Reconsidering Eoliano's geolinguistic position: what its complementation system tells us

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While Bartoli's norm of the isolated area has been described as applicable to any part of Sicily (Ruffino 1984), this is not the case for the Eolian islands: in fact, Eoliano is hypothesized to be a more recent dialect (post 16th-century), and the product of a pan-southern *koiné* (Fanciullo 1995). The socio-historical events that have unfolded in the volcanic archipelago have led its dialect to behave similarly to those spoken in many of Sicily's other minor islands (such as Ustica and Lampedusa): in particular, it diverges from the geographically most proximate Sicilian dialect (in this case, Messinese), and presents heterogeneous traits representative of different areas of Sicily and Southern Italy, in all levels of grammar (Ruffino 1977).

Eoliano is classified as an ESID, and in particular, as a Sicilian dialect, thanks almost exclusively to its stressed vowel system (Pellegrini 1977; Fanciullo 1983, 1995). Furthermore, it is described as one sole dialect – referred to exclusively in the singular – due to the apparent lack of systemic linguistic variation between the seven main islands (Stromboli, Panarea, Vulcano, Lipari, Salina, Filicudi, Alicudi), of which a subset have been studied (Coray 1930; Fanciullo 1983, 1995). These studies have focused mainly on phonological and etymological aspects, leaving morphosyntactic considerations altogether unaddressed.

This study seeks to reframe the discussion regarding Eoliano's classification as a Sicilian dialect in relation to recently collected data on Eoliano's complementation structures. Eoliano presents a dual complementizer system (1) which appears to align more with corresponding USID systems (in particular early ones), rather than with ESID systems. More specifically, Eoliano aligns with the former on a morpholexical level; although some modern dialects conserve both complementizers (3), both were systematically present in older varieties (Ledgeway 2005, 2006). No reflexes of a MODO-complementizer typical of western ESIDs (2) are to be found in Eoliano.

(1) a. u fratə   mia mə   diʃə   **ca** sugnu   bbrava
      the brother my CL.ACC.1SG tell.PRES.IND.3SG CA be.PRES.1SG   good
      'my brother says that I am a good girl'   (Eolie: Salina, locality of Pollara)
     b. vwoj   **chə**   vvaju   jo?
        want.PRES.2SG   CHƏ   go.PRES.1SG   I
      'do you want me to go?'   (Eolie: Salina, locality of Lingua)
(2) uliti   **mi**   vaju   jo?
    want.PRES.2PL MI   go. PRES.1SG   I
    'do you (pl.) want me to go?   (Messina; Rohlfs 1972: 334)
(3) Libero vulwera   **cchə** Ccarmela vənerədə   a Bbrəvəcarə
     Libero want.COND.3SG CHƏ Carmela come.COND.3SG   to Verbicaro
     'Libero would like Carmela to come to Verbicaro.' (Verbicaro; Groothuis 2019: 12)

With regards to the structural positions of its finite complementizers, Eoliano appears to behave uniquely – although recent data reveal its similarity to the USID of Verbicaro (cf. Groothuis 2019) – in that both complementizers appear to the left of constituents raised into the CP, suggesting that both of Eoliano's complementizers, *ca* and *chə*, are hosted in the Force position (assuming Rizzi's 1997 split-CP).

(4) satt͡ʃu   [ForceP ca [TopP ɖɖu təʈʈinu [IP gaetanu u   vennù]]]]
    know.PRES.1SG CA   that land   Gaetano CL.ACC   sell.PAST.3SG
    'I know that Gaetano sold that land'   (Eolie: Stromboli)

(5) vogghju   (*u libbru) [ForceP chə [TopP u   libbru [IP u   catta   Marju]]]]
    want.PRES.1SG (*the book)   CHƏ   the   book   it.CL.ACC buy.3SG Mario
    'I want Mario to buy the book'   (Eolie: Salina, Santa Maria Salina)

In terms of its infinitival complementation, again Eoliano deviates from ESIDs. In particular, as suggested by Fanciullo (1995), the "loss of the infinitive" so characteristic of ESIDs (5) proves to be systematically absent in the islands of Salina and Stromboli (4). While data from further recently conducted fieldwork will be incorporated, it is clear that the infinitive proves to be very resilient in complement clauses under subject control, again reflecting a more USID-like behavior (6). (It must be noted that, in this respect, it *does* seem to align with Messinese, which also differs from other ESID varieties (Damonte 2005)).

(4) nə   vulimu   vìder- o   bbar?
    us.CL.ACC   want.PRES.1PL to.see=at=the café?
    'do we want to meet at the café?'   (Eolie: Salina & Stromboli)
(5) voliti   ma   veniti?
    want.PRES.2PL MA   come. PRES.2PL
    'do you (pl.) want to come?'   (Catanzaro; Rohlfs 1972: 326)
(6) Giuanne   vô   dicere bucie
    Giuanne   want.3SG to.tell lies
    'Giuanna wants to tell lies.'   (Nap., Ledgeway 2000:162)

This first look at Eolian morphosyntax, in particular its finite and non-finite complementation structures, yields convincing counterarguments (the absence of a complementizer ⌜*mi*⌝, and the continued use of the infinitive) to the claims that Eoliano be considered a Sicilian, and in general an Extreme Southern variety. Rather, it seems to present a "USID type" of complementation (even if we consider the absence of syntactic marking in finite complementation), which supports the view of a hybrid (and here, USID-influenced) recent origin.

The straightforward parallels between the data collected on the island of Salina and that collected on Stromboli do support prior claims of inter-island uniformity, at least regarding this particular syntactic phenomenon. Further fieldwork conducted on the other islands has confirmed the more widespread extent of this uniformity, and allows us to begin answering important questions regarding the (morphosyntactic) microvariation present in the archipelago, which in previous studies has been deemed not linguistically "pertinent" (Fanciullo 1983: 27).

Selected References

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