

Processes of Pluralization in Sicilian: Inflectional Classes, Prosodic Templates and Morphological Representations

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The Sicilian nouns with *-u*, *-i* singular endings show peculiar morphological patterns of pluralization that have long attracted the attention of scholars. The irregularity of these patterns complicates a satisfactory partition of Sicilian inflectional classes, although – at least for certain nouns – semantic gender features and word structure can be considered factors of predictability of the plural forms.

Another problematic issue concerns the gender system of Sicilian and in particular the possibility to envisage a morphologic category of neuter. Like other Southern Italian dialects Sicilian has relics of the Latin neuter plural inflection, the *-a* ending of II declension neuter nouns (in some nouns of fruits and in other lexemes that were neuter in Latin) and the ending *-ora* of the neuter nouns of III declension. Both endings however have spreaded to lexemes that had no equivalent inflectional behaviour in their Latin antecedents. The *-a* ending also shows proliferation to [+Animate] and [+Human] nouns whose structure contains particular suffixes (*-aru*, *-uni*, *-turi*).

Apparently the plural morphs *-a*, *-i*, *-ura* (*-ira*) of many inanimate nouns are not predictable from other morphological properties of the word and this may lead to the conclusion that they should be treated as features specified in the lexical representation of the word. Historical and semantic reasons could make this assumption valid for the small group of *-u* nouns with the *-a* plural that are direct continuation of Latin neuter nouns, some of which also have correlates in the Italian language (*vrazzu* ‘arm’, plur. *vrazza*, *vinuocchiu* (*dinuocchiu*) ‘knee’, plur. *vinocchia*, etc.). However, for most inanimate *-u* nouns and some *-i* nouns there seem to be reasons to rule out the lexical representations of the plural endings and to contemplate morphological regularities that deal with the prosodic templates of the structure of the word.

After a critical reconsideration of the traditional explanations that relate the spreading of *-a* to the functional reasons of avoiding ambiguity in number or gender, the discussion will be devoted to the analysis of the factors of prosodic morphology that may be crucial in the choice of the morphs *-a*, *-i*, *-ura* (*-ira*) and to their interaction with other aspects of the word structure and the features of semantic gender. This examination, which implies problems of morphological representation, may also lead to a partition of the inflectional classes of nouns in Sicilian.