

## On two discourse particles in (central) Sicilian polar questions

Valentina Bianchi  
University of Siena

Silvio Cruschina  
University of Helsinki

1. In central Sicilian, a direct polar question (PQ) is optionally introduced by the particle *chi*:

- (1) (*Chi*) *ci veni ta frati au vattisimu?* ‘Is your brother coming to the Christening?’  
PTC LOC comes your brother to-the christening

*Chi* can in turn be preceded by the particle *cusà* (from: who+know.3SG, Brucale et al. 2019):

- (2) *Cusà (chi) jà 10 euro d'impristarimi?* ‘Can I borrow 10 euros off you?’  
PTC PTC have.2SG 10 euros to lend-me

These discourse particles are not limited to PQs. The *chi* particle can also appear in replies like (3B-B’), with an interesting flip: when realized with falling intonation (B), it conveys a confirmation move (meaning ‘I know’); when realized with a high ‘incredulity’ intonation (B’), instead, it conveys a strong denial.

- (3) A: *Maria si misi cu ddru babbu di Peppi.* B: *A chi...* ‘I know.’  
Maria RFL put.3SG with that idiot of Peppi  
A: ‘Maria got engaged to that idiot of Peppi.’ B’: *A chi?!* ‘No way!’

*Cusà* can introduce a declarative sentence and functions as a dubitative particle:

- (4) *Trasi a machina nt’u magazzinu, cusà chiovi.*  
enter.IMP.2SG the car in-the garage PTC rain.3SG  
‘Put the car in the garage, it may rain.’

We propose an analysis based on Farkas’s (2020) approach to (non)canonical questions.

2. Farkas (2020) points out that canonical questions are associated with the default pragmatic assumptions of (i) speaker ignorance and (ii) addressee competence about the true answer; moreover, (iii) the commitment anchor is the addressee. Farkas argues that various types of non-canonical questions arise from the suspension of one of (i)-(iii).

Based on this characterization, we show that *chi* marks addressee competence in PQs: in fact, it is unacceptable in *quiz questions* (5), where the speaker cannot presuppose the addressee’s competence, and in *engaging questions* (6), where the commitment anchor is the group of speaker and addressee (Farkas 2020, §4.1).

- (5) (*#Chi*) *a Sicilia (#chi) jè l’isula cchiù ranni d’u Mediterraneu?*  
PTC the Sicily PTC is the-island more big of-the Mediterranean  
‘Is Sicily the biggest island of the Mediterranean Sea?’  
(6) (*#Chi*) *un putissimu pigliari a machina?* ‘Couldn’t we take the car?’  
PTC not can.SBJV.PST.1PL take.INF the car

*Cusà* instead marks speaker ignorance in PQs: it is unacceptable in quiz questions like (5) above, where speaker competence about the answer is presupposed, and also in confirmation questions (7), where the speaker’s epistemic state entails a positive answer.

- (7) (*#Cusà*) (*chi*) *viagnu cu vuantri?* ‘Am I coming with you?’  
PTC PTC come.1SG with you.PL

3. In the inquisitive model of the discourse context proposed in Farkas & Roelofsen (2017), (henceforth F&R), Farkas (2020), both declaratives and PQs denote a (downward closed) set of alternatives (an issue). PQs differ from declaratives in being *inquisitive*: they denote a polar

set consisting of two alternatives, rather than a singleton set. Declaratives, but not PQs, are *informative*, i.e. their denotation excludes some indices from the context set. Finally, both declaratives and PQs *highlight* the alternative denoted by the sentence radical, introducing one propositional discourse referent (Roelofsen & Farkas 2015, (60); Roelofsen *et al.* 2019, §3.1).

When a speaker asks a question, the set of alternatives it denotes is pushed on the Table (a push-down store that records, at any stage, the current goal of the conversation); the question also projects a set of possible evolutions of the addressee's commitment state (the *projected set*, *ps*) in each of which she becomes committed to one of the alternatives in the question denotation. Thus, the addressee is the commitment anchor.

4. With this background, we propose that *chi* and *cusà* take in input an issue *p* and introduce a conventional implicature about how *p* relates to one interlocutor's knowledge state. Specifically, *chi* conveys that every alternative in *p* is *decided* in the current epistemic state of the commitment anchor, being either entailed by it or inconsistent with it:

$$(8) \llbracket \textit{chi} \rrbracket^c = \lambda p.p \cdot (\forall \alpha \in p) [\text{Epist}_{ca}(i_c) \subseteq \alpha \vee \text{Epist}_{ca}(i_c) \cap \alpha = \emptyset]$$

( $\text{Epist}_x(i)$  is  $x$ 's epistemic state at  $i$ ;  $i_c$  the time and world of the utterance context;  $ca$  the commitment anchor of the utterance; • à la Potts 2005)

When *chi* applies to a PQ, whose commitment anchor is the addressee (1)-(2), the default assumption of addressee competence is strengthened; the issue denoted by the PQ is non-vacuously pushed on the Table, as it is open for the speaker.

As for the confirmative response (3B), we propose that *chi* anaphorically picks up the unique alternative  $\alpha$  highlighted by the declarative (3A) (cf. Roelofsen & Farkas 2015, 378-79). Assume that *chi* again conveys the implicature (8) that  $\alpha$  is decided in the current epistemic state of the commitment anchor, which is speaker B here: this is compatible with B's confirming  $\alpha$  only if  $\alpha$  is, in fact, *positively* decided in her epistemic state (i.e.  $\alpha$  is already entailed by it). The same response *a chi* can be pronounced with an 'incredulity' intonation, in which case it conveys a denial. We assume that this intonation signals lack of speaker commitment to  $\alpha$ : this is compatible with (8) only if  $\alpha$  is *negatively* decided in the speaker's current epistemic state (i.e. is inconsistent with it) – whence the denial import.

*Cusà* again takes in input an issue *p* and conveys that for every alternative  $\alpha$  in *p*, the speaker is unable to decide on its truth ( $\mathcal{R}$  is a contextually relevant accessibility relation):

$$(9) \llbracket \textit{cusà} \rrbracket^c = \lambda p.p \cdot (\forall \alpha \in p)(\forall i' \mathcal{R}(i_c, i)) \neg [\text{Epist}_{\text{CSPK}}(i') \subseteq \alpha] \ \& \ \neg [\text{Epist}_{\text{CSPK}}(i') \cap \alpha = \emptyset]$$

Note that the ignorance implicature (9), contrary to (8), remains anchored to the speaker both in questions and in declaratives: hence, a *cusà* declarative like (4) does not establish a speaker commitment, but it simply highlights the unique alternative in its denotation.

As for PQs, note that when the speaker is unable to find out the true answer, she typically has recourse to the addressee's competence: this is why *cusà* very often co-occurs with *chi*. ■

6. Finally, note that *cusà* and *chi* cannot introduce a wh-question. Following Roelofsen *et al.* (2019:§3.1), wh-questions also denote an issue, but they differ from declaratives and PQs in that they do not highlight an alternative, but an  $n$ -place property ( $n \geq 1$ ). We tentatively propose that the implicatures of *chi* and *cusà* must be associated to a propositional discourse referent, corresponding to a highlighted alternative ( $\alpha^\pm$  in (10)-(11)): this is available in the case of PQs and declaratives, but not in wh-questions.

$$(10) \llbracket \textit{chi} [\phi] \rrbracket^c = p \cdot [\text{Epist}_{ca}(i_c) \subseteq \alpha^\pm \vee \text{Epist}_{ca}(i_c) \cap \alpha^\pm = \emptyset]$$

$$(11) \llbracket \textit{cusà} [\phi] \rrbracket^c = p \cdot (\forall i' \mathcal{R}(i_c, i)) \neg [\text{Epist}_{\text{CSPK}}(i') \subseteq \alpha^\pm] \ \& \ \neg [\text{Epist}_{\text{CSPK}}(i') \cap \alpha^\pm = \emptyset]$$

( $\alpha^\pm$  the alternative highlighted by  $\phi$ ;  $p$  the issue denoted by  $\phi$ ; • à la Potts 2005)

Brucale, Lo Baido & Mocchiario 2019. Talk at DISROM6, Bergamo, 29–31 May 2019.

Farkas 2020. Canonical and non-canonical questions. Available from semanticsarchive.net.

Farkas & Roelofsen 2017. *Journal of Semantics* 34.2, 237–289.

Roelofsen, Herbstritt & Aloni 2019. von Heusinger *et al.*, *Questions in discourse, Vol.1*. Brill.