

Italian heritage language communities: Multiple perspectives

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The study of Italian emigration, or Italian diaspora, has attracted growing interest among linguists over the last decades, and we can now count on a number of case studies describing the linguistic features of specific Italian communities abroad, as well as extensive overviews on the subject (Turchetta 2005, Vedovelli 2011, Di Salvo and Moreno 2017). However, most immigration settings involving communities of Italian origin are still poorly described, with data becoming more and more difficult to retrieve due to ongoing language shift towards the national language; currently, existing corpora are relatively small and there are even fewer resources available online. At the same time, not unlike other immigrant communities, research within this field needs to keep up with the constant evolution of migration flows over the years; in fact, changing mobilities create new multilingual societies and new heritage language scenarios that in most cases require an adaptation of the categories of analysis used for past migrations. Furthermore, while the previously mentioned research perspectives are a matter of concern in most cases of heritage language communities, there are specificities inherent in the Italian sociolinguistic scenario that characterize virtually all Italian communities abroad; indeed, as is now well-known, Italian has coexisted throughout history with Italo-romance dialects, i.e. sister languages that arose through regional differentiation of Latin during the Middle Ages (Auer 2005, Berruto 2005, 2012). Therefore, most Italian migrant communities have complex repertoires including one or more dialects and not necessarily including Standard Italian, which in Italy came to be used in ordinary spoken interactions only in the mid 20th century (see De Mauro 1963). This is also a crucial point where differences are expected to be found between older migrant communities and more recent ones: older migrations normally involved individuals who had dialect as their L1, while Italian appears to be the main resource in newer communities. As a consequence, there are different possible contact scenarios, not only determined by the languages spoken in the host country, but also related to the migrants' linguistic repertoires. Therefore, we identify two main directions in the study of Italian migrant communities: on the one hand, the study of language contact between the heritage language and the sociolinguistically dominant language; on the other hand, the study of contact occurring *within* the migrant community, between different dialects, different varieties of the same dialect, or different varieties of Italian.

This workshop aims to bring together the experiences of researchers working on Italian heritage communities, in order to achieve new theoretical advances that can make a lasting contribution to the discipline of heritage language studies, as well as to provide an in-depth exploration of the key features that are shared by most Italian heritage language communities. Below is a list of possible research topics that researchers are invited to consider while preparing their final submissions.

Language documentation of Italian communities abroad. We invite the submission of papers discussing ongoing or completed research on undescribed or poorly described Italian communities abroad, focusing on such linguistic aspects as linguistic repertoires, language contact with the national language, code-switching, language variation and/or change in the heritage language, and language shift; authors are also encouraged to discuss fieldwork methods and current issues related to data collection, transcription and annotation.

Italian and dialects in the heritage language scenario. Several Italian heritage language communities are dialect-speaking communities. As said, this is a salient feature of Italian communities, one that has very few parallels at least among speakers of other European national languages. Key topics related to this aspect of migrant communities include complex repertoires, patterns of language maintenance or language shift associated with specific dialects (and possibly diverging from the tendencies in which Standard Italian is involved), language contact between a dialect and the national language and patterns of variation and change. Furthermore, a relatively understudied topic is contact between different mutually intelligible dialects within the migration setting; this has been described in a few cases where most migrants come from the same region and might eventually lead to the formation of new varieties that are referred to in the literature as migrant koinés (Kerswill 2006)

Comparisons between old and new migrations. Changes in migration patterns may lead to changes in the dynamics observed within the heritage language communities, both in their external sociolinguistic aspects (e.g. structure of linguistic repertoires and language maintenance vs shift) and in their structural outcomes. For this reason, we encourage the submission of works aimed at comparing different heritage language scenarios involving Italian communities, for example highlighting the differences between older communities--such as Italians in Brazil, Argentina or the United States--with more recent ones.

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