

The Interpretation of Indefinites with Adnominal Adjectives in the Sicilian Dialects

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Abstract Indefinite nominals can typically be modified by pre- or postnominal adjectives in Romance languages. With the exception of a small group of adjectives concerning physical or moral characteristics whose meaning changes according to their pre- or postnominal use, the position of an attributive adjective does not alter its meaning. However, prenominal adjectives in a Spanish indefinite trigger its specific interpretation, thus preventing its variable reading; the same phenomenon obtains also in Catalan. The aim of this paper is to discuss specific cases in some Sicilian dialects – mainly in the dialect of Delia (province of Caltanissetta) – in order to provide further evidence of the fact that prenominal evaluative adjectives force the specific interpretation of indefinites in Romance. Since Sicilian dialects do not typically display prenominal adjectives, this paper will therefore draw on elatives to check whether Sicilian shows a parallel restriction in the postnominal position.

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1 Introduction

One typical feature of Romance languages is the possibility for an adnominal adjective to appear in two different positions:¹ either before the N head or after it, the latter being the most occurring, unmarked position.

¹ I would like to thank Guglielmo Cinque and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments. All errors remain mine.

What types of adjective can occur in both pre- and postnominal position is subject to variation within Romance languages, especially within older stages of them or within their dialects. In Walloon, for example, the NP can only cross nationality APs, while it could fail

Let us see some examples of the two positions of adjectives with indefinite nominals in Italian, French, Spanish and Catalan:

- (1) a. *Una persona **importante**.* (Ita.)
 a person important
 a'. *Un'**importante** persona.*
 an important person
 b. *Une fleur **horrible**.* (Fra.)
 a flower horrible
 b'. *Une **horrible** fleur.*
 a horrible flower
 c. *Un vestido **elegante**.* (Spa.)
 a dress elegant
 c'. *Un **elegante** vestido.*
 an elegant dress
 d. *Un dibuix **divertit**.* (Cat.)
 a drawing amusing
 d'. *Un **divertit** dibuix.*
 an amusing drawing

Generally, the different position of the adjective affects its interpretation, in fact postnominal adjectives license contrastive readings whereas prenominal adjectives license non-contrastive readings. However, the position of the adjective does not generally alter its semantics: the adjective *importante* 'important' in (1a-a'), for example, can be paraphrased as 'famous' or 'influential' in both cases. Nevertheless, there is a restricted class of adjectives concerning physical or moral characteristics whose meaning changes according to their pre- or postnominal use (French examples in (2c-d') are from Bouchard 2002):

- (2) a. *Un amico **vecchio**.* (Ita.)
 'an aged friend'
 a'. *Un **vecchio** amico.*
 'a long standing friend'.
 b. *Un uomo **povero**.*
 'a poor man'
 b'. *Un **pover**'uomo.*
 'a pitiable man'

to cross nationality APs in Old Italian (cf. Cinque 2010). I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out to me.

- c. *Un femme **seule**.* (Fra.)
 'a woman who is alone'
- c'. *Un **seule** femme.*
 'only one woman'
- d. *Une victoire **certaine**.*
 'a sure victory'
- d'. *Un **certaine** victoire.*
 'a certain victory'

Among Romance languages, Sicilian dialects display just one available position for adnominal adjectives, that is after the N head, the only exception being the possible prenominal position of that restricted class of adjectives shown in (2). This situation is quite widespread in the dialects of central-southern Italy, which make limited use of the prenominal position (cf. a.o. Rohlfs 1969, 330; Ledgeway 2007; Andriani 2015). Examples in (3-4) are from the dialect spoken in Delia (province of Caltanissetta), while the examples in (5) are from Barese (from Andriani 2015):

- (3) a. *Nna pirsuna **'importanti**.* (Del.)
 a person important
- a'. **Nn'**importanti** pirsuna.*
 an important person
- b. *Nna casa **ranni**.*
 a house big
- b'. **Nna **ranni** casa.*
 a big house
- (4) a. *Un carusu **bjiddru**.*
 a boy handsome
- a'. *Un **bjiddru** carusu.*
 a handsome boy
- b. *Nna vicina **brava**.*
 a neighbour good
- b'. *Nna **brava** vicina.*
 a good neighbour
- (5) a. ****Lèngə**/***rùssə**/***'taliànə**/***amməquàtə** pəmədòrə.* (Bar.)
 long red Italian rotten tomato
- b. *Pəmədòrə **grèssə rùssə'taliànə amməquàtə.***
 tomato big red Italian rotten

It is important to point out that, although belonging to the same class of adjectives shown in (2), not all Sicilian prenominal adjectives seem to display

a difference in meaning with respect to their postnominal counterpart.²

2 The Interpretation of Indefinites with Adnominal Adjectives

It is a well-known fact that pre- and postnominal adjectives differ in interpretation with respect to the following semantic distinctions: stage-level or individual-level reading, restrictive or non-restrictive reading, implicit relative clause or modal reading, intersective or non-intersective reading, comparative or absolute reading of superlatives, specificity or non-specificity inducing reading, evaluative or epistemic reading of adjectives meaning 'unknown', NP dependent or discourse anaphoric reading of adjectives meaning 'different' (cf. Cinque 2010 for a complete analysis of these interpretations in Romance and Germanic languages). Among these pairs of semantic distinctions, I will take into consideration the specific vs non-specific reading and, following Bosque (1993) and Picallo (1994), I will apply it to indefinite nominals in Sicilian dialects.

When the adjective is in its unmarked postnominal position, it is ambiguous between the specific and the non-specific reading. On the other hand, when the adjective is prenominal, it forces the specific reading of the indefinite DP in *realis* context.³

The following examples are from Cinque (2010):

- (6) a. *Domani, alla festa so che interverrà* (Ita.)
 tomorrow at-the party know.1sg that attend.FUT.3sg
un attore famoso.
 an actor famous
- b. 'Tomorrow, I know that a certain famous actor will come to the party'
- c. 'Tomorrow, I know that some famous actor or other will come to the party'

2 The most common case is that of *vjicchju/vicchju/vecchju* 'old', which gets the meaning of 'long standing' in prenominal position. Another prenominal adjective, *malu* 'evil', 'bad', does not have a postnominal counterpart. With regard to 'old', an anonymous reviewer questions the grammaticality of that adjective in prenominal position in the Sicilian dialects. I am aware of the fact that this position could sound a bit 'too Italian' and, perhaps, it is the result of the pressure of Standard Italian on the dialects of Sicily. Nevertheless, many speakers use 'old' (meaning 'long standing') in prenominal position. The example in (i) is from the dialect spoken in Milazzo (Messina):

(i) *Ajeri incuntraì a un vecchju amicu.* (Mil.)
 yesterday meet.PAST.1sg to an old friend
 'I met an old friend yesterday'

3 Cf. Cinque 2010 (ch. 2, fn. 10) to see the right interpretation of a prenominal adjective with an indefinite DP in Romance in a modal (*irrealis*) context.

- (7) a. *Domani, alla festa so che intervorrà*
tomorrow at-the party know.1sg that attend.FUT.3sg
un famoso attore.
a famous actor
- b. 'Tomorrow, I know that a certain famous actor will come to the party'
- c. #'Tomorrow, I know that some famous actor or other will come to the party'

Whereas the canonical position of *famoso* ('famous') in (6) makes the interpretation of the DP ambiguous, (7c) shows an impossible interpretation, since the prenominal position of the adjective forces the specific reading of the DP.

In order to provide evidence that prenominal adjectives in the Sicilian dialects behave in the same way as Spanish and Catalan ones in forcing the specific reading of the DP, it is not possible to rely exclusively on normal degree prenominal adjectives, for the reasons pointed out in section 1. Therefore, I will draw on a particular type of adjectives, called elatives, which are maximum degree adjectives. The following section will offer an overview of the subgroups of elative adjectives that can be found in Sicilian dialects, taking into consideration the micro-variation this wide area is subject to.

3 Sicilian Elatives

Elative adjectives in the Sicilian dialects are always postnominal and fall under four different types:

- (i) **lexical** elatives, like *magnificu* 'wonderful', *stupendu/stupennu* 'amazing', or *maravighiusu* 'marvelous', are adjectives already displaying the maximum degree in their lexical entry.⁴
- (ii) **syntactic** elatives are the result of the combination of some specific adverbs which combine with the adjective to display its maximum degree. These adverbs can precede their adjective, as is the case of *troppu* 'very, too' or *veru/veramenti* 'really' or follow them, as with *assà/assai* 'a lot' or *piddaveru* 'for real'. The adjective *bjiddru/biddru/beddru* 'nice' and its feminine counterpart can also be used to create a syntactic elative, e.g.: *nna pirsuna beddra 'mportanti* 'a very important person';

4 The lexical elatives in (i) are taken from Traina (1868). An anonymous reviewer suggests that adjectives like *magnificu* 'wonderful' or *maravighiusu* 'marvelous' should be considered as gradable, since they can be used in the comparative and superlative and allow modification by intensifiers. I haven't found evidence of comparative use of those adjectives. Nevertheless, the claim is true in the sense that adjectives like *magnificu* can

- (iii) **morphological** elatives combine an adjective with the morpheme *-issimu/a*. Although cases are found of early use of morphological elatives in Sicilian (the most common example being probably *santissimu/a* 'very holy'), they are still the last option for Sicilian speakers and can be considered the result of the constant contact with Italian.⁵ An alternative elative form is found in the dialects of the province of Catania, featuring the morpheme *-uni/a* originally used for augmentative purposes, e.g.: *nna pirsuna'mportantuna* 'a very important person';
- (iv) **reduplicative** elatives are a typical feature of Italian and Italian dialects. They consist of the reduplication of an adjective, most typically describing physical characteristics. This type of elatives cannot be modified by adverbs, as is the case of (ii).

Lexical elatives are not usually preceded or followed by the adverbs in (ii), neither are they modified by the elative morpheme *-issimu/a*. Nevertheless, while in Italian such combinations are to be considered completely unacceptable, in Sicilian dialects cases like *stupinnissimu* (lit. 'very amazing') or *troppu magnificu* (lit. 'very wonderful') are not impossible.

3.1 A Problem of Ambiguity

Although we have seen in the previous section that some Sicilian dialects do display the morphological elative that parallels the Italian *-issimo/a*, the other non-lexical ways to form elatives are always ambiguous between a higher degree adjective and the maximum degree adjective. This means that, when native speakers are asked to tell whether a form is to be considered as an elative or just as a superlative, they need to refer to the whole sentence for an accurate answer. Let us take a look at the following examples:

be intensified by adding the suffix *-uni/a* (*magnificuni* 'very wonderful') in some dialects of eastern Sicily (provinces of Catania and Ragusa).

5 Some evidence of the fact that morphological elatives in *-issimu/a* are more available to speakers than before, as a result of the contact with Regional and Standard Italian, is the presence of elatives such as *bellissima*, as in:

- (i) *qj c'è nna bellissima jurnata.* (Del.)
 today there-be.3sg a beautiful day
 'Today it's a beautiful day'

Not only is the elative adjective in prenominal position (which is rather exceptional), but its morphology clearly indicates an Italian origin, since the elative of *beddra* 'nice' should be **bidrissima*.

- (8) a. *Nna pirsuna 'mpportantissima.* (Del.)
 a person very important
- b. *Nna pirsuna troppu 'mportanti.*
 a person too important
- c. *Nna pirsuna 'mportanti assà.*
 a person important a lot
 'A very important person'
- d. *Nna pirsuna veramenti 'mportanti.*
 a person really important
 'A really important person'
- e. *Nna pirsuna troppu 'mportanti assà.*
 a person too important a lot
 'An extremely important person'
- (9) *Nna strata stritta stritta.*
 a street narrow narrow
 'A very narrow street'

The morphological elative in (8a) is never ambiguous and speakers recognize it as a maximum degree adjective. On the other hand, the cases in (8b) and (8c), without the right context, can be perceived as simple superlatives. When speakers need to be unambiguous, they may turn to the syntactic option in (8d), with the adverb *veramenti* (really) – which is not completely free of ambiguities – or (8e), with a preceding and a following adverb (something which is not allowed in Italian). Reduplicative elatives, like the one in (9), do not generally allow for a simple superlative reading. The ambiguity some elative forms are subject to is relevant to account for some grammaticality judgements we will discuss in the next section with reference to non-specificity contexts.

4 Testing the Contexts of Non-specificity

Following Diesing (1992), when the adjective precedes the N head, the nominal forms an operator-variable structure where the quantifier takes wide scope. So, the interpretation of these expressions is grammatically significant and does not depend on a theory of use (cf. Picallo 1994): it is a syntactic procedure, that is word order of the phrase, that triggers the particular reading for indefinites in some Romance languages. Prenominal qualificative adjectives and elatives, then, are marks of quantification that yield ungrammatical results in contexts where quantification is not possible. In this section I will, therefore, test Sicilian elatives in contexts which do not allow for the specific reading.

4.1 Indefinites with Quantificational Adverbials

Indefinite nominals get the non-specific reading when they are interpreted as variables under the scope of generic operators and quantificational adverbials (cf. Heim 1982). For Romance indefinite nominals with adnominal adjectives to be accepted in this reading, the adjectives must be in their canonical, i.e. postnominal, position. Prenominal adjectives and relatives behave alike in excluding indefinite DPs from the non-selective reading. Examples in (10) with the adverb *sempri* 'always' are adapted from Bosque (2001):

- (10) a. *A li setti c'era sempri* (Del.)
 at the seven thereCL be.PAST.3sg. always
nna trasmissioni 'nteressanti.
 a program interesting
 'There was always an interesting show at seven o'clock'
- b. *A li setti c'era sempri nna trasmissioni*
 at the seven thereCL be.PAST.3sg. always a program
troppu 'nteressanti.
 too interesting
 'There was always a very interesting show at seven o'clock'
- c. *A li setti c'era sempri nna trasmissioni*
 at the seven thereCL be.PAST.3sg. always a program
veramenti 'nteressanti
 really interesting
 'There was always a very interesting show at seven o'clock'
- d. *A li setti c'era sempri nna trasmissioni*
 at the seven thereCL be.PAST.3sg. always a program
troppu 'nteressanti assà.
 too interesting a lot
 'There was always an extremely interesting show at seven o'clock'

While (10a) is ambiguous between the interpretation in which a different TV show was showed every day and the one in which there was always the same TV show every day, and the interpretation of (10b) could still be, to some extent, ambiguous (although most speakers would prefer the specific reading), the only possible interpretation of (10c-d) is the specific one. The next section will test 'there-be' sentences in another context, namely under deontic modals.

4.2 The Case of 'there-be' Sentences Under Deontic Modals

According to Milsark (1974), indefinite nominals in English 'there-be' sentences under deontic modals or verbs of propositional attitude are not ambiguous, because the indefinite cannot take scope. The non-specific

reading is then the only possible one. Picallo (1994) provides examples in Catalan to show that the same phenomenon also holds in Romance languages. If we consider indefinite nominals modified by evaluative qualificative adjectives, grammaticality judgements of the sentences with *haver-hi* 'there-be' under modals or verbs of propositional attitude depend on the position of the adjective in the DP: the degree of acceptability of the construction with the prenominal adjective, Picallo argues, is very low, because it makes the specific interpretation obligatory. According to Diesing (1992), the indefinite DP is a variable in 'there-be' sentences. As such, the indefinite DP does not take scope at the interpretive component. Following Diesing's (1992) proposal that indefinites cannot uniformly be treated as quantifiers or as variables, Picallo (1994) makes the prediction that specific indefinites should not be able to appear in constructions where they are interpreted as bound to an operator, since they form operator-variable structures. On the other hand, non-specific indefinites, which are variables and do not have quantificational force, should be allowed in such constructions.

The Catalan sentences in (11), which are from Picallo (1994), are followed from examples in Sicilian:

- (11) a. *En Joan creia que hi havia* (Cat.)
 the Joan believe.PAST.3sg that there have.PAST.3sg
*un polític **corrupte** en el Senat.*
 a politician corrupt at the Senate
 'J. believed that there was a corrupt politician at the Senate'
- b. (*?)*En Joan creia que hi havia*
 the Joan believe.PAST.3sg that there have.PAST.3sg
*un **corrupte** polític en el Senat.*
 a corrupt politician at the Senate
 'J. believed that there was a corrupt politician at the Senate'
- (12) a. *C'ava a essiri nna soluzioni 'ntelligenti* (Del.)
 thereCL have.3sg to be.INF an solution smart
a stu problema.
 to this problem
 'There has to be a really smart solution to this problem'
- b. *?C'ava a essiri nna soluzioni veramenti 'ntelligenti*
 thereCL have.3sg to be.INF an solution really smart
a stu problema.
 to this problem
 'There has to be a very smart solution to this problem'
- c. **C'ava a essiri nna soluzioni troppu 'ntelligenti*
 thereCL have.3sg to be.INF an solution too smart
a stu problema.
 to this problem
 'There has to be a very smart solution to this problem'

Although a little odd, the sentence in (12b) can be acceptable, if the adjective is not considered as a syntactic relative, so that the speaker him/herself could not have in mind a particular solution to the problem. On the contrary, the option in (12c) is not acceptable at all.

4.3 Indefinites in Habitual Sentences with Explicit Adverbials

Both explicit adverbials, such as *sempri* 'always' and *solitamente* 'usually', and non-explicit operators in generic and habitual sentences containing indefinites bind the same type of individual variables (cf. Bosque 2001). The presence of an relative (as well as a prenominal adjective in those Romance languages allowing it), thus, fails to provide the suitable reading in the latter context too. The examples in (13) are from the dialect spoken in Enna:

- (13) a. *Vint'anni annarriri, un scarparu listu* (Enn.)
 twenty years ago a shoemaker quick
si faciva i grana.
 SI make.IMPERF.3sg the money
 'Twenty years ago, a quick shoemaker could earn a lot of money'
- b. **Vint'anni annarriri, un scarparu listu assà*
 twenty years ago a shoemaker quick a lot
si faciva i grana.
 SI make.IMPERF.3sg the money
 'Twenty years ago, a very quick shoemaker could earn ù a lot of money'

In (13b) *un scarparu listu assà* 'a very quick shoemaker' cannot but be interpreted as an individual, a specific shoemaker the speaker has in mind, and thus fails to provide the needed variable to be bound by the generic quantifier.

4.4 The Non-specific Interpretation of Directive Contexts

Let us now take into account another well-known fact, that is the non-specificity of indefinite nominals in directive contexts, such as imperatives, with deontic modals, and other intensional contexts (cf. Bosque 2001). Consider the following pair:

- (14) a. *Dunami un martjiddru gruissu.* (Del.)
 give.IMPER.2sg to-meCL a hammer big
 'Hand me a big hammer'

- b. *Dunami* *un martjiddru* ***bjiddru*** *gruissu*.
give.IMPER.2sg to-meCL a hammer nice big
'Hand me a very big hammer'
- c. *?Dunami* *un martjiddru* ***gruissu assà***.
give.IMPER.2sg to-meCL a hammer big a lot
'Hand me a very big hammer'

In (14c) the specific reading of the indefinite *un martjiddru* 'a hammer' is forced by the presence of the adnominal syntactic relative *gruissu assà* 'very big'. Since specificity cannot have wider scope than the imperative projection, the resulting sentence is odd. The syntactic combination in (14b), on the other hand, seems to be a legitimate option to ask the reader for a big hammer, without having in mind a specific one, present in the place. The examples in (14a) and (14c) can be compared with some Spanish sentences provided by Bosque (2001), showing the same results:

- (15) a. *Escribe* *una novela* ***interesante***. (Sp.)
write.IMPER.2sg a novel interesting
Te harás *famoso*.
youCL make.FUT.3sg famous
'Write an interesting novel. You'll be famous'
- b. **Escribe* *una* ***interesante*** *novela*.
write.IMPER.2sg an interesting novel
Te harás *famoso*.
youCL make. FUT.3sg famous
'Write an interesting novel. You'll be famous'
- c. *??Escribe* *una novela* ***interesantísima***.
write.IMPER.2sg a novel very interesting
Te harás *famoso*.
youCL make.FUT.3sg famous
'Write an extremely interesting novel. You'll be famous'

The pronominal adjective in (15b) makes the sentence unacceptable, because it forces the specific reading in a context that does not allow it. The specific reading provided by the use of the morphological relative in (15c) cannot have wider scope than the imperative projection either.

4.5 Indefinites Within Negative Sentences

Let us now consider the effect of negation on indefinite nominals with adjectives. As already noted by Bosque (2001) for Spanish, relatives and attributive pronominal adjectives cannot be interpreted under the scope of negation. The adjective *famosa* 'famous' in (16) yields different results in terms of grammaticality, according to its being postnominal (cf. (16a)),

prenominal (cf. (16b)) or in its relative form (cf. (16c)). Examples in (16) are adapted from Bosque (2001):

- (16) a. *No he leído una novela famosa* (Spa.)
 not have.1sg read.PASTPART a novel famous
desde hace años.
 since do.3sg years
 'I have not read a famous story in years'
- b. **No he leído una famosa novela*
 not have.1sg read.PASTPART a famous novel
desde hace años.
 since do.3sg years
 'I have not read a famous story in years'
- c. *No he leído una novela famosísima*
 not have.1sg read.PASTPART a novel very famous
 (**desde hace años.*)
 since do.3sg years
 'I have not read a very famous story in years'

The same holds true for Sicilian. Imagine that the sentences in (17) are uttered by an unlucky journalist in search of important people to interview ('*mportanti* 'important' is one of the adjectives that can also be found in the morphological relative among most speakers):

- (17) a. *Avi du anni ca nun parlu ccu nna pirsuna* (Del.)
 have.3sg two years that not speak.1sg with a person
 '**mportanti.**
 important
 'I have not interviewed an important person for two years'
- b. **Avi du anni ca nun parlu ccu nna pirsuna*
 have.3sg two years that not speak.1sg with a person
 '**troppu mportanti.**
 too important
 'I have not interviewed a very important person for two years'
- c. **Avi du anni ca nun parlu ccu nna pirsuna*
 have.3sg two years that not speak.1sg with a person
 '**mportantissima.**
 very important
 'I have not interviewed a very important person for two years'

The indefinite nominal *nna pirsuna* 'a person' in the negative context must be non-specific, that is why (17b) and (17c), which clearly indicate that the journalist has a specific person to interview in his/her mind, are not possible.

Bosque (2001) adds that there is the possibility for indefinite nominals to escape the scope of negation and allow the specific reading. But the presence of a negative polarity item bound by negation forces the non-specific reading, so that it is not compatible with any grammatical marker forcing the specific reading, such as a prenominal adjective or an elative.

- (18) a. *Nun m' haju accattatu mancu un taganu* (Del.)
 not to-meCL have.1sg buy.PASTPART not-even a saucepan
nni unu di sti du mircatara.
 in one of these two marketers
 'I have not bought a saucepan from any of these two marketers.'
- b. **Nun m' haju accattatu mancu un taganu*
 not to-meCL have.1sg buy.PASTPART not-even a saucepan
troppu caru *nni unu di sti du mircatara.*
 too expensive in one of these two marketers
 'I have not bought a very expensive saucepan from any of these two marketers.'
- c. **Nun m' haju accattatu mancu un taganu*
 not to-meCL have.1sg buy.PASTPART not-even a saucepan
caru assà *nni unu di sti du mircatara.*
 expensive a lot in one of these two marketers
 'I have not bought a very expensive saucepan from any of these two marketers.'

In (18b) and (18c) it is the elative marker that conflicts with the non-specificity that the noun *taganu* 'saucepan' must have in the negative context.

4.6 Indicative vs Subjunctive Relative Clauses

Indefinite nominals usually escape the scope of intensional predicates and become specific (cf. Bosque 2001). If the relative clause contains a verb inflected in the subjunctive mood, indefinites have to be bound by an intensional operator. Non-specificity can thus be tested also through subjunctive relative clauses (cf. Rivero 1977). The use of the elative in (19b) forces the specific reading of *нна carusa* 'a female assistant', so that the hearer understands that the speaker is referring to a very smart assistant already known. On the other hand, the sentence in (19c) is ungrammatical because the non-specificity of the subjunctive relative clause collides with the specificity forced by the elative *troppu sperta* 'very smart':

- (19) a. *Haju bisuignu di nna carusa **sperta** ca parla* (Del.)
 have.1sg need of a girl smart who speak.3sg
'nglisi e francisi.
 English and French
 'I'm looking for a smart assistant who can speak English and French'
- b. *Haju bisuignu di nna carusa **troppu sperta** ca parla*
 have.1sg need of a girl very smart who speak.3sg
'nglisi e francisi.
 English and French
 'I'm looking for a very smart assistant who can speak English and French'
- c. *??Haju bisuignu di nna carusa **troppu sperta** ca*
 have.1sg need of a girl very smart who
parlassi 'nglisi e francisi.
 speak.SUB.3sg English and French
 'I'm looking for a very smart assistant who could speak English and French'

4.7 Indefinites Within Rhetorical Questions

According to Progovac (1992, 1993), rhetorical questions license the non-specific reading of indefinites. Since prenominal adjectives and relatives force a wide scope reading, either the question is not to be interpreted as rhetorical or the sentence is not grammatical at all.

Consider the following examples from Bosque (2001):

- (20) a. *¿Cuando me has regalado tú una novela* (Spa.)
 when to-meCL have.2sg gift.PASTPART you a novel
***interesante** para leer por la noche?*
 interesting to read.INF for the night
 'When on earth have you bought me an interesting novel to read in the evening?'
- b. *#¿Cuando me has regalado tú una **interesante***
 when to-meCL have.2sg gift.PASTPART you an interesting
novela para leer por la noche?
 novel to read.INF for the night
 'When on earth have you bought me an interesting novel to read in the evening?'
- c. *#¿Cuando me has regalado tú una novela*
 when to-meCL have.2sg gift.PASTPART you a novel
***interesantísima** para leer por la noche?*
 very interesting to read.INF for the night
 'When on earth have you bought me an extremely interesting novel to read in the evening?'

The # mark indicates that the prenominal adjective in (20b) and the relative in (20c), which force the specific reading of the indefinite, are not rejected only when the question is not interpreted as rhetorical anymore. This is not the case in Sicilian, where rhetorical questions of this type are expressed through the element *quannu ma'/mai* 'when on earth', whereas normal questions only feature *quannu* 'when'. Nevertheless, the specific reading constraints hold for both Spanish and Sicilian:

- (21) a. *Quannu ma' m' ha arrialatu un libbru* (Del.)
 when ever to-meCL have.2sg gift.PASTPART a book
 '**nteressanti** ppi leggiri la sira?
 interesting to read.INF the night
 'When on earth have you bought me an interesting book
 to read in the evening?'
- b. **Quannu ma' m' ha arrialatu un libbru*
 when ever to-meCL have.2sg gift.PASTPART a book
 '**nteressanti assà** ppi leggiri la sira?
 interesting a lot to read.INF the night
 'When on earth have you bought me an extremely interesting book
 to read in the evening?'

4.8 The Case of 'donkey sentences'

The 'Donkey sentences' can be used as tests for non-specificity (cf. Heim 1990, Picallo 1994, Bosque 2001). Consider the following sentences:

- (22) a. *Ogni viddranu ca havi un sceccu forti, cci duna* (Del.)
 Every farmer who own.3sg a donkey strong to-itCL give.3sg
a mangiari.
 to eat.INF
 'Every farmer who owns a strong donkey, feeds it'
- b. ?*Ogni viddranu ca havi un sceccu troppu forti, cci*
 Every farmer who own.3sg a donkey too strong to-itCL
duna a mangiari
 give.3sg to eat.INF
 'Every farmer who owns a very strong donkey, feeds it'
- c. ??*Ogni viddranu ca havi un sceccu forti forti, cci*
 Every farmer who own.3sg a donkey strong strong to-itCL
duna a mangiari
 give.3sg to eat.INF
 'Every farmer who owns a very strong donkey, feeds it'

In (22a) the indefinite nominal is bound to the universal quantifier and the clitic pronoun *cci* 'to it' is interpreted as a logical variable as well. This

means that there is a strong donkey for each farmer. In (22b) the ambiguity between the non-relative and the relative use of the phrase *troppu forti* 'very strong' allows the free variable reading only in case of the non-relative use. Nevertheless, the sentence sounds odd to some speakers. Finally, in (22c) the use of the reduplicative relative *forti forti* 'very strong', although still allowing for some non-relative reading (hence the ?? mark), makes the sentence extremely odd because relatives (and prenominal adjectives too) have to be specific and, therefore, are rejected in these constructions.

4.9 Floating Quantifiers

This is one point of divergence between the behaviour of indefinite nominals in Catalan and in Sicilian dialects. Drawing on Sánchez's (1994) proposal on floating quantification,⁶ Picallo (1994) shows the behaviour of indefinite nominals with floating quantifiers like *cada un* 'each one' appearing in intermediate position in Catalan.⁷ According to Picallo, specific indefinites (that is the ones with prenominal adjectives or with relatives) cannot be related to such floating quantifiers, whereas non-specific indefinites can. Let us see the following examples in Catalan (from Picallo 1994):

- (23) a. *Els meus germans van arribar [cada un] (Cat.)*
 the my brothers go.3pl arrive.INF each one
en una camioneta impressionant.
 in a van impressive
 'My brothers each arrived in an impressive van'
- b. ??*Els meus germans van arribar [cada un]*
 the my brothers go.3pl arrive.INF each one
en una impressionant camioneta.
 in an impressive van
 'My brothers each arrived in an impressive van'

The ?? mark on (23b) shows that the sentence is highly unacceptable, because the prenominal position of *impressionant* 'impressive' forces the

6 According to Sánchez (1994), floating quantifiers behave like the English *each other* (previously analysed in Heim, Lasnik & May 1991) in that they are distributed operators relating two arguments, that is the two terms of the distribution. The first argument is the antecedent of the floating quantifier, while the other argument is interpreted as a variable bound by this antecedent. The floating quantifier mediates between the two terms of the distribution.

7 Catalan floating quantifiers can also appear in sentence final position but, according to the author, this does not alter the interpretive effects provided by the examples reported in (23).

specific reading of *una camioneta* 'a van'. This latter element, then, cannot be interpreted as a bound variable and cannot be assigned the different referential values the distributive relation implied by the floating quantifier requires. On the other hand, the examples in Deliano in (24b, c), with an elative adjective functioning as the counterpart of the prenominal adjective in the Catalan indefinite nominal, are both acceptable, although no speaker would think the brothers got the same prestigious job. The floating quantifier *ognunu* 'each one' does not allow the variable reading of the indefinite nominal regardless of the position (and the degree) of the adnominal adjective. All the cases in (24), marked with #, are grammatical either without the floating quantifier⁸ or with the non-specific reading only:

- (24) a. #*A li ma frati cci capità* (Del.)
 to the my brothers to-themCL happen.PAST.3sg
 [*a ognunu*] *un travagliu 'mportanti.*
 to each one a job important
 'My brothers each happened to get a prestigious job'
- b. #*A li ma frati cci capità* [*a ognunu*]
 to the my brothers to-themCL happen.PAST.3sg to each one
un travagliu 'mportanti assà.
 a job important a lot
 'My brothers each happened to get a very prestigious job'
- c. #*A li ma frati cci capità* [*a ognunu*]
 to the my brothers to-themCL happen.PAST.3sg to each one
un travagliu troppu 'mportanti.
 a job very important
 'My brothers each happened to get a very prestigious job'

4.10 Indefinite Quantifiers

The following are some examples featuring the Sicilian indefinite quantifier *quarsiasi* 'any' which parallels the Spanish *cualquiera* 'any' and *ningún* 'no' or 'not any' in forcing the non-specific interpretation of the indefinite nominals (cf. Bosque 2001). For this reason, these indefinite quantifiers are not compatible with prenominal adjectives and elatives in Spanish, and with elatives in Sicilian (examples (25) and (26) are from Bosque 2001):

- (25) a. ?*Cualquier famosa novela.* (Spa.)
 any famous novel
 'Just any famous novel'

8 In this first case the adjectives cannot be interpreted as elatives for the reasons we have seen in the previous sections.

- b. ?*Ningún interesante descubrimiento.*
not any interesting discovery
'Any interesting discovery'
- (26) a. ?*Cualquier libro maravilloso.*
any book wonderful
'Just any wonderful book'
- b. ?*Ningún descubrimiento interesantísimo.*
not any discovery interesting
'Any extremely interesting discovery'
- (27) a. *Quarsiasi pirsuna 'mportanti.* (Del.)
any person important
'Any important person'
- b. ?*Quarsiasi pirsuna 'mportantissima.*
any person very important
'Any extremely important person'

4.11 'Cleft-conditional' Sentences

Gutiérrez (1994) provides us with some interesting Spanish cleft conditional sentences that Bosque (2001) includes among his tests for non-specificity. These syntactic constructions feature a copulative clause whose predicate can be identified as the content of the pure variable. This type of variable can either be an indefinite pronoun, such as *algo* 'something' or *alguien* 'somebody' or a whole indefinite nominal (as in (28a)). As expected, Bosque argues, postnominal adjectives are allowed in these cleft conditionals because they are interpreted as the variable under the scope of the conditional operator *si* 'if'. Prenominal adjectives and relatives, on the other hand, are not allowed, since this construction necessarily requires a variable interpretation of the indefinite nominal (cf. (28b, c)):

- (28) a. *Si Juan ha conocido a una persona* (Spa.)
if Juan have.3sg meet.PASTPART to a person
interesante *en su vida, ha sido a María.*
interesting in his life have.3sg be.PASTPART to María
'If J. has ever met anyone interesting in his life, it is M.'
- b. **Si Juan ha conocido a una interesante persona*
if Juan have.3sg meet.PASTPART to an interesting person
en su vida, ha sido a María.
in his life have.3sg be.PASTPART to María
'If J. has ever met anyone interesting in his life, it is M.'

- (29) **Si Juan ha leído alguna novela*
 if Juan have.3sg read.PASTPART any novel
 {*larga / ??larguísima*} *en su vida, ha sido el Quijote.*
 long quite long in his life have.3sg be.PASTPART the Quijote
 'If J. has ever read a {long / quite long} novel, it has been el Quijote'

This is one of the cases in which the ambiguity between the superlative and the relative degree of most Sicilian adjectival constructions (described in § 3.1) does not allow us to provide examples with relatives that are clearly unacceptable (as was the case of (29) in Spanish). Thus, the # mark in (30c) shows that the sentence can be acceptable if the phrase *troppu beddra* 'very beautiful' is not interpreted as an relative. However, the pre-nominal position of *beddra* in (30b) yield as an ungrammatical result as the one provided by Bosque (2001) (cf. (28b)):

- (30) a. *Si c' è nna carusa beddra nni ssu paisjiddru.* (Del.)
 if thereCL be.3sg a girl beautiful in that village
jè Maria.
 be.3sg Maria
 'If there is a beautiful girl in that small village, it is M.'
- b. **Si c' è nna beddra carusa nni ssu paisjiddru.*
 if thereCL be.3sg a beautiful girl in that village
jè Maria.
 be.3sg Maria
 'If there is a beautiful girl in that small village, it is M.'
- c. #*Si c' è nna carusa troppu beddra nni ssu*
 if thereCL be.3sg a girl too beautiful in that
paisjiddru. jè Maria.
 village be.3sg Maria
 'If there is a very beautiful girl in that small village, it is M.'

4.12 Prepositional Accusative

Some Romance languages share a typical accusative marking construed with the prepositions *a* 'to' in Spanish and Sicilian dialects (cf. Guardiano 2010), or *pe* 'on' in Romanian. In the former case, also known as 'personal a', the noun must have the [+specific] feature (cf. (31a)) but not necessarily the [+human] one (cf. (31b)). Thus, (31c) is ungrammatical with 'personal a' because the noun is not specific. The examples in (31) are from the dialects spoken in Catania:

- (31) a. *Visti a Gianni.* (Ctn.)
 see.PAST.1sg to Gianni
 'I saw G.'

- b. *Visti a Pacu, u ta canuzzu.*
see.PAST.1sg to Pacu, the your puppy
'I saw P., your puppy'
- c. *Visti (*a) un cani o spicu da strata.*
see.PAST.1sg to a dog at-the corner of-the street
'I saw a dog on the corner of the street'

According to Bosque (2001), the absence of the preposition *a* with personal indefinites under the scope of intensional predicates provides the variable interpretation. The expectation that 'personal *a*' is necessary when the indefinite nominal contains an element forcing the specific reading is met in Sicilian too:

- (32) a. *Ciircu nna pirsuna 'mportanti ppi sta parti* (Del.)
search.1sg a person important for this role
'I am looking for a famous actor for this role'
- b. **Ciircu nna pirsuna 'mportantissima ppi sta parti*
search.1sg a person very important for this role
'I am looking for an extremely famous actor for this role'
- c. *Ciircu a nna pirsuna 'mportantissima ppi sta parti*
search.1sg to a person very important for this role
'I am looking for an extremely famous actor for this role'
- d. *Ciircu a nna pirsuna 'mportanti assà ppi sta parti*
search.1sg to a person important a lot for this role
'I am looking for an extremely famous actor for this role'

4.13 The Interpretation of 'aspetta ca' Sentences with Indefinite Nominals

In section 4.7 we have seen the unacceptability of those indefinite nominals forcing the specific reading with rhetorical questions. Another rhetorical context that can be used to test the non-specificity of indefinite nominals is provided by a typical construction in the dialects of Sicily, which can be found in other Romance varieties, although it is less common: the 'aspetta ca' sentences.⁹ These are sentences starting with *aspetta ca...* (literally: 'wait that...') that license the non specific reading of the indefinites.

⁹ Naturally, sentences starting with *aspetta ca* can also be found in a non-rhetorical context. In that case, the non-specific reading is not necessary:

(i) *Aspetta ca ora ti pigliu un fuigliu {nuivu / nuivu nuivu}* (Del.)wait.IMP.2sg that now to-touCL take.1sg a sheet new new newppi pruvati ssa pinna.to try.INF that pen'Wait! I'll hand you a brand new sheet of paper so that you can try that pen.'

- (33) a. *Aspetta ca ora ti pigliu un fuigliu nuivu* (Del.)
 wait.IMP.2sg that now to-touCL take.1sg a sheet new
ppi pruvvari ssa pinna!
 to try.INF that pen
 'You don't want me to hand you a new sheet of paper just to
 try that pen, do you?'
- b. **Aspetta ca ora ti pigliu un fuigliu nuivu nuivu*
 wait.IMP.2sg that now to-touCL take.1sg a sheet new new
ppi pruvvari ssa pinna!
 to try.INF that pen
 'You don't want me to hand you a completely new sheet of paper
 just to try that pen, do you?'
- c. **Aspetta ca ora ti pigliu un fuigliu troppu nuivu*
 wait.IMP.2sg that now to-touCL take.1sg a sheet too new
ppi pruvvari ssa pinna!
 to try.INF that pen
 'You don't want me to hand you a completely new sheet of paper
 just to try that pen, do you?'

5 Conclusions

In this paper, I have shown that Bosque's (1993) discovery that evaluative qualificative adjectives can trigger specificity effects on indefinite nominals does hold true for Sicilian dialects too. In the first part of the paper, I have briefly introduced the interpretation of indefinite nominals in terms of non-specificity, according to the pre- or postnominal position of the adjective. I have also described the various types of elatives that can be found in Sicilian and shown that some types, namely syntactic and reduplicative elatives, are ambiguous between a maximum degree and a higher degree interpretation. In the second part of the paper, following Bosque's (2001) analysis on Spanish indefinite nominals and Picallo's (1994) one on Catalan counterparts, I have tested the main contexts requiring the non-specificity of indefinite nominals to demonstrate that Sicilian elatives behave like Spanish elatives and Spanish and Catalan prenominal qualificative adjectives in producing unacceptable results, given that they force the specific reading of the indefinite nominals which is not allowed in those contexts.

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