

HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

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Habilitation thesis

Paths of modality and beyond. The grammaticalisation of modals and directive markers in Sicilian

Reviewer

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Dr. Egle Mocciaro's habilitation thesis comprises five scholarly articles – two single-authored and three co-authored – published between 2009 and 2021 and presented here as individual chapters. All the chapters examine the area of modality in Sicilian, each addressing a specific sub-domain. They are conceived as (and titled) “Paths” to highlight how they represent both individual tracks of inquiry through and beyond the domain of modality and a coherent trajectory along the primary lines of investigation that have characterized Dr. Mocciaro's research activity. That is, they intend to reflect Dr. Mocciaro's primary research agenda, which centers on modality and diachronic change (specifically, grammaticalization processes), but also includes sociolinguistics, as well as her fundamental theoretical orientation, which is grounded in functionalist approaches to linguistic analysis, particularly cognitivism, and relies strongly on naturally occurring data. The five ‘core’ chapters are preceded by an introductory chapter, which gives the theoretical, methodological, and contextual background that grounds the studies presented in the thesis, and followed by a closing chapter, which summarizes the studies and frames them within a topographical approach and, following previous models (i.e., van der Auwera and Plungian 1998), proposes a unified semantic map of the modal domain of Sicilian which covers both the synchronic and the diachronic dimension.

As noted above, **Chapter 1** – “Framing the study of modality in Sicilian: an introduction” – provides the necessary theoretical, methodological, and contextual background underlying (and uniting) the research presented in the volume. The chapter starts with a historical sociolinguistic overview of Sicilian, which addresses its status as a historical natural language comprising two main varieties, western and central-eastern, each encompassing a plurality of varieties unified by a set of shared distinctive features, its speaker population, and its usage contexts. Next, the primary corpora that provided the data on which the studies are based are presented in detail. These are a corpus of contemporary spoken Sicilian, *Atlante linguistico della Sicilia* ‘Linguistic atlas of Sicily’ (ALS), and two historical corpora *ARTESIA. Archivio testuale del siciliano antico* ‘Textual archive of Old Sicilian’ and *Collezione di testi siciliani dei secoli XIV e XV* ‘Collection of 14th- and 15th-century Sicilian texts’. The chapter continues with an overview of the existing research on modality in Sicilian, both from the more traditional perspective of dialectology and from more modern, theoretical frameworks, detailing three subareas of the modal domain and modal encoding which are particularly relevant for Sicilian and have received special attention since around the 1990s, namely: (a) conditionals forms and constructions; (b) constructions and phenomena related to the lack of present subjunctive and the loss of the infinitive verb form in subordinate clauses; and (c) the periphrasis ‘*aviri a* ‘have to’ + infinitive’, “a flagship trait of Sicilian” (p. 29), which is highly significant for the modality-tense interface. Moreover, attention is drawn to some new subdomains and ‘peripheral’ domains of modality, that is, areas in which modal subdomains overlap

or modality crosses other (related) domains. Regarding the intersection of modality and non-modal domains, some phenomena of non-canonical modal marking, which are lexico-discursive in nature and therefore lay at the interface between morphology and pragmatics, are highlighted since they are currently at the core of a lively scholarly debate and follow within the scope of Dr. Mocciaro's research interests. Then, the general theoretical framework adopted in the studies is introduced, which is grounded primarily on three interrelated functionalist approaches, Cognitive Grammar (Langacker 1987, 1991), the usage-based/discourse-based approach (Bybee 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007), and the prototype approach to linguistic analysis (Givón 1986, Lakoff 1987, Taylor 1989, *inter alia*). Special attention is given to the notions of *subjectification* and *intersubjectification* (Langacker 1985, 1990; Traugott 2003, 2011), *grammaticalization* (Bybee et al 1994; Heine 1993; Heine & Claudi 1986; Heine et al. 1991, *inter alia*) and *semantic typology* and *topography* (van der Auwera & Plungian 1998; van der Auwera 2013), as they constitute key operational tools of Dr. Mocciaro's analyses, particularly the diachronic ones. The introductory chapter ends with an outline of the five 'core' chapters, all of which, in different ways and from different though cohesive perspectives, deal with and further develop the topics previously discussed in the chapter.

Chapter 2 – “First path. From possession and volition to modal meanings” – examines two Sicilian constructions comprising a modal auxiliary and the infinitive form of lexical verbs: ‘*aviri a* ‘have to’ + infinitive’ and ‘*vuliri* ‘want’ + infinitive’. The primary objective of the study is to trace and compare the grammaticalization trajectories through which the two constructions developed a range of pre-modal, modal, and post-modal functions, as well as temporal (i.e., proximate and future) value. Through an in-depth and systematic analysis of the two constructions’ morphosyntactic and semantic features, the study shows that ‘*aviri a* + infinitive’ has reached a more advanced grammaticalization stage than ‘*vuliri* + infinitive’ since it conveys a wide range of modal values which cover both the epistemic and non-epistemic domains, whereas ‘*vuliri* + infinitive’ expresses predominantly non-epistemic modal values. The higher degree of grammaticalization of ‘*aviri a* + infinitive’ is also evinced by the fact that, although both constructions can convey values related to necessity and prediction/future, in ‘*aviri a* + infinitive’ these values are crucial in both modal domains, while in ‘*vuliri* + infinitive’ necessity is restricted to the deontic (non-epistemic) domain and prediction/future to all the others.

Chapter 3 – “Second path. From volition to modal-passive meanings” – offers an extensive contrastive analysis of three constructions involving *vuliri* ‘want’ and the past participle of a lexical verb: “(1) *U scaluni è lordu: voli esseri puliziatu* ‘The step is dirty: it must be cleaned’, (2) *U picciriddu voli esseri accattata [sic] na cosa duci* ‘The child wants to be bought something sweet’, and (3) *U picciriddu voli accattata na cosa duci* ‘The child wants to be bought something sweet’” (p. 118). This is primarily a sociolinguistic study couched in a variationist approach, whose main goal is to evaluate the frequency and productivity of the three constructions in both present-day Sicilian and the regional variety of Italian spoken in Sicily, as attested by the analysis of data from the ALS corpus. Nonetheless, by characterizing the constructions’ structural features and semantic domains, the study can also sketch a general assessment of their degree of grammaticalization given that stages of grammaticalization may be (indeed often are) reflected in synchronic variation. Concerning the constructions’ frequency and productivity in contemporary Sicilian, the following results emerge: first, only types (1) and (3) are attested in the corpus, the latter to a higher degree than the former; second, they occur primarily in the context of what Dr. Mocciaro, following Paternostro and Sottile (2010), refers to as “ethnotexts”, that is, semi-spontaneous texts which are typically long and monological, describe local traditions (particularly related to food and festivities), and are produced by elderly dialect speakers with a low level of education; and third, the constructions are pan-Sicilian, in that no differences appear in terms of geographical areas. As for the status of the constructions in the regional Italian of Sicily, which was assessed by the analysis of the Italian translations of an example of type (3) (i.e., *A vo accattata na cosa duci?* ‘Do you want to be bought something sweet’), the option produced almost unanimously and irrespective of age, level of education, and geography, was the calque of the input sentence, *La vuoi comprata una cosa dolce/un dolce?*, with the only difference being at the lexical level, (i.e., *una cosa dolce* ‘a

sweet thing’ vs. *un dolce* ‘a cake’). Finally, it is proposed that these constructions attest to a halted grammaticalization process because they are fossilized (“frozen”) constructions, which are highly context-dependent (i.e., appear predominantly in ethnotexts) and restricted to elderly speakers with low education; and, it is argued, it is precisely because of their fossilized status that they entered regional Italian.

Chapter 4 – “Third path. From volition to directive meanings” – brings us back to the historical dimension with a diachronic analysis of the semantic domain of the verb *vuliri* ‘want’. This study aims to uncover the origins of the verb’s modern semantic values, which spans from volition to modality and beyond modality into the domains of illocution and discourse pragmatics. It is shown that in the 14th-16th centuries *vuliri* already displays a rich, articulated semantic network, which basically includes all its modern meanings. The semantic network of Old Sicilian *vuliri* is then configured in a semantic map, which represents one of the original contributions (and a quite valuable one) of the study. Another notable contribution this study makes is drawing attention to some important structural-semantic, areal, and sociolinguistic issues related to *vuliri*. Regarding *vuliri*’s semantic network, it is argued that two separate though quite interconnected phenomena partook in its development, namely grammaticalization and pragmaticalization. Concerning the areal dimension, the important remark is put forward that *vuliri*’s functional scope (i.e., the range of constructions it participates in and the values it carries) overall tallies the functional load observed by previous research for *vuliri*’s counterparts across Italo-Romance varieties. Lastly, with respect to the sociolinguistic dimension, the fact that the corpus includes texts from a wide variety of genres and linked to different social classes and registers/styles, allows Dr. Mocciano to formulate some hypotheses about the influence of sociolinguistic and textual variables on the development of *vuliri*’s semantic network, one of which, is that the higher frequency of directive constructions in monastic rules can be attributed to the regulatory nature of this text type.

Chapter 5 – “Fourth path. From (itive) motion to illocution” – addresses a concept, oriented motion, which is the source of several different grammaticalization processes all robustly attested cross-linguistically. The study focuses on the grammaticalization process through which verbs denoting oriented motion (e.g., *come* and *go*) develop directive functions. The construction under scrutiny is [*va* IPM], which comprises the imperative marker *va* (i.e., the second-person singular imperative form of *iri* ‘go’) and the second-person singular or plural imperative form of a lexical verb (e.g., *va travagghia/travagghiatu* ‘(Go) work!’). The structural features of [*va* IPM] are thoroughly analyzed vis-à-vis two other constructions often considered similar to [*va* IPM] in the literature: ‘*iri a* + infinitive’ (*iti a travagghiaru* ‘go to work’) and ‘*iri/V_{motion}* + V’, where both verbs are conjugated in the same tense, mood, and person (e.g., *Vàiu a fazzu* ‘I’m going to do’ (lit. I go a I do)). The grammaticalization degree of [*va* IPM] is measured with reference to a notable body of recent literature which incorporates discourse-pragmatics to the traditional, canonical notions and parameters employed in evaluating grammaticalization trajectories and adopting this account, it is argued that the development of [*va* IPM] is rooted in the discourse-pragmatic dimension. Hence, the construction [*va* IPM] it is related neither to the ‘*iri a* + infinitive’ nor to the ‘*iri/V_{motion}* + V’ construction.

Chapter 6 – “Fifth path. A semantic map for modal verbs” – examines the semantic-functional domain covered by five modal constructions, ‘*aviri a* ‘have to’ / *putiri* ‘can be able’ / *sapiri* ‘can be able’ / *vuliri* ‘want’ + ‘infinitive’ and ‘*vuliri* + past participle’, in present-day Sicilian. The study is based on the qualitative analysis of data gathered from the ALS corpus and focuses on two closely interrelated semantic-functional domains: (non-epistemic) participant-oriented modality and directivity. The main goal is to position the four construction within the two domains under consideration, then sketch a semantic-functional map of the participant-oriented modality sub-domain and its overlap with directivity. This study brings in the constructions *putiri* and *sapiri* which have received considerably less attention in previous research but, more importantly, it differs significantly by the studies presented in the previous chapters by embracing an onomasiological rather than semasiological approach. Additionally, it presents some interesting results on the range of vitality of the four constructions under consideration: in particular, ‘*aviri a* + infinitive’ stands out for its high degree of productivity and

polysemy, as well as for being firmly rooted in the linguistic repertoire of young well-educated speakers whose first language is Italian rather than Sicilian.

Chapter 7 – “Towards a unified account: a semantic modality’s map for Sicilian” – sums up and draws conclusions from the core results of the studies collected in the thesis, in order to schematize them in a unitary semantic-functional map with both diachronic and synchronic scope. This ‘final’ map is drawn adopting an onomasiologic approach (i.e., it plots functions/meanings to forms/constructions, rather than forms/constructions to functions/meanings, as in the preceding studies) and encompasses the entire core domain of Sicilian modality, which Dr. Mocciaro configures in four subdomains, overall following van der Auwera and Plungian’s (1998) model but with some minor (though pertinent) modifications: (1) *Participant internal* modality, which covers necessity, volition/desideration, and possibility controlled by conditions inherent to the participant; (2) *participant external* modality, which covers necessity and possibility governed by circumstances external to the participant; (3) *Deontic* modality, viewed here as a specialization of participant-external modality, where the controlling conditions are embodied by a person or social or ethical norm; and (4) *epistemic* modality, which covers probability as inference rather than logical necessity and epistemic possibility (i.e., a conjecture considered plausible by the speaker). The proposed map, however, also includes areas of interface with the bordering domain of directivity, as well as other post-modal domains (e.g., temporal-aspectual). Thus, it is characterized by several ‘fuzzy’ areas, particularly at its boundaries, where numerous understudied constructions and phenomena dwell, which appear to be at the heart of Dr. Mocciaro’s research agenda.

Individually, all the five studies collected in Dr. Mocciaro’s habilitation thesis make strong, valuable, and innovative contributions to the areas of modality, historical linguistics, and sociolinguistics, which are the areas on which Dr. Mocciaro’s scholarly pursuits have been focusing. Moreover, they provide an invaluable addition to the study of Sicilian from a more up-to-date perspective than the traditional dialectology approach that characterizes the larger part of the available literature on this Italo-Romance varieties. More specifically, **Chapter 2** makes a contribution to the diachronic research on two specific constructions, ‘*aviri a* ‘have to’ + infinitive’ and ‘*vuliri* ‘want’ + infinitive’, as well as to research on Sicilian modality in general, which is three-fold since (a) it provides the first systematic and rather extensive analysis of ‘*vuliri* + infinitive’; (b) it proposes the first Cognitive Grammar based account of ‘*aviri a* + infinitive’; and (c) it offers the first characterization of the two constructions’ semantic networks and their interaction with tense and aspect. The contribution made by **Chapter 3** is also three-fold, in that the study (a) makes a notable addition to the study of Italian dialects (and more in general, Romance languages/varieties) by providing a comprehensive contrastive analysis of the morphosyntax and semantics of the construction type ‘*vuliri* ‘want’ + past participle’, given that although this construction type has been addressed by previous research, the focus has been on Neapolitan and other southern varieties but not on Sicilian; (b) it provides a viable account of the grammaticalization path of the three subtypes of the constructions analyzed which can serve as useful reference for future studies on comparable constructions; (c) it incorporates a sociolinguistic approach into the diachronic analysis. **Chapter 4**’s most notable contribution is that it proposes the first semantic-functional map of Old Sicilian *vuliri*. Furthermore, the chapter highlights important structural-semantic, areal, and sociolinguistic issues related to *vuliri* which should be examined in more details, namely: (a) that two separate though closely interrelated phenomena played a role in the development of the semantic-functional network of *vuliri* (i.e., grammaticalization and pragmaticalization); (b) that the array of constructions *vuliri* participates in and the values it carries (i.e., *vuliri*’s functional scope) overall matches the functional scope previous research has identified for *vuliri*’s counterparts across Italo-Romance varieties; and (c) that the of the corpus in terms of texts and genres make is possible to put forward hypotheses about the influence of sociolinguistic and textual variables on the development of *vuliri*’s semantic network. The detailed diachronic analysis of the directive construction ‘*va* ‘go’ + imperative’ offered in **Chapter 5** makes a notable contribution to the general research on grammaticalization, first and foremost, because it presents a case study of the development of directive

values from verbs of oriented motion (a phenomenon which remains understudied), but also because it addresses the import of discourse-pragmatics in grammaticalization processes. Furthermore, the chapter also re-examines several thorny and still controversial features of the linking element *a*, including its distribution in ‘*iri a* + infinitive’ vs. and ‘*iri*/_{*v*motion} + V’ and its debated etymology, for which convincing alternative interpretations are put forward. Finally, **Chapter 6** examines five constructions: ‘*aviri a* + infinitive’, ‘*putiri/sapiri* + infinitive’, ‘*vuliri* + infinitive’, and ‘*vuliri* + past participle’, two of which (‘*putiri/sapiri* + infinitive’) remain significantly understudied. More notably, however, this chapter takes on an onomasiological rather than the semasiological approach adopted in the preceding chapters. Moreover, some interesting sociolinguistic results are presented on the degree of vitality of the four constructions under analysis, which indicate that ‘*aviri a* + infinitive’ exhibits a high degree of productivity and polysemy and is also well-alive in the linguistic repertoire of young well-educated speakers who are native speakers of Italian rather than Sicilian. Before moving to comment on the value of Dr. Mocciaro’s habilitation thesis en bloc, I would like to point out that besides being notable individual contributions to current research on modality, historical linguistics, and sociolinguistics, the five ‘core’ chapters do indeed attest to an articulate trajectory of intellectual growth, both at the theoretical and methodological level.

As a whole, Dr. Mocciaro’s habilitation thesis is a strong, first-rate scholarly work. In my opinion, two features make it stand out as especially valuable. First, the thesis directly tackles or touches on several topics and fields of current interest in linguistic inquiries, which include modality, historical linguistics, semantic topography, sociolinguistics, and Romance linguistics, either filling important gaps in the existing literature or calling attention to forms and phenomena whose analyses remain controversial or unsatisfactory. Concerning **modality**, Dr. Mocciaro’s thesis deepens and improves our understanding of the modality domain of Sicilian (and, I would add, Romance languages/varieties in general) since it provides systematic and thorough investigations of the semantic-functional scope of a number of core Sicilian periphrastic constructions, some of which have been addressed within the traditional (but now somewhat outdated) dialectology approach, yet remain unexplored from more current theoretical and methodological perspectives, while some others have not received attention at all. In addition, the entire thesis calls attention to constructions and phenomena that belong to peripheral areas of the modality domain (or pre- and post- modal domains), that is, domains of complex interface between modality and other semantic-functional domains, which constitute an extremely fertile field of research since they are marginally addressed in the current literature. Indeed, some of the studies also put forward interesting, viable accounts of constructions and phenomena that inhabit the periphery of the modality domain. Among these peripheral areas, the one that Dr. Mocciaro’s thesis examined in more detail is directivity (Chapters 5 and 6). But other important areas/dimensions of interface are underlined as needing investigation; for instance, the temporal-aspectual dimension, particularly regarding the proximate value which arises from the predictive value of ‘*aviri a* + infinitive’ or from volition in the case of ‘*vuliri* + infinitive’ when these constructions involve inanimate subjects (e.g., *chiddu àrbulu voli cadiri* ‘that tree is about to fall’) or weather verbs (e.g., *avi a chioviri* ‘it’s going to rain’, *voli chioviri* ‘it is about to rain’); or the future meaning that stems from other semantic-functional values of these same constructions; precisely, from the predictive-epistemic and intentional values of ‘*aviri a* + infinitive’ (e.g., *aju a bbeniri dumani* ‘I must/will come tomorrow’) and volition in the case of ‘*vuliri* + infinitive’ (e.g., *ci vogghiu iri dumani* ‘I want/plan to go there tomorrow’). Exploring the interface between modality and the temporal dimension in Sicilian is especially relevant given the absence in this language of the synthetic future (e.g., Italian *canterò* ‘I will sing’ < Latin CANTARE HABEO ‘to sing I have’). Furthermore, regarding epistemic modality, attention is drawn to non-verbal lexical sources, such as epistemic/epistemic-evidential adverbs in *-ca* ‘that’ (e.g., *dicica* (< *dici* ‘say.3sg present indicative’ + *ca*), *pàrica* (< *pari* ‘seem.3sg present indicative’ + *ca*), or epistemic markers based on the verb *sapiri* ‘to know’ (e.g., *cusà* < *cu sa* ‘who knows’, *sapiddu* < *sapi iddu* ‘knows he’), which have been largely ignored in the literature.

Dr. Mocciaro's diachronic case studies contribute to the research on **grammaticalization** (hence, also historical linguistics at large) by tracing grammaticalization processes with wide, well-established cross-linguistic application for a language, Sicilian, still underexplored in this respect. These case studies on Sicilian not only add new data to the literature on grammaticalization but also provide an opportunity of confirming the validity of widespread and robust grammaticalization trajectories, or, possibly, identifying theoretical and/or methodological tenets that might need refining. In fact, they address important issues which presently stand at the center of an active scholarly discussion because they are still not fully understood and/or controversial. First and foremost, among these is the question of the import that discourse-pragmatics holds for grammaticalization processes, which is a key issue in grammaticalization studies because it is closely related to the debate (theoretical, methodological, and terminological) about the exact nature of grammaticalization. Identified by some scholars as the diachronic process that leads to the development of discourse markers, grammaticalization is yet to receive a unanimous characterization in the literature, and its precise status as a phenomenon independent of or interacting with grammaticalization is also under dispute. Therefore, new research on these matters is much needed. Another important issue related to grammaticalization which is addressed in Dr. Mocciaro's studies is the role metaphor, metonymy, and (inter)subjectification play in grammaticalization processes. The role of (inter)subjectification, for instance, comes up regarding the development of directive (or prohibitive) values by *vuliri* 'want' (e.g., *c'a vo finiri?* 'do you want to stop?/could you stop?') which, Dr. Mocciaro argues, result from the transfer of the speaker's desire/intent of carrying out an action to the addressee, so that the speaker can convey an order/request in a less abrupt, more polite way. The development of directive *vuliri*, then, implies the speaker's attention to the addressee's; hence, it involves intersubjectification.

As for **semantic topography**, Dr. Mocciaro is, to the best of my knowledge, the first to design semantic-functional maps of an Italo-Romance (possibly, just Romance) language; therefore, her contribution in this area is truly pioneering.

Lastly, Dr. Mocciaro's work quite obviously bears upon the field of **sociolinguistics** because some of her studies are specifically sociolinguistic in nature, while others combine sociolinguistics and diachronic linguistics. Additionally, however, her sociolinguistic analyses are related to the study of the vitality and patterns of distribution of Sicilian today. Her work, thus, raises awareness about the uncertain situation of the Italian 'dialects' today and serves as a model and inspiration, I would hope, for similar research on the other 'dialects' of Italian, and, possibly, also promote dialect revitalization.

The second aspect of Dr. Mocciaro's thesis (actually, her scholarly work in general) that I consider particularly valuable and much inspiring, is her theoretical and methodological approach, whose most distinctive feature is the incorporation of core functionalist approaches; among these, the usage-based approach is, in my opinion, especially beneficial because it entails analyses that rely on naturally occurring language data. In this respect, Dr. Mocciaro's work makes a noteworthy contribution to the field of Romance linguistics, which continues to remain deeply rooted in formalist (Chomskyan) approaches, as clearly attested by the tradition of two of the most prominent conferences on Romance Linguistics, the *Linguistic Symposium on Romance Languages* and *Going Romance*. To conclude, I deem Dr. Mocciaro's habilitation thesis to be a sound academic work, which discloses rigorous research on topics of current and lively interest in linguistics. More precisely, Dr. Mocciaro frames her research on the Sicilian language within a composite, 'modular' theoretical and methodological framework, which brings together effectively and innovatively the synchronic, diachronic, and sociolinguistic dimensions. Furthermore, her research bears important implications for linguistic typology and, of course, comparative Romance linguistics. The individual studies collected in the thesis tie together to form a cohesive and coherent body of research, as shown by the semantic map (the 'final path') she proposes in Chapter 6, which systematizes the whole modality domain of Sicilian, both from a synchronic and diachronic perspective.

Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence (number of questions up to the reviewer)

1. In Chapter 3 – “Second path. From volition to modal-passive meanings” – Dr. Mocciaro writes: “This first survey of the passive uses of *vuliri* leaves open many questions, indicating as many directions for further investigation. First of all, the direction of change must be ascertained, that is, whether the volitional type constitutes the basis on which the deontic type has developed or whether, rather, the latter is based on the deontic values conveyed by *vuliri* even outside the domain of the passive.” (p. 132) I would like to ask Dr. Mocciaro how she would proceed in investigating the directionality of the change.

2. In Chapter 7 – “Towards a unified account: a semantic modality’s map for Sicilian” – Dr. Mocciaro states that “the proposed map, while summarising the research conducted so far in a unified and coherent vision, also contains the research directions that need to be taken in the near future to complete the picture of the modality in Sicilian.” (p. 247) I wonder if Dr. Mocciaro could elaborate (even just tentatively) on the future research directions she hints at.

Conclusion

The habilitation thesis entitled Paths of modality and beyond. The grammaticalisation of modals and directive markers in Sicilian by Egle Mocciaro fulfils requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of Linguistics of Concrete Languages (Roman Languages).

Date: April 18, 2023

Signature: 