



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

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## Default assumptions for canonical questions

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- (1) Addressee Competence: In a canonical information-seeking question, the source of information is the addressee, who is competent about the propositional content.
- (2) Speaker Ignorance: In a canonical information-seeking question, the speaker is ignorant about the propositional content.

... the engine driving the conversation is the wish to increase information that is mutually available to participants. [...] [In a question] Speaker ignorance follows from the fact that were the Speaker to think she knows which alternative in P is the true one, a more efficient way of increasing information would be to simply assert a declarative sentence that publicly commits her to that alternative.

(Farkas 2020, 11-13)

## Some non-canonical question types (Farkas 2020)

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- Quiz questions: [- Speaker Ignorance] [- Addressee Competence]

(3) *Is Sicily the biggest island of the Mediterranean Sea?* (QuizPQ)

- Engaging questions: The source is not the addressee, but the group speaker+addressee(s): [∅ Speaker Ignorance] [∅ Addressee Competence]

(4) *Couldn't we take the car?* (EngPQ)

- Confirmation questions: the Speaker has a positive bias towards the propositional content: [- Speaker Ignorance], [+ Addressee Competence]

(5) *Am I coming with you then?* (ConfPQ)

## The Sicilian PQ particle *chi*

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- (6) (*Chi*) *ci veni ta frati au vattisimu?*  
PTC LOC comes your brother to-the christening  
'Is your brother coming to the Christening?'
- (7) (*#Chi*) *a Sicilia (#chi) jè l'isula cchiù ranni d'u Mediterraneu?*  
PTC the Sicily PTC is the-island more big of-the Med.  
'Is Sicily the biggest island of the Mediterranean Sea?' (#QuizPQ)
- (8) (*#Chi*) *un putissimu pigliari a machina?* (#EngPQ)  
PTC not can.SBJV.PST.1PL take.INF the car  
'Couldn't we take the car?'
- (9) (*Chi*) *viagnu cu vuantri?* (✓ConfPQ)  
PTC come.1SG with you.PL  
'Am I coming with you?'

## The Sicilian PQ particle *chi*

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question type	Addressee competence	Speaker ignorance	chi
Canonical PQ	+	+	✓
Quiz PQ	-	-	#
Engaging PQ	∅	∅	#
Confirmation PQ	+	-	✓

⇒ *Chi* is conventionally associated with Addressee Competence

## The Sicilian PQ particle *chi*

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Cruschina (2012, 190-192): The particle *chi* can also be used in **replies**, preceded by one of the 'emphatic' particles (depending on the dialect: Piccitto & Tropea 1977-2002):

- *a* (unclear origin)
- *ca* (omophonous with the declarative complementizer)
- *nca* (unclear origin)

⇒ with falling intonation, it conveys a confirmative reply

⇒ with high ('incredulity') intonation, it conveys a denial.

## The Sicilian PQ particle *chi*

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(10) A: *Maria avi na simana ca un nesci di dintra,*  
Maria has one week that not go-out from inside  
*studìa ùattu uri au jùarnu pirchí javi esami.*  
studies eight hours at-the day because has exams

'Mary hasn't gone out for a week, she's studying eight hours a day because she has exams.'

B: *A chi, veru, mi scurdavu nzina chi facci javi.*  
PTC PTC true, REFL forgot.1sg even which face has

'Right, I even forgot her face.'

## The Sicilian PQ particle *chi*

(10B)    *A*    *chi*, veru,    mi scurdavu    nzina    chi facci    javi.  
PTC    PTC    true,    REFL forgot.1sg    even    which face    has

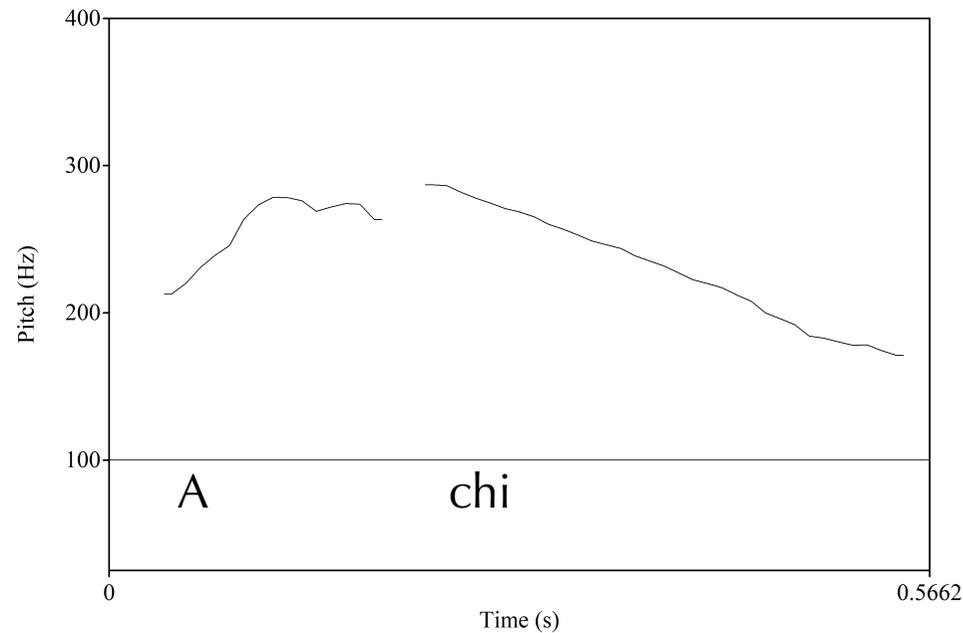


Fig 1. Intonational profile of *A chi* in (10B) (one speaker)

## The Sicilian PQ particle *chi*

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(11) A: *Maria avi na simana ca un nesci di dintra,*  
Maria has one week that not go-out from inside  
*studìa ùattu uri au jùarnu pirchí javi esami.*  
studies eight hours at-the day because has exams

'Mary hasn't gone out for a week, she's studying eight hours  
a day because she has exams.'

B: *A chi ?!* A vitti stamatina au mercatu.  
PTC PTC her saw.1SG this morning at-the market

## The Sicilian PQ particle *chi*

(11B) *A chi?! A vitti stamatina au mercatu.*  
PTC PTC her saw.1SG this morning at-the market

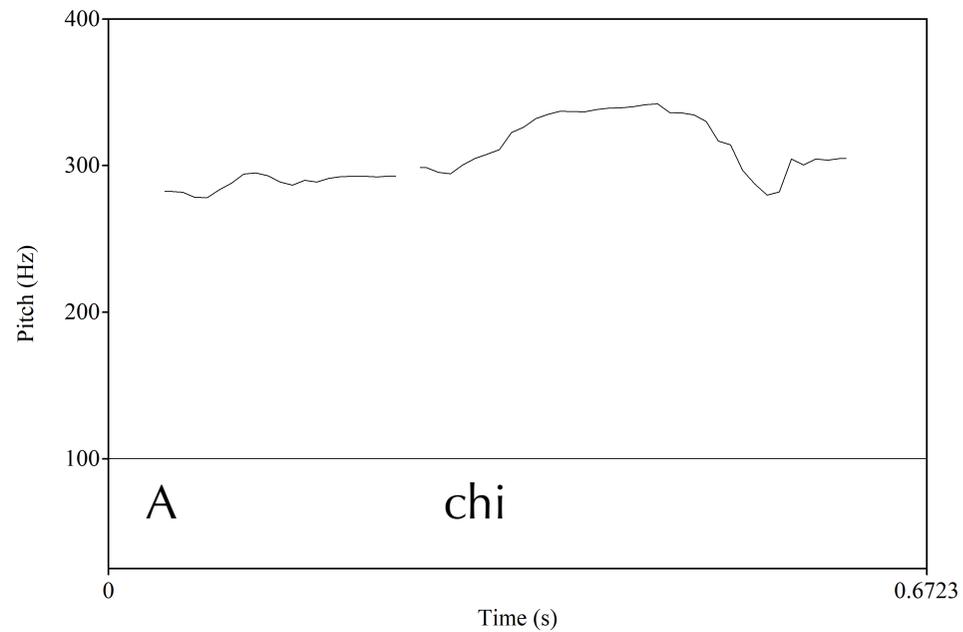


Fig 2. Intonational profile of *A chi?!* in (11B) (one speaker)

- Confirmative *A chi* – in (10B) : falling intonation (+ L- boundary tone)
- Incredulity *A chi?!* – in (11B) : high intonation (+ L% boundary tone)

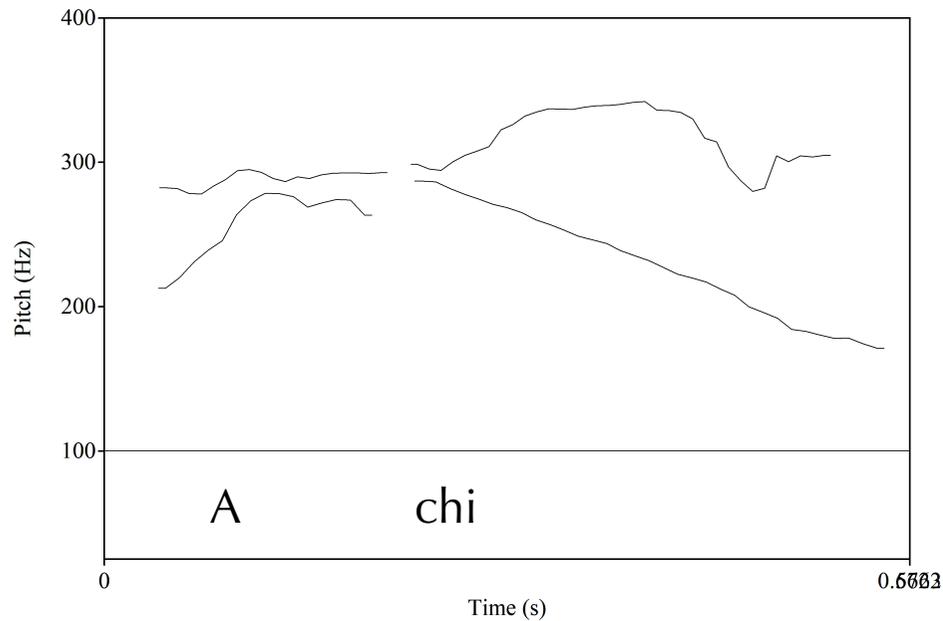


Fig 3. Comparison of the two intonations (one speaker)

## The Sicilian PQ particle *cusà*

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(12) *Cusà (chi) jà 10 euro di mi mpristari?*  
PTC PTC have.2SG 10 euros to me lend.INF  
'Can I borrow 10 euros off you?'

(13) (#*Cusà*) *a Sicilia jè l'isula cchiù ranni d'u Mediterraneu?*  
PTC the Sicily is the-island more big of-the Med.  
'Is Sicily the biggest island of the Mediterranean Sea?' (#QuizPQ)

(14) (#*Cusà*) *un putissimu pigliari a machina?*  
PTC not can.SBJV.PST.1PL take.INF the car  
'Couldn't we take the car?' (#EngPQ)

(15) (#*Cusà*) *(chi) viagnu cu vuantri?*  
PTC PTC come.1SG with you.PL  
'Am I coming with you?' (#ConfPQ)

## The Sicilian PQ particle *cusà*

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question type	Addressee competence	Speaker ignorance	<i>cusà</i>
Canonical PQ	+	+	✓
QuizPQ	-	-	#
Engaging PQ	∅	∅	#
Confirmation PQ	+	-	#

⇒ *Cusà* (from *who+know.3SG*, Brucale et al. 2019) is conventionally associated with Speaker Ignorance

In declaratives, *cusà* is a dubitative particle (see Brucale et al. 2019 for discussion):

- (16) *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/in case it rains.'

- In a speech act, the **source** is the participant (if any) who becomes committed to the propositional content, or else the participant who is expected to become committed to it
  - in assertions and replies, the source is the Speaker
  - in questions, the source is the Addressee

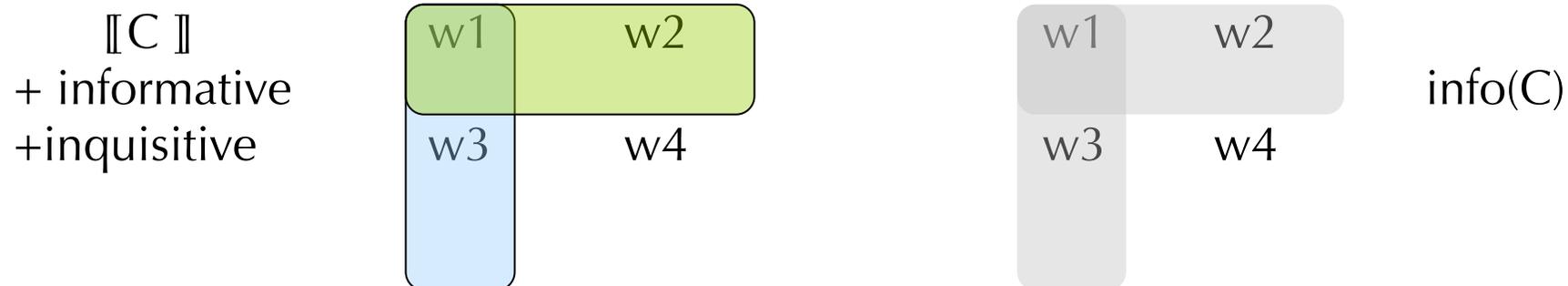
(Farkas 2020, (15); cf. also Speas & Tenny 2003)
- The lower particle *chi* is conventionally associated with competence of the source: the Speaker in declarative replies, the Addressee in questions.
- The higher particle *cusà* is always anchored to the Speaker (both in questions and in declaratives), and is conventionally associated with Speaker ignorance.
- We develop our analysis in the framework of inquisitive semantics.

## The inquisitive semantics framework

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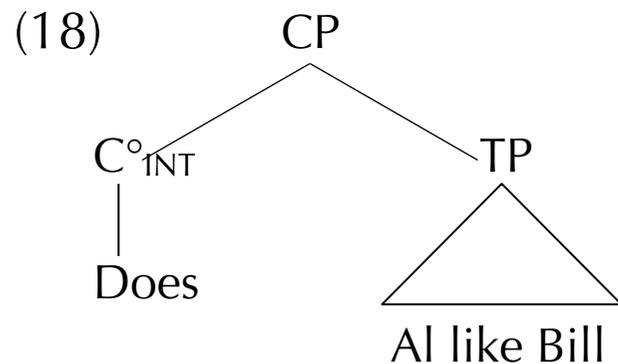
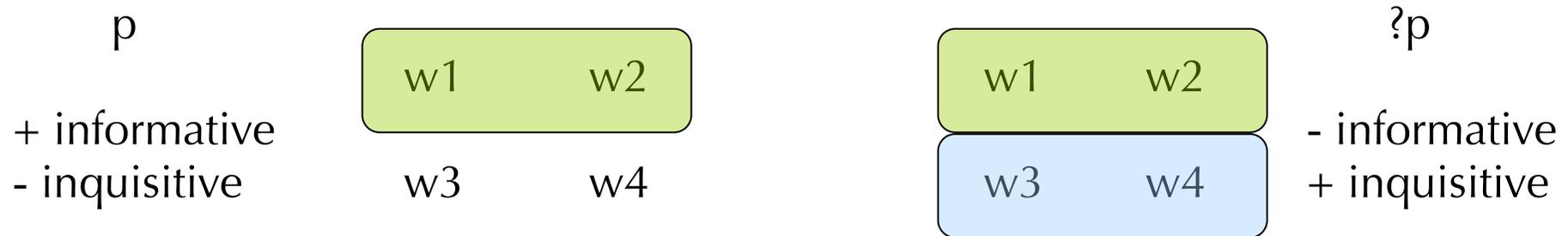
- A proposition is a nonempty set of **alternatives** – each a maximal set of indices
- The informative content of a clause  $C$ ,  $\text{info}(C)$ , is the union of the alternatives in its denotation
- A clause  $C$  is **informative** iff  $\text{info}(C) \neq W$  (i.e.,  $C$  excludes some indices)
- A clause  $C$  is **inquisitive** iff  $\text{info}(C) \notin \llbracket C \rrbracket$ , i.e. its denotation contains at least two alternatives.

(17) Al invited Ben **or** (he invited) Carl.



# The inquisitive semantics framework

- For any proposition  $p$ , the non-informative closure of  $p$  is  
 $?p := p \cup \{s \mid \text{for all } a \in p, s \cap a = \emptyset\}$



$\llbracket TP \rrbracket = \{ i \mid \text{like}_i(a,b) \} \downarrow$  (highlighted D-ref)  
 $\llbracket C^\circ_{INT} \rrbracket = \lambda p. ?p$   
 $\llbracket CP \rrbracket = \{ \{ i \mid \text{like}_i(a,b) \} \downarrow, (W - \{ i \mid \text{like}_i(a,b) \} \downarrow) \}$

(19) An information state  $s$  supports a clause  $C$  iff  $s \subseteq \text{info}(C)$ .

Note that for any  $C$ ,  $\text{info}(C) \subseteq \text{info}(?C)$  and  $\text{info}(\neg C) \subseteq \text{info}(?C)$ : hence,  $C$  and  $\neg C$  are more informative than  $?C$ .

(20) Canonical speech act

Update the context with the most informative (relevant) clause that is supported by your epistemic state.

⇒ If a speaker asserts an informative clause  $C$ , then  $C$  is supported by her epistemic state (Speaker Competence)

⇒ If a speaker asks a non-informative PQ  $?C$ , her epistemic state supports neither of the more informative clauses  $C$  and  $\neg C$  (Speaker Ignorance)

⇒ The speaker tentatively assumes that the addressee can answer  $?C$  by complying with (20) (Addressee Competence) – NB but the speaker has no introspective access to the addressee's epistemic state.

- (21) Given an information state  $s$  and a possibly inquisitive proposition  $p$ :
- a. an alternative  $a \in p$  is positively decided in  $s$  iff  $s \subseteq a$
  - b. an alternative  $a \in p$  is negatively decided in  $s$  iff  $a \cap s = \emptyset$
  - c.  $p$  is decided in  $s$  iff every alternative  $a \in p$  is either positively or negatively decided in  $s$ . Otherwise,  $p$  is undecided in  $s$ .

*Chi* takes in input a proposition  $p$  and introduces the **conventional implicature** that  $p$  is decided in the current epistemic state of the source:

$$(22) \llbracket \textit{chi} \rrbracket^c = \lambda p.p \bullet (\forall a \in p) [\text{Ep}(c_{\text{source}})(i_c) \subseteq a \text{ or } \text{Ep}(c_{\text{source}})(i_c) \cap a = \emptyset]$$

( $i_c$  is the time and world of the utterance context;  $\text{Ep}(x)(i)$  is  $x$ 's epistemic state at  $i$ ;  $c_{\text{source}}$  the source of the speech act;  $\bullet$  as in Potts 2005)

$\Rightarrow$  When *chi* applies to an information-seeking PQ, whose source is the addressee, the default assumption of Addressee Competence is strengthened.

In an assertion of  $!p$  (= info( $p$ )), *chi* is infelicitous:

- ⇒ The source is the Speaker: *chi* would convey the implicature that the only alternative in  $!p$  is decided in the speaker's epistemic state
- ⇒ But principle (20) independently requires that the speaker's epistemic state support  $!p$  for the assertion to be felicitous (and the speaker has introspective access to her epistemic state)
- ⇒ Hence, the conventional implicature of *chi* would be completely redundant.

(10) [A: 'Mary hasn't gone out for a week, she's studying eight hours a day because she has exams.']

B: *A* *chi*, veru, mi scurdavu nzina chi facci javi.  
PTC PTC true, REFL forgot.1SG even which face has

Assumption: The reply *a chi* anaphorically picks up the unique alternative (=info(C)) of the preceding declarative C (cf. Roelofsen & Farkas 2015, 378-79)

- *Chi* conveys that info(C) is decided in Speaker B's epistemic state (21)
- Falling intonation conveys that B commits herself to info(C) (Gunlogson 2003: 33)  
⇒ info(C) must be **positively decided** in B's epistemic state  
(otherwise, she would commit herself to a clause that is not supported by her epistemic state, violating (20))
- The implicature conveyed by *chi* in (10B) is not redundant because B has not herself asserted C.

(11) [A: 'Mary hasn't gone out for a week, she's studying eight hours a day because she has exams.']

B: *A chi ?!* A vitti stamatina au mercatu.  
PTC PTC her saw.1SG this morning at-the market

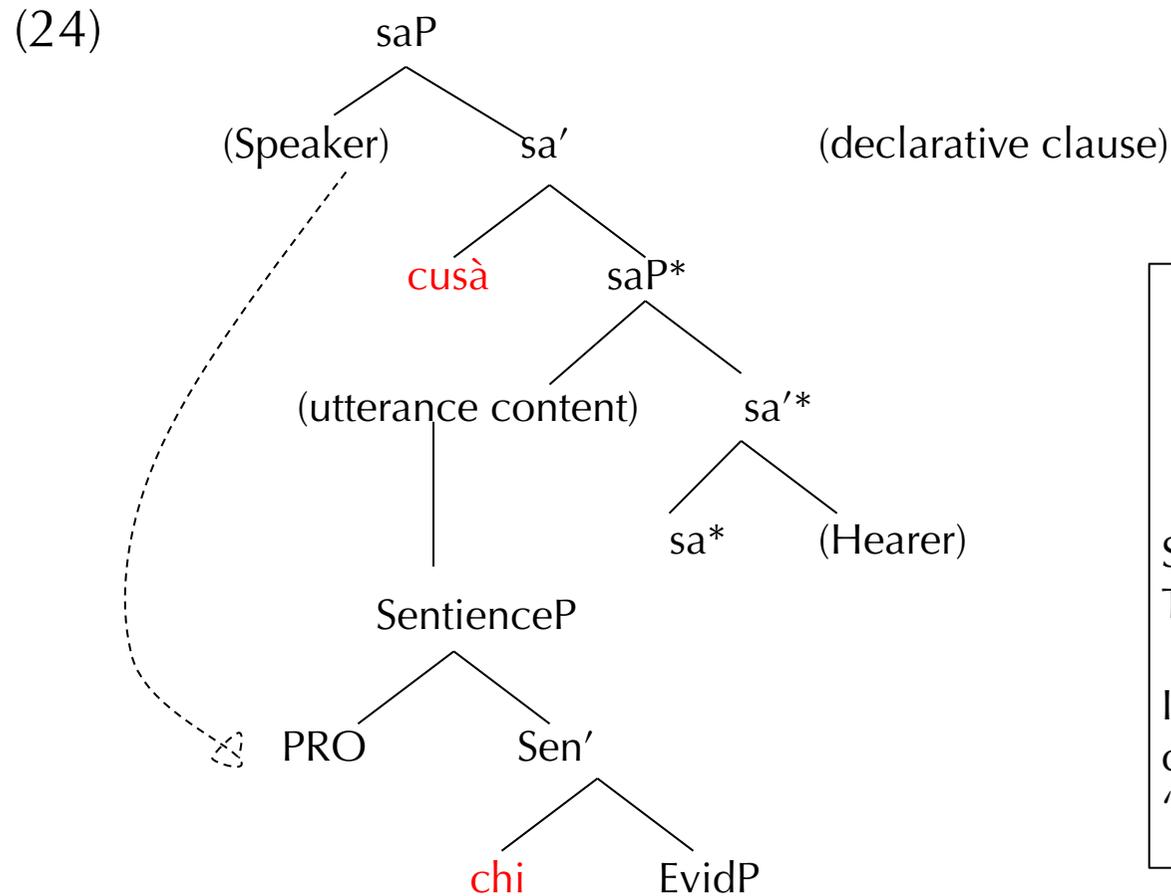
- By (22), a *chi* in (11B) again implicates that the unique alternative asserted by A (= info(C)) is decided in Speaker B's epistemic state
- We assume that 'incredulity' intonation conveys lack of Speaker commitment: Speaker B refuses to commit to info(C)
  - ⇒ Lack of Speaker commitment implicates that info(C) is **negatively decided** in B's epistemic state (hence C is not supported by it).

*Cusà* conveys the conventional implicature that for every alternative  $a$  in the input proposition  $p$ , the **Speaker** is unable to decide it in her epistemic state:

$$(23) \llbracket \textit{cusà} \rrbracket^c = \lambda p.p \bullet (\forall a \in p)(\forall i' \mathcal{R}(i_c, i')) [\neg [\text{Ep}(c_{\text{spk}})(i') \subseteq a] \ \& \ \neg [\text{Ep}(c_{\text{spk}})(i') \cap \alpha = \emptyset]]$$

( $\mathcal{R}$  is a contextually relevant reflexive accessibility relation;  $\bullet$  as in Potts 2005)

- When the Speaker is unable to find out the true answer to a PQ, she typically has recourse to the addressee's competence: this is why *cusà* very naturally co-occurs with *chi*.
- In a declarative clause, *cusà* conveys that  $p$  cannot be decided in the Speaker's epistemic state: by (20), the Speaker does not commit to its truth, nor does she project the Addressee's committing to it. The *cusà* clause simply highlights  $p$  as a salient possibility.

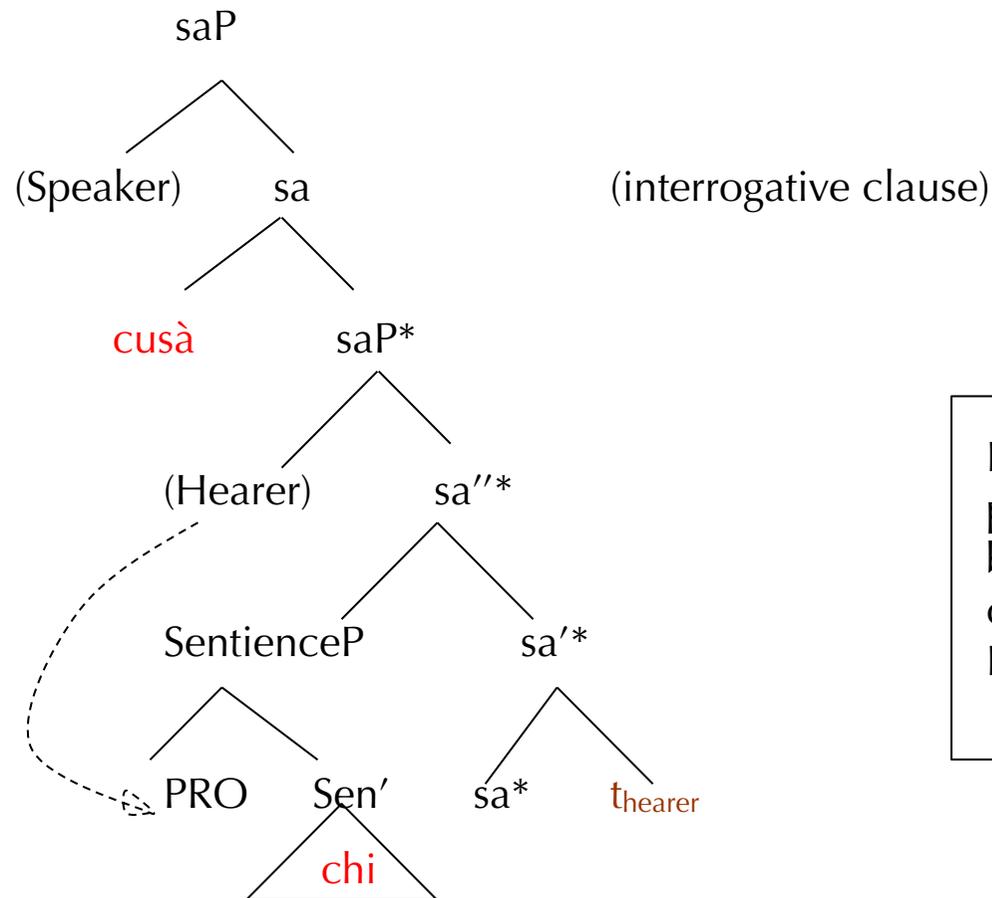


.... we may think of the Speaker as the agent of the speech act, the Utterance Content as its theme and the Hearer as its goal.

Speas & Tenny (2003), (2004), Tenny (2006)

In declaratives, Speaker is the closest c-commander for the 'Source' PRO

(25)



In interrogatives, Hearer is promoted inside SaP\* and becomes the closest c-commander of the 'Source' PRO in Spec, SenP.

Both *chi* and *cusà* are incompatible with wh-questions:

(26) (\*Cusà) (\*chi) unni si nni jì Silvio?  
 PTC PTC where REFL LOC went Silvio

(27) { { i | GO<sub>i</sub>(s, x) | x ∈ LOCATION } } +  
 presupposition: info({ { i | GO<sub>i</sub>(s, x) | x ∈ LOCATION } })  
 (cf. AnderBois 2012; Ciardelli et al. 2019: 83-84)

Tentative hypothesis: the particles' conventional implicature must be associated to a **highlighted alternative**  $a^\pm$ . However, a wh-question highlights an n-place property and not an alternative (Roelofsen et al. 2019: §3.1)

(27)  $\llbracket \text{chi } \phi \rrbracket^c = \lambda p.p \bullet [\text{Ep}(i_c)(c_{\text{source}}) \subseteq a^\pm] \vee [\text{Ep}(i_c)(c_{\text{source}}) \cap a^\pm = \emptyset]$

(28)  $\llbracket \text{cusà } \phi \rrbracket^c = \lambda p \bullet (\forall i' \mathcal{R}(i_c, i)) \neg [\text{Ep}(i_c)(c_{\text{spk}})(i') \subseteq a^\pm] \& \neg [\text{Ep}(i_c)(c_{\text{spk}})(i') \cap a^\pm = \emptyset]$

- The assumption that declaratives and questions have the same denotational type allows for a unified approach to all the uses of the Sicilian particles
- The default scalar inferences based on (20) can be strengthened to conventional implicatures grammatically associated to discourse particles
- The syntactic distribution of the two Sicilian particles supports the hypothesis of “speech act projections” in the left periphery of main clauses, dedicated to conventional non-at-issue meanings related to conversation management.

Thank you for your attention!

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*Chi* is incompatible with ‘expletive’ negation and an epistemic modal (Cruschina 2012):

(30) A: Non trovo i ragazzi.

B: (#Chi) Non potrebbero/dovrebbero essere in palestra?

Krifka (2015): ‘Expletive’ negation conveys the denegation of an assertion  
– B asks A whether she excludes asserting that the boys might be at the gym.  
This marked move is resorted to when Addressee Competence is not guaranteed –  
whence the infelicity of *chi*.

*Cusà* cannot be used as a confirmative particle (dubious example in Brucale et al 2019) – maybe because it sits in the highest SaP and it cannot license an elliptical structure (similarly, *a / nca* cannot license an elliptical clause)

When a speaker asserts A or B,  $A \cup B$  (= info (A or B)) is supported by her epistemic state, hence A is epistemically possible and B is epistemically possible (free choice effect).