On the allomorphy of the definite article in Sicilian

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Data. In most Sicilian dialects (Piccitto 1954: 316 fn. 27), the definite article surfaces as u/a/i (m. sing., f. sing., pl. m./f.) before a nominal expression beginning with consonant (1); and as l before nominal expressions beginning with a vowel different from unstressed a- (one form for all genders and numbers) ((2)-(3)):

- (1) *u nannu* (m.) 'the grandfather', *a manu* (f.) 'the hand', *i cani* (m.pl.) 'the dogs', *i rrosi* (f.pl.) 'the roses'
- (2) *l àvvulu* 'the tree' (m.), *l omu* 'the man' (m.), *l evva* 'the grass' (f.), *l ucchiatura* (f.) 'the jinx'
- (3) *l àvvuli* 'the trees' (m.pl.), *l òmini* 'the men' (m.pl.), *l ucchiaturi* (f.pl.) 'the jinxes'

Before unstressed a-, no overt article seems to occur, but the initial a- of the nominal expression may optionally be lengthened:

- (4) a. [a]/[a:]citu 'the vinegar', [a]/[a:]livu/i 'the olive/s' [a]/[a:]nciova/i 'the anchovy/ies'
 - b. *l/*u acitu 'the vinegar', *l/*i alivu/i 'the olive/s', *l anciova 'the anchovy'

A subset of Sicilian nouns, however, although beginning with unstressed a-, select, mandatorily ((5)) or optionally ((6)-(9)), the allomorph l, as those in ((2)-(3)):

(5)	a.	l abbeggu 'the hotel'	(*[a]/[a:] <i>bbeggu</i>)
	b.	l abbrei 'the Jews'	(*[a]/[a:] <i>bbrei</i>)
	c.	l appattu 'the contract'	(*[a]/[a:] <i>ppattu</i>)
	d.	<i>l attista</i> 'the artist'	(*[a]/[a:]ttista)
	e.	l autobbussu 'the bus'	(*[a]/[aː]utobbussu)
	f.	l autunnu 'the autumn'	(*[a]/[a:]utunnu)
	g.	l avvocatu 'the lawyer'	(*[a]/[aː] <i>vvocatu</i>)
	h.	<i>l augùriu/i</i> 'the wish/es'	(*[a]/[aː] <i>ugùriu/i</i>)

- (6) [a]/[a:]spirin/i ([a]/[a:]spirina/i) 'the aspirin/s', [a]/[a:]ntìçipu / l'antìçipu 'the down payment' [a]/[a:]reoplanu / l areoplanu 'the airplain'
- (7) cc[a]/[a:]iùtu/ccu-ll aiutu ri Ddiu 'with the help of God'
- (8) comu ficiun' [a]/[a:]ntichi / comu ficiunu l antichi 'as the Ancients did'
- (9) [a]/[a:]miçi / l amiçi 'the friends', [a]/[a:]mica / l amica, 'the friend'/'the lover' (f.)

Analysis. The examples with [a]/[a:] can be viewed as the result of the application of phonosyntactic rules involving an allomorph x (to be identified) and the initial vowel of the nominal expression immediately following x. The allomorphy of the definite article system may thus be represented as follows:

	masculine	feminine	plural	
before consonants	и	а	i	
before vowel, except unstressed a-	l			
before unstressed <i>a</i> -	$x (x+[a] \rightarrow [a:]/[a])$			

On the basis of Piccitto (1954)'s analysis, one could assume that x corresponds to a ([+long]) feature, added to the vowel immediately following x (\rightarrow [a:]). Building on Bafile (2012)'s analysis (which was made on a similar data set not based on Sicilian, but on Napoletano and some other Central and Southern Italian dialects), we may instead have **x coincide with an allomorph** *a*. According to Bafile (2012), the allomorph

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 l alternate, may be explained hypothesizing that a applies only when the nominal expression is perceived as l-native l 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 l in unstressed syllable in l and l aeroplànu, whereas l words have l only in stressed syllables), or semantic/pragmatic cues (e.g. "modern world" referents like 'aspirin' may be perceived as l -native l 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 a and a and a before a feminine word beginning with a vowel ((11), cf. Nespor 1993: 219-220):

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(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'
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- (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. Rohlfs 1968: § 421, fn. 2)¹:

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(12) a. l äpə, l aciddə, l àkərə, 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'
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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 (\underline{lu} cani: u cani = \underline{l} anciova: anciova. \rightarrow no phonetic content is then associated to the definite article in acontexts).

¹ 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 feminine² (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).

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² 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).