova, ‘the anchovy’ [a]livi ‘the olives’ and [a]citu ‘the vinegar’ might have been interpreted as /a/ /a/nciova, /a/ /a/livi and /a/ /a/citu. Once this allomorph /a/ had entered the system, it could give rise to the alternative realizations with [a:], allowed by Sicilian vowel degemination.

Examples in (5), in which *l* is selected instead of *a* in front of unstressed *a-*, and examples in ((6)-(9), in which /l/ and /a/ alternate, may be explained hypothesizing that *a* applies only when the nominal expression is perceived as [+native] w.r.t. to Sicilian. I further assume this feature is not predefined in the lexicon, but speakers (re)evaluate the lexeme at each usage on the basis of phonological cues (e.g. the markedness of [ɔ] in unstressed syllable in *avvocàtu* and *aeroplànu*, whereas [+native] words have [ɔ] only in stressed syllables), or semantic/pragmatic cues (e.g. "modern world" referents like ‘aspirin’ may be perceived as [-native]), with different results according to the context and the cues' strength.

There are other examples in Romance in which a determiner belonging to a gender occurs, as an allomorph, before a nominal expression belonging to a different gender, for phonological reasons: in Spanish, the definite article *el* (m.sing.) occurs instead of *la* (f.sing) before feminine nominal expression beginning with a stressed /a/ ((10)); in French, masculine singular possessive determiners *mon*, *ton* and *son* occur instead of feminine *ma*, *ta* and *sa* before a feminine word beginning with a vowel ((11), cf. Nespor 1993: 219-220):

- (10) a. *la amíga* (f.) ‘the friend’  
       *la aréna* (f.) ‘the sand’  
       b. *el (\*la) água* (f.) ‘the water’  
       *el (\*la) alma* (f.) ‘the soul’

- (11) a. *ma mère* (f.), *ta femme* (f.), *sa soeur* (f.)  
       ‘my mother, your wife, his/her sister’  
       b. *mon amie* (f.), *ton épouse* (f.)  
       ‘my friend, your bride’.

Another example is found in the dialect of Matera, in which the allomorph of the plural definite article selected before vowels is *l* ((12)a), but the one selected before consonants coincides with the masculine singular form *u*, generalized to all genders and numbers ((12)b) (v. Rohlf 1968: § 421, fn. 2)<sup>1</sup>:

- (12) a. *l äpə*, *l aciddə*, *l àkəɾə*, *l èəvə*  
       ‘the bees, the birds, the needles, the eggs’  
       b. *u dandə* (m.s.) *u dində* (m.pl.), *u nəpitə* (m.s.), *u pènnə* (f.pl.)  
       ‘the tooth, the teeth, the nephews, the pens’

The data suggest that a form already present in an allomorph system may extend to other "slots" of the same system, and this could be an economic repair strategy in case a slot remains empty. In a previous stage of Sicilian, the deletion of *l-* might have caused one such slot to be empty, as Piccitto (1954) pointed out (*lu cani* : *u cani* = *l anciova* : *anciova*. → no phonetic content is then associated to the definite article in *a-* contexts).

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<sup>1</sup> In the examples from Spanish, French and the dialect of Matera, the morpheme extended to other genders is the masculine one, used before feminine and/or plural nominal expressions, whereas in Sicilian, according to my hypothesis, it is the feminine form that is generalized. However, this difference is accidental, because in no case the phenomenon is driven by gender, but by phonological/reanalysis processes.

One last example from the dialect of Nicosia (Sicily) is also relevant: the noun *iutö* /'juto/ 'help' combines with masculine adjectives, but the article it selects is feminine<sup>2</sup> (*a*) (*a iutö che ne dà fö randö* m. (\**randa* f.) 'the help he has given us was big'). This case appears to be an intermediate stage in a process starting with a resegmentation (*a iutö* < *aiutö*) and usually ending with a gender change (nic. *a neö* (f.) *randa* 'the big ring' < \**aneö* (m.) < ANELLU (m.)). The allomorph generation here clearly depends on reanalysis and could not be accounted for by phonological processes such as vocalization (Menza 2019).

## References

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<sup>2</sup> The phenomenon aligns with processes of differentiation between the gender shown by nouns and by their agreement targets (Corbett 1991: 151) and with processes of morpheme-to-gender feature remapping observed in other languages (Formentin & Loporcaro 2012).