

The Influence of the Arabic Language in the Sicilian Dialect and in Camilleri's Vigatese

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ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the richness associated with having several dialects within the same Italian language system, and specifically discusses the Sicilian dialect that was highly affected by Arabic. The article will also go back historically to introduce "Sicillia," examining the Arabic Sicilian lexicology to demonstrate syntactic constructions typically relevant to the Arabic language, and thus exposing the Sicilian Arabism. My main target is to show, through different examples, the interaction between the Sicilian and Arabic languages at the cultural, syntactic, lexicological and grammatical levels. I will also trace some terms used by Andrea Camilleri through his "Commissario Montalbano," which have become a "modo di dire" or way of speaking that has become an integral part of the Italian language.

INTRODUCTION

Andrea Camilleri (6 September 1925 – 17 July 2019), an Italian writer and an expert in the Italian language and Sicilian culture, was a prominent figure of this era, and his writings and immortal archive need particular attention. What essentially fascinates Camilleri's readership is his personality and eloquence of his writings depicting reality in an unmatched sarcastic manner. Preeminently real to himself first, and subsequently to his readers, some of his translated work drove me to invest more in this study. Being a translator, I am unable to ignore aspects of his work that deal with the internationalization of his messages. I sense a personal commitment to this author whose detective novels have enthralled more than 30 different cultures and outlooks. For instance, his book, *Inseguendo un'ombra*, has been translated into 35 languages, including Chinese. Therefore, my current research revolves around the Sicilian dialect that distinguishes Camilleri, providing him with a distinct, individual identity, one that fuses Arabic and Sicilian.

This article is divided into three parts. Firstly, I briefly describe the Italian reality, the notion of dialects in Italy, and the standardization of the language with Dante Alighieri. I proceed to track the nature of the Sicilian dialect, referring to a controversial issue that arose recently in Italy regarding the origin(s) of the Italian language. In the second part, I discuss the interaction between the Sicilian dialect and the

Arabic language at various levels. Finally, in the third part, I highlight a few Sicilian-Arabic expressions diffused in Italy through Camilleri. It is central to note that Andrea Camilleri, through his "Commissario Montalbano," has contributed to the diffusion of many Arabic linguistic "clichés" in Italy or its standard language.

This paper indicates the amplitude associated with having several dialects within the same Italian language system, specifically focusing on the contribution of the Sicilian dialect, that was highly affected by Arabic, to this amplitude. It will also demonstrate some syntactic constructions typically relevant to the Arabic language in the Sicilian dialect, hence, exposing the Sicilian Arabism. My main target is thus to show, through different examples, the interaction between the Sicilian and Arabic languages at the cultural, syntactic, lexicological and grammatical levels. I will also be tracing some terms used by Andrea Camilleri through his "Commissario Montalbano," which have become a "modo di dire" or manner of speaking; in other words, a part of the everyday Italian popular usage.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Loporcaro (2009), when we invoke the word "dialect" or "*dialetto*" in the Italian reality, we are referring to a linguistic variety that is not standardized. Each region

in Italy has its own dialect far from the Italian standard language, “*la lingua Fiorentina*,” the language of Florence. According to the UNESCO classification of world dialects or languages, Italy employs standard Italian, while each region has its own dialect or its own language. Latin was employed for a lengthy period in the Italian Peninsula. However, it was a time for “Vulgar Latin,” a language spoken by the poor and uneducated population. Latin was used for official documents and during ceremonies, but people were using the colloquial dialect in everyday life.

According to Carla Marcato (2002), the diversified Italian dialects are the result of transformation and differentiation from the spoken diffused Latin, through the Romanian domination, not only in Italy, but also in a large part of Europe and across the African Northern Coast. The Latin vernacular is modified in many parts of Italy and eventually generates a variety of languages: Romance or Neo-Latine Languages. The Italian dialects are thus a variety of Italo-Romance independent first-degree languages (those sharing the same origin and are in a socio-linguistic relationship) facing the second-degree dialects (dialects that arise from the geographical differentiation of a given language instead of a common mother language).

It is essential to mention that the first historical classification of Italian dialects reverts to 1303–1304, when Dante Alighieri first initiated the sorting of different dialects. According to Dante’s classification, we observe a minimum of fourteen dialects having geographic criteria (Marcato, 2002, pp. 11-12). Dante Alighieri has been traditionally accredited for the standardization of the Italian language by inscribing the most significant portion of his work in Florentine. Dante’s *Divina Commedia*, was read and understood throughout Italy; its written dialect or language became the “standard” that was agreed on and fathomed by educated Italians. Thus, Florence’s dialect became the official language of Italy. However, there exists currently a crucial debate in Italy that claims it was not Dante and Tuscany that engendered the Italian language. Previously, there existed the Sicilians under the rule of Frederic II, who were the first to use a language remote from Latin, and who eventually spread it to other parts of Italy. The issue of origin is simply, as Marcato’s (2002) article states, a chronological issue. This conclusion, which initiated an open debate, is not intended to diminish the unquestionable importance of Dante Alighieri. It only proposes to understand the use of another language that substitutes Latin, as the Sicilians have seemingly done this earlier (1270–1290). Thus, as the same article mentions, the poets affiliated to the Sicilian school were decidedly cultivated persons who were notaries, experts in Jurisprudence. Consequently, we speak at this level about Sicilians as being the pioneers of the Italian language. The state eventually adopted the Italian Standard Language after Italy’s Unification in 1861. Following this period, abundant words were introduced to the language through the loan or borrowing process. For example, the word “*ciao*” that originates from the Venetian word “*s-cia[v]o*” was used to mean slave.

It is important to highlight, after a close lexicological examination, that the Italian language evolves continuously as it embraces English, French, and Arabic besides other languag-

es. An indicatory means to observe the progress of a particular language is through the work of its famous writers and poets, as is the case with Camilleri; we diligently appreciate here the impact of Arabic on the Sicilian language and vice versa.

METHODOLOGY

This study necessitates a comparison of the structures or terms of Sicilian or Italian and a target language, the Arabic language in our present case; an approach named contrastive analysis¹.

A discourse record was designed to include all the information I intended to analyse. In particular, I closely examined vocabulary and terms/expressions employed by Camilleri in some of his books. I compared different usages and sought their origins, analyzing them in the process. Finally, I used keywords related to Translation Studies in order to provide a solid tool for data gathering in this research endeavor.

Research Questions

This paper seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How vast is the difference between standard Italian and the Sicilian dialect?
2. Is the influence of the Arabic language obvious in the Sicilian dialect?
3. Has Camilleri become an influence in the diffusion of some Sicilian terms of Arabic origin employed in standard Italian?

ANALYSIS

Let us briefly note some examples of the Sicilian dialect and differences spotted vis-a-vis the Italian standard language, exhibiting non-Italians particularities worth mentioning. This study believes or assumes that Italians are keenly aware of the significant difference between the Sicilian dialect and the Italian standard language:

A. At the Phonological Level and Morphosyntactic Levels:

Table 1 highlights the vast differences between standard Italian and the Sicilian dialect.

Table 1. Comparison between standard Italian and Sicilian dialect

B. At the Lexical Level:

Ruffino (2001) elucidates that the central occidental Sicily is rich with Arabism more than the central oriental part, which has more Gallo-Italiac influences (p. 64). He divided the Sicilian dialect into three classes based on their development and situation: Dead terms out of use, terms about to die or become out of use, and migrant terms which are the subject of our study.

Migrant, Loan, or Borrowed Words from Arabic to Sicilian:

If we perceive the migration of words between Arabic and Italian or Latin Languages in general, we notice the exodus of a large amount of vocabulary due to the interaction between the

Table 1. Comparison between standard Italian and Sicilian dialect

The Standard Italian language	The Sicilian Dialect
- Normal pronunciation:/dubbio/,/giro/ -/ns/for the word/senza/,/insalata/ts for/calza/and/calzetta/	-Strong pronunciation:/dubbbbio/,/ggiro/ -/Nz/for/senza/instead of/sensa/,/inzalata/instead of/insalata//lz/ Loud for calza calzetta
-The gender: “il carciofo” the artichoke	-Difference in the gender:/la carciofa/(regional) instead of “il carciofo”
-Use of normal allocuzione for those who talk (mother, father...) vieni qua (come here)	-Use of the inverse allocuzione for those who talk vieni qua, mamma (mother, father...)
-Mangia/mandja/(eat), angelo/andjelo/: (angel)	-Different pronunciation: Mangia:/mancia/, angelo:/ancelo/
-Use of the <i>passato</i> prossimo, simple past, a form that is usually used in the Italian standard in the spoken language	-Use of the <i>passato</i> remote, a form that is rarely used in the Italian standard in the spoken language
-Use of <i>testa</i> (head), <i>domandare</i> (to ask), <i>ferragosto</i> (the 15 th of August feast), <i>sorcio</i> (mouse), <i>stare in piedi</i> (to stand up)	-Use of <i>capo</i> instead of <i>testa</i> (head), <i>chiedere</i> instead of <i>domandare</i> (to ask), <i>mezzagosto al posto di ferragosto</i> (the 15 th of August feast), <i>topo</i> instead of <i>sorcio</i> (mouse), <i>stare all'impiedi</i> instead of <i>in piedi</i> (to stand up)
-The interrogative form “ <i>chi?</i> ” has one form in the standard Italian Language	-The interrogative form “ <i>chi?</i> ” has two different Sicilian forms/ <i>cchini/or/ccchi/</i>

two languages. Additionally, it is vital to stress that languages, in general, are living phenomena constantly evolving. However, my focus here is exclusively on the interaction between Arabic and Sicilian; specifically, the reason why the selection of borrowed words or terms is somehow limited, especially since a qualitative analysis is necessary at this level. Some general Sicilian examples of Arabic origin are mentioned below before shifting to the Sicilian Arabic words used by Camilleri himself.

Here's a list of some Sicilian words of Arabic origin that could reveal many aspects of the language itself:

Ganzaria, porcile: ar. Ganzir: porco and it refers to pork
Cuba, ar. Cuba it refers to cup

Gisira: ar. jesira and it refers to island

Nfernu: ar. Fern Molino and it refers to oven

Alcantara: ar. el quanthara, ponte and it refers to bridge

Gibil-russa, Gibil-manna- Gibillina, Mon- gibellu: ar. jabbal and it refers to mountain

Gaddufu, gattufu (piccolo gallo o cappone, gatto) diminutive arabic Kherouf, agnelino, khallouf, porcellino meaning lamb

Gazzara: armadio: ar. khizana meaning wardrobe

Mafia, Mafioso: ar. mafia referring to mafia

Margu: campo o prato ar. marju meaning meadow

Murabitu, astemio che si priva del vino ar. murabit meaning the person who deprives himself from wine

Musa, banana: ar. Mouza and it refers to banana

Nikea, nikeja e Nikia dispiacere: ar. nikeja meaning displeasure

Saja canale d'irrigazione: ar, saquia meaning a lake

Tannura forno fatto nel suolo: ar. tennur special oven (oriental)

Zaituni specie d'ulivo: ar. zitoun meaning olive

Zimmili cimbili: ar. zimbila meaning tuft

Zubbibu, specie d'uva passa: ar. zebib meaning dried grapes²

DISCUSSION

The previous part was introduced essentially to pave the way to an overriding one focusing on Camilleri, specifically,

the few terms and expressions of Arabic origin used in his writings that circulated all over Italy. For instance, *Cabasisa* is a term used in botanics meaning “*babagigi*” which is the name of the “*Cyperus Esculentus*” plant. The etymology of the word refers to the Tunisian Arabic *habb al-‘aziz*. It is a fruit as large as chicory and as small as a bean. Whereas the Sicilian glossary provides the following different meanings to the word:

The first meaning is *Tuberi del Cyperus Esculentus*, which refers to a type of plant. Whereas the figurative meaning refers to testicles (*I testicoli*). The expression “*Dare cabassia*” which in Italian is “*dare un bel nulla*” or “*non dare proprio niente*” means to give absolutely nothing.

Escl “*Capperi*= *Non me ne importa un cappero cioè “non me ne importa assolutamente niente” ma nache capperi* meaning “gosh” or “oh my God” or “oh damn” or “wow”.

It is essential to note that Camilleri, through his commissario Montalbano, employs the popular language. For instance, “*Rompero I cabasisi?*” o “*Chi era che gli scassava I cabasisi?*” o “*che grannissima rottura di cabasisi?*” signifying “*rompere le palle*” or “ball breaking.” This expression occurs frequently in Camilleri’s novels. It is a fixed utterance that has to be mentioned since we are conducting a philological study which includes vocabulary that are “*parolacce*” or “vulgar words.” It is Camilleri and il commissario Montalbano’s habitual mode of speech. Words taken from the colloquial dialect enhance our understanding of the lifestyle of the people and eventually, in this study, of the Sicilians’ mode of talking in general. The expression is used in his “Una lama di Luce” (Camilleri, 2012a) and “Una voce di notte” (Camilleri, 2012b) frequently. The term referring to the masculine organs is eminently renowned in Italy. Camilleri, by way of the commissario Montalbano, has contributed to the diffusion of some terms, or manner of talking, throughout Italy.

At this level, I will briefly indicate a few other terms of Arabic origin also employed by Camilleri that have acquired country-wide recognition or usage:

- Cacocciula

Carciofo (artichoke) is an exclusive Sicilian type. Its origin could be attributed to the Arabic (hursuf standard Arabic). Camilleri (2012a) uses the term *cacocciuli* in his writings (in *Lama di luce*)

- Mmatula

Inutile directly deriving from the Arabic *batil*. The form in Arabic is *batala*

Camilleri (2012b) in (*Una Voce di Notte*) uses what follows:

“Ti è piacciuta? Ammatula facisti arrubbari il registrotori!”

- Mischinu

From the Arabic/*miskin*/, *povero*, *miserabile*. *Mischinu* is not only in the Sicilian dialect but also in the Italian language, with the word “*meschino*” signifying the one that suffers from moral or material poverty.

Camilleri (2012a,b): “*La fine di Savastano era stata orrenda, un “mischino” oppure un “se l’è meritata!” ci sarei dovuto nesciri da cori.*” (*Una Voce di Notte*). He also uses the word *mischineddra* (*Una Lama di Luce*)

- Tabbutu

Tabutu derives from the Arabic/*tabut*/. *Cassa da morte*; a death box; from the Arabic word *tabut*. From Sicilian, the words *tabbutu* or *tabutto* became part of the Italian language.

Camilleri (2012a) uses the following expression: *Il tabbutu è vacante o chino? (lama di luce), la tomba/bara e vuota o piena? Il morto c’è o non c’è?* Is the box empty or not? The dead is or is not there?

- Taliari

Transitive verb meaning “look, observe” We have direct borrowing from the Arabic/*tatala*’a/. *Atto di guardare*.

Camilleri (2012a,b): *Montalbano si calo a taliarlo meglio*; This word was used frequently by Camilleri in his writings (*una voce di notte*) and (*una lama di luce*).

CONCLUSION

I attempted, as much as possible in this study, to shed light on the interaction between Arabic and the Sicilian language that results in the migration or usage/borrowing of numerous terms. Camilleri is a writer who has emphatically triggered my curiosity and deep esteem. I accompanied him on an unforgettable journey to discover the profound roots and attractive interchange between the Sicilian and Italian languages.

I reverted to the origin of the Italian language, resuming a debate as to whether the origin of the language harks back to Dante, or historically speaking, to the Sicilians. Subsequently, I examined a bit more intensely the Sicilian language, signalling a few originally useful Arabic terms as becoming a part of the Sicilian language. Lastly, I emphasized the vocabulary of Arabic origin that Camilleri popularized in his “*commissario Montalbano*.” My findings are still open to many research papers, and I wish to pave the way through this short qualitative inventory (based on previous studies) for further research in the scarcely exploited domain of lexicology or lexicography with respect to dialects and/or languages, their implications, and their interplay.

END NOTES

1. <https://www.bartleby.com/essay/Methods-of-Lexicological-Analysis-P3K2AYE3RZZA>.
2. *Supplemento a’ Dizionari arabi – in Introduzione allo studio del dialetto arabo.*

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