

FIRST PERSON, MODALITY AND THE SYNTAX OF THE LEFT PERIPHERY: SOME CASES FROM ITALIAN, SPANISH AND PALERMITAN

Introduction

In this work I consider the distribution of a particular first person verbal form in a variety of Sicilian, that is to say, Palermitan. The form in question is, apparently, a version of the imperfect, and it ends with *-vu*, as in *accatavu* (I buy-*vu*, but we will consider the precise temporal and aspectual value later). The first person of the ‘normal’ imperfect reported in grammars has the ending *-va*, as in *accattava* (I buy-IMPF).

The other persons do not exhibit a ‘double’ imperfect and only have the regular forms: *accattavi*, *accattava*, *accattàvamu*, *accattavati*, *accattavanu* (you buy-IMPF, s/he buy-IMPF etc). Besides the imperfect, in Palermitan, as in all other varieties of Sicilian, the simple past expresses the temporal value of past, as in *accattai*, *accattasti* etc (I bought, you bought, etc).

I will show that the *-vu* form is not just a possible expression of the imperfect, freely alternating with the *-va* form, but a specific modal form, overtly marked as first person. Precisely by virtue of its overt first person ending, it occupies a higher left-periphery position, expressing a speaker-related evaluative/affective meaning.¹

I will also provide some evidence from Italian and Spanish evaluative constructions that can be analyzed in the same way of Palermitan’s ones.

The relevance of this discussion is twofold: on one hand, we will illustrate a phenomenon still unnoticed in the literature on Sicilian dialects – having this ending *-vu* of the Palermitan variety been neglected so far. On the other hand, thanks to Italian and Spanish examples, I will provide evidence in favour of the existence of a rich left periphery of the clause, including a high speaker-related position.

I will also try to show that Spanish’s speakers projections share almost the same properties of Italian and Palermitan.

The data

Note first that the ending *-u* in *accatavu*, *manciavu*, *iocavu*, etc. (buy, eat, play + *-vu*) is reasonably accounted for as a first person ending. It appears in fact in the present tense, as in *accattu*, *manciu*, *iocu* (I buy, I eat, I play). This also happens in the (normal) paradigm of the imperfect in Italian, with *-o*: *compro* (I buy)/ *compravo* (I buy-IMPF); *mangio* (I eat)/ *mangiavo* (I eat-IMPF).

Conversely, the form in *-va* (*manciava* eat-IMPF) is lacking a specific person ending, being syncretic with the third person, i.e., *manciava* means I/she eat-IMPF.

The other important observation concerns the fact that the *-vu* form does not exhibit the main properties of the imperfect, as they are described in the literature for various languages: it is not **anaphoric**, it does not express a **continuous** aspectual value, it cannot express **habituality**, it is not used in **fictional** contexts, systematically contrasting with the *-va* form:²

Anaphoricity. The imperfect in (2) is ungrammatical without an explicit temporal reference – cf. (3) – when used out-of-the-blue, but not the *-vu* form in (1):

- (1) *Accatavu i fichi r’India* (I buy-*vu* prickly pears)
- (2) **Accattava i fichi r’India* (I buy-IMPF prickly pears)
- (3) *Aeri accattava i fichi r’India* (yesterday I buy-IMPF prickly pears)

Continuity. The form *accatavu* (I buy-*vu*) is not available in a continuous context:

- (4) *Mentre accattava/*accatavu u pani me matri m’aspittava fuora r’u negozio*
While I buy-IMPF/ *buy-*vu* bread, my mother waited for me outside the shop

Habituality. Only *-va* can express the habitual value:

- (5) *Quannu era nicu iucava/*iucavu sempre a palluni n’u cortili*
When I was young, I always played football in the backyard

Fictional contexts. Only the *-va* form can be used in these cases:

- (6) *Sugnai ca manciava/*manciavu i fichi r’India*
I dreamt that I eat-IMPF/ *eat-*vu* prickly pears

As for the temporal interpretation, this form is a **past**. For the persons other than the first, in fact, a simple past (and not an imperfect) is used, with the same value:

- (7) *Aeri manciavu assai* (yesterday I eat-*vu* a lot)

¹ Among the many others, see Rizzi 1997, Poletto 2000, Beninca’ and Poletto 2004. On adverbs Cinque 1999. On a speaker-related position on the left of the clause, Giorgi 2010.

² On the properties of the imperfect in Italian, see among the others Bertinetto 1986, Bertinetto and Delfitto 2000, Bertinetto and Bianchi 1993.

(8) *Aeri manciasti/ manciò* etc. assai (yesterday you ate/ she ate etc. a lot)

Note, finally, that (7) coexists with (9):

(9) *Aeri manciai assai* (yesterday I ate a lot)

Some syntactic properties will be shown as well, namely the impossibility for this personal evaluative form to appear in some constructions that express the same function: exclamation sentences that have, among other features, also the evaluative feature:

(10) *Mizzichina quantu manciai / *manciavu* (I ate a lot!)

Mizzichina is a negative evaluation particle and it is reasonable to think that it competes for the same feature of the morpheme -vu

Other syntactic data will be shown, namely it will be analyzed the distribution of this morpheme -vu in embedded sentences and I will bring some evidence to show that this evaluative form cannot be embedded in sentences where there is a switch between the subject of main sentence and the subject of the embedded sentence:

(11) *Gianni ci cuntò a Marco ca aeri accattai/ accattavi / *accattavu u pisci spata*

(Gianni told Marco that yesterday I bought the sword fish)

(12) *Ci cuntai a Marco ca aeri accattai/ accattavi / accattavu u pisci spata.*

(I told Marco that yesterday I bought the sword fish)

I will give some evidence in order to prove that this is not a root phenomenon.

It will be shown that -vu appears just in the local domain of the speaker; this property is due to the presence of the reduced pronoun -u. This property is very closed to the Italian verb *credo* (Giorgi 2010) (I believe)

I will make a comparison with shifting properties of Italian (Giorgi 2010), namely shifting with evaluative, epistemic and with speaker's adverbs. I will try to show how Italian evaluative strategies share many features with the Palermitan morpheme -vu.

A further comparison will be made with similar Spanish constructions that show a micro variation compared with Italian sentences.

(13) *Credo che francamente Gianni is a stupid* (I frankly believe that John is a stupid)

(14) **Creo que francamente Josè es un estúpido* (I frankly believe that John is a stupid)

The hypothesis

The difference between sentences such as (7), with -vu, and (9), with the past, is that the -vu form expresses an evaluative affective (i.e., speaker-related) value, whereas the simple past has only the temporal value. Consider for instance the following cases:

(15) *Truvavu/ truvai a u mercatu i fichi r'India*

I find-vu/ found in the market the prickly pears

The sentence with *truvavu* implies that the speaker expresses an evaluation of the event (for instance: "what a lucky circumstance, we can now eat them together"), whereas the sentence with the simple past *truvai* just mentions the fact that such event took place in the past. A detailed discussion of this point will be provided.

The fact that the -vu form expresses a modal value of its own is also shown by its incompatibility with other modals:

(16) *Puotti/ putieva/ *putievu* (I can-PAST/ can-IMPF/ *can-vu)

(17) *Vuosi/ vulieva/*vulievu* (I want-PAST/ want-IMPF/ *want-vu)

I propose that this form is characterized by a past value – e > U – and a modal evaluative feature (see Cinque 1999). Moreover, since it incorporates a first person (reduced) pronoun (see Cardinaletti 2004), it must also check it in the high left-periphery speaker-related position. The -va form, on the contrary, cannot support these functions, being unmarked for person.

Various data will be shown to converge on this direction. For instance, I will analyse the distribution of this form in respect to negation and terminative adverbs. The same facts, but with different strategies, are founded in other romance languages as standard Italian and Spanish. The difference between Italian and Spanish varieties seems lying in the fact that Spanish's left periphery has a different distribution of evaluative adverbs. I will show that this fact can be explained, assuming different speaker's functional projections that in Spanish are not available in some cases.

As far as syntax is concerned, the evaluative feature of -vu is authorised by the local presence of speaker. Giorgi and Pianesi (1997) and Higginbotham (1995) propose that, relatively to temporal interpretation, in T projections it is represented the attitude bearer (subject) of embedded clause. It seems that Sicilian, Italian and basically also Spanish share the same property, namely the fact that the attitude bearer represented in T – that allows a modifier of first person – has to be the speaker.

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