

Variation in intonation across Italy: The case of Palermo Italian

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Intonation patterns and their implementation may vary considerably depending on the variety of Italian taken into account. This is clearly shown in the few works in the literature on Italian that systematically analyzed a high number of varieties in parallel, that is Savino's (2012) survey on polar questions in 15 varieties of Italian, Crocco's (2013) study on intonation of right dislocation in declaratives and yes/no interrogative sentences in the same varieties, and Gili Fivela et al. (2015) on the intonation of a wide set of sentence types and modalities, that is statements, exclamations, yes-no questions, wh-questions, imperatives, vocatives, in 13 varieties of Italian and by considering both read and semi-spontaneous speech. What these works have clearly shown is that variations in intonation patterns do not allow to identify isoglosses that resemble those traditionally proposed on the basis of vernaculars ("*dialetti*") synchronic structural differences, and extralinguistic factors, such as geographical and historical issues (e.g. the representation by Pellegrini 1977). Rather, as Gili Fivela et al. (2015) show, in some cases it is possible to find one intonation pattern that can be used by speakers of varieties belonging to different traditional isoglosses (e.g. in broad-focus statements, lists, wh-questions, counterexpectational wh-questions, disjunctive questions, and vocatives). However, in most cases a high variability is found in relation both to the intonation inventory selected by speakers of different varieties and to the specific functions associated with nuclear configurations.

The present work aims at extending the investigation on variety specificities concerning intonation and on the variation throughout Italy, by focusing on Palermo Italian. Such variety was first investigated by Grice (1995), who exploited a read speech corpus to compare British style analyses and autosegmental ones, and has been further considered by Savino (2012) and Crocco (2013), who referred to a public corpus that included semi-spontaneous speech collected by means of the Map-Task. However, as mentioned above, in such works very specific modalities or syntactic constructions were considered. The final goals of the present study are achieving a better and wider knowledge of the Palermo Italian and being able to compare its features with those found in other varieties of the language. To reach the goals, the intonation features of Palermo Italian are deeply investigated along the lines of Gili Fivela et al. (2015), under the hypotheses that 1) a better knowledge on its intonation may be reached by focusing on a wide set of communicative contexts and by considering both read and semi-spontaneous speech; 2) cross variety variation may be highlighted by adopting the very same methods used to investigate other 13 varieties.

Materials were collected adopting the same criteria followed by Gili Fivela et al. (2015), that is they were elicited by asking 5 Palermo Italian speakers (3F, 2M, aged 23–27 years) to perform the Discourse Completion Task (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989). Prior to the experiment, each speaker filled a questionnaire aiming at collecting all the relevant information to identify the linguistic profile of the experimental subject. All speakers had been continuously exposed to Palermo Italian, used it for everyday conversation, and had a similar educational level, that is university level (they were either students enrolled in the program or graduated students). The task included 57 situations/contexts presented in pseudo-randomized order. Each time a situation/context and an example of response were proposed and speakers were asked 1) to read carefully and understand a written text describing a context/situation, presented over the PC screen; 2) to produce a spontaneous utterance which would fit with the situational context presented; 3) to read as spontaneously as possible the target sentence proposed by the experimenters as suitable for the same context. Thus, four productions corresponding to the same target interpretation were recorded for each speaker (two "spontaneous" realizations and two read ones), by presenting twice the whole set of target utterances. Interviews

were carried on by the second author, which is a speaker of Palermo Italian, by means of an Edirol AudioCapture UA-5 (24bit/96KHz) USB sound card and a Kraun omnidirectional (50Hz-13KHz) microphone. Sampling rate was 44100 Hz.

Auditory analysis and acoustic inspection of the fundamental frequency tracks were performed by the authors to highlight the main phonetic and phonological features of Palermo Italian intonation (as for the latter, the work was framed within the autosegmental metrical theory; Bruce 1977, Pierrehumbert 1980, for an overview see Ladd 1996). The study was performed by considering renditions of statements, exclamations, yes-no-questions, wh-questions, imperatives, and vocatives, by analysing both spontaneous productions and read utterances. However, specific attention was devoted to spontaneous renditions, whose relevance and specific alignment characteristics were nevertheless confirmed by read productions. Thus, if not specified, the analyses proposed are considered to be not dependent on speech styles.

Preliminary results confirm that the most frequent nuclear accent in yes-no-question is characterized by a rising-falling fundamental frequency movement (L*+H L% according to the autosegmental-metrical theory; see Gili Fivela et al. 2015 for the boundary tone notation) with some instances of final rising intonation (L*+H LH%); further, the broad focus accent in statement is usually realized by means of a falling nuclear accent (H+L* L%). As for yes-no questions, Savino (2012) proposed a correlation between high boundaries and read speech data, that is more controlled speech material. Of course, our data cannot be considered as representative of differences related to speech styles and they are rather taken to offer information that integrate each other especially when a phonological analysis is at order. Nevertheless, data observed so far did not suggest that high boundaries are found in read, more controlled speech.

By comparing the results obtained so far with the description of intonation in other varieties of Italian, the work confirms the lack of homogeneity in intonational patterns used within isoglosses traditionally proposed in the literature on vernaculars in Italy.

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