

Prepositions of Italian unite! A non-allomorphic account of preposition-article sequences

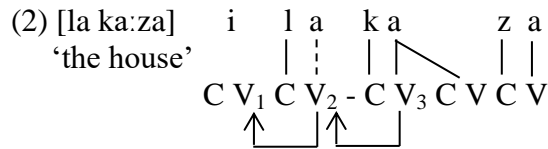
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Background: Building on Larsen’s (1998) analysis of the masculine singular definite article, Faust, Lampitelli & Ulfsbjorninn (FLU 2017) argue against an explanation based on allomorph selection of the different realizations of the Italian definite articles [lo, il, l]. Instead, we proposed an analysis within Government Phonology (KLV 1990; Lowenstamm 1996; Scheer 2004) which derived these three realizations (as well as those of the plural [i], [li] and of the feminine [la, l], [le]) from a single underlying representation, modified according to regular phonological processes.

(1) The definite article: a single underlying representation

a. Def.		b. φ-features	
i	l	/o/ _{Msg} , /i/ _{Mpl} , /a/ _{Fsg} , /e/ _{Fpl}	
C	V ₁	C	V ₂

Central to the analysis were two representational propositions: (A) the presence of CV₁ and (B) the presence of a floating /i/ in V₁. As shown by the framing in (1a), both CV₁ and the floating /i/ expone definiteness, and so, crucially, they are also predicted to be present in the representation of the feminine definite articles. However, the feminine article has only one realization [la], seemingly never showing evidence for either (A) or (B). In order to account for this invariance, FLU proposed that the /a/ of the feminine is lexically linked to V₂. In our system, this implies that the /i/ of V₁ will always be governed, and therefore will never surface (2). This solves the problem, but it simultaneously raises a question and an issue for the learner: is there any convergent evidence for (A) and (B)? Can learners realistically be expected to posit underlying forms with properties for which there is never any direct evidence (for the sake of a morphologically unified analysis)?



Aims and Gains: We will show that there is evidence for the presence of both (A) and (B) in the UR of the feminine article. Indeed, once the “abstract” phonological structure in (1) is accepted for all definite articles, including non-alternating ones like the F sg, one may understand previously unexplained alternations in the form of preposition-article sequences. Thus, the prediction of the analysis is confirmed, lending it the required independent support.

Data and argument: Italian prepositions *di* ‘of’ and *in* ‘in, at’ display an intriguing paradigm when followed by a definite noun (3) (Serianni 1989) (data appears in broad API transcriptions; plural forms follow predictable patterns and are left aside):

(3)	prep.	M sg			F sg	
		a.	b.	c.	d.	e.
article		il	lo	l	la	l
i.	di	del	dello	dell	della	dell
ii.	in	nel	nello	nell	nella	nell
environment		__C/TR	__CC	__V	__C	__V

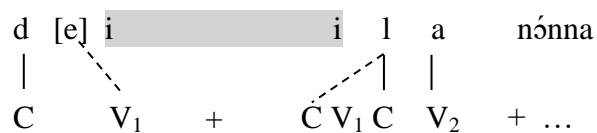
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TR=branching onset. e.g [tr]
CC=other clusters, e.g. [sk]

We will be concerned with two notable facts from (3): the gemination of /l/ and the alternating vowel of the preposition *di*.

As shown in (3), whenever the article alone begins with a singleton [l], this [l] is geminated if preceded by the preposition. This gemination is initially surprising, because *di* is not a *raddoppiamento fonosintattico* (RS) trigger: [di kárlo] ‘Carlo’s’ *[di kkárlo]. The lack of RS, we submit, implies that the UR of the preposition carries a single CV (Passino 2013:335-ff.). Once this is established, the gemination of /l/ follows from our analysis of the definite article in (1) above: the empty CV₁ of the definite article provides the space for gemination (4), which then comes as no surprise. If so, even the feminine article contains a CV₁ (proposition A above).

The analysis in (1) also provides motivation for the vowel alternation in [di], [dello]. This change is again initially unexpected, because [i] can precede a geminated [l] in Italian, e.g. [dillo] ‘say it’. But the surprise is again minimized when one considers a representation that follows our proposal in (1). As shown in (4), in our proposal, when an article follows *di*, the underlying vowel /i/ of /di/ precedes another /i/, that of the article (both /i/’s are shaded in 4). We submit that this sequence of the two underlying /i/’s constitutes an OCP violation, which is resolved by the deletion of the first /i/. The V₁ position nevertheless has to be realized, because the gemination of /l/ leaves it ungoverned. It is realized through epenthesis of [e], the only general epenthetic vowel of Italian (*pace* Repetti 2012) e.g. [gólle] for ‘goal’. Note that this account crucially relies on the presence of /i/ in the article, and therefore lends independent support to our proposition (B).

(4) dⁱ + ⁱla > d[e]lla nóнна ‘of the grandmother’



The epenthesis-based solution is strongly supported by the behaviour of the preposition *in* (3ii), because in this case the unexpected [e] alternates with zero: [inØ] but [ne-ll/o/a]. Notice, in addition, that the initial /i/ of *in* alternates according to the same conditions as [il] vs. [lo] in FLU: it is not realized when governed by the following nucleus.

To conclude, we have seen two previously unexplained facts of Italian morphophonology which find an explanation when one adopts our previous account of the definite article. More broadly, allomorphy and allomorph-selection is not required to model the variations of form of preposition-article sequences.

References: Author, A. 2017. [KLV 1990] = Kaye, J., J. Lowenstamm & J.-R. Vergnaud. 1990. Constituent structure and government in phonology. *Phonology Yearbook* 7: 193-231. Larsen, B. U. 1998. Vowel length, Raddoppiamento Sintattico and the selection of the definite article in Italian. *Langues et Grammaire II-III, Phonologie*, P. Sauzet (ed), 87-102. Paris. Lowenstamm, J. 1996. CV as the Only Syllable Type. In *Current Trends in Phonology Models and Methods*, J. Durand & B. Laks (eds), ESRI, University of Salford. 419-442. Passino, D. 2013. A unified account of consonant gemination in external *sandhi* in Italian: *Raddoppiamento Sintattico* and related phenomena. *The Linguistic Review*, 30(2):313-346. Repetti, L. 2012. Consonant-Final Loanwords and Epenthetic Vowels in Italian. *Catalan Journal of Linguistics*, 11:167-188. Serianni, L. 1989. *Grammatica italiana*. Torino: UTET. Scheer, T. 2004. *A Lateral Theory of Phonology. Vol 1: What is CVCV, and Why Should it Be?* Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.