

On complementizers in main clauses. The case of Palermitan *ca**

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1. Introduction

In this paper we examine the distribution of the complementizer *ca* in main clauses in Palermitan (henceforth Main Clause *ca*, MC *ca*). Normally the complementizer *ca* introduces embedded declaratives (1a) and relative clauses (1b).

- (1) a. Ricistivu *ca* Mario un vieni (Palermo, ASIIt)
you.said that M. not comes
'You said that Mario will not come.'
- b. A fimina *ca* pulizia i scali è ammalata
the woman that cleans the stairs is ill
'The cleaning woman is ill.'

However it is also found in root interrogatives (2a), in imperatives (2b) and in cases like (2c), where two instances of *ca* appear before and after epistemic adverbs like *certu* 'sure' or *veramenti* 'truly' in declarative sentences that we can provisionally define as "emphatic".

- (2) a. *Ca* un t'u spiò nuddu? (Palermo, ASIIt)
that not you.DAT=it=explained no.one
'Didn't anyone tell you that?'
- b. *Ca* manciatillu!
that eat=you.DAT=it
'Eat it!'
- c. *Ca certu ca* c'u rissi
that sure that him.DAT=it=I.told
'Of course I told him that.'

The phenomena exemplified in (2) raise some questions about the categorial status of *ca*, about the features encoded by this element and, more in general, about the syntax of

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subordination and the relation between grammar and pragmatics. Cases of declarative complementizers in main clauses are not uncommon in Romance. The following is a not exhaustive list: *che* in yes/no questions in Central and Southern Italian varieties (Lusini 2013, 46ff), *che* with the subjunctive in dubitative interrogatives in Italian (Fava 1995, 117), Catalan *que* in yes/no questions (Prieto and Rigau 2007), Romanian *că* in root declaratives (Hill 2012).

In all these cases one possible analysis is to postulate that the clause is selected by a silent verb (or a silent head of some type) and the complementizer is the same element found in dependant clauses. An alternative possibility is that the complementizer is an underspecified element that can be inserted in different structural positions in order to activate or, in minimalist terms, to check specific grammatical features.

It must be pointed out that in the contexts exemplified in (2) (but not in those in (1)) *ca* is optional and its presence correlates with specific interpretative nuances. In what follows we will propose that these interpretative nuances are all the reflex of the fact that the speaker implies that some relevant information is or should already be known by the addressee. The main point of our analysis is that this pragmatic configuration is represented syntactically by a null topic, whose presence is signaled by *ca*. In some sense, the analysis we propose goes beyond the two possibilities mentioned above. On the one hand, we assume that there is a silent element, but it does not select for an embedded clause; on the other, we do not claim that MC *ca* encodes *per se* some specific feature, but rather that it is merged in order to activate the higher portion of the CP layer.

In section 2 we describe the syntactic data that we take into consideration; section 3 is dedicated to the interpretative aspects of the phenomenon; in section 4 we present our analysis; section 5 contains some concluding remarks and possible further developments of the analysis.

2. *Ca* in root clauses

MC *Ca* can surface in root interrogatives, imperatives and declaratives, as shown in (2). In (3) we provide further examples in order to show that it can appear in negative imperatives and *wh* interrogatives:

- (3) a. Ca un t'u manciari!
that not you.DAT=it=eat
'Don't eat it!'
- b. Ca quannu te l'avìa a ddiri?
that when you.DAT=it=had to tell
'When did I have to tell you that?'

Ca can also appear in front of isolated *wh* items (4a-b) and isolated adverbs corresponding to *sure* or *truly*, etc., used as positive polarity answers (4c-d):

- (4) a. Ca picchì?
'Why?'
- b. Ca quannu?
'When?'
- c. Ca certu
'Sure.'
- d. Ca veramenti
'Indeed.'

Similarly, it can precede the polarity particles corresponding to *yes* and *no*. Furthermore, it can appear in isolation as a positive answer:

- (5) a. Ca sì
'Yes.'
- b. Ca no
'No.'
- c. Ca
'Yes.'

Some syntactic environments do not tolerate the presence of MC *ca*. First, in yes/no interrogatives MC *ca* is allowed only if the question contains a clausal negation, as in (2a) opposed to (6)(we discuss the semantic and pragmatic aspects of this in the next section):

- (6) *Ca Nanni t'u spiò?
 that John you.DAT=it=explained
 'Did John tell you that?'

Furthermore, exclamative sentences of any type cannot contain MC *ca*:

- (7) a. (*Ca) chi ssì bravu!
 that what are good
 b. (*Ca) chi bbravu ca sù!
 that what good that are
 'You are really good!'
 c. *Ca ssì bravu!
 that are good

Finally, in declaratives MC *ca* is allowed only if there is a focalized constituent, like the adverb *certu* in (8a) or the PP *a scuola* in (8b), otherwise the sentence is ungrammatical:

- (8) a. Ca *certu* ca c'u rissi
 that sure that him.DAT=it=told
 'Of course I told him that.'
 b. Ca *a scuola* u purtavu u picciriddu
 that to school him=took the child
 'To the school I took the child, of course.'
 c. *Ca c'u rissi
 that him.DAT=it=told
 'I told him that.'

The previous examples also show that MC *ca* precedes focalized elements and *wh* items. More in general, it must be in first position, preceding also left dislocated constituents:

- (9) a. Ca stu fattu quannu te l'avìa a ddiri? *ca – CLLD – wh*
 that this fact when you.DAT=it=had to tell
 'When did I have to tell you that fact?'
 b. *Stu fattu ca quannu te l'avìa a ddiri? **CLLD – ca – wh*

In cases like (2c) or (8a), where there is a focalized adverb followed by another instance of *ca*, MC *ca* must be in first position, followed eventually by a left dislocated topic and then the adverb. Notice that there are no other possible positions for left dislocated topics:

- (10) a. *Ca stu fattu certu ca c’u rissi* *ca – CLLD – certu – ca*
 that this fact sure that him.DAT=it=told
 ‘Of course I told him this fact.’
- b. **Stu fattu ca certu ca c’u rissi* **CLLD – ca – certu – ca*
- c. **Ca certu ca stu fattu c’u rissi* **ca – certu – ca – CLLD*
- d. **Ca certu stu fattu ca c’u rissi* **ca – certu – CLLD – ca*

MC *Ca* seems completely incompatible with hanging topics; however it should be pointed out that hanging topics are in general rarely used in Sicilian varieties:

- (11) a. **Mariu ca quannu c’u ricisti?* **HT – ca*
 Mario that when him.DAT=it=told
 ‘When did you say that to Mario?’
- b. **Ca Mariu quannu c’u ricisti?* **ca – HT*
- c. **Mariu_i ca certu ca c’u_i rissi*
 Mario that sure that him.DAT=it=told
 ‘Mario, of course I told him that.’

The scope of this paper is on the variety of Palermo, but the other Sicilian varieties behave in a similar way. One relevant difference that it is worth reporting here is displayed by South-Eastern Sicilian varieties, that tolerate the presence of a left dislocated constituent after the lower *ca* in emphatic clauses.¹ Compare the examples in (10) with (12):

- (12) *Ca certu ca stu fattu c’u rissi* (Ragusa)
 that sure that this fact him.DAT=it=told
 ‘Of course I told him this fact.’

We discuss this variation in section 4.

At this point, it is possible to derive some descriptive generalizations about the syntax of MC *ca*.

¹ We thank Cristina Guardiano who pointed out this to us.

a) MC *ca* requires a focalized element in the left periphery: a *wh* item or a focalized XP. In the case of negative yes/no questions it can be assumed that the NegP containing the verb has moved to a CP focus position. Interestingly, considering the widely accepted idea that the verb moves to the CP in main questions, this distribution suggests that in the analysis positive and negative verbs have to be treated differently (and perhaps occupy different positions). For the relation between negation and focus, see Surányi (2006) and in particular Poletto (2009), who discuss focus as a semantic component of negation.

b) MC *ca* appears to be the highest element of the clause, since it precedes both topics and foci. The incompatibility with hanging topics, but not with lower left dislocated topics (or even right dislocated topics), is evidence for a syntactic clash, not an interpretative one.

c) There can be more instances of *ca* in the same sentence (*ca certu ca...*). However this configuration has two possible analyses, a mono-clausal one and a bi-clausal one (see section 4 for discussion).

3. On the interpretation of Main Clause *ca*

In the previous section we have shown that MC *ca* appears in three different clause types: imperatives, interrogatives (*wh* or negative yes/no questions) and declaratives containing a focalized element.

In imperatives with *ca* the speaker expresses that the order should be considered a consent or an authorization. For this reason these constructions are impossible in out-of-the-blue contexts.

- (13) a. *A enters the room;*
 B: #*Ca chiui a porta!*
 that close the door
 ‘Close the door!’
- b. A: *Mii r’u friddu, putemu chiuere a porta?*
 ‘It’s very cold! Can we close the door?’
 B: *Ca chiui!*
 that close=her
 ‘Close it!’

In both *wh* and yes/no interrogatives, , *ca* introduces an interpretation similar to that of rhetorical questions. More precisely, by using *ca* the speaker expresses that the value of the *wh* element or the positive answer to the yes/no interrogative is already in the common ground, and that other answers cannot be taken into consideration.

- (14) *B meets A in this moment for the first time since a long time;*
A: Picchì um m’u ricisti prima?
why not me.DAT=it=told before
‘Why haven’t you told me that before?’
B: Ca quannu te l’avìa a ddiri?
that when you.DAT=it=had to tell
‘When did I have to tell you that?’
(= I am telling this now because there have not been other chances before now and you are supposed to know this)

- (15) A: S’astutò a luci n’u ufficiu
REFL turned.off the light in the office
‘The light turned off in my office.’
B knows that the day before all the clerks had been informed about the blackout in the office;
B: Ca un t’u spiò nuddu?
that not you.DAT=it=explained no.one
‘Didn’t anyone tell you that?’
(=you should have known about the blackout since you were informed)

In the case of declaratives we have a similar interpretative configuration. The focalized constituent is not new from the point of view of information structure, but it is emphasized by the speaker who wants to point out to the addressee that he/she should know that information. In other words, the speaker assumes that the focalized element is in the common ground.

- (16) A: Unn’u purtasti u picciriddu?
where it=took the child
‘Where did you take the child?’
B always takes the child to the school at that time in the morning;
B: Ca a scuola u purtavu u picciriddu

that to school him=took the child

‘To the school I took the child, of course (and there are not other possibilities).’

In the case of structures like *ca certu ca*, the focalized adverb confirms the whole sentence as true, and the addressee is supposed to already have this information, sharing it with the speaker in the common ground.

In this brief excursus we have described the different interpretative nuances of clauses containing MC *ca*. Even if it can show up in different clause types, it can be argued that in all these cases MC *ca* is related to a precise discourse property, namely the fact that the speaker points out to the addressee that some relevant information is already in the common ground and, thus, it should already be present in her/his knowledge. On the basis of this generalization, we assume that in all the cases described above *ca* is merged in the same position.

4. Analysis

Since MC *ca* has to precede both clitic left dislocations and focuses (and *wh* items) in the left periphery, we assume that it is located in a high position in the CP layer. The fact that it cannot co-occur with hanging topics suggests that the two items compete for the same position; following Benincà (2001) we label it DiscourseP:

- (17) a. [DiscourseP *ca* [TopP *stu fattu* [FocusP [FinitenessP [IP]...]]
b. [DiscourseP *ca* [TopP [FocusP *quannu* [FinitenessP [IP]...]]

More precisely, we claim that *ca* lexicalizes the head of DiscourseP, while its specifier is occupied by a null topic, which we label Common Ground Topic (CGT). This element instantiates the pragmatic property described in the previous section at the syntactic level.²

Cases like (2c), repeated below as (18), are particularly interesting because they display two instances of *ca*:

² An alternative possibility is that *ca* occupies Rizzi's (1997) Force^o, which is higher than left dislocated topics. However, MC *ca* is not related to sentential force, since it can appear in different clause types. Furthermore, *ca* with the special interpretations described in this paper is not allowed in dependant clauses. For the relation between common ground null topics and pragmatic effects similar to those described here, see Poletto and Zanuttini (2013).

- (18) *Ca certu ca c' u rissi*
 that sure that him.DAT=it=I.told
 'Of course I told him that.'

Similar sentences can be analyzed in two ways, as mono-clausal structures or as bi-clausal ones. The two possibilities are represented in (19):

- (19) a. [_{CP} *ca certu ca c' u rissi*] mono-clausal
 b. [_{CP} *ca certu* [_{CP} *ca c' u rissi*]] bi-clausal

The fact that a left dislocated constituent can appear only in one position in these sentences, namely after the first *ca* (examples in (10)), suggests that the mono-clausal analysis is the correct one, since in a bi-clausal structure there would be a second slot for topics after the lower complementizer. This, however, leaves some questions open. First, this solution implies that the complementizer *ca* can be merged in the low left periphery. Furthermore, the data from the dialect of Ragusa (where a clitic left dislocation can follow the lower *ca*) show that in similar grammars the same linear sequence can have a completely different structural organization. Leaving aside this second issue, since we concentrate on Palermitan, it can be argued that the existence of a low *ca* is not problematic considering double complementizer structures as those studied by Paoli (2003) (see also Ledgeway (2007) on the hypothesis that finite complementizers are generated in the low CP space). Assuming that the adverb *certu* occupies the specifier of the Focus projection (it has the same linear position of *wh* items³), we propose the following structure for sentences like (18):

- (20) [_{DiscourseP} CGT [_{Discourse°} *ca* [_{ForceP} [_{TopicP} [_{FocusP} *certu* [_{FinP} *ca* [_{IP} *c' u rissi*]]...]]]]

According to this analysis, the higher *ca*—MC *ca*—is the head of the highest projection, while the lower *ca* is the head of the Finiteness projection. As mentioned in the previous discussion, we do not postulate that the special meaning of sentences with MC *ca* derives from some feature encoded by the complementizer. Rather, the different interpretative nuances found in the various types of clauses with MC *ca* are a consequence of the presence

³ Another piece of evidence in favor of the idea that the adverb is located in the new information focus position is that in these sentences the left periphery can contain only left dislocated topics, which can be individuated by the mandatory presence of a resumptive clitic (see Cruschina (2010) and Garzonio (2008) on left dislocations in Southern Italian dialects):

- (i) **Ca certu a Mmariu vitti* / **Ca a Mmariu certu vitti* **ca – certu – FOC* / **ca – FOC – certu*
 that sure to M. I.saw / that to M. sure I.saw
 'I saw Mario of course.'

of the CGT. As for the role of *ca*, we surmise that it is purely syntactic, in the sense that it is merged in order to activate the Discourse projection containing the CGT.

One relevant property of all the clauses with MC *ca* is that some element has to be moved to the left periphery: a *wh* item, a focalized constituent, or the verb (adopting the widespread view that the verb is moved to CP in interrogatives and imperatives). We do not provide here a formalization of this requirement, but we propose that it is related to the presence of the CGT and the construction of a local topic-comment configuration.

5. Conclusions and further developments

In this paper we have described the syntactic distribution of the complementizer *ca* in main clauses in Palermitan. We have argued that the special interpretations connected to its presence are the consequence of a Common Ground null topic in the higher portion of the CP layer. We have also argued that MC *ca* lexicalizes the head of a Discourse projection, and it is not involved in clause typing and subordination.

Some elements require further developments of the analysis. In section 2, we have shown that *ca* can appear also with isolated *wh* items and polarity particles. While the first phenomenon does not require particular refinements of the analysis, as it can be explained assuming ellipsis of the lower part of the interrogative clause, the other one is more challenging, in particular in the light of the fact that *ca* alone can correspond to the positive polarity particle (5c).

A more general problem which we have only briefly mentioned here is the relation between the different instances of *ca* (declarative *ca*, relative *ca*, MC *ca*, Finiteness *ca*). In our proposal we claim that MC *ca* occupies the head of DiscourseP, but we have not proposed a derivation for this configuration, as at the moment we do not have enough data to postulate movement from a lower projection (FinitenessP, or some revised version of Bhatt and Yoon's (1991) SubP). The ungrammaticality of MC *ca* in dependant clauses could be related to the non availability of the higher part of the left periphery in embedded contexts (Hill 2012).

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