

## Marking yes/no questions

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While in north-eastern Italian dialects subject inversion syntactically marks yes/no questions on a par with *wh*-questions (Benincà 1997), in Italian no special syntactic device exists for marking this kind of interrogative, intonation being the only element distinguishing between a declarative and an interrogative sentence.

However, in some central and southern Italian varieties a particle introduces this type of interrogative: *che* in Tuscan and Roman, *chi* in Sicilian, *ce/cə* in Salentino, *ma* in Calabrian (Rohlf 1969) and *a* in Sardinian (Jones 1993).

In this paper, drawing comparison with other Romance varieties at several points in the course of the analysis, we concentrate on Sicilian. Following a cartographic framework and assuming a split-CP-system (Rizzi 1997, 2001), we intend to analyse the semantic and the syntactic properties of Sicilian interrogative clauses introduced by the dialectal particle *chi*, which is rendered as *che* in the regional variety of Italian spoken in Sicily (regional Sicilian Italian, RSI):

- (1) Chi a puzzu addumari a luci? (Sic)  
Che la posso accendere la luce? (RSI)  
INT it\_CL I-can switch on the light  
'Can I switch on the light?'

- (2) Chi sù stancu? (Sic)  
Che sei stanco? (RSI)  
INT are tired  
'Are you tired?'

We argue that in Sicilian this element marks canonical yes/no questions, i.e. questions asked to obtain pure new information, and not only non-standard questions, as claimed for other particles in other dialects (Obenauer 2004, Garzonio 2004). Both in (1) and in (2) the answer to the question can be either yes or no, with no presupposition of any kind.

Although in some Sicilian varieties (and in RSI) this marker is homophonous with the finite complementiser, it will be shown that they must be considered as distinct elements. In some central and southern Sicilian varieties, in fact, the two elements, i.e. the interrogative particle and the complementiser, display different morphological forms. Moreover, considering the syntactic distribution of *chi/che* within the left periphery, the ordering restrictions of this element in conjunction with topics and foci strongly suggest that the interrogative marker occupies a position lower than ForceP and higher than FocP. In particular, it can be either preceded by a Topic (cf. 3) or followed by a fronted informational Focus, assumed to occupy Spec/FocP (cf. Cruschina 2006) and indicated in bold in (4):

- (3) A Maria chi a salutasti?  
to Maria INT her\_CL you-greeted  
'Did you greet Maria?'

- (4) Chi **a Maria** salutasti?  
INT to Maria you-greeted

‘Was it Maria that you greeted?’

Therefore it seems natural to conclude that *chi/che* occupies the specifier of INT (cf. Rizzi 2001), the ordering of the positions being illustrated as in (5):

(5) Force (Top\*) INT (Top\*) Foc (Top\*) Fin

These data provide direct evidence for the presence and activation of INT in main questions, a position that in Italian is clearly realized only in embedded questions introduced by *se* ‘if’ and in wh-questions introduced by the operators *perchè* ‘why’ and *come mai* ‘how come’ (Rizzi 2001). The yes/no question marker shares some semantic and syntactic properties with the other elements which appear in INT, in that they do not question a single constituent as with wh-questions, and they do not require adjacency with the verb, again in contrast to wh-questions. Some elements, in fact, can intervene between *chi/che* and the verb, such as certain adverbs (*subbitu* ‘at once’, *forsi* ‘maybe’, *ancora* ‘still’, *già* ‘yet’, etc.; cf. 6), focalizing elements (*sulu* ‘only’, *anchi* ‘also’, *mancu* ‘neither’, etc; cf. 7), informationally focalized constituents (cf. 4), and (marginally) topics (cf. 8):

(6) Chi subbitu am’ a partiri?  
INT at once we-have to leave  
‘Do we have to leave at once?’

(7) Chi sulu/mancu Salvo ci veni a festa?  
INT only/neither Salvo there\_CL comes to the party  
‘Does Salvo only/neither come to the party?’

(8) ??Chi a festa ci veni Salvo?  
INT to the party there\_CL comes Salvo  
‘Does Salvo come to the party?’

Once demonstrated a unified analysis for main and embedded questions, both of which involve INT, we will then extend the analysis carried out for Sicilian main interrogatives to the other central and southern Italian varieties which display such a marker, highlighting differences and similarities.

## References

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