

# Contact-Induced Change in Sicilian Gallo-Italic The Multipurpose *Aviri a* + Infinitive Construction in the Dialect of Nicosia

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**Abstract** In this paper we focus on an aspect of the change in the syntax of the Gallo-Italic variety of Nicosia (Enna), presumably fostered by prolonged contact with Sicilian: the use of the *Aviri a* + Infinitive Construction (AICo). This periphrasis can cover different functions (deontic, epistemic, futural, and optative) and, in Nicosiano, can surface in different configurations. We considered a written corpus containing works (poetry, short stories, novels, theatre plays) by the two major authors in Nicosiano: La Giglia (1862-1922) and Castrogiovanni (1933-2007). We compared the occurrences of the AICo in the corpus with those of modal *dövè* 'must' and synthetic future forms, whose functions generally overlap with those of the AICo. The data collected confirm the effects of Sicilian on Nicosiano: the AICo has almost completely taken over *dövè* and synthetic forms for all the functions considered, the latter constructions generally occurring in crystallised expressions in the corpus.

**Keywords** Gallo-italic. Sicilian. functional HAVE. multipurpose periphrases. contact phenomena

**Sommario** 1. Introduction. – 2. The *Aviri a* + Infinitive Construction. – 2.1 The AICo in Nicosiano. – 2.2 Clitic Climbing as a Restructuring Effect. – 2.3 The Different Configurations of the AICo in Nicosiano. – 2.4 Modal MUST. – 2.5 The Synthetic Future. – 3.1 Some Notes on the Dialect of Nicosia. – 3.2 The Origin of the Texts in the Nicosiano Written Corpus. – 3.3 The Encoding of the Corpus. – 4. Data and Discussion. – 4.1 Some Considerations on the D- and -d- Configurations. – 4.2 On the Synthetic Future Forms. – 4.3 On Modal MUST. – 5. Conclusions.



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309

## 1 Introduction

The Gallo-Italic varieties<sup>1</sup> spoken in Sicily represent a linguistic phenomenon emerging from the migration of settlers from southern Piedmont and Liguria to central-eastern Sicily during the Norman conquest between 1061 and 1091 (cf. Petracco Sicardi 1969; Pfister 1988; Trovato 1998; 2013). This migration was motivated by the need to fill a demographic vacuum left by the Norman occupation and resulted in a significant sociolinguistic shift in the region. The settlers, coming from regions with distinct linguistic characteristics, mostly did not establish new towns but integrated into existing Sicilian communities. This integration process fostered a complex linguistic scenario where Gallo-Italic dialects developed independently from their homeland counterparts in northern Italy and alongside the indigenous Sicilian varieties, leading to areas of bilingualism and varying degrees of language proficiency.

Today, these Gallo-Italic dialects are spoken in approximately ten villages, marking a linguistic identity distinct from the surrounding Sicilian dialects mainly in terms of phonetic and phonological features, but also of inflectional morphology. However, beyond these villages, Gallo-Italic features are also detectable in broader areas, especially within the provinces of Messina, Catania, and Enna.<sup>2</sup> The historical context of these migrations has had profound sociolinguistic implications. The coexistence of Gallo-Italic and Sicilian communities sometimes led to rivalry and conflict but also resulted in the emergence of bilingual speakers.<sup>3</sup> The degree of bilingualism varied, influenced by factors such as village or town size and the relative prestige of the languages. For instance, in San Fratello (Messina), the Gallo-Italic dialect exhibited “lively vitality and granitic compactness” by the end of the 1960s (cf. Tropea 1974, 371), with Sicilian restricted to formal contexts. Conversely, in places like Nicosia, Aidone, and Novara di Sicilia, a symbiosis with Sicilian dialects was

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**2** Trovato (1998, 538-39) identifies three linguistic areas with varying levels of Gallo-Italic features. The first area (Group A), where the local varieties spoken are Gallo-Italic with some Sicilian influences, includes San Fratello, San Piero Patti, Montalbano Elicona, Novara di Sicilia with Fondachelli-Fantina (in the consortium of municipalities of Messina), Randazzo (Catania), Ferla (Syracuse), Piazza Armerina, Aidone, Nicosia and Sperlinga (Enna).

**3** And trilingual speakers with the spread of Italian after the Unification in 1861.

observed, though with notable differences in the sociolinguistic dynamics among these localities (cf. Trovato 1998).

Despite the pervasive influence of Sicilian, and, later, of regional Italian, on the Gallo-Italic dialects, their phonetic and phonological systems have remained remarkably conservative. This conservatism, which is noteworthy because of the extensive borrowing of lexical items and syntactic patterns from Sicilian, has recently led to a research project started by De Angelis (2023). This linguistic scenario presents a complex interplay between historical migration patterns, sociolinguistic dynamics, and language preservation efforts. The resilience of these varieties reflects a deep-seated sense of linguistic identity among speakers, underscored by their efforts to maintain distinct phonetic characteristics, a phenomenon that De Angelis (2023, 14) calls ‘Phonetics as Last’.

In this respect, syntax lies in the opposite extreme of the continuum, since most Sicilian traits have permeated the local Gallo-Italic dialects to the point that nowadays the latter appear as ‘Sicilian’ (or sometimes, more generally, as southern Italo-Romance) from a syntactic point of view (cf. De Angelis 2023, 3-6). Some of the most remarkable syntactic features (cf. Trovato 1998) are: (i) a type of differential object marking often referred to as ‘prepositional accusative’ (cf. De Angelis 2022, § 5.1.3); (ii) the construction WANT + past participle (a form of WANT passive widespread in southern Italo-Romance in general; cf. Ledgeway 2016a, 267);<sup>4</sup> (iii) the generalisation of the auxiliary HAVE in the present perfect and the pluperfect indicative instead of the opposition BE/HAVE attested in Italian (cf. Rohlfs 1969, § 729); (iv) the adverbial function of adjectival forms (cf. Bonner 2001); (v) the prolativ function of noun, adjective and adverbs reduplication (cf. Castiglione, Chilà 2023); (vi) the so-called ‘loismo’, i.e. the optional replacement of the indirect object clitic pronoun with the direct object clitic one (cf. De Angelis 2022, 23); (vii) informational non-contrastive Focus Fronting (cf. Cruschina 2012); (viii) the inverted vocative (cf. Sgroi 1990, 218). Moreover, in the verbal domain, different multi-purpose two-verb periphrases with a functional verb (namely, either a motion verb, STAY, or HAVE) and a lexical verb either tensed or not tensed (infinitive or gerund) can be found (cf. Ledgeway 2012). Finally, we can add a phenomenon that has not received attention in the literature, namely the argument structure of some Sicilian Gallo-Italic verbs that diverge from their Italian counterparts and follow the Sicilian path, cf. the

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., the following example from Menza (2017, 74) in Nicosiano:

- (i) *Vuò strengiud’ a man.*  
want.3SG held.PAST.PART.F the hand.F  
‘(S)he wants his/her hand held.’

anti-causative non pronominal Nicosiano verbs *ddumè* ‘light up’ and *squaghjè* ‘melt down’ vs. the Italian pronominal *accendersi* and *sciogliersi*, respectively.<sup>5</sup>

The case of the central variety spoken in Nicosia (Enna) is particularly relevant, since diatopic variation is found in the small city (less than 13,000 inhab.), according to which the variety spoken in the districts of Santa Maria and San Michele are more Gallo-Italic oriented, compared to the lower district of San Nicolò (cf. Menza 2019). In the present paper, we focus on the syntactic and semantic properties of the *Aviri a* + Infinitive Construction (or AICo; cf. Di Caro 2019b) as found in a small written corpus in Nicosiano (see Section 3.2). The texts analysed were written by two local authors, i.e., Carmelo La Giglia (1862-1922; from San Nicolò) and Sigismondo Castrogiovanni (1933-2007; from San Michele).

The aim of this paper is manifold: to assess whether (i) there is micro-diatopic variation in the distribution of the structures; (ii) the author from the Gallo-Italic district of Nicosia (i.e., San Michele) shows a different linguistic behaviour from the author from the Sicilian district of Nicosia (i.e., San Nicolò). We also took into account an important syntactic phenomenon, referred to as Clitic Climbing, regarding the procliticisation onto the V1 of a pronoun that is an argument of the V2.<sup>6</sup> Clitic Climbing, although attested in Old Piedmontese (cf. Parry 1995), is not found in contemporary northern Italo-Romance dialects. Thus, the contact with Sicilian, if not the direct cause of the widespread Clitic Climbing displayed by Gallo-Italic varieties in Sicily, can at least be considered a reinforcing factor.

The rest of the paper is organised as follows: in Section 2 the Sicilian AICo is dealt with together with the competing constructions that can take on one or some of the AICo semantics, namely the synthetic future and modal MUST, with each subsection providing the Gallo-Italic counterparts, when attested; in Section 3 the corpus of written Nicosiano is described. The data collected are analysed and discussed in Section 4. Section 5 draws the conclusions.

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**5** Cf. Deliano *addrumari* ‘light up’ and *squagliari* ‘melt down’. Note, however, that under the pressure exerted by Italian, the pronominal counterparts are now expected in Sicilian too (i.e., Deliano *addrumàrisi* and *squagliàrisi*).

**6** Following recent literature on Italo-Romance two-verb periphrases (cf. Di Caro 2017; 2019a; 2019b; Cardinaletti, Giusti 2020; Giusti, Cardinaletti 2022; Di Caro, Menza 2024; Di Caro, Molinari 2024), V1 and V2 are interpreted here as, respectively, the functional verb and the lexical verb of the relevant periphrasis.

## 2 The *Aviri a* + Infinitive Construction

The *Aviri a* + Infinitive Construction (here referred to as AICo; cf. Di Caro 2019b) is very common among southern Italo-Romance periphrases (cf. Amenta 2010).<sup>7</sup> In Sicily, the AICo has been attested since the 13th century (cf. Núñez Román 2007; 2009; Amenta 2010; Amenta, Paesano 2010; Di Caro 2019b). In this periphrasis, the V1 HAVE can take on different functions. It is used as a future marker in most Sicilian dialects (cf. (1a)), where a morphological future is no longer productive. The same holds true for the deontic function, since there is no continuation of Latin *DEBĒRE* ‘must’ in Sicilian (cf. (1b)).<sup>8</sup> A third, equally common function of V1 HAVE is that of epistemic marker (cf. (1c)). Finally, the AICo can also be used for optative purposes (cf. (1d)).

- (1) a. Lu            misi            ca            trasi    amm’            a  
the            month        that        enters    have.PRS.1PL    to  
gghjiri        a            Londra.  
go.INF        to            London  
‘We’re going to London next month.’ [adapted from Di Caro (2019b, 223); Delia (Caltanissetta)]
- b. Oi            amm’            a            ffari    la            spisa.  
today        have.PRS.1PL    to        do.INF    the        shopping  
‘We have to do the shopping today.’ [adapted from Di Caro (2019b, 223); Delia (Caltanissetta)]
- c. Sunaru?      chissu            lu            paccu    di            Amazon  
ring.PST.3PL    this            the        parcel    from        Amazon  
av’            a            èssiri.  
has            to            be.INF  
‘Did someone ring the bell? This must be Amazon.’ [adapted from Di Caro (2019b, 223); Delia (Caltanissetta)]
- d. T’            avìssiru                    a    ngagliari    nni            la    facci!  
you    have.SUBJ.IMPF.3PL    to    hit.INF    in            the    face  
‘May they hit you in the face!’ [Delia (Caltanissetta)]

Note that the *ammu* in the Deliano example in (1b) is a present indicative 1PL reduced form of HAVE (cf. the extended *avjimmu* ‘we have’) only found in grammaticalised periphrases such as the AICo and *Pasato Prossimo* (Present Perfect), phonetic erosion being an expected result of grammaticalisation, cross-linguistically (cf. Heine, Reh 1984, 15; Bybee et al. 1994, 19).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Rohlfs (1968, § 591) reports that this periphrasis is also attested in popular Florentine, in Sardinian, and Corsican.

<sup>8</sup> See Amenta, Paesano (2010, 21).

<sup>9</sup> With this regard, Di Caro (2019, 222) claims that, contrary to the AICo, the *Aviri di* + Infinitive Construction (i.e. the deontic construction featuring the connecting

## 2.1 The AICo in Nicosiano

In the Gallo-Italic varieties of Sicily, the AICo is also found robustly, and it can take on all the different semantic functions described for Sicilian in (1). In this respect, three features found in the Nicosiano texts are noteworthy: (i) there are remnants of the modal *dōvë* ‘must’ (cf. It. *dovere*) which, however, displays a defective paradigm and is being progressively replaced by the AICo (cf. Trovato, Menza 2020: LXX; See Section 2.4);<sup>10</sup> (ii) there are remnants of morphological future forms, those again being progressively replaced by the AICo (cf. Trovato and Menza 2020: LXX); (iii) in the AICo the connecting element generally surfaces as *da* (cf. (2)), with [d] being just a transitional sound that may have presumably been influenced by the *Aviri da* Construction of the underlying Sicilian variety spoken in Nicosia before the Gallo-Italic immigration, witnessed by the neighbouring Sicilian varieties nowadays spoken in Enna and Gagliano Castelferato (Menza 2019, 66; see also Castiglione, Menza 2024).<sup>11</sup>

(2) Amö                      da *partö*.<sup>1</sup>  
have.PRS.1PL    to leave.INF

‘We have to leave.’ [adapted from Trovato and Menza (2020, 59); Nicosia (Enna)]

<sup>1</sup> Note that Nicosiano also displays a dedicated, reduced form for the present indicative 1PL of HAVE, namely *amö* (vs. extended *avëma* ‘we have’; cf. Trovato & Menza 2020: XX).

## 2.2 Clitic Climbing as a Restructuring Effect

Clitic Climbing is a widespread phenomenon in Romance, which is analysed as a transparency effect of restructuring verbs (cf. Rizzi 1982) and thus a property of monoclausal constructions. Italian displays optional Clitic Climbing while in Sicilian dialects it is obligatory.<sup>12</sup> De Angelis (2023) claims that the periphrases in the Gallo-Italic varieties of Sicily display Clitic Climbing regularly but probably not

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element *di*) shows a biclausal behaviour, since it neither allows for any reduced forms of HAVE, nor any Clitic Climbing (see Section 2.8). Following the same line of reasoning, the *Aviri cchi* (i.e. HAVE that) + Infinitive Construction, as in *aviri cchi fari* ‘to have something to do’ (cf. also Nicosiano *Nen à che pelië* NEG has that nibble.INF ‘He has nothing to nibble’), is also biclausal and will not be considered in the present work.

<sup>10</sup> Note, however, that it is not possible to exclude that modal *dōvë* in Nicosiano could be an Italianism.

<sup>11</sup> See Menza (2017; 2019) for an analysis of the different configurations of the AICo in Nicosiano according to the position of the element [d].

<sup>12</sup> With some rare exceptions, i.e. cases in which the pronoun is enclitic onto the V2 (cf., e.g., Leone 1995, 58).

as a case of direct change by contact with Sicilian. Instead, Sicilian may have favoured the keeping of a phenomenon already present in those Gallo-Italic varieties that arrived in Sicily, since Clitic Climbing was widespread in Old Piedmontese and has gradually faded away.<sup>13</sup>

- (3) a. Tâ porta o tâ vetrina ghje l' aë  
in-the door or in-the window to-it it have.PRS.2SG  
da mpecighè.  
to stick.INF  
'You have to stick it either in the door or in the window.' [Castrogiovanni;  
Trovato & Menza (2020, 538-39)]
- b. M' aë da dè a mia verghëtta.  
to-me have.PRS.2SG to give.INF the my wand  
'You have to give me my own wand back.' [La Via]<sup>14</sup>
- c. Ghje dissö chëö che ghj' avia  
to-him tell.PST.3SG what that to-him have.IMPF.3SG  
da dî.  
DA tell.INF  
'He told him what he had to tell him.' [La Via; Menza (2019, 64)]

<sup>13</sup> Mariano La Via Bonelli was a lawyer, politician, and ethnolinguist born in Nicosia. As a linguist, he wrote phonetic essays and ethnographic texts, also providing the first orthographic system for Nicosiano. These works favoured the extensive written production of the first Nicosiano poet: Carmelo La Giglia (cf. Trovato 2003).

Our prediction is that Clitic Climbing will be found regularly among the occurrences of the relevant periphrases in the Nicosiano corpus.<sup>14</sup>

### 2.3 The Different Configurations of the AICo in Nicosiano

Let us now have a closer look at the different configurations the AICo can assume in Nicosiano according to the connecting element, and the interplay of the [d] element with HAVE and the clitic elements, if present. Menza (2019, 62-63) provides a thorough overview of all the

<sup>13</sup> Parry (2005) reports that Clitic Climbing is still found in the Ligurian village of Cairo Montenotte (in the province of Savona). Note, moreover, that although Clitic Climbing is reported to be typically found in central-southern Italo-Romance varieties (cf. Ledgeway 2016b, 223; Roberts 2016, 799), recent work on the relevant phenomenon by Cardinaletti, Giusti & Lebani (to appear) has shown that the scenario is way more complex than previously thought. With this respect, they show that many northern dialects, including that spoken in Zoagli, Genoa (AIS point 187; cf. Jaberg, Jud 1928-40) about one century ago, allowed Clitic Climbing (the map considered is 1086 *voglio attaccarla* 'I want to tie it').

<sup>14</sup> For systematic Clitic Climbing with modals *völè* ('want') and *pödè* ('can') in Nicosiano, cf. Menza (2023, 169, fn. 10).

phonological and syntactic realisations found in the Nicosiano AICo, which we adapted in (4):<sup>15</sup>

- (4) a. HAVE+a+V2 (“a”)  
Chëö ch’ am’ a vëndö.  
the-one that have.PRS.1PL A sell.INF  
‘The one we have to sell.’ [La Giglia]
- b. HAVE+da+V2 (“da”; cf. (2) *supra*)  
Amö da partö.  
have.PRS.1PL DA leave.INF  
‘We have to leave.’ [La Giglia]
- c. d-HAVE+V2 (“d-”)  
Ö lèvetö d- avia essö no  
the yeast D- have.IMPF.3SG be.INF neither  
librö moö no librö durö.  
too soft nor too hard  
‘The yeast had to be neither too soft nor too hard.’ [Castrogiovanni]
- d. d-HAVE+a+V2 (“d+a”)  
D’ am’ a sparagnè.  
D- have.PRS.1PL A save-money.INF  
‘We have to save our money.’ [La Giglia]
- e. CL+d-HAVE+da+V2 (“d+da”)  
I rradigadè àutè le d- avì da fè  
the roots high them D- have.PRS.2PL DA make.INF  
sòutè.  
pop-off.INF  
‘You have to crop high roots.’ [Castrogiovanni]
- f. D-+CL+HAVE+a+V2 (“d+a”)  
Tutè de l’ an’ a servö ö rrè.  
all D- him have-PRS.3PL A serve the king  
‘Everyone has to serve the king.’ [Castrogiovanni]
- g. -D-+HAVE+V2 (“-d-”)  
Adavì venì ô matremönö.  
-D-+have.PRS.2PL come.INF to-the wedding  
‘You have to come to the wedding.’ [Castrogiovanni]
- h. CL+-D-+HAVE+a+V2 (“-d-”)  
Che n’ àden’ a fè mangè?  
what to-us -D-+have.PRS.3PL A make.INF eat.INF  
‘What do they have to let us eat?’ [La Vía; Menza (2019)]

<sup>15</sup> The configuration abbreviation shown into parentheses will be used henceforth. Note that some configurations display the same abbreviation, since the difference lies in the presence of Clitic Climbing, which is coded separately in the dataset.



Let us now focus on the origin of the [d] element. Menza (2019, 62-63) considers all the different configurations in (4) as underlying one and the same structure that has undergone different degrees of reanalysis. The configuration in (4a) mimics the traditional Sicilian AICo with the connecting element *a* between V1 and V2. (4b) shows an instance of AICo with *da*. This is the default configuration in Nicosiano, where the [d] element appears on the complementiser. In (4c) the [d] element appears before HAVE. Menza (2019, 64) postulates the presence of an allomorph *d* in free variation with *da* but behaving as a proclitic element, which has to climb onto HAVE. The climbed allomorph *d* can yield a string that is not allowed in Nicosiano, namely *d+C*, which is solved by the insertion of a schwa. In the cases instantiated by (4d) and (4e), where the [d] element co-occurs with a complementiser (either *a* or *da*), the former may have been reanalysed as part of HAVE, thus surfacing as *davë* ‘to have to’.<sup>16</sup> As for (4f), the element *de* on the left of the object clitic pronoun is interpreted by Menza (2019, 65) as the result of an epenthetic process inserting a [ə] to avoid the unacceptable combination of the two elements climbed onto HAVE, namely *d* and *l*. The latter element replaces all the accusative clitic pronominal forms found in Nicosiano (i.e. the singular masculine *ò*, the singular feminine *a*, and the indistinct plural *i*) when the following words start with a vowel, as is the case of all the forms of *avë* ‘have’.

The steps in (5) reproduce the order of movements described by Menza (2019, 65) to account for all the different configurations corresponding to ‘We have to do it’:

- (5) a. *Amö d fè l(ö)*  
b.  $L_1 amö d fè t_i$   
c.  $D_j l_1 amö t_j fè t_i$   
d.  $D_j e l_1 amö t_j fè t_j$  (epenthesis of [ə])  
e.  $L_1 e d_j amö t_j fè t_i$  (metathesis of the onset consonants of the first two syllables)

The only configuration not accounted for in (5) is that of the forms *adavi* (PRS.2PL), *àdemö* (PRS.1PL), *àdenö* (PRS.3PL) and *avidenö* (IMPF.3PL), which according to Menza (2019, 65) are to be interpreted

<sup>16</sup> Menza (2019, 64) notes that the combination of HAVE with the procliticised *d* pronoun resembles phonetically the synonymous modal verb *dövë* ‘must’ < Lat. DEBĒRE, which may have fostered this form. Interestingly, the constructions considered in this paper, i.e. the AICo, modal MUST and the synthetic future, all contain forms of HAVE: Lat. DEBĒRE comes from DE+HABĒRE, and as regards the Romance synthetic future, it is a well-known fact that it is the result of the combination of the infinitival forms of the lexical verbs and inflected forms of HAVE.

as the result of a phenomenon of opacification whence the integrity of *avë* ‘have’ is compromised, and the verb is no more recognisable. Once the complementiser is incorporated into HAVE, it no longer functions as such, so another complementiser can be inserted (as shown in (4g) and (4h)).

## 2.4 Modal MUST

If the use of the AICo is the result of the contact between local Sicilian and the Nicosiano Gallo-Italic (cf. De Angelis 2023), we expect to also find instances of morphological deontic (and epistemic) MUST in the texts available, at least in the earliest ones, considering the fact that this modal verb is typical of northern Gallo-Italic varieties.<sup>17</sup> Trovato and Menza (2020, LXX) provide the inflectional scheme of *dövë* ‘must’, which appears as a defective verb, and point out that the missing cells of the paradigm are filled in by the *avë a/da* periphrasis. The occurrence in (6) found in a text by La Giglia is taken from Trovato, Menza 2020 (306):

- (6) Don Libertö se sentia cacòciöla e  
Don Libertö REFL feel.IMPF.3SG artichoke and  
dövëndö maridè a suorö...  
having-to give-daughter’s-hand-in-marriage.INF the sister  
‘Don Libertö thought he was smart and, since he had to marry her sister off...’  
[La Giglia; Trovato and Menza (2020, 273)]

An interesting fact shared by Sicilian and Nicosiano is the persistence of the noun expressing the concepts of ‘duty’ and ‘obligation’ which derives from an infinitival form that is no more productive. Cf. Deliano *Fari lu sa dduviri* ‘to do one’s duty’ (Di Caro 2019a, 170) and Nicosiano *Ma fazz’ö mia dövëre* ‘but I do my duty’.

## 2.5 The Synthetic Future

Along with the other southern Italo-Romance varieties, Sicilian has generally abandoned the Latin (originally deobligative) synthetic

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<sup>17</sup> Some northern Gallo-Italic varieties do show traces of AICo (featuring the connector *da*), as in Romagnolo (cf. Pellicciardi 1977, 135, *apud* Cruschina 2013, 275), where it fills some cells of the paradigm of modal *dvér* ‘must’, in a morphomic distribution called ‘N-Pattern’ (see, at least, Maide, O’Neill 2010). Note, however, that Emilia-Romagna is not among the areas from which Gallo-Italic settlers moved to Sicily.

future,<sup>18</sup> replacing it with either the AICo - which only covered deontic uses in Old Sicilian (cf. Bentley 1998, 122-3) - or present indicative forms. The literature tends to describe the Sicilian synthetic future as a largely disused form of cultivated usage and of Tuscan influence (cf. D'Ovidio 1878, 183; Ebnetter 1966, 36ff; Rohlf's 1968, § 589-91; Leone 1995, 36), which is now found mainly in north-eastern Sicily and in other isolated centres.<sup>19</sup> However, Bentley (1997, 50-3), Loporcaro (1999, 69ff) and, more recently, Assenza (2023) have argued in favour of an autochthonous form of synthetic future, especially in the northeastern area, albeit a recessive one today. Instances of synthetic future in Modern Sicilian are discussed in Bentley (1998), who reports that the linguistic scenario found in 19th century Sicily - exemplified by the collection of Sicilian tales and short stories by Giuseppe Pitrè, published in 1875 - shows a drastic change with respect to Old Sicilian, where the AICo was not used to indicate future tense.<sup>20</sup> Bentley (1998, 124) only found 37 occurrences of synthetic future in the whole Pitrè corpus, whereas the AICo has already also taken on epistemic functions, as shown in (7):

- (7) a) Vaju pi lu pumu chi sona.  
go.PRS.1SG for the apple that sound.PRS.3SG  
Guai ha a curriri...  
troubles have.PRS.2SG to run.INF  
A: 'I'm going for the ringing apple'. B: 'You're gonna have some troubles...'  
[adapted from Pitrè ([1875] 1993: I, 322)]
- b) A li tri anni... chiantu sti favi e  
to the three years plant.PRS.1SG these fava-beans and  
vidi quantu mi nn' hannu a fari!  
see.PRS.2SG how-much to-me NE have.PRS.3PL to make.INF  
'I'm going to plant these fava beans in three years, and you'll see how many I'll get.' [adapted from Pitrè ([1875] 1993, II, 267)]

**18** This derives from a former periphrasis featuring a lexical verb in the infinitive and a postponed weakened form of HAVE (cf. Loporcaro 1999; Robert, Roussou 2003, 50; Ledgeway 2012, 135). For a comprehensive list of references on the origins and developments of synthetic future in Romance see Ledgeway (2012, 135, fn. 68).

**19** See, e.g. the map 1661 and the conjugation tables 1684-1688 of the AIS (Jaberg and Jud 1928-1940).

**20** Bentley (1998) suggests that a layering process (*à la* Hopper 1991, 22-4), according to which the new layer represented by the informal low-register uses of periphrastic future adds to the formal synthetic future layer in written texts, may have fostered the use of the AICo to express future in Modern Sicilian. See also Andriani et al. (2020, 329-40) for a generative account of the evolution of synthetic and periphrastic future from Latin to Italo-Romance.

Occurrences of synthetic future in north-eastern Sicily are also discussed in Leone (1995), who reports forms such as *saravi* ‘s/he will be’ in S. Teresa di Riva and Ucria, *vinirà* ‘s/he will come’ and *farògghiu* ‘I will do’, both in Ucria. In a more recent fieldwork by Assenza (2023), both epistemic (8a) and deictic future (8b) uses of the synthetic future in north-eastern Sicily are documented:

- (8) a. Me maritu non manciau: astura  
my husband NEG eat.PST.3SG now  
aviràvi fami.  
have.FUT.3SG hunger  
‘My husband has not eaten yet: he must be hungry now.’ [adapted from Assenza (2023, 30); Messina; Taormina; Milazzo; Capo D’Orlando; Sant’Agata di Militello; Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto; Francavilla; Galati Mamertino]<sup>1</sup>
- b. Dumani venirànnu i nostri parenti.  
tomorrow come.FUT.3PL the our relatives  
‘Our relatives will come tomorrow.’ [adapted from Assenza (2023, 30); Messina; Santa Teresa di Riva; Taormina; Milazzo; Capo D’Orlando; Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto; Francavilla; Galati Mamertino]

<sup>1</sup> Assenza (2023, 30, fn. 11) points out that the examples chosen to represent the translations provided by the participants in her study do not take into account any variety-specific orthographic differences.

Although Nicosia does not fall administratively under the influence of Messina, its geographic position is not far from the Messinese Gallo-Italic centres. The synthetic future in Nicosiano is attested in the available literature, where it can be used in the epistemic mood, as shown in (9):

- (9) Sarerà na passiadina dissö ö padrö.  
be.FUT.3SG a insect-sting say.PST.3SG the father  
‘It must be an insect sting, said the father.’ [Trovato and Menza (2020, 75)]

Whether the occurrences of synthetic future in Nicosiano are limited to the epistemic uses or they are also used to indicate future tense is something we aim to assess in the analysis of the data from the corpus.

Now that all the constructions under investigation have been presented, we can delve into the corpus of Nicosiano, presented in Section 3.

### 3 The Corpus

#### 3.1 Some Notes on the Dialect of Nicosia

Nicosia, a small centre located 724 metres above sea level in the consortium of municipalities of Enna, with 12,947 inhabitants (ISTAT 2022), is one of the ten main Gallo-Italic speaking centres of Sicily (cf. Trovato 1998). Its linguistic history is peculiar and shows the interaction of the northern settlers from Southern Piedmont and Liguria with the local Sicilian population.<sup>21</sup> Nicosia was besieged by the troops of Count Roger in 1062 and conquered some years later. The immigration from northern Italy started the following century. As a consequence, the local Sicilian speaking community moved from the upper district built around the church of Santa Maria (hence the nickname ‘Mariani’ for its inhabitants proposed by La Via 1898) to the lower district built around the church of San Nicolò (whose inhabitants are called ‘Nicoleti’; cf. La Via 1898). The new settlers established themselves in the districts of Santa Maria and San Michele. This gave birth to a continuous process of mutual linguistic interference between Mariani and Nicoleti, together with a long lasting rivalry that was still ongoing in the 14th century, as reported by La Via (1898) (cf. Trovato 1998; Menza 2017; 2019). As will be clear in the rest of the paper, their belonging to a given district will be relevant for the two authors considered and their linguistic choices.

#### 3.2 The Origin of the Texts in the Nicosiano Written Corpus

The two authors whose texts make up the corpus were born in Nicosia.<sup>22</sup>

Carmelo La Giglia (1862-1922), son to a blacksmith, was born in the district of San Nicolò and worked as a chemist in Nicosia (cf. Menza 2017, 14). His poetic production was fostered by the linguistic work of Mariano Vincenzo La Via Bonelli (1868-1931), a lawyer, a politician but also an ethnolinguist who established an orthographic system for Nicosiano by means of his phonetics essays and ethno-texts (cf. La Via 1899).

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**21** Of the ten Sicilian Gallo-Italic dialects that Trovato (1998) groups together as those of major linguistic Gallo-Italic nature, the most documented and studied is that of Nicosia. See Menza (2017, 9-10, fn. 2) for a list of references from the earliest works such as De Gregorio (1882-85). See also Trovato and Menza (2020).

**22** The original corpus also comprised three popular short stories collected by Mariano La Via (cf. La Via 1887). We decided not to include them in the analysis because of the difficult attribution of his texts to a specific variety of Nicosiano.

Sigismondo Castrogiovanni (1933-2007) was born in the district of San Michele and lived in Nicosia as a school teacher until his retirement, when he began running a holiday farm in the Nicosia countryside.

The texts that make up the corpus are taken from the following works: *Tutte le poesie edite* (La Giglia 1975); *I figghi aubedienti (I figli obbedienti)*, *Commedia in tre atti in dialetto nicosiano* by C. La Giglia;<sup>23</sup> *Da l'avocatò Marianò La Via quandò o fèno a secònda vorta deputà* by C. La Giglia;<sup>24</sup> *I veri sassini* by C. La Giglia;<sup>25</sup> The manuscripts of the unpublished fairy tales and short stories by C. La Giglia (cf. Menza 2017, 25); The manuscripts of the unpublished poems by C. La Giglia; *Favole e racconti nel dialetto galloitalico nicosiano* (La Giglia 1976); *Tutte le poesie inedite* (La Giglia 1984); *Sovèprasgèssò! Poesie nel dialetto galloitalico di Nicosia* (Castrogiovanni 1995); *A Passiòn. La passione di nostro Signore* (Castrogiovanni 2004);<sup>26</sup> *De na nada a l' àuta* by S. Castrogiovanni.<sup>27</sup>

The difference in the district of origin between the contributors to our corpus, i.e. La Giglia (who comes from the Sicilian speaking district of San Nicolò) and Castrogiovanni (who comes from the Gallo-Italic speaking district of San Michele), will be taken into account in analysing the data.

### 3.3 The Encoding of the Corpus

The corpus is made of 235 texts from the two Nicosiano authors described in Section 3.2. A total of 1227 observations of either AI-Co, synthetic future or modal MUST were collected and manually tagged.<sup>28</sup> For each observation, the following variables, and the related levels, were encoded:

- **Author:** La Giglia, Castrogiovanni;
- **Text:** the title of the text (whether a poetry in a collection, a short story, a novel chapter, or the section of a theatre script) the occurrence is taken from;

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**23** This is an unpublished autograph manuscript preserved in the Municipal Library of Nicosia (cf. Menza 2017, 24).

**24** This is the unpublished autograph manuscript of a comic sketch in Nicosiano verses (cf. Menza 2017, 25).

**25** This is an unpublished autograph manuscript which is the first version of *A guerra (la guerra. Versi in dialetto nicosiano)*, included in La Giglia (1975) (cf. Menza 2017, 25).

**26** This is a verse drama of just under 70 pages with a parallel Italian translation.

**27** This is an unpublished novel-ethnotext, consisting of 413 typed pages in Nicosiano, which describes life on the farm in Nicosia (cf. Menza 2017, 97).

**28** The occurrences of conditional forms were not considered.

- **Type:** AICo, synthetic future, or modal MUST;
- **Semantics:** the semantic function taken on by the relevant construction (i.e., deontic, epistemic, optative, future);
- **Mood:** the Mood functional HAVE in the AICo, the synthetic future verb, or modal MUST is inflected for;
- **Tense:** the Tense functional HAVE in the AICo, the synthetic future verb, or modal MUST is inflected for;
- **Person:** the combination of grammatical Person and Number of the subject in the relevant construction (i.e., 1SG, 2SG, 3SG, 1PL, 2PL, 3PL);
- **V2:** the lexical entry of the second verb of the construction (if present);<sup>29</sup>
- **V3:** the lexical entry of the third verb of the construction (if present);
- **Climbing:** whether Clitic Climbing of an accusative or oblique pronoun occurred or not;
- **Connect:** the form the connecting element appears in (a, da, d-, -d-, d+a, d+da) or lack thereof (reported as “no” in Table 3).<sup>30</sup>

#### 4 Data and Discussion

Of the 1227 observations collected, those featuring the AICo amount to 1089, whereas the occurrences of synthetic future and modal MUST are 118 and 20, respectively (see Table 1).

**Table 1** Number of the occurrences of the structures considered by author

	<b>Texts</b>	<b>AICo</b>	<b>Future</b>	<b>MUST</b>
<b>La Giglia</b>	83	390	76	17
<b>Castrogiovanni</b>	154	699	42	3
<b>TOT.</b>	237	1089	118	20

Table 2 shows the distribution of the semantic functions of each construction. Note that it was not always easy to identify a purely future tense function in the AICo, since it started out as a deontic deligative construction.

<sup>29</sup> It is always indicated in the AICo and modal MUST. It was coded as a “no” for the synthetic future forms in simple tenses.

<sup>30</sup> This only applies to the AICo.

**Table 2** Number of the occurrences of the structures considered by semantic feature

	Deontic	Epistemic	Future	Optative
<b>La Giglia</b>				
<b>Aico</b>	330	37	4	19
<b>Future</b>	-	21	51	4
<b>Must</b>	17	-	-	-
<b>Castrogiovanni</b>				
<b>Aico</b>	644	45	6	4
<b>Future</b>	-	22	17	3
<b>Must</b>	3	-	-	-
<b>TOT.</b>	<b>994</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>30</b>

Let us now take a closer look at what happens inside the AICo. Table 3 shows the distribution of the different configurations of AICo described in Section 2.3 as found in the two authors considered.

**Table 3** Number of occurrences of the different AICo configurations by author

	da	a	d-	-d-	d+a	d+da	no	TOT.
<b>La Giglia</b>	217	127	39	1	2	-	4	390
<b>Castrogiovanni</b>	11	4	562	-	117	2	3	699
<b>TOT.</b>	228	131	601	1	119	2	7	1089

#### 4.1 Some Considerations on the d- and -d- Configurations

Let us start by considering the d- configuration in the two contributors. La Giglia and Castrogiovanni display an opposite behaviour in selecting their connectors (see Table 3). La Giglia prefers the more canonical V1+connector+V2 configurations 49.2% of the time (*da* 31%; *a* 18.2%) and resorts to d- less frequently (10%). On the contrary, Castrogiovanni selects a [d] form 97.4% of the time (d- 80.4%; d+a 16.7%; d+da 0.3%). This fact comes as no surprise if we consider that the displacement of the [d] element is a typical Gallo-Italic innovation in the AICo (see Section 2.3; cf. Castiglione and Menza 2024) and, thus, it is more frequent in the author from the Gallo-Italic district of San Michele.

As regards the -d- forms of HAVE in the AICo (i.e. *adavì* PRS.2PL, *àdemö* PRS.1PL, *àdenö* PRS.3PL, and *avidenö* IMPF.3PL), only 1 occurrence has been found in the corpus (in a text by La Giglia). In this case, however, it should be noted that 7 more occurrences of -d- AICo were found in the three short stories collected by La Via (cf. fn. 23). Although the origin of those texts remains uncertain, this fact



should be taken into account, as La Via and La Giglia were coeval. In fact, there is no trace of the -d- configuration in Castrogiovanni, who is the most recent author, as he died in 2007. This may signal a more recent tendency for the AICo to align to the Sicilian configurations or, at least, to avoid the most extreme, i.e. non productive, forms. Moreover, 5 out of the 8 occurrences of -d- AICo (in the two relevant authors combined) feature *fè* ‘do/make’ as V2 (used either as a lexical verb or as a light verb followed by different V3s), which may indicate a sort of lexicalisation of the combination -d- HAVE + *fè*.

## 4.2 On the Synthetic Future Forms

Only 118 occurrences of synthetic future forms were found in the corpus (see Table 1), 36.4% of which display an epistemic function, as shown in (10).

- (10) a. Sareranö i diävölë - pensanö tutë.  
be.FUT.3PL the devils think.PST.3PL all.PL  
‘It must be the devils – everybody thought.’ [Castrogiovanni; *A ntëna*]<sup>1</sup>
- b. Se maridà Töfaniö, avrà  
REFL get-married.PST.3SG Töfaniö, have.FUT.3SG  
corcö döë anë...  
some two years  
‘Töfaniö got married, it must have been about two years ago...’  
[La Giglia; *Ö sfasölà*]

<sup>1</sup> The information provided into square brackets are, respectively, the author and the work the occurrences belong to.

This is in line with the trend shown in the literature discussed in Section 2, according to which the AICo has progressively taken on the functions of the synthetic future. Moreover, Castrogiovanni, the author with the most recent contributions to the corpus, resorts to the synthetic future less frequently than La Giglia (35.6% vs. 64.4%). A further possible contribution to justifying the treatment of the synthetic future as a relic of the past in Nicosiano is given by the presence or the absence of Clitic Climbing. Table 4 clearly shows that this restructuring phenomenon rarely occurs with the synthetic future in any of its functions. Cf. (11) for some of the few occurrences found in the corpus:

- (11) a. Comö döë palömbëtë ve starerì ocantö.  
Like two little-doves each-other be.FUT.2PL beside  
‘You will be together like two lovebirds.’ [La Giglia; *Dê zzitë*]

b. Se tu poi bestentare, te ne  
if you can.PRS.2SG wait.INF you NE  
verrai cö mia.  
come.FUT.2SG with me  
'If you can wait, you'll come with me.' [La Giglia; *A Mèreca*]

**Table 4** Number of Clitic Climbing occurrences by semantic function of the synthetic future

	Future	Epistemic	Optative
<b>Clitic Climbing</b>	16 (23.53%)	5 (11.63%)	3 (42.86%)
<b>No Clitic Cl.<sup>1</sup></b>	52 (76.47%)	38 (88.37%)	4 (57.14%)
<b>TOT.</b>	68 (100%)	43 (100%)	7 (100%)

<sup>1</sup> The label “No Clitic Climbing” means that no clitic pronoun is present in the given occurrence. In the corpus, whenever a clitic pronoun is found, it is always procliticised onto the syntetic future form.

Unsurprisingly, 21 of the 24 occurrences of Clitic Climbing with a synthetic future form are found in the texts by La Giglia, i.e. the author from the Sicilian district of San Nicolò.

### 4.3 On Modal MUST

The contribution of modal MUST to the 1227 observations in the corpus is minimal, with only 20 occurrences (1.6%) in total (La Giglia: 17; Castrogiovanni: 3), as shown in Table 1. The overall low number of occurrences of modal MUST may be evidence that the contact-induced change caused by Sicilian regarding the replacement of Gallo-Italic MUST in favour of the deontic and epistemic AICo was already almost completed when La Giglia wrote his works.

Interestingly, most occurrences of this verb in the corpus are confined to non-indicative contexts, as shown in Table 5.

**Table 5** Number of occurrences of modal MUST by mood and tense

	Present	Imperfect	Past	Pluperfect
<b>Conditional</b>	3	//	1	//
<b>Gerund</b>	1	//	-	//
<b>Indicative</b>	1	2	1	-
<b>Subjunctive</b>	-	9	-	2

The most recurring form is that of imperfect subjunctive *avëssö dövvütö* ‘should have’ + V3.PPT (5 occurrences), as shown in (13), to which an occurrence of past conditional *averia dövvütö* ‘should have’ + V3.PPT adds. This could once again hint at a sort of lexicalisation of the construction.

- (13) a. Ma nen m' ö credia ca ia v'  
but NEG to-me it believe.IMPF.1SG that I you.PL  
avëssö dövùitö stampè.  
have.SBJ.IMPF.1SG must.PPT print.INF  
'But I didn't believe that I would have to publish you.' [La Giglia; *Dê mièè verscè*]
- b. Ö savia che pe dda sëira n'  
it know.IMPF.3SG that for that.F night NE  
avëssö dövùitö ndè dëö defuora.  
have.SBJ.IMPF.3SG must.PPT go.INF he outside  
'He knew that, for that very night, he himself would have to go outside.'  
[Castrogiovanni; *Il pranzo dopo ö scröntö*]

## 5 Conclusions

The analysis of the written corpus of the Gallo-Italic dialect of Nicosia proposed in this paper has clearly shown how the AICo, i.e., the Sicilian multipurpose HAVE periphrasis, has almost completely replaced the competing constructions (i.e., the synthetic future and modal MUST) in the different semantic functions, starting from the deontic one. This reinforces the idea that Nicosiano follows the general trend of Sicilian Gallo-Italic to display Sicilian traits in syntax (cf. Trovato 1998; Trovato and Menza 2020; De Angelis 2023). More in detail:

- The deontic and epistemic functions of modal MUST are almost completely taken on by the AICo and are generally limited to non-indicative constructions;
- The synthetic future forms are rather scarce;
- There seems to be a difference in the linguistic choices of the two authors considered (i.e., La Giglia and Castrogiovanni) according to their district of origin, respectively San Nicolò and San Michele.

Moreover, in order to assess whether modal MUST and the syntactic future have been definitely replaced by the multipurpose AICo in Nicosiano, we leave to future research the possibility to expanding the corpus analysed in the present contribution. This expansion would involve those recent literary works, either original poetry, theatre plays, or translations of famous novels, that have been fostered by Trovato's (2003) simplification of Nicosiano orthography.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Menza (2023, 8-9) for an up-to-date overview of all the available written texts in Nicosiano.

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