

Epenthesis of *-ə/* prosodically licensed? Evidence from southern Italian dialects

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Several (upper) southern Italian dialects display the reduction into *-ə/* as the outcome of the development of the original atonic final vowel system (Rohlf's 1939, I, 187), which in a few dialects exhibit the opposition *-a/* ~ *-ə/*, the former being the only final vowel surviving, which mainly marks the related singular nominal class (1). Apparently, in several north-western Calabrian dialects (Map1), the segment *-ə/* is optionally lost if the onset of the word's last syllable is a (short/long) plosive or affricate. In this case the vocalic segment is absent and the articulation of the word final plosive might entail an aspirate appendix (2).

The alleged optionality of these patterns is disambiguated in specific pragmatic contexts of the utterance, i.e. exclamative and interrogative sentences. Namely, if the word is sentence-final in an exclamative or interrogative utterance, a peculiar prosodic contour, bound to a specific intonation configuration, necessarily requires for the speaker to overtly realise the underlying final *-ə/*, so causing (re-)insertion of the segment and re-syllabification.

As for interrogatives, the realisation of *-ə/* requires a falling-rising intonation, i.e. Low > High pitch, on the final word, whereas the same utterance with the word ending in aspirated plosive/affricate is normally articulated with an unmarked rising (High) final intonation. This prosodic configuration licenses a specific pragmatic interpretation, i.e. the speaker's surprise or incredulity.

As for exclamatives, the articulation of *-ə/* results again in a re-syllabification. The intonation contour proves to be altered, as the additional syllable is articulated with an a final falling intonation unity, which follows the unmarked rising intonation (High>Low). The pragmatic entailment of this contour is a stronger affirmation of the utterance's semantic content.

To sum up, the reinsertion of the *-ə/*, i.e. a phonological (and etymologically justified) segmental item, proves to be driven by a specific intonation contour selected by speakers to convey a post-lexical or utterance-level distinctively marked pragmatic value for interrogatives and exclamatives. This fact is not surprising as, according to other domains of the linguistic analysis such as the formally syntactic evaluation of the sentence as a whole, questions and exclamations display a peculiar configuration, involving specific positions placed at the left periphery (Rizzi's 1997 a.o.).

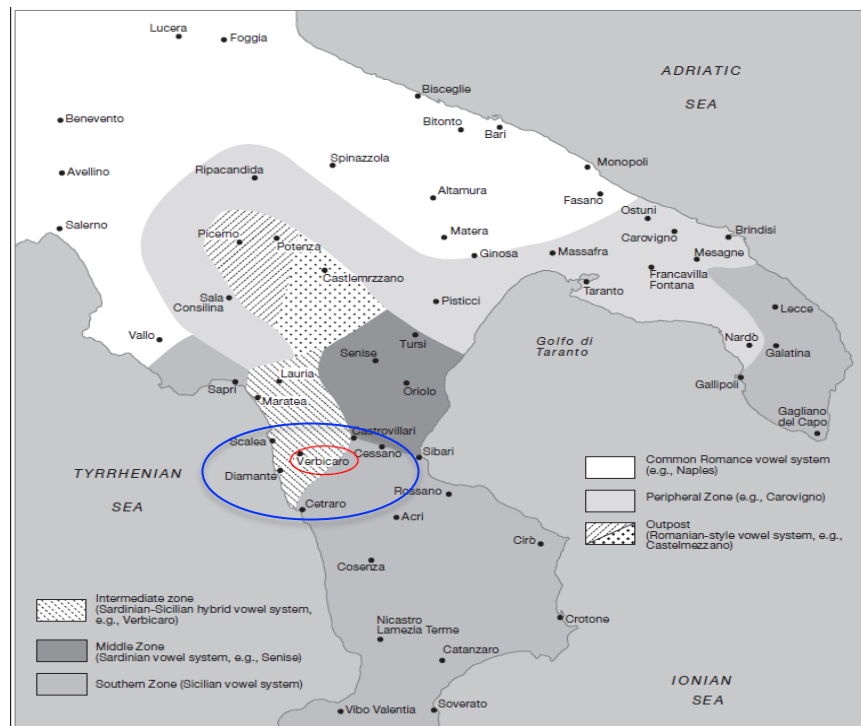
Based on the analysis of newly collected data of the dialect of Verbicaro (Cosenza), I shall propose an account for this complex interaction between phonological change involving *-ə/* and the two specific intonation configurations licensing such a change on the light of the sentence syntactic structure. I will follow the main theoretical assumptions of the syntax-

phonology interface (Selkirk 2011 a.o.) in order to account also for the (relative) prominence of those phrases expressing the focalised/new information in the sentence.

Relevant examples

- (1) [ˈfimmina] 'woman' F.SG [ˈsinnikə] 'mayor(s)' M.SG/PL
 [ˈfimminə] 'women' F.PL (dialect of S. Maria del Cedro)
- (2) a. [ˈpat.tə] ~ [ˈpattʰ] 'deal'
 b. [ˈka.pə] ~ [ˈkapʰ] 'heads'
 c. [ˈkac.cə] ~ [ˈkaccʰ] 'noose(s)' (dialect of Verbicaro)

Map1 (Verbicaro among other north-western Calabrian dialects. From: Ledgeway, A., 2015. *The Language of Italy*. Ms. University of Cambridge.



Essential references

- Rizzi, L., 1997. The Fine Structure of the Left Periphery. In L. Haegeman (ed), *Elements of Grammar*. Kluwer: Dordrecht.
- Rohlf, G., 1969. *Grammatica storica della lingua italiana e dei suoi dialetti*. 3 Voll. Torino: Einaudi.

Selkirk, E., 2011. The syntax-phonology interface. In J. Goldsmith, J. Riggle and A. Yu (eds), *The Handbook of Phonological Theory* (2nd edition). Oxford: Blackwell.