

## CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE OF PROSODIC SUBSYSTEMS OF THE DIALECTS SPOKEN IN THE SALENTO (ITALY) - A LINGUISTIC AND INSTRUMENTAL APPROACH

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### Introduction

As widely accepted by the scientific community, prosody is the first phonetic features to be acquired by a child and the last to be lost through aphasia or during the acquisition of another language. Nevertheless several aspects of the prosodic system of a language show slight changes during language evolution.

This paper is a first attempt to illustrate the situation of a region of southern Italy, where a divergence between geo-prosodic sub-systems - common to different linguistic strata - occurred at a certain time. As shown for a number of other features by the *Gruppo di Lecce* (e.g. Sobrero & Romanello 1981), it is very likely that nowadays one of the two main sub-systems is becoming more attracting, and different varieties are probably converging towards it. Moreover, in the same region, the Salento peninsula - the "heel of the Italian boot" -, different linguistic varieties are concerned by these interesting dynamics: Sallentinian, a Romance language, widespread in a number of slightly differing dialects usually considered low varieties; a regional variety of Italian, the official language, locally representing the high variety; and, in a small area of the peninsula, Griko, a Greek dialect still spoken by a few speakers.

The analyses we conducted on speech make-up collected in a number of villages and towns gave interesting data which we summarise and discuss below.

### The linguistic repertoires

The linguistic situation of the region in the case study is well described in a number of surveys published by the *Gruppo di Lecce* (among others, see Sobrero *et al.* 1991). Several works deal with geolinguistic and sociolinguistic aspects in the frame of the *NADIR* project whereas interesting studies in the frame of the perceptual dialectology of M.T. Romanello (1995, 1996, forthcoming) describe speakers' perception of linguistic identity and dialectal variations. The linguistic repertoire of people living in this area is partly discussed, among others, in Bochmann (1988) and in Berruto (1993) and, more recently, in Sobrero (1996a) where it is compared to other Italian cases.

Among the main languages spoken in this area, we find Sallentinian varieties: "Sallentinian" (it. *salentino*) is a Romance language spoken in the Salento peninsula by more than one million of Salento inhabitants belonging to the same linguistic sub-group of Sicilian and southern Calabrian (see figure 1). It is well taken in account in national studies and has an important vernacular literature (mainly since the 18th century) who even kept a number of medieval texts (Parlangeli 1958; Cuomo 1977).

A traditional complete analysis of Sallentinian dialectal varieties is offered by Mancarella (1975, 1998) whereas, outside Italy, these dialects provided, since the end of the 19th century, a ground for

academic controversy (e.g. between famous philologists such as G. Rohlfs and O. Parlangeli). In larger frameworks, even if short presentations on historical bases were already available in the fifties in studies on dialects of Italy (e.g. Pulgram 1958) and even if a number of attempts to resume a few isolated distinctive properties have been proposed in works like the one in Cortelazzo (1996), a more detailed description, jointly to Apulia, is offered by Loporcaro (1996).

Sallentinian has not a Standard: even if some kind of levelling has been highlighted by Sobrero & Romanello (1981), it is still widespread under a constellation of dialects and continues to live thanks to continuous exchanges with a dominant Italian variety (about different varieties of regional Italian in the Salento and for the description of a dialectal *koiné*, inspired to the hegemonic variety of Lecce, see Sobrero & Romanello 1981).

The dynamics of the contamination are more or less the same in most of the other Italian regions (cp. Grassi C. *et al.* 1997, Sobrero 1996b). Telmon (1990-1997) proposes to consider that a shift is taking place in the traditional 4-stratum continuum from the lowest to the highest variety (Pellegrini 1960): local dialects, all the Romance varieties more or less involved in a series of interferences with Italian, are receding to a limited use as *old dialects*, whereas low "regional Italians" are becoming more and more the *new dialects*.

Not far more complexe until the nineties, the sociolinguistic dynamics in the Greek-speaking area are now troubled by a revival of political-cultural attention. Greek varieties (loc. *Griko*, it. *Grico*) are spoken in a small area of the peninsula by not more than 20,000 people (mainly older speakers, for a raw reference see *Ethnologue* 1995), at the same time speakers of Sallentinian and/or regional Italian. Thanks to its *alloglossia*, Griko, which does not have a Standard (see the interesting considerations in *Gruppo di Lecce* 1979), is well taken in account in European studies as a minority language (while the other varieties in the Sallentine Peninsula are not - see the situation of the *Albania Salentina* described in Mancarella 1987). Describing a case of suspected *triglossia* without trilingualism in this area, in her phonetic study of the Greek variety spoken in Corigliano d'Otranto, O. Profili (1983) underline that some speakers were not able to tell Sallentinian apart from Italian ("Quand je m'adressais en italien à des locuteurs d'une cinquantaine d'années, ils me répondait en parler roman, tout en m'assurant qu'ils parlaient italien" Profili 1983, p. 16). In the meanwhile, things have changed and nowadays a few speakers master in some way the three different codes. Most of young people ignore completely the Griko rarely spoken by some parents to grandparents: that's the reason why several projects (e.g. the "Graecanic Lexicon", see ref.) have been financed in order to "hand down to descendants" the dying Greek varieties (also see Tommasi 1996).

### **Prosodic systems: persistence vs. variability**

As recently resumed by Hirst & Di Cristo (1998, p. 2), "The prosodic characteristics of the language are not only probably the first phonetic features to be acquired by a child [...], but also the last to be lost either through aphasia [...] or during the acquisition of another language or dialect".

Nevertheless changes in the prosodic systems are accounted for in long term studies. In facts, the 21<sup>st</sup> annual meeting of the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Sprachwissenschaft* (Fikkert & Jacobs 1999) has been held at the University of Konstanz on the general theme "Change in Prosodic Systems".

We acknowledge that some prosodic features show minor changes compared to segmental features; nevertheless our work proposes evidence for changes in the intonation system and discusses the resistivity of these language features usually considered little variable.

It is well known that the prosodic organisation of stress units and sentences may show significant differences from a linguistic variety to another. This is obvious not only when dealing with national languages, as it is widely proved by the literature, but also with geographical varieties of neighbouring linguistic areas - as it dramatically happens between Salento and Apulia, where different types of rhythmic organisation are widespread along a quite clear-cut borderline (see figure 1; for a review on this topic see Romano 1997). This allows macroscopic geolinguistic boundaries, in the dialectal field, with significant reflexes on the varieties of national language spoken by speakers from both areas. Furthermore, at a smaller scale, several tiny differences do exist as well, and they belong to the everyday life of people living in the region.

Romance dialects widespread in the Salento are basically homogeneous from a prosodic point of view even though they can be characterised by the recourse to usually different pitch patterns (e.g. for yes/no questions): like everybody else for his/her own linguistic domain, Salento inhabitants are often very sensitive to this kind of cues.

Looking for an historical explanation of these differences, we may admit that microprosodic changes occurred at some time and that some of them are probably still acting under the pressure of koinaization processes. As we have extensively shown in Romano (1998, 1999), the diffusion of the same specific dialectal intonation contours and its persistence in regional Italian provides:

- further elements to theories on the evolution and on the dialectal variation in this region;
- a brand new contribution to the analysis of sociolinguistic dynamics in the interaction between Sallentinian dialects and regional Italian;
- a source of evidence for a change in the prosodic system (at least concerning intonation patterns).

### **Main outcomes of the study here resumed**

A survey of the intonation structuring of statements and questions has been carried out in the framework of a PhD we have disserted at the Univ. Stendhal (Grenoble) at the end of November 1999. More than 2,000 utterances of speakers of two varieties (chosen as a consequence of previous areal fieldwork) have been extensively studied to verify the stability of the prosodic differences detected and to test their persistence in various conditions (code switching, shift in the speaker register, speaking style change, and with different distribution of sentence information and under the effects of different syntactic hierarchies and wording strategies). This allowed:

- a) To verify the existence of two main geoprosodic sub-systems (see figures 2 and 3):
  1. A southern sub-system widespread in a small "isolated" area.
  2. A mid-northern sub-system common in the main cities (mainly Lecce, Gallipoli, Galatina, Nardò and Greek-speaking areas, with the area around Brindisi probably converging to it).
- b) To verify the degree of correlation between dialect and Italian from a prosodic point of view.

The southern system shows more or less the same properties of other intonation systems of southernmost Romance languages like Sicilian and southern Calabrian varieties (cp. pitch contours in figures 2a and 3a with the melodic movements proposed by Grice 1995, for similar questions in Palermo Italian questions).

Speakers of the transition areas seem currently using this system but they sometimes have recourse to patterns remembering the mid-northern sub-system's schemas, especially when speaking Italian. As stated above (in a.2.), the northern Sallentinian sub-system is "common" to the Greek varieties spoken in the Salento (see figure 4 where utterances in Griko sound exactly like utterances in northern Sallentinian and so their curves look). That rises relevant questions about the evolution of one of the prosodic systems of the two languages: is Griko using a Romance prosody or viceversa? Has the original Greek prosody of Griko been replaced by a Romance prosodic system or has the prosody of Griko spread to Romance varieties?

## Discussion

Taking into account the sociolinguistic dynamics observed in the transition areas, an explanation could be advanced in terms of divergence and convergence (Auer & Di Luzio 1988) of varieties derived from a common system and partially evolving towards a dominant model.

With these premises, from an historical point of view, we must hypothesize a change, occurred at a given time, accounting for the present geoproisodic split of the Salento in the two small areas where two slightly differing prosodic systems are widespread and perhaps explain the current trends observed in transition areas as the result of a continuous change. Three hypotheses follow:

- *Hp0 (common to both the following hypothesis)*: Southernmost varieties are archaic and not recently inspired by "Sicilian" mediatic models (this seems to have more sensible bases than the opposite stating that the southern Sallentinian sub-system evolved under the influence of a Sicilian model).
- *HpA*:
  - A1) The Lecce *koiné* spontaneously developed a proper system of intonation signs from expressive schemas (**divergence**).
  - A2) The Lecce *koiné* spreads northward (attracting major towns) but possibly southern varieties would **converge** to it.
- *HpB*:
  - B1) The Lecce *koiné* derived its intonation sub-system from Griko spoken in a larger area in the past (there is evidence of a "Byzantine corridor" in Parlange 1953, D'Elia 1957, and for an ancient Greek wider diffusion in Rohlfs 1972, and Fanciullo 1996).
  - B2) Other communities in the North-Salento were influenced by these intonation patterns at the same time and are at present varying their prosodic repertoire.

If *HpA* (A1 + A2) is the right hypothesis then:

Conclusion A: **Intonation is not well anchored** (partially contrasting with studies on *Mind and Speech* and *Second Language Acquisition*).

If *HpB* (B1 + B2) is the right hypothesis then:

Conclusion B: **Intonation does persist through drastic changes in the linguistic code** (according to studies on *Second Language Acquisition* and *Linguistic Change*)

Unfortunately for the latter hypothesis, intonation curves we inspected in for speakers from Crete and Rhodes, together with the ones published for regionally unmarked modern Greek (see Botinis

1992; Arvaniti 1995) does not show any correlation with the corresponding contours of Sallentinian sub-system in B1 (common to Griko). As a consequence:

⇒ *HpB* is not supported by any evidence (but conclusion B can stand anyway);

⇒ *HpA* is probably true (and conclusion A find some bases).

If we totally accept the principle of strong persistence of prosodic features which always show slower changes than segmental features, we would look for major segmental differences among varieties in areas characterised by geoprosodic consistency. This is often the case for villages in the same prosodic sub-area, but we find as well a number of Sallentinian villages along the southern geoprosodic borderline showing the same kind of segmental variations than elsewhere *plus* an abrupt change in the preference for different intonation patterns.

In order to explain the evolution of the two intonation sub-systems in contact and the current tendency of northern varieties little differing on the segmental side to converge towards a prosodic model, we must admit that the intonation system is subject to interferences, innovations, and stylistic "unconscious" choices of speakers.

## Conclusions

From the study of intonation patterns presented by Sallentinian speakers, two intonation sub-systems emerge in a dialectal area which share the same general prosodic code. Even if the same prosodic system is often common to all the linguistic varieties spoken by the same speaker, southern speakers refer to a sub-system considered more conservative, whereas mid-northern areas converged or are converging towards the model spreading from the central area.

This implies that, even though *timing* and *rhythm* are well anchored and do persist better than other linguistic properties, intonation strongly depend on *ectosemantic* and social factors often unconscious and uncontrolled.

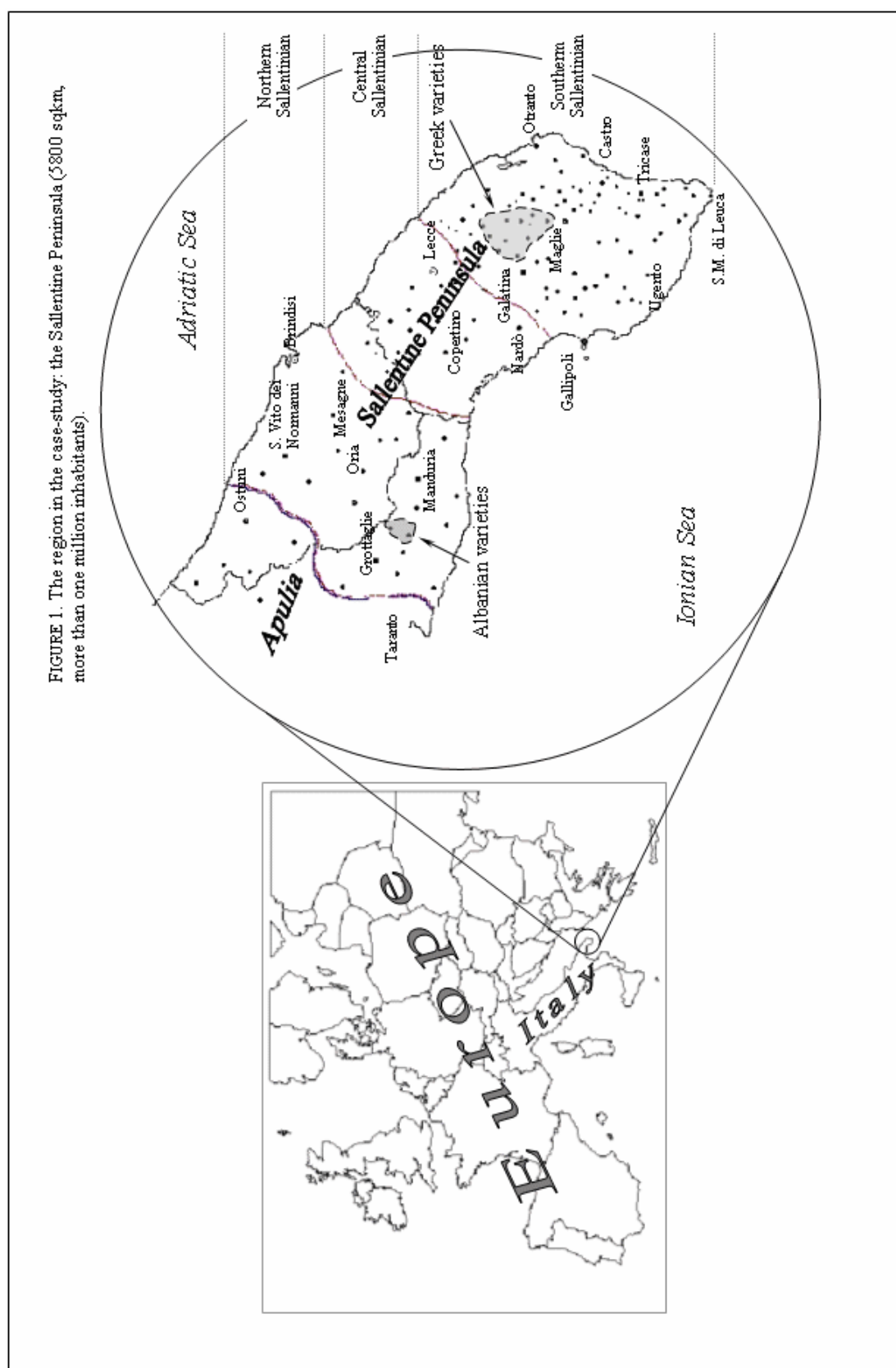
These factors, which do not affect the linguistic relevance of prosody in synchrony, probably raise melodic patterns, resulting from pressures and preferences active in an expressive domain, from a *parole* status to a *langue* status (cp. Fónagy 1983). Does this explain why Greek-speaking people in the Salento speaks it showing prosodic patterns common to Romance varieties? Can this question help determining the stages of the historical process of peopling of this land?

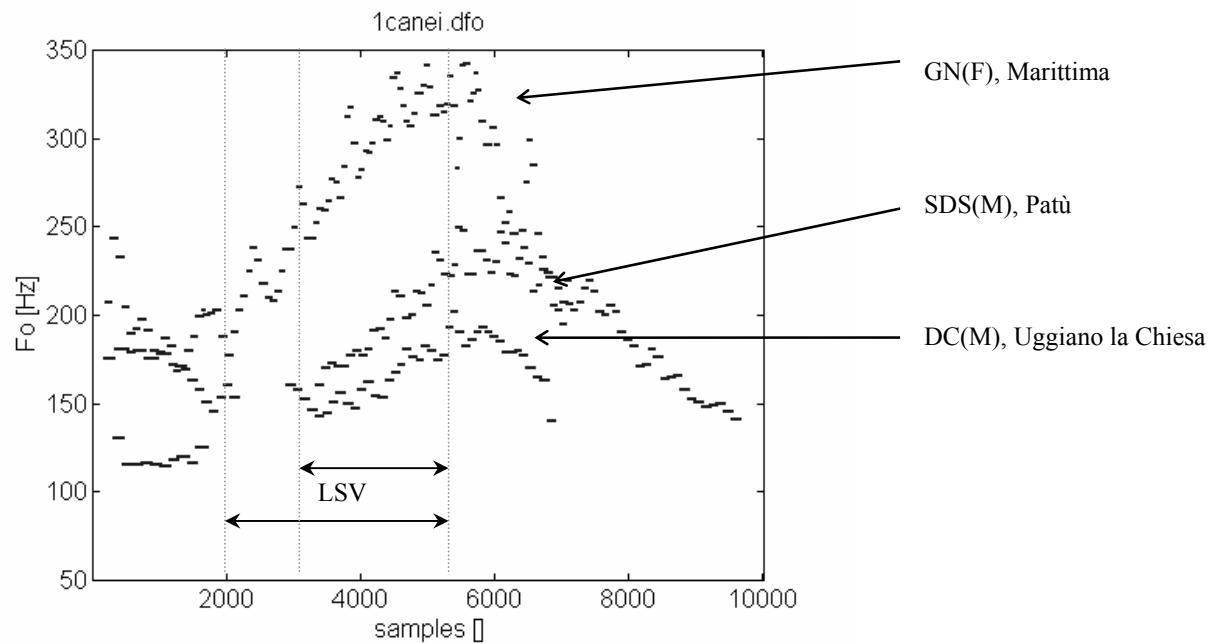
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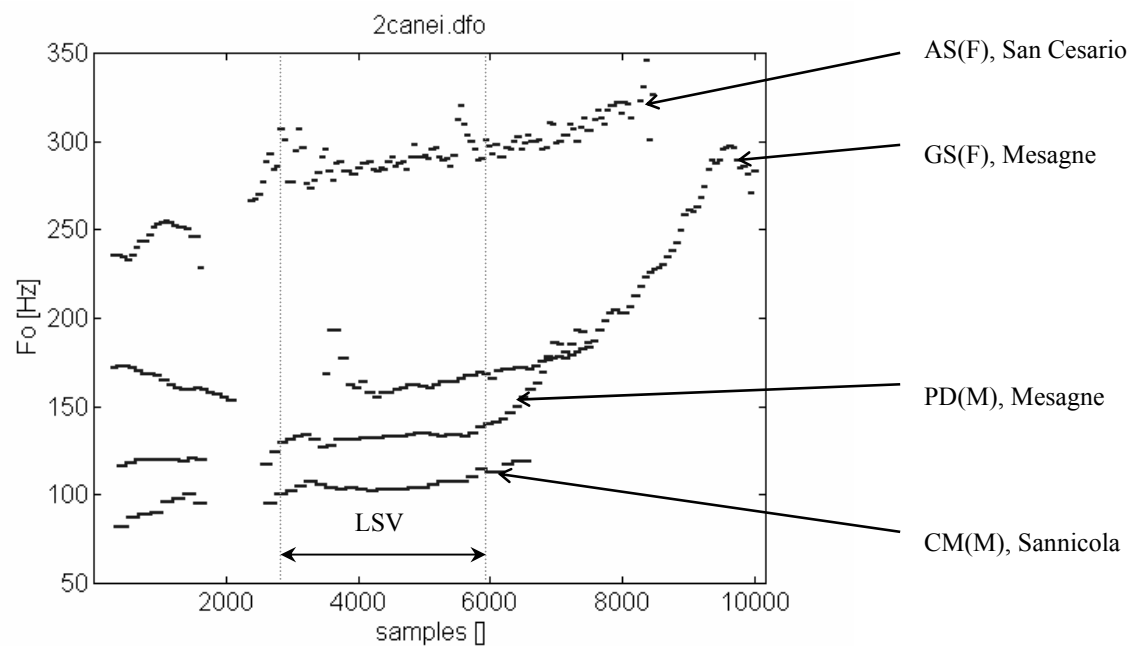
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a.



b.

FIGURE 2. Examples of unmarked intonation pattern for yes-no questions found in the two main prosodic subsystems of Sallentinian. Pitch contours (for 7 speakers (male, M, and female, F) of different places) for the simple question: *nu cane?* ("a dog?") **a.** Curves of speakers showing final rising-falling contours (increase in  $F_0$  especially on the last stressed vowel, LSV): southernmost area; **b.** Curves of speakers showing final flat-rising contours (increase in  $F_0$  especially on the last *unstressed* vowel): northern area.

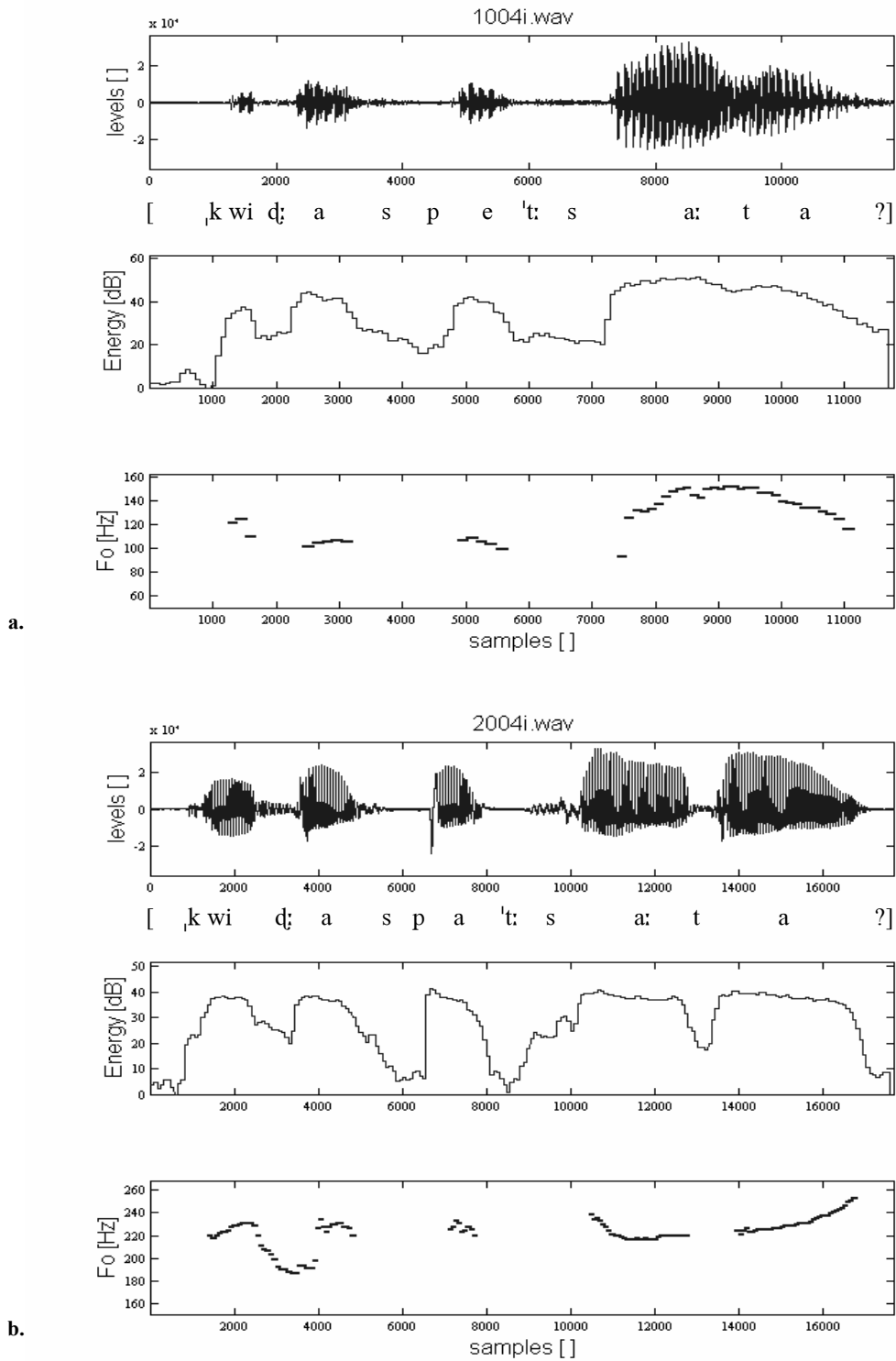


FIGURE 3. Examples of unmarked intonation pattern for yes-no questions recorded from spontaneous speech. Pitch contours for the questions *quidda spezzata?* / *quidda spazzata?* ("the broken one [f.]?") uttered by: **a.** a male speaker from Parabita (FC28, southern variety) and **b.** a female speaker from Sannicola (FM27, mid-northern variety).

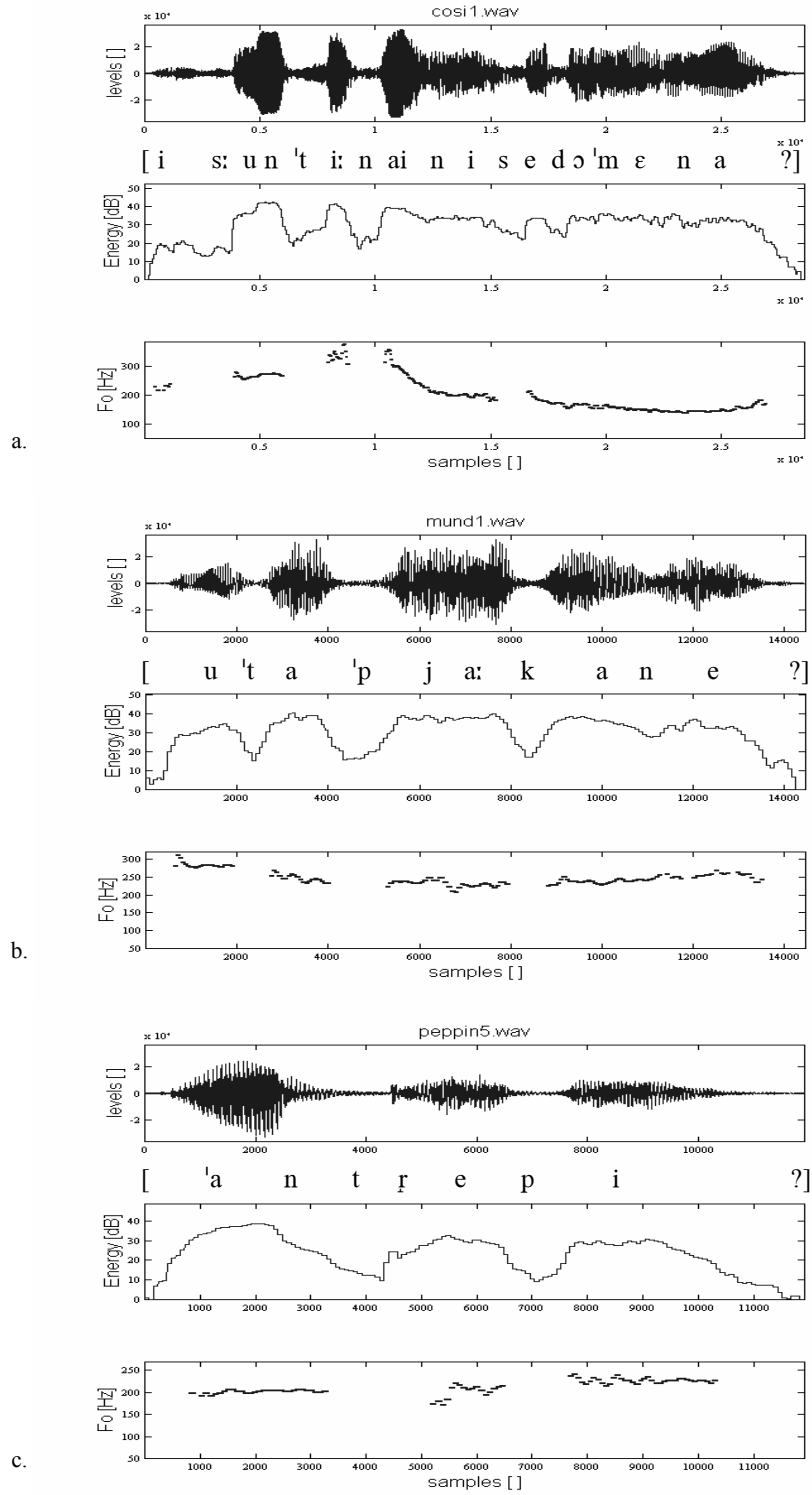


FIGURE 4. Waveform, loudness and pitch curves for three spontaneous sentences in Griko uttered by three female speakers from Calimera: **a.** CV63, question: *i Ssuntina in ise domèna?* ("did you see Assuntina?"); **b.** MD59, question: *u ta piàkane?* ("they've taken them to him?"), and **c.** PA69, question-exclamation: *àntrepi?!* ("men?!").