

# Between Two Languages: The Linguistic Repertoire of Italian Immigrants in Flanders

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## 1 Introduction

This paper is part of a larger, ongoing PhD-project carried out at the K.U.Leuven in Belgium. The project investigates the linguistic effect of intensive bilingualism on Italian as a subordinate language for two generations of Italian-Dutch bilinguals who reside in Limburg, the easternmost region of Flanders, Belgium. The study examines language contact phenomena (language variation and language change) and specific speech patterns and the main purpose is to determine whether different types of grammatical phenomena (morphological, syntactic and lexical) in the speech of bilinguals are affected by language contact in the same way. It also seeks to determine whether the identified changes can be explained on the basis of the processes that are recognized in the literature (Muysken 2001; Silva-Corvalán 1994; Van Coetsem 1995) as characteristic of language contact, namely *simplification* and *transfer*. Finally, the project verifies in which way these features correlate with social factors.

Until now very few studies on ‘migrant Italian’ in Europe have been carried out up, and most of them have focused on language attrition of the first generation. As far as concerns the Italian language in Belgium, most of the studies on second generation Italians in Flanders concern language behaviour, as eg. language shift (Jaspaert & Kroon 1991) or school problems of children of migrant workers (Jacqmain 1978a; 1978b; 1979). For the second<sup>1</sup> and third generation Italians, which constitute the group we have opted for, the concept of *language loss* is composite. In fact, the language of these two generations is the result of a series of phenomena that characterize linguistic evolution in emigrant communities and that can be classified under the general denominator of *language loss*.

A first process is the *language attrition* of the first generation Italians, due to migration and the social distance from the community of native speakers. Furthermore, a large number of first generation Italians did not speak standard Italian when they immigrated to Belgium, they all spoke their own regional variant. The language they developed by talking with other Italians coming from other regions of Italy was a sort of ‘lingua franca’, often called *Italiano popolare* (Berruto 1983; Lepschy 1983; 1989a; 1989b; 1989c), to which we will return later in this paper. It is this language that was then passed on to the next generations.

The second process that determined the language of the next generations is *language shift*. Studies on language shift among Italians in Flanders showed that Italian is not used anymore, only in family contexts, i.e. in the presence of grandparents or other first generation Italians that most of the time do not speak Dutch (Jaspaert & Kroon 1991). The informants who collaborated in my fieldwork (cfr. *infra*) firmly expressed that they would spontaneously start a conversation in Dutch, rather than in Italian. Although they continue to speak it and although they make efforts to maintain it, for instance by planning frequent holidays in Italy, watching news on Italian television channels and buying Italian journals or magazines, more and more second --and obviously third--generation Italians speak mainly Dutch in every day life, even if they live in a community with many Italians. Dutch has clearly become the dominant language and will continue to influence the language of future generations.

As a direct consequence of the previous processes, the third process that defines the language of our target group is the so-called *incomplete language acquisition* (Jaspaert & Kroon 1986), due to the

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<sup>1</sup> The first steps towards an analysis of language patterns of the second generation Italians in Flanders can be found in Vanvolsem et al. 1991.

two previous phenomena. Children of Italian immigrants grew up in a twofold situation: they needed to develop and use the language and culture of the host community and at the same time they are --or were-- constrained to develop and use their native language and culture within the very restricted native community (that had already been exposed to attrition) and in a foreign environment. So, while they were born and while they were growing up in Belgium (which, as a matter of fact, for them cannot be called 'host country' anymore) they have no relevant contact with the community of provenance whose language they also have or try to master. They learned Italian exclusively inside the family. Major part of the children of Italian migrants attended special, weekly two-hour courses in Italian language and culture which were organized by the Italian consulate. These courses unfortunately often did not bring in very good results because they are 'after school' courses and their organization is not always efficient from the didactic point of view<sup>2</sup>.

The emphasis of our investigation lies on the latter of the three processes, viz. the question of 'incomplete language acquisition' among second and third generation immigrants. Hence, the bottom line is not the 'forgotten language' of the Italians who were born in Italy and emigrated to Flanders, but rather the language 'acquired' by people who are born in Belgium and who try to maintain ties with their roots.

Therefore, instead of using the concept 'language attrition' or 'language loss', we prefer to use 'language change' and 'language variation' as a result of language contact. We will thus concentrate in the first place on the 'acquisition' of another variety of Italian - of an 'emigrant language' as Gonzo & Saltarelli (1983) put it. The phenomena of language change that are observed in the Italian speech of the second and third generation may be defined on the basis of two processes. The first process is simplification. This process can lead to the deletion and omission of grammatical forms but also to rule generalization. The second process is transfer. By 'transfer' we mean 'the incorporation of language features from one language to another'.

The outline of this paper is as follows. First, I will introduce the concepts on which the investigation is based; after that I will sketch the socio-historical background of the Italians in Flanders and I will present the fieldwork approach I have opted for. Finally I will describe and illustrate the linguistic features that characterize the speech of the informants. It should be noticed that since the investigation on which this paper is based is unfinished, the analysis is inevitably sketchy (especially in the sociological part), and the findings should be approached with some amount of caution.

## 2 Approach

As was pointed out in the first paragraphs, this research has as its starting point the idea of the 'acquisition' of a language variant that has changed under influence of attrition (in the simple sense of 'forgetting') and of transfer from another, more dominant language. The most important factor, from which the whole process of language change starts, is the restriction in use of the Italian language and the shift to the local, Dutch language.

The approach of the current research follows first the idea of Andersen (1983), who defends 'the posited relationship between processes that account for the nature of pidgin (...) languages and equivalent processes in language acquisition' (id.: 5) and secondly as has been done by Gonzo and Saltarelli (1983; see also Berruto 1991) the idea that the interpretation of pidginization and language acquisition can be extended beyond the domain of second language acquisition and thus be applied to the domain of emigrant languages. There are several reasons to assume that the 'incomplete language acquisition' of the second and third generation Italians in Flanders amounts to what Gonzo and Saltarelli (1983) have indicated as the 'pidgin' stage in the development of migrant languages.

According to Gonzo and Saltarelli (id.) the 'pidgin stage' is the second phase of the evolution that starts with a standard stage, followed by a first stage of 'fading', a stage of 'pidgin' and finally of

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<sup>2</sup> Since the 1980s schools started with a 'bicultural' project, which consists of courses in the 'mother tongue' of the children of diverse ethnic origin during the normal school hours. During these hours Belgian children follow the same lessons, in Dutch, but they may also join one of the Italian, Turkish, Spanish or Arabic classes. This method seems to have better results because it does not overcharge young children after school and it stimulates the interculturality in schools with many different nationalities.

'fragment'. The features that principally determine the three succeeding phases in the evolution of migrant languages are exactly 'simplification' and 'transfer'. According to the definitions of Gonzo and Saltarelli (id.), the pidgin stage characterizes only the second generation, whereas the traits of the third generation Italians point toward a 'fragment' stage, which differs from the previous stage for the increase of simplification and transfer features.

Although the third generation tend to speak less fluently than their parents, for which the main reason is a reduced contact with native Italians (in this case the first generation speakers or speakers that lives in their native community), it is my point of view that the language of the third generation in Flanders has not yet developed to a 'fragmentated' Italian, because their parents, second generation immigrants, continue to encourage their children to learn and speak Italian.

Both the motivations and the formal characteristics have led us to create a link between language acquisition (be it in migration settings) and pidginization. Factors playing a role in the acquisitional setting of pidgins are also at work in established immigrant communities. The different sources Andersen (1983: 26-28) gives for pidginization can thus be retrieved in our context:

(a) Physical and social distance:

In the same way, physical and social distance from the native community are responsible for the restricted language input, the lack of 'native' models and the little amount of interaction with speakers of 'standard' Italian.

(b) Cognitive constraints on inferring structure from the input:

When there is social distance and hence lack of an adequate input, a situation comes in of strong constraints on remembering and producing the transmitted language and communication in the target language becomes infrequent, because the speaker is conscious of his limits.

(c) Limiting the function of language to communication:

Both pidgins and 'emigrant languages' occur because the language in question is restricted to the communication of only strictly denotative information (talking with grandparents, speaking Italian during holidays, ...) and is almost never used for more expressive functions.

(d) Heterogeneous non-standard input:

The major input that the two studied generations receive is indeed very heterogeneous. Firstly because the first generation consists of people who left Italy for economic reasons and who had generally very limited school experience. Secondly they came from very different regions in Italy and their Italian is therefore marked by regional features. The common language that the immigrated Italians created in order to communicate with each other, is thus, like we already called it, a kind of 'lingua franca': a popular, spoken variant of Italian. This variety of Italian has become a shared, common and 'new' normative language, hence a new standard language which constitutes the input for others who are almost completely dependent of the language that is being 'transmitted' and who will further 'attrite' the already 'pidginized' input and pass it on to others in their communication with friends or their children.

As has already been suggested, the formal characteristics of the contact variety are twofold and rely on two types of processes, an internal and external development. With respect to the internal changes, the language of the informants immediately gives the impression of being 'simpler', less fluent and stylistically less varied, which is for the greater part the outcome of the transmitted variant of Italian, spoken by the first generation. In the next paragraphs we will show some salient properties of morphosyntactic and lexical simplification in the repertoire of our informants. These characteristics recall those of 'italiano popolare', which has very often been compared to 'migrant Italian' (Bettoni 1991; 1993; Berruto 1983a; 1983b, Montanari et al. 1996; Rovere 1977). The 'italiano popolare' is a spoken variety of Italian, with many deviant forms used by Italians of lower classes with a lower degree of instruction, "an imperfect Italian spoken by non-educated persons" (Bruni 1984: 205; see also Berruto 1983; Lepschy 1983; 1989a; 1989b; 1989c).

From the point of view of external change it has already been remarked that the variety of Italian spoken by our target group is more than just a reduced language. It is impossible not to take into account the presence of Dutch, the language in which the informants express themselves much more fluently than in Italian, as they all confirm. As pointed out by Muysken (2000), interference takes place in three different forms: (1) lexical borrowing eventually leading to syntactic borrowing, (2) calquing and imitating of prestige patterns, and (3) gradual convergence due to prolonged coexistence. Above all the two first processes characterize the transfer phenomena of the informants in my investigation.

The third one, that suggests convergence between two grammars, will hardly occur, since the shifting to Dutch started very early, and yet from the second generation on, Italian was clearly substrate.

To characterize the evolution of the Italian language among the second and third generation Italians in Flanders, for two reasons I prefer to use the term 'contact variety' instead of 'pidgin'. First of all, the investigations concern both second and third generation and it is not clear yet whether the language of the third generation can be defined by the same 'pidginization' phase as can be the second generation. Secondly, the question might raise whether 'pidgin' constituted really the best term for the language spoken in Flanders. Since the object of the entire project is the study of a new variant of Italian, spoken in Flanders and passed to the next generations, the concept of 'contact variety' seems more appropriate.

### 3 History of the speech community<sup>3</sup>

The Italian migration to Belgium links up with the emergence of the coalmines and should therefore be considered as an 'economic' migration. Three different waves of migration can be distinguished: before WW II, right after WW II and in the 1970s.

Since the Walloon<sup>4</sup> mine areas suffered from a lack of labourers after WW I, Belgian authorities were looking for international mineworkers, mainly from Poland and the Czech Republic, but also from France and Italy. The first Italian migrants came to Belgium between 1922 and 1930 and settled predominantly in the French-speaking Walloon area.

In 1945, the annual production of pit-coal decreased to 16 million tons (in 1939 30 million ton was produced). This decline was a direct consequence of the strong decrease of employees in this sector. While in 1940 some 130.000 worked in the mining business, after WW II the total number of mineworkers was hardly 90.000.

In spite of improved work conditions and salaries, the recruitment of mineworkers continued to decrease. So, the Belgian state decided to revert to an international approach, like they had already done before WW II: the recruitment of foreign workers. Contacts were made with the Italian authorities, which eventually lead to the signature of a protocol between Belgium and Italy in June 1946.

This protocol guaranteed the sending of 50.0000 Italian workers to the Belgian mines in exchange for 200 kilograms of pit-coal for each mineworker and for each day, which Italy had to pay at full price. The initial demand was rapidly surpassed and chain emigration started: between 1946 and 1948 more than 65000 Italians arrived in Belgium and they were sent to the five Belgian pit-coal basins (Limburg, Liège, Charleroi, Mons and in the center).

Unfortunately, mine work brought about numerous accidents and after 1956 Italy suspended emigration in Belgium. At this moment, new treaties were signed with nations like Spain, Greece, Morocco, Turkey, Tunisia and Algeria.

After pit-coal crisis, Italian immigrants nevertheless stayed on in Belgium and found a job in other economic sectors, like factories, transports or in building trade. In Limburg, the province where I do my research, the opening of a gigantic Ford factory in the early seventies gave rise to a new wave of immigration from Italy, though not as large-scale as the one after WW II. The Italians who immigrated during that period mostly came from the southern part of Italy.

The Italians who migrated to Belgium, generally intended to return to Italy after a few years (when they had saved enough money); only a handful returned. The Italian men, who first came alone, let their women and children join them and decided to continue working in Belgium.

The fact that Italians in Limburg were accommodated in concentrated areas, like the ones we are studying, had as a result that the first generation scarcely learned the Dutch language<sup>5</sup>. In these

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<sup>3</sup> For detailed information about the history of Italian migration in Belgium, cfr. Franciosi 1996; Perrin & Poulain 2002; Martinello & Rea s.d.; Sartori 1962.

<sup>4</sup> Wallonia is the French speaking part of Belgium.

<sup>5</sup> The situation in the Walloon area was very different: Italians who settled there immediately learned French, by which the shift process started much more early among the Italians living in the French speaking area where even first generation Italians learned rather quickly to speak French. In the first place the similarities between French and Italian played an important role: testimonies proved that Italians did not feel so helpless in approaching French

neighborhoods, native Belgian merchants acquired a few words of Italian, just enough to communicate and do business. In the mines, the common language was French<sup>6</sup>, mingled with some Italian words (Belgian mineworkers as well made efforts to adapt) and sign-language. According to first-generation immigrants reports, this language was a sort of jargon, which no outsider would understand.

However, the second generations of immigrants in Flanders shifted very rapidly to Dutch, even if their specific demographic situation did not stimulate it. In fact, Italians are the largest non-Dutch speaking community in Belgium and they tend to live close to one another in relatively dense concentrations --which was evidently promoted by the authorities when they located all of them together in the mine regions. Furthermore, 80% of the Italian children of the second generation attended the voluntary classes in Italian culture and language (third and fourth generation immigrants, it must be observed, are less prone to follow these courses).

According to the questionnaires the informants (cfr. *infra*) filled out, the second generation (adults) and the third generation (adolescents) use Dutch in everyday life, both in the family domain and within their Italian peer group, whereas the first generation continues to use Italian or their original Italian dialect. Only if family members are unable to speak Dutch they will use Italian, or sometimes the Italian dialect of the region of provenance. The questionnaires indicate also that the younger Italians (who are mostly of third generation) are most of all shifting to Dutch. Although no one of the third generation informants uses Dutch when speaking to their grandparents, they tend however to speak less Italian than the second generation does, to the extent that they will rarely speak Italian even with their parents, uncles or aunts. Given this rapid decrease of number of speakers and domains of use, Italian as a contact language, is evidently subjected to changes in the linguistic structures, which will be pointed out in the following paragraphs.

## 4 Fieldwork

### 4.1 *The informants*

The data for this study were collected in two specific communities in the eastern part of Flanders: Genk (Zwartberg-Waterschei) and Heusden-Zolder (Lindeman). These two areas were chosen because they represent two different types of 'societies' of Italians. Zwartberg and Waterschei are two adjacent garden suburbs<sup>7</sup>, called "cités". They were built before WW I, by order of the directors of the mines, around the mine territories and were meant to house the mineworkers. Italian families settled there after WW II, when most of them decided to stay in Belgium with their families. Until the 1970s, there were almost exclusively Italians and these quarters constituted very closed Italian communities. Afterwards many other ethnic groups settled there (Moroccans, Turks, Greeks, ...). Lindeman is the same type of garden suburb, built for the same reasons, but for mineworkers who worked in the mine of Heusden-Zolder. Lindeman is very small and hence it took longer before the Italian community there lived with other ethnic groups, which makes this community different from that of Zwartberg-Waterschei.

Compared to the Italian population living in the quarters of Zwartberg-Waterschei the Italians in Lindeman are more interconnected, meet each other every day in the familiar Italian bar, the only one in this small neighborhood. The latter group uses the Italian language much more in their every day

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speaking people. Therefore, they had less problems with speaking the host language than their compatriots in Limburg. Secondly, the French speaking Belgians did not care to learn the languages of the new immigrants themselves. '*Mah... il francese è un pò come l'italiano, è una lingua latina, non c'è stato problema per impararlo*' (Giuseppe Zappacosta, in Franciosi 1996: 243): 'Ahm..., French is more like Italian, it's a Latin language, there were no problems to learn it'.

*'Nel Limburgo i negozianti della zona avevano però imparato l'italiano. Io conosco una commerciante belga di lì che ha imparato il dialetto siciliano, leccese, pugliese pur di vendere*' (Rocco Lamonarca, in Franciosi 1996: 244): 'In Limburg the local merchants had learned Italian. I even know a Belgian merchant woman who has learned the dialect of Sicily, Lecce and Puglia, so that she would sell better'.

<sup>6</sup> It has already been noted that the engineers spoke French with the foreign workers and used sign-language. Those who had come earlier to Belgium (and thus were supposed to understand the engineers) often were brought in as translators.

<sup>7</sup> Since they are so close to each other and the boundaries between the two neighborhoods are not very clear, I have decided to take both communities together.

conversations, because in this small area the first generation is still implicated in the activities of every day life.

The informants have been selected on the basis of the following criteria:

- 1) They have to be born in Belgium, from two Italian parents (born either in Belgium or in Italy)
- 2) They are between 18 and 50 years
- 3) They live in one of the two communities mentioned: Zwartberg-Waterschei or Lindeman

The whole group consists of 48 informants<sup>8</sup>, structured along a geographic dimension (Heusden vs. Genk), sex dimension (males vs. females), and a generation dimension (2<sup>nd</sup> vs. 3<sup>rd</sup> generation). As far as the latter dimension is concerned, we consider as the second generation those immigrants whose parents are both first generation immigrants (i.e. came to Belgium as adults), whereas third generation immigrants have at least one parent that was born in Belgium.

## 4.2 *Data collection and corpus*

Since we investigate the relationship between the speech patterns of the informants and their sociolinguistic background, our fieldwork is carried out in two phases.

During the first, the subjects of the present investigation were contacted through a number of local Italian clubs and organizations in the cities of Genk and Heusden-Zolder. All potential candidates were strictly selected on the base of the mentioned criteria and contacted first by letter, in which the researcher introduced herself, explained the main purpose of the investigation and the duration of the questionnaires and the interviews. After approximately two weeks, these persons were contacted by telephone.

Those who were willing to cooperate immediately received the questionnaires. Following the fieldwork approach of Hulsen (2000; 2001) two types of questionnaires were used. The first focused on language use in different domains at home and beyond, as well as the role of Italian culture and language for the informant -- made operational in the amount of contact with Italian speakers, the frequency of visits to Italy, etc. ... . In addition, all the relevant speaker characteristics were recorded for each participant (such as age, education, profession, nationality and language background of their partner; ...). The second questionnaire is used to comprehend the social network of the informant, in order to be able to investigate the language use and language change at intergenerational and intragenerational level and in different settings (family, school, work, friends, ...). In this way, we get a clear idea how frequent the interviewed person speaks Italian.

The linguistic data were collected by means of various types of recorded interviews with the informants. The goal is to collect a corpus of spontaneous and semi-spontaneous spoken Italian, in order to analyze the speech patterns present in the language of the second and third generation Italians. Two types of recordings were made. During the first part of the interview, the informants are questioned by the researcher about the role of Italy and the Italian language in his/her every day life, about the advantages or the disadvantages of being bilingual, of living and growing up with two languages. The aim is to encourage, as much as possible, non-elicited spontaneous speech on non-complex, comfortable topics (and thus to avoid the impression that the informant is “interviewed”).

The second instrument selected for the elicitation of data production is the wordless cartoon story *Frog Where are You?* (Mayer 1969). This picture book has been found to be appropriate for speakers of different languages and of all age groups, and has been widely used in language acquisition studies (Berman & Slobin 1994) and in language attrition studies (Kaufman 2001). The storytelling activity is a task that triggers data in a spontaneous way, and will not, therefore have a biasing impact on the speech production.

## 4.3 *Analytical framework*

In order to investigate the relation between sociological and linguistic features, a model of analysis with four sociological and two linguistic variables was developed. The former are drawn from the two

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<sup>8</sup> Since the investigation is still in progress, not all the informants have been interviewed at the time of writing. For this contribution, half of the total data have been collected. For any information about the selection of the group of informants, mail to: stefania.marzo@arts.kuleuven.ac.be

questionnaires: area (Zwartberg-Waterschei versus Heusden-Zolder), sex, generation (second versus third) and contact with Italians from the native community or with Italians belonging to a previous generation.

The linguistic variables deal with the ‘contact’ features in the speech of the informants. These patterns are restricted to the morphosyntactic level and they belong to the prior mentioned processes of language development in contact situations: the first group is related to simplification phenomena and the other to transfer phenomena. As we will see further on in this paper, the domain of morphosyntax cannot always be strictly separated from the lexical level. Consequently, we will also have to take the latter into account.

## 5 Linguistic analysis

In the remaining part of this paper, we will concentrate on the salient characteristics that can be observed in the language system of the two generations under investigation. The principal aim is to link these features to the information which has been provided in the previous paragraphs on Italian as a migrant language and thus understand whether, and then in which direction, Italian is changing in Flanders. We will also try to determine whether the different types of linguistic change follow the two principles which might be considered to be typical of languages learned in an emigrant setting, namely simplification and transfer.

### 5.1 Simplification

The first aspect that defines a particular emigrant language is a series of system internal features that can be classified under the coverterm *simplification*, which implies poorer lexical baggage, simplification of the surface structure (fewer elements and deletion of morphological information), derivational simplification and simplification of the underlying structure.

It should immediately be made clear that these tendencies can be traced back to those processes of linguistic simplification, analogical regularization and hypercorrection already found in *italiano popolare* in Italy (cfr. supra). In fact, qualitatively the speech of the second and third generations displays the same morpho-syntactic features as in *italiano popolare*, while quantitatively they tend to surpass them.

In addition, it needs to be stressed that the processes of simplification in migrant Italian and also in *italiano popolare* may be universal. In fact, various studies on simplified registers (Berruto 1983b; Ferguson 1971; Meisel 1977, 1983) have revealed that the different kinds of strategies are identical or at least very comparable and that they all follow a number of criteria for simplification of which the most important in this article are:

- 1 analytical paraphrases replace what are intuitively judged to be “complex” expressions
- 2 missing elements (articles, prepositions, copula/main verbs, personal pronouns)
- 3 inflectional endings on verbs, adjectives and nouns are deleted
- 4 complex sentences are very unusual (Meisel 1977)

In the corpus there are a series of features which have been already largely reported with regard to simplified Italian registers and thus also to *italiano popolare*. The morphological simplification in the Italian of the informants in particular affects the morphological markers of gender and number in articles, pronouns, nouns and adjectives.

A first process of simplification, and more specifically here, of analogy, is clearly evident in the loss of allomorphs (*i* versus *gli*) in the paradigm of the definite article. Only few second generation subjects use the article *gli* before vocals, *z* and *s-impura*:

- (1) *dei studenti, dei studi, dei sbagli, un sport, i errori*

A similar restructuring pertains to pronominal morphology, where the loss of the morphemes *loro* and *le* in favor of the masculine form *gli* occurs, causing a loss of gender and number marking. However, since this has already been thoroughly examined in studies on contemporary Italian (Berretta 1993, Berruto 1983a, 1985), we prefer not to elaborate on the subject further.

- (2) a. CM 391: *L'anno scorso quando mia mamma è andata alle Cinque Terre, Portovenere, gli avevo dato anche il mio libro che avevo*  
 b. 'Last year, when my mother went to Cinque Terre, Portovenere, I gave her also my book.'
- (3) a. CM 399: *... devi fare un paio di foto, un paio di foto alla Francesca, perchè qua eh gl'altri, quando gl'altri gli hanno, gli fanno delle foto vie+... viene diversa sulle foto, sulle fotografie.*  
 b. 'Because you have to take some pictures of Francesca, because here ... euhm ... the others, when other people take pictures of her (...) she looks different.'

Second, deletion of the article, especially the definite article, is very frequent, in prepositional phrases.

- (4) a. SA 287<sup>9</sup>: *come in sud.*  
 b. 'Like in the south'
- (5) a. PB 210: *Se mi trovo in "Cantina" che c'è \*calcio ...*  
 b. 'When I'm at the Cantina and there is football ...'
- (6) a. CM 27: *Prò ho lavorato a Ford e lì ...*  
 b. 'But I've worked at the Ford factory and there ...'
- (7) a. CM 94/95: *... quando sono andato a colloquio*  
 b. 'When I went to the interview'

Analogy also plays a part in the regularization of inflectional paradigms of adjectives, like in *le attività mia*. In *le associazioni belghi, i genitori miei*, ... The informants generally use the *i*-ending as marker of the noun as masculine plural, and mark the adjectival agreement accordingly. In *sono parole olandese, queste grande cose mondiale*, they analogically apply the feminine plural ending *-e* of the noun also to the adjective *olandese*, that has a plural form in *-i*.

Analytical paraphrases are mainly used in the formation of comparative expressions, for instance,

- (8) a. PB 180: *... Qui a Lindeman parliamo l'italiano più meglio che \*le parti di Beringen.*  
 b. 'Here at Lindeman people speak better Italian than at Beringen'
- (9) a. SdB 232: *Si, sì, perchè più prima l'avevo calabrese [dialetto], ...*  
 b. 'Yes, because, before, I had a Calabrian dialect, ...'

As far as verbal morphology is concerned, a particular feature shows up in the stories of the informant: the use of the past tenses. Before informants start telling the 'Frog story', the researcher asks them to begin with *C'era una volta* ('Once upon a time') and to continue the whole story in the past tense, which normally, for a story, has to be the simple past tense, the *passato remoto*. This causes a series of morphosyntactical problems. Firstly, very few subjects begin in the *passato remoto*, the others tell the events in the imperfect, because they clearly do not master the simple past. Because this incongruence is in fact more of a semantic nature, we will not deal with it in this paper.

Those who try to continue in the simple past, struggle to find the right form but most of them stumble and here again analogy plays an important role. So we find verb forms like *cadò* (< *cadde*) 'he felt', *lo mese* (< *mise*) 'he put', *accorgiò* (< *accorse*) 'he perceived', *corrò* (< *corse*) 'he ran', *vesse* (< *vide*) 'he saw', *visse* (< *vide*) 'he saw', *comincero* (< *cominciarono*) 'they started', ...

Another type of frequently recurring simplification is the collapse of the modal distinction with verbs with the indicative instead of the subjunctive mode, for example, LR *Penso che sentiva*, RM *spero che resta anche per loro così*, LG 135 *Non vuole che il papà lo sente*, ... Usually, the problem appears in the hypothetical phrase, where the informants tend to neutralize the complex structures by using two identical modes, viz. the imperfect indicative both in the main clause and the subordinate clause, for example

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<sup>9</sup> The conventions before each example indicate the first letter of first name and last name, followed by the line number of the feature or sentence in the corpus.

- (10) a. GA 95-96: *se andavamo alla scuola cattolica, dovevamo andare in bicicletta e mia mamma non era tranquilla.*  
 b. ‘If we would have gone to the catholic school, we would have gone by bike, and my mother would have been at ease.’

or the conditional mode,

- (11) a. GA 6-7: *se avrei fatto quel corso lì, avrei potuto ...*  
 b. ‘if I would have done that course, I would have had the possibility to’

## 5.2 *Transfer*

In the study of migrant languages like those of the second and third generation Italians, it would be wrong to omit the grammars of the two languages the learner has acquired or is trying to acquire. We certainly agree with Muysken’s statement about the ‘simultaneous access’ (Muysken 2000: 277) bilinguals have to the two languages they master, even if one is predominant.

‘The simultaneous presence of two languages in the presentation may be realized in different ways: (a) both languages are fully present; (b) any one module can be selected from either language, but not from both. The first option would resemble the idea of simultaneously available multiple trees proposed by Moyer (1992), the second is more like the ‘chamber orchestra’ suggested by Grosjean (p.c.), where different languages play different instruments, as it were, in the chamber orchestra of sentence production.’ (Muysken 2000: 262)

In the speech of the informants the overlap between Italian and Dutch is unmistakable: we clearly observed linguistic features from Dutch that were ‘incorporated’ into Italian. It is striking how subtly these features are integrated : very often the sentences are perfectly comprehensible and they just ‘sound’ different than a native Italian would express the same idea. It is only by confronting them with the Dutch version, that one sees the problem, which makes a comparative approach of crucial importance.

- (12) a. SA 219: ... *io mai ho avuto problemi, anche a scuola no* ... (instead of: *Io non ho mai avuto problemi, nemmeno a scuola*)  
 b. Dutch: Ik heb nooit problemen gehad, ook op school niet ...  
 c. ‘I’ve never had problems, not even at school’

According to the distinction Muysken (2000) has made (cf. supra), the changes we observed can be categorized in two groups:

- (1) lexical borrowing leading to syntactic borrowing,
- (2) calquing and imitating of prestige patterns

### 5.2.1 *Lexical borrowing leading to morphosyntactic borrowing*

Lexical borrowing often goes hand in hand with morphosyntactic borrowing and consequently, a restructuring of the morphosyntactic patterns. Sometimes the borrowing is limited to one element of the phrase, but very often a single borrowed feature can involve the structure of the whole sentence.

Prepositions appear to be particularly conducive to the investigation of transfer processes. Deviances in the use of prepositions are indeed by far the most recurring and their restructuring is expressed in substitutions, omissions and additions<sup>10</sup>.

Some examples:

- (13) a. LR 52: ... *l’inizio non è facile per \*convincerli \*per parlare con te l’italiano.* (instead of: *non è facile convincerli*)

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<sup>10</sup> It needs to be observed that prepositions can be difficultly elicited in specific tasks, as in the ‘Frog story’.

- b. In het begin is het niet gemakkelijk om hen te overtuigen (om) met jou Italiaans te spreken.  
 c. 'In the begin it is not easy to convince them to speak Italian'.
- (14) a. MtR 173: ...invece noi siamo più *preoccupati su quello* (instead of: *di*)  
 b. ... wij zijn meer ongerust over deze dingen ...  
 c. 'worried about'
- (15) a. PB 538: *andare alla banca* ... (instead of: *in*)  
 b. naar de bank gaan  
 c. 'go to the bank'

These substitutions are caused by the interference with the Dutch syntagm, as in LR 52, where the preposition *per* clearly expresses the notion of goal, comparable to the Dutch expression *overtuigen om iets te doen*. In the other cases, the preposition is simply copied from Dutch, for example, *andare alla banca* (naar de bank gaan), *preoccupati su* (je zorgen maken over), *cercare dietro sta rana* (zoeken achter de kikker)

Transfer from Dutch is also a common cause for deletions, as in the following sentences (although—as we have seen earlier—deletions can also be due to processes of internally induced simplification),

- (16) a. LR 43-44: *Ho cominciato a lavorare a Belgacom* (instead of: *lavorare alla Belgacom*)  
 b. Bij Belgacom  
 c. 'At Belgacom'
- (17) a. FdF 198: ... *e poi sono andato a Zolder* ... (instead of: *andato ad abitare*)  
 b. ... en dan ben ik ben gaan wonen in Zolder ...  
 c. '... and then I went living in Zolder ...'
- (18) a. LR 6: ... *è venuta mia nonna a Zolder* (instead of: *ad abitare*)  
 b. ... mijn oma is bij ons komen wonen  
 c. '... mijn grandmother came to live with us;'

More than once, the modeling on the basis of the Dutch sentence is not restricted to the preposition but involves the whole sentence,

- (19) a. LR 85: *Sì, doposcuola ho fatto \*uno o due anni.*  
 b. Nascholing heb ik één of twee jaar gedaan  
 c. 'I did after school courses for one or two years.'

Nevertheless, it needs to be stressed that, as we have already suggested, certain structures have to be attributed to merely imperfect acquisition of the grammatical system and hence a 'transmitted' language attrition. The prepositions that are substituted are generally the most common ones, namely *di, da, in, su, per e con*. These 'errors' originate from a sort of 'uncertainty' on the speakers' part about the choice of the preposition that is appropriate for the requested function and thus they reveal, in a sense, a partial lack of knowledge about the precise use of prepositions. Insecurity, often expressed through hesitations or repetitions and corrections, is indeed an important reason for ungrammaticality.

- (20) a. ED 72: *Solamente \*queste due ragioni qua non vado in Italia.*  
 b. 'Only for these two reasons I don't go in Italy.'
- (21) a. LR 132: *Poi si sentiva meglio \*esprimersi in italiano.*  
 b. 'I think he felt better expressing himself in Italian.'
- (22) a. FdF 158: ... *\* In modo di pensare ... nel modo\* come vivere ...*  
 b. '... in the way of thinking ... in the way of living ...'

An often recurring problem concerns the use of the Italian *più*. No one seems to master this construction and syntactic borrowings from Dutch are very similar.

- (23) a. LR 30: *Il più lungo che ci sono stato* (instead of: *Il periodo più lungo che ci sono stato*)  
 b. Het langst dat ik er ben geweest ...

- c. 'The longest period I've been there'
- (24) a. FdF 102 : *I più Italiani che ho incontrato ...* (instead of: *La maggior parte degli Italiani che ho incontrato*)  
 b. De meeste Italianen die ik tegenkom en tegen wie ik Italiaans spreek ...  
 c. 'Most of the Italian that I meet and to whom I speak Italian ...'

*Il più* or *I più*, in these sentences, is a translation of the Dutch 'het meest' ('the longest' or 'the most'), but cannot be used in this way in Italian. *Più* followed by an adjective expresses a superlative, but this syntagm cannot be used in an absolute way, in the sense of 'the longest period,' nor can it be used alone, in the sense of 'the most.'<sup>11</sup>

### 5.2.2 Calquing and imitating of prestige patterns

Calques and imitations of patterns contain a type of syntactic borrowing that is limited to the 'extended lexicon': idioms and set phrases. Very often the informants just translate Dutch expressions into Italian or sometimes use a locution into a normal sentence. Although these 'imitations' are syntactically and morphologically correct, they do not exist in Italian and would probably lead to problems in communication.

- (25) a. CM 566-567: *una cosa che non mi piace di tante donne italiane ... che hanno la bocca troppo grande!* (instead of: *parlare troppo, essere troppo loquaci*)  
 b. een grote mond hebben  
 c. 'to be too loquace'
- (26) a. CM 599: *avevo un pantalone normale, vestito, un pantalone vestito ...* (instead of: *un pantalone elegante*)  
 b. een geklede broek  
 c. 'elegant trousers'
- (27) a. FdF 53-54 : ... *ma alle cinque deve smettere perchè deve andare al pallone* (instead of: *andare a giocare a pallone*)  
 b. naar de voetbal gaan  
 c. 'to go to play football'
- (28) a. PB 460: ... *chi andava troppo lontano* (instead of: *esagerare, oltrepassare i limiti*)  
 b. wie te ver ging  
 c. 'to go out of bounds'

According to Muysken (2000), this is one of the most evident outcomes of the simultaneous access bilinguals have to the two languages.

'This type of calquing can be viewed in terms of the simultaneous access models and the frequent switching of idioms in bilingual use. It is only one step away from lexically embedding an idiom to translating it literally.' (Muysken 2000: 273)

### 5.3 Contact language: a variety

We are fully aware of the somewhat artificial distinction between the two processes of language change we just analyzed. The two intertwine in the speech production of the informants and it is exactly the combination of these two processes that results in what we called a 'contact variety.' The following sentence clearly demonstrates the complexity of the language of our informants, where transfer on the lexical and syntactic level correlate with a mode and tense simplification.

- (29) a. GSA 197: *Perché noi già \*due anni che siamo stati a Montesilvano e il tempo non era così come doveva essere.*

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<sup>11</sup> As was already mentioned with regard to the simplification process, *più* is also used in the construction of an analytical comparative.

- b. Want we zijn al twee jaar in Montesilvano geweest en het weer was niet zoals het had moeten zijn.
- c. ‘... Because it has been two years we are going to Montesilvano and the weather was not like it should have been’

This sentence is a clear calque of the Dutch *Want we zijn al twee jaar in Montesilvano geweest en het weer was niet zoals het had moeten zijn*, where the temporal complement is not introduced by a preposition and the first verb has to be in present perfect. Italian permits two possible constructions for this sentence, which are *Perché sono due anni che andiamo a Montesilvano (...)* or otherwise, with the preposition *da*, *Perché è già da due anni che andiamo a Montesilvano (...)*. The informant here mixes up the two possibilities, but the choice of the tense (present perfect instead of the present) is incorrent in any case.

The second part of the utterance is nothing more than a combination of lexical transfer and tense simplification. First *il tempo non era così come doveva essere*, is a literal translation of *het weer was niet zoals het had moeten zijn* (which does not exist in Italian), and secondly, the use of the imperfect instead of the past conditional is a clear example of tense simplification.<sup>12</sup>

The variety of Italian spoken by the second and third generation Italians in Flanders is clearly the product of a combination of the two language processes, simplification and transfer, and neither of them can be omitted. The simplified register, the ‘italiano popolare’, has been passed on to the second and third generation, but the transfer patterns will appear later, as soon as these people come into contact with Dutch more often.

## 6 Conclusion

Part of this contribution confirms what prior researches have already highlighted (Bettoni 1993; Coveri 1998; Haller 1996; Rovere 1977; Schmidt 1993), namely that the language of the immigrants appears to be a variety which is characterized by lexical reduction and fading of the flexional and derivational morphology and syntax. In short, a general tendency towards simplification (Berruto 1987). These previous studies referred especially to the language of first generation Italians.

However, in the present article another group of speakers was the focus of attention, viz. second and third generation speakers. This group does not merely speak a reduced Italian but the features we have just analyzed also display an ‘interfered’ Italian (Berruto 1987). The language variety of these two generations reflects the outcome of two types of contact-induced changes. With regard to simplification the corpus shows a restructuring of pronominal and verbal morphology, missing elements (articles, prepositions, ...), analytical paraphrases instead of complex expressions, a regularization of the inflectional paradigms of the adjectives and a predisposition to use indicative mode instead of subjunctive or conditional mode. As far as concerns the transfer features, the categories proposed by Muysken (2000), viz. lexical borrowing that leads to syntactic borrowing and imitation of specific patterns, are also found in the corpus. However, the distinction between the two transfer types appears to be rather rigid, since one sentence can cumulate different types of transfer and a simple loan translation can be accompanied by another, syntactic borrowing.

On the other hand, the two processes leading to what has been called ‘incomplete language learning’ appeared to be even more difficult to distinguish. Very often simplification and transfer patterns intertwine in one single sentence of the informant. Hence I have proposed to use the term ‘contact variety’ (cf. *infra* fig. 1), a term which covers both the internal evolution (simplification) and the external evolution towards a hybrid system (transfer).

The model of Gonzo and Saltarelli will be further used as a basis to comprehend and to give an overview of the progresses of Italian as an emigrant language. However, the term ‘contact variety’ is

<sup>12</sup> This translated expression recurs a few times in the speech of the informants; probably this type of expression has entered the vocabulary of the Italians in Flanders and it will be maintained because most of them speak Dutch now and will have no problem understanding it.

(30) CM 201-202: ... *la mia conoscenza del computer era poca, poco, sapevo utilizzare il computer, pero' non è quello che doveva è+..., dovev'essere.*

also preferred to ‘pidgin’, because the current research is not enough developed to prove the existence of a ‘pidgin’ language, for both second and third generation Italians in Flanders.

Figure 1 illustrates the perspectives for the next stages of this research project. What is important are the following questions. First, does the simplification process develop further from the second to the third generation and, second, since the shift to Dutch increases in the third generation, how do the transfer patterns develop (do they also increase?) from the second to the third generation? Finally it will be important to further analyze the relation between the two processes (simplification and transfer): are they distinct or do they interweave and does this “intertwinement” increase in the younger generations?

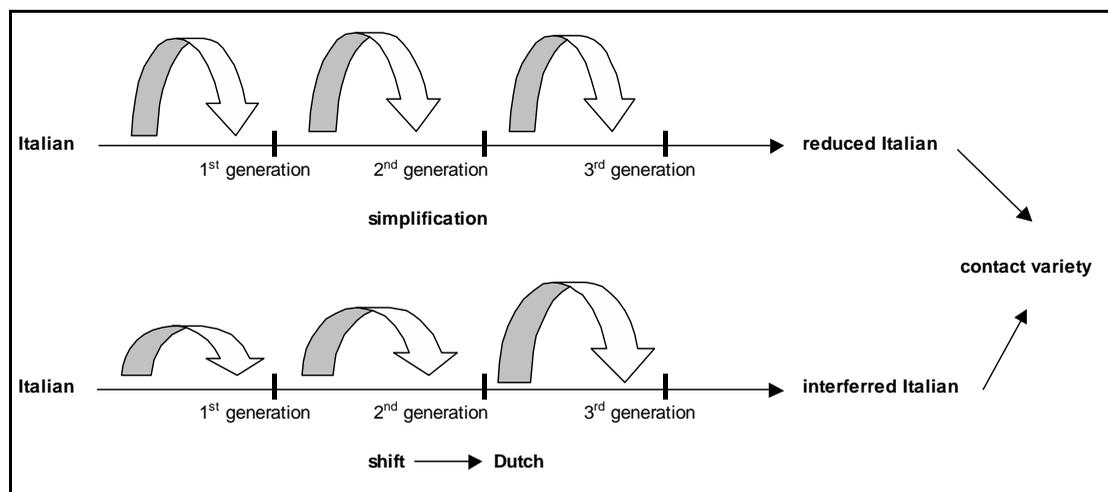


Fig. 1: The processes of language change due to a contact situation

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