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Keywords: morphosyntax; evaluative morphemes; adverbials; left periphery

An Evaluative Head in Romance: The case of Palermitan

In this work we analyze the distribution and the properties of a verbal evaluative morpheme in Palermitan (Sicily). The morpheme in question, *-vu*, is a first person verbal morpheme, expressing also the temporal value of pastness and the aspectual value of perfectivity. *-vu* expresses an evaluation by the speaker on the whole sentence; its positive or negative value is contextually determined. *-vu* contrasts minimally with the “normal” past morpheme *-a(v)i*, which does not express any evaluation.

(1) *Truvai nu mercatu i fichi r'India* (“neutral” event)

I found in the market prickly pears

(2) *Truvavu nu mercatu i fichi r'India*

I found-EVAL in the market prickly pears (positive evaluation: How nice! We can eat them together!)

(3) *Carivu r'i scali*

I fell-EVAL down the stairs (negative evaluation)

This phenomenon might be interesting for two reasons: first, this one seems to be the only case of this kind in Romance – at least at the present state of knowledge. Second, this morpheme shows up in Palermitan as an innovation and is fully productive, especially among the youngest generation (NB: three generations have been considered), contradicting in a way the general hidden assumption that dialects are conservative and bound to disappear.

The analysis of this morpheme will shed light on the properties of that portion of the clause having to do with the so-called *high* adverbials – including evaluative, evidential and epistemic projections (Cinque, 1999) – and its interaction with lower projections inside the V-layer. Moreover, the analysis of the *-u* part, an enclitic reduced form of the first person pronoun, provides evidence in favor of the existence of a low contrastive focus position in *vP*, as already proposed on the basis of independent evidence, by some scholars in their works on Sicilian and Southern Italian dialects.