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Linguistic identities of Italian in Italy and North America

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In the European linguistic landscape Italy stands out for its high stratification and rich diversity, with evolving identities, and with evolving relations between its language and dialects, alloglot languages, and a great number of immigrant tongues. While Italy boasts one of the historically most prestigious civilizations, its national language, unlike English, does not have the status of a language for international communication, and, unlike Spanish or Chinese, it does not span entire continents. Yet the language has spread across continents without an empire and armies, primarily through migrations of people who left the country at different times and with different purposes.

This unique situation has led to complex and variegated social and linguistic identities in Italy.¹ Regarding the latter, Beccaria's *Mia lingua italiana* (2011), Bruni's *Italia. Vita e avventure di un'idea* (2010), Dardano's *La lingua della nazione* (2011) and Trifone's *Storia linguistica dell'Italia disunita* (2010) were all published on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Italian unification. Some of these texts are polemical in nature, but all are concerned with the theme of identity, the question of unity versus disunity, the relations between the unitary language and the country's multilingual history. The articles in this issue of *Forum Italicum* explore the theme of linguistic identities further, highlighting questions of multilingualism within Italophone territories and in the diasporas. If De Mauro (1963) was able to compare the Italian peninsula to a 'selva di dialetti' when referring to the years of the country's unification, with most people speaking dialect exclusively or predominantly in everyday communication, and relatively few mastering standard Italian, the reverse is true today. Following an astounding transformation that has taken place in the course of the last 150 years, the Italian language has reached all social strata throughout the

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country, with slight regional differences in pronunciation and lexis. However, despite this massive change, Italy's dialects and regional traditions are still alive today, frequently as private languages of families and friends in a diglossic relationship with Italian and with widely disparate sociolinguistic patterns of use. In his essay, 'Centralizzazione e federalismo,' Bruni (2007) notes how the delicately balanced mutual relations between language and dialect illustrate the history of modern Italian as the story of freedom ('storia della libertà').² When trying to determine the identities of the Italian language across the globe, different forms of Italophony might be distinguished. These encompass the autochthonous languages and dialects of Italy and its contiguous Italian-speaking territories of Switzerland, with their complex sociolinguistic varieties, ranging from the standard to different forms of Italian and dialect according to region, speech context, generation, educational background and other variables. What stands out in the architecture of Italian in these contexts are its dynamically evolving plurilingual identities and relations between language and dialects. 'Italophony' also extends to the uses of Italian outside Italy, due to its very significant historical migrations. North America in particular boasts a large Italian heritage community, in which dialects of various forms and in contact with English have survived to the present day, despite pervasive attrition and language shift. In addition, a revival of Italophony is noted today outside Italy, owed to recent emigrations, the internet and other media, the teaching and acquisition of Italian as a foreign language, and to Italy's commercial presence in the world traveling through its language.

As a tribute to the 150th anniversary of the Italian unification, this issue of *Forum Italicum* explores the linguistic identities of contemporary Italian, including its multiple identities encountered in North America. It includes papers presented for this occasion during the fifth 'Settimana della Lingua Italiana nel Mondo' at a conference held at the Italian Cultural Institute in New York on 20 October 2011, on the topic 'The Identity of Italian in Italy and North America' (see Figure 1). The sponsorship of the conference by Prof. Riccardo Viale, Director of the Italian Cultural Institute, and the permission to publish the proceedings of the one-day meeting are gratefully acknowledged. We particularly thank Prof. Giovanni Desantis (Attaché for Cultural Affairs: Language and Literature) for offering to host a seminar with a linguistic theme, and for his very efficient organization of the conference. In addition to the papers presented at the conference, the editors invited contributions from prominent Italian linguists teaching in the USA, and a contribution by the conference chair has also been included.

The following is a brief overview of the contributions in this issue. In his theoretical paper, 'On language unity and disunity,' Mario Saltarelli (University of Southern California) discusses Italian linguistic identity, arguing for the interdependence of linguistic unity and disunity, with reference to Italy's *questione della lingua* and particularly to Dante's linguistic thought. The paper highlights the multiple identities of the language sciences and philosophies of language, raising the question of language planning, the future role of regional languages in the European Union and language rights.

5th *Settimana della Lingua Italiana nel Mondo*
 Istituto Italiano di Cultura, New York, USA
 20 October 2011, 3–6 pm

The Identity of Italian in Italy and North America

The conference will discuss the linguistic varieties present in Italy and the United States, and the relations and contact between a unified 'lingua media', Italian dialects, minority languages, and English. The 'lingua media', in which practically all Italians are now able to communicate, spread gradually throughout society, following a lengthy process of Italianization of a country made up largely of dialect speakers in the years of unification. Today, the dialects continue to be used with Italian by a majority of the population (diglossia), while English is becoming increasingly important in the Italian and European contexts. This plurilingual architecture is compared to the multiple identities of Italian in the USA, where it is present as a language of immigration, but also as a language of prestige in commercial enterprise.

Hermann Haller, City University of New York, Conference Chair, Introduction
 Mario Saltarelli, University of Southern California, 'Unity and Disunity in Linguistics'
 Lori Repetti, Stony Brook University, 'Italian Dialects in Italy Today'
 Marcel Danesi, University of Toronto, 'Italian and English in the Digital Age'
 Anna De Fina, Georgetown University, 'Language and Identities in U.S. Communities of Italian Origin'

Figure 1. Announcement for the 5th *Settimana della Lingua Italiana nel Mondo* conference.

Language rights are also discussed in the contribution by Thomas Cravens (University of Wisconsin), "'Italia linguistica" and the "European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages"'. Cravens highlights the ambiguity and arbitrariness of the designation of 'regional and minority' languages in the European Charter and in the 1999 Italian law to protect minority languages. The article illustrates the tenuous definitions of a 'regional language' and the complex definitions of 'dialect' in various national contexts.

The changing forms and roles of dialects and dialect varieties in contemporary Italy are addressed by Lori Repetti (Stony Brook University, SUNY) in her paper 'Where did all the dialects go? Aspects of the influence of Italian on dialects.' Drawing on her research on the grammar and prosody of Italian dialects, she shows how dialects are changing in their form, while their grammatical structure is still distinct enough from standard Italian to remain as a marker of identity.

New forms of identity and community are constructed within the context of computer-mediated communication (CMC), argues Marcel Danesi (University of Toronto). In his article 'Forging a linguistic identity in the age of the internet,' Danesi examines the changing use of Italian, spearheaded by the young.

Among the contributions addressing topics of Italian abroad, the article by Hermann Haller (Queens College and Graduate Center, CUNY) on 'Evolving linguistic identities among the Italian-American youth: Perceptions from linguistic autobiographies' is based on short linguistic biographies written by predominantly second-generation Italian-American students. Within a complex web of individual language experiences, the writers' perceptions offer insights into gradually changing linguistic behaviors and attitudes, from the affective attachment to grandparents' dialects to their later censure in the school environment, and eventually to a greater appreciation of multilingualism and non-standard varieties in American society.

With her article 'Language and identities in US communities of Italian origin', Anna De Fina (Georgetown University) shows how, in the face of significant language shift in communities of Italian heritage, Italian words and expressions (for example, in card games and storytelling) are used as symbols for identity construction. The article argues that this discourse strategy reflects a potential for the promotion of Italian language and culture.

Christina Tortora (College of Staten Island and Graduate Center, CUNY) offers an in-depth critical discussion of the Italian heritage argument used to promote Italian language and culture in the USA. Her article, 'Heritage nation v. heritage language: Towards a more nuanced rhetoric of "heritage" in Italian language pedagogy,' reviews the terms 'Italian' and 'dialect' as they are used disparately by linguists and by speakers in the Italian-American community, arguing for the integration of the discourse on dialects as part of the Italian studies curriculum in the USA.

Focusing on a survey of Italian identity practices conducted among a group of recent Italian immigrant families in North Carolina's industrial triangle made up of highly educated professionals and their Italian and US-born children, the article by Luciana Fellin (Duke University), 'The Italian new wave: Identity work and socialization practices in a community of new Italian immigrants in America,' shows how language use in this group differs significantly from those of earlier waves of Italian immigrants. This ethnographic paper documents strong Italian language and cultural loyalty among these recent arrivals.

Also included in this issue are reviews of four recently published books on Italian: two on the linguistic history of particular groups, and two detailing the linguistic characteristics of Tuscan varieties. Silvia Morgana's 2012 *Storia linguistica di Milano* (reviewed by Daniela D'Eugenio) and Massimo Vedovelli's 2011 collection of essays, *Storia linguistica dell'emigrazione italiana nel mondo* (reviewed by Emily Romanello), provide a unique perspective on the history of language use and the complex interplay between language and identity in Italy and abroad. Mary Stevens's *Phonetic Investigation into 'Raddoppiamento sintattico' in Sienese Italian* (2012) and Luigia Garrapa's *Vowel elision in Florentine Italian* (2011) (both reviewed by Giovanna Marotta) are meticulous studies of phonetic and morpho-phonological characteristics of spoken Tuscan.

We hope that the contributions to this edition of *Forum Italicum* will raise awareness of the complex sociolinguistic issues involved in language use and identity.

Notes

1. See, for example, Calcagno (2005), Galli Della Loggia (1998) and Romano (1997) for social identity, and Beccaria (2011), Bruni (2010), Dardano (2011) and Trifone (2010) for linguistic identity.
2. On the vitality of dialects, see Sobrero and Miglietta (2005). The use of dialects among the very young seems to be less encouraging (Ruffino, 2006).

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