

# Differential Object Marking in Italian: Evidence from Heritage Italian communities

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We compare patterns of use of Differential Object Marking in conversational regional Italian, combining variationist sociolinguistic and language contact approaches to examine variation and change in Heritage Italian. We compare four communities to query the role of the context of residence and the generation (since immigration) in this variable: Campanians in Italy and in Bedford, UK, and Calabrians in Italy and in Toronto, Canada. The Bedford community is more insular than the Toronto group. Given expected ensuing differences in the amount of Italian input to each group of heritage speakers, as well as their rate of use of the language, we hypothesized that there would be more change in the heritage variety spoken in Canada than in the UK.

Data was collected in the four communities following the standard sociolinguistic interview protocol (cf. Labov 1984) and analyzed in the comparative variationist framework. This analysis compares patterns of variation (*a* + Object vs bare Object) in samples of spontaneous conversations across the groups (*n*=509) using Mixed Effects Models. All generations retain conditioning of three factors (Object Referent, Verb Type, Dislocation) in animate object contexts and rarely overextended the marker to inanimate object contexts. The Campanian group (Homeland and Heritage) has a higher rate of DO-marking than the Calabrian group. However, Generation is not a predictor of the rate of Differential Object Marking use in either community. Therefore, we lack evidence that the amount of input, as well as the frequency of language use, influence the rate of change for this morphosyntactic variable.

**KEYWORDS:** comparative variationist sociolinguistics, Differential Object Marking, Heritage Italian, heritage language.

## 1. Introduction

The paper explores variable use of Differential Object Marking (DOM, defined in the next section), a feature of southern Italian varieties but not of standard Italian. It examines whether contact with English, a language which does not use DOM, influences Italian varieties in the migratory setting and whether the DOM system is retained. We investigate patterns in two communities where regional Italian and Italian dialects are used by heritage speakers.<sup>1</sup> The first dataset was gathered in Toronto, Canada, and in Calabria, Italy, for the

*Heritage Languages Variation and Change* (HLVC) project (Nagy 2009, 2011, 2015). The second dataset was collected in Bedford, UK, and in Campania, Italy, for the research project *Transnational Italian: the case of the Italian communities in the UK* (Di Salvo 2019). The two heritage communities are distinguished by distance from Italy and by their social network structures. The more insular British group lives closer to the homeland and has retained a higher rate of use of Italian than the more dispersed Canadian group, according to self-reported measures (discussed in §1.3). The contexts of the Canadian and British groups differ in the density of Italians in the overall population, local attitudes towards bilingualism and immigration policies. In general, Canada supports migrant integration, while the UK supports migrant assimilation. Therefore, considering expected differences in the amount of Italian input to heritage speakers, as well as their rate of use of the language, we hypothesized that there would be more change in the heritage variety spoken in Canada than in the UK.

Given the complexity of its behaviour, described in Sections 2 and 3, DOM presents a rich context in which to examine cross-variety and cross-generational variation and change. In this paper, we compare the effects of the linguistic factors (definiteness of the object, the type of verb and the syntactic structure of the sentence) on DOM usage in the Calabrian Italian spoken as a heritage language in Toronto and in the Campanian Italian spoken in Bedford. We hypothesize that both rates and constraint hierarchies governing DOM may vary according to external factors, such as the country of immigration – given the difference between the communities (discussed in Section 1.3).

Three questions are investigated through this combination of corpora: what effects do the linguistic predictors of DOM have (1.1)? How do the effects of the predictors of DOM change across generations of speakers (1.2)? Are there differences between the communities (1.3)?

### *1.1. Internal variation: What effects do the linguistic predictors of DOM have?*

First, what effects do the linguistic predictors of DOM have? And are these consistent between the two regional varieties (Campanian vs Calabrian)? We focus on parameters which have been reported to influence DOM in the homeland variety: type of object, type of verb, clausal position (see Section 2). We examine how they influence the DOM system, paying particular attention to those that differ between the Calabrian and Campanian varieties.

*1.2. Language change: How do the effects of the predictors of DOM change across generations of speakers?*

The lens of language attrition through which heritage languages are often considered would suggest that DOM might be lost due to its non-existence in the contact language (English). This is one of the possible outcomes underlined by Mardale & Karatsareas (2020) for those settings where a DOM language is in contact with a non-DOM language. However, the framework of language attrition may not be able to adequately interpret variation and change in heritage languages: previous studies on Heritage (Calabrian) Italian in Toronto, for example, gave evidence of the lack of attrition both in phonetics and in syntax and suggest a lack of influence from English. For phonetics, the study of Voice Onset Time (VOT) carried out by Nodari, Celata & Nagy (2019: 107) showed that VOT in Heritage Calabrian in Toronto is affected in the context of post-consonantal stops in unstressed syllables only (C.CV), i.e. the prototypical aspiration context for Calabrian varieties, but not in onset stops in stressed syllables, the prototypical aspiration context for English. So, on one hand, contact with English does not imply the generalization of aspiration to all unvoiced stops, but VOT in C.CV contexts reflects a rate change for the Calabrian sociophonetic variable across generations of heritage language speakers (Nodari, Celata & Nagy 2019: 107). Since work by Weinreich (1953), it has been claimed that morphosyntax is generally less influenced by language contact than phonetics and phonology are. Given this, we may infer that if the phonetics and phonology are not conditioned by attrition or language contact in a particular context, then the grammar should not be either. In fact, this expectation is supported in that, in the same corpus, we do not find any evidence of variation or change in the morphosyntactic variable of null subject presence (Nagy 2015). However, further heritage language (HL) studies are needed to test this and, in general, to see what happens to the grammar of a language used in a context where it not the dominant language. To this end, a variationist approach may contribute to understanding these dynamics in a variation and change perspective, that is, a perspective that considers multiple social factors in tandem with linguistic conditioning, rather than monofactorial analysis of rates of use of a particular structure. In the comparative variationist approach to the study of HL, comparison between the homeland and heritage variety may show whether the varieties share the same patterns of variation. Then, comparing the linguistic behaviour of first generation (Gen1) and following generations (Gen2, Gen3) can show how (or if) the language evolves in the heritage context. Including multiple factors in the last step can show whether this variation is due to social or acquisitional causes.

1.3. Social factors: Are there differences between the communities?

Our expectation was that the different social contexts of the two immigration groups would differently affect DOM in Toronto vs Bedford. In both places, the immigrants arrived as adults, with a low level of education and for the purpose of finding work. Yet, the two communities differ in that the UK community of Italians is more insular, while the Canadian community is more dispersed within the city. Data on ethnic orientation collected in the HLVC project and summarized in Nagy (2009, 2011) and Nagy *et al.* (2014) demonstrate that Italians in Toronto claim only moderate feelings of belonging to Italy. That is, on a scale from 0 (orientation toward Canada and English) to 2 (orientation toward Italy and Italian), scores for ethnic identity average around 1, as do scores for their language preferences and social network. These are quantified responses to open-ended questions from the orally administered Ethnic Orientation Questionnaire (<[ngn.artsci.utoronto.ca/pdf/HLVC/short\\_questionnaire\\_English.pdf](http://ngn.artsci.utoronto.ca/pdf/HLVC/short_questionnaire_English.pdf)>, Nagy *et al.* 2014).

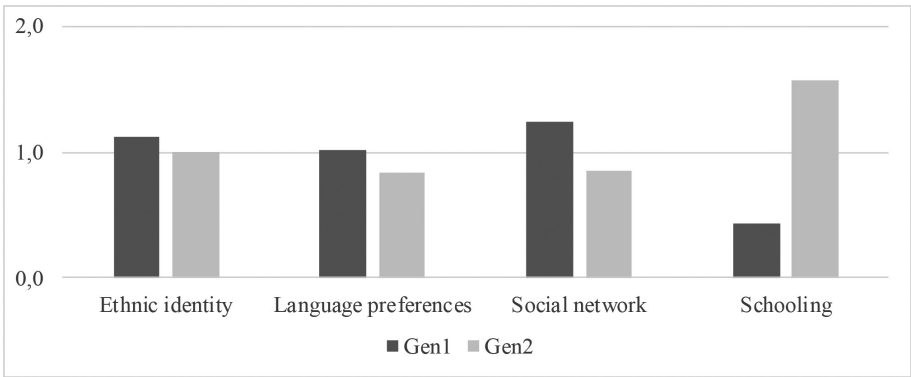
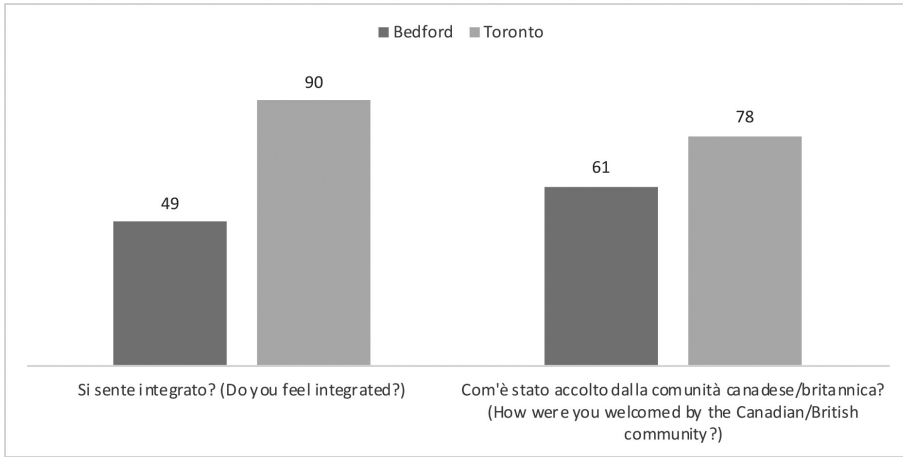


Figure 1. Ethnic orientation scores for the 16 Toronto Italians.

How does this compare to the speakers in the UK? Turchetta & Vedovelli (2018) show that first generation Italians in Toronto are generally able to speak English and have more contact with the host society than Italians in Bedford. Data collected with the same questionnaire in Toronto and in Bedford demonstrated that, in Bedford, 61% of the immigrants (Gen1) sampled declared feeling welcomed into British society and less than half the speakers involved in the research (49%) have connection with English people (Di Salvo 2012: 78). Responses to both questions indicate a higher degree of integration in Toronto (Turchetta & Vedovelli 2018).



**Figure 2.** Percentage of Italian immigrants who say ‘yes’ when asked if they feel integrated (left) and if they were welcomed (right), comparing responses from Toronto (n = 331) and Bedford (n = 150), adapted from Turchetta & Vedovelli (2018) and Di Salvo (2012).

Even the Gen2 and Gen3 speakers in the Bedford Italian community demonstrated a strong feeling of belonging to Italy, according to data in Guzzo (2007):

Sebbene cresciuti in Inghilterra, essi si definiscono più italiani che inglesi. Sorprendentemente, i membri di seconda generazione non si sentono inglesi mentre hanno un forte senso di “italianità” [...] Ancora più sorprendente è il fatto che il quadro non cambia molto nella terza generazione, con il 57,5% dei ragazzi e il 75% delle ragazze che dichiarano di sentirsi estremamente italiani secondo il questionario somministrato loro da Guzzo nel 2004. La loro identità etnica è italiana, piuttosto che britannica o inglese, ed è estremamente forte (Guzzo 2007: 131).

‘Even if they grew up in England, they define themselves as more Italian than English. Surprisingly, the members of the second generation do not feel English but rather have a strong sense of *italianità*. [...] Even more surprising is the lack of change for the third generation, with 57.5% of boys and 75% of girls saying that they feel extremely Italian according to the questionnaire administered by Guzzo in 2004. Their identity is Italian, more than British or English, and is extremely strong’ [our translation].

In Toronto, Turchetta and Vedovelli gave evidence that Gen2 and Gen3 feel more Italo-Canadian than Italian (Turchetta & Vedovelli 2018: 84).

Furthermore, there are differences in the proportion of Italians in the overall population in the two migration settings. In 2011, Toronto was 9% ethnically Italian, with half the Italians reporting Italian as their mother tongue (Statistics Canada 2012). Bedford was about 30% Italian during the 1950s and the 1960s (Colpi 1991, Guzzo & Gallo 2014, Guzzo 2014) but that percentage had dropped to <8% by the 2011 census and 1% of the population reported speaking Italian (Qpzm Localstats UK 2021). During the 1950s and the 1960s about 100,000 Italians moved to Bedford, making it the largest Italian community in Great Britain, with 42,261 members according to the 2001 Census (Guzzo 2007). Toronto has the fourth largest Italian population in the world (after São Paulo, Buenos Aires and New York City), and many of the ~450,000 Italian immigrants who came to Canada in the 1950s and 1960s settled in Toronto (Statistics Canada 2017, Ramirez 1989).

There are also differences between the communities regarding attitudes towards bilingualism and immigration policies. The countries follow different acculturation strategies (Berry 1998, p. 88): Canada favours INTEGRATION, in which people value both maintaining one's identity and maintaining relationships with the larger society; while in Britain SEGREGATION (Berry 2006) is the norm, migrant communities prefer maintaining their own identity, at the expense of relationships with the larger society. It could be argued that the multilingual and multicultural approach espoused by Canada's immigration policy encourage integration to the host society and Italian migrants and their descendants might consequently consider themselves a more integral part of the host society (Turchetta 2021). In contrast, the tendency to consider migrants as minorities and not as heritage speakers in the UK, discouraging their integration to the host society, may encourage migrants to feel differently with respect to the host society (Turchetta 2021). Furthermore, Canada's policy of multiculturalism symbolizes Canada's commitment to a society that not only tolerates linguistic and cultural diversity, but strives to preserve, develop and institutionalize it (Danesi, McLeod & Morris 1993). While the purpose of this policy (and its revision in 1988) is to encourage language maintenance, there is no legislation or funding to implement it. Thus, most heritage language education programs are run by local community groups (Cummins 2014). Even if heritage languages are not financially supported by the government, multiculturalism and multilingualism are tolerated in Canada. On the other hand, in the UK migrants are considered as a minority group and their multilingualism is less tolerated: they are strongly encouraged to assimilate to the host society. This is made abundantly clear in Brookes

& Wright's (2020) corpus analysis of recent press representations of non-native English-speaking migrants living in the UK.

Heritage languages are positively evaluated at a political level in Canada, while in Europe they are considered as minority languages that must be rejected in favour of the dominant language of the host society. Consequently, these languages received less support from an economic and political point of view. Regarding minority languages in the UK, Guzzo & Gallo (2014: 83) state:

The integration of such minorities into mainstream society depends on two main theories: firstly, when the same values of civic pluralism are shared, the maintenance of their languages and cultures is fostered by the State, and integration into mainstream society is made easier. However, the assimilation of ethnic ideas also occurs and allows a mainstream society takeover, eventually leading to a loss of the minorities' cultural and linguistic identities.

We query whether these differences between the two communities influence DOM distributional patterns.

## *2. DOM in homeland varieties*

This section provides an overview of the linguistic factors that have been claimed to influence Differential Object Marking (DOM) in Italian dialects and in Southern regional Italian. When analyzing spontaneously produced speech as data, it is essential to include these factors are essential in order to overcome differences in distributional patterns and accurately to ascertain grammatical differences between varieties. We review the factors implicated in the literature on DOM in Italian varieties.

We first note that DOM affects mainly Southern dialects and, through contact with them, southern Italy's regional varieties. Standard Italian is based on the Florentine dialect used in the literary work of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio (13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries). The term 'dialect' refers to the many varieties, which – just like the Italian language – originated from spoken Latin in different regions. According to previous studies (Vedovelli 2011), the repertoire of migrants varies across the migratory waves: for those who emigrated after the Second World War, dialect was the mother tongue, but migrants were also able to use a regional variety of Italian. The spoken data used in this paper includes conversations in Campanian/Calabrian Italian and in Campanian/Calabrian dialects – it is not possible to objectively distinguish utterances from each of these in the context of spontaneous speech.

### 2.1. Semantic features of the direct object

While DOM is not present in Standard Italian, it is found in all the Southern dialects of Italian.<sup>2</sup> In these dialects, objects that are [+animate], [+human], [+definite] can be introduced by the preposition *a* as in examples (1-3).

- (1) Ø     *aiutavano*     *a*     *noi*  
 (they) help.IPF.3PL     DOM     us  
 ‘They used to help us.’ (I1F73A, 13:03)<sup>3</sup>
- (2) *facevamo*     “*vedi*     *se*     *lo*     *puoi*     *convincere*     *tu*     *a*     *Nicola*.”  
 make.IPF.1PL     see.IMP.2SG     if     him     can.2SG     convince.INF     you.SG     DOM     Nicola  
 ‘We were like, “See if you can convince Nicola.”’ (I1F61A, 36:50)
- (3) *e*     *penso*     *che*     *aiuta*     *a*     *i*     *bambini*  
 and think.1SG     that     help.3SG     DOM     the.M.PL     children  
 ‘And I think that he helps children.’ (I2F44, 09:57)

Guardiano (2010) developed a scale that incorporates the features of animacy, humanness and definiteness, of ten types of nominal arguments distributed according to the likelihood of object marking (with a preposition) on items in each category, which we reproduce from Di Salvo & Nagy (2022), which includes a broader review of DOM.<sup>4</sup> Items nearer the top of this scale are more likely to carry DOM.

- (4) Scale of likelihood of DOM marking (from Guardiano 2010)
1. first and second person personal pronouns
  2. third person singular pronouns with human referent
  3. proper nouns (person or animal)
  4. kinship nouns preceded by an expression of possession
  5. third person pronouns with non-human animate referent
  6. common nouns of people
  7. common nouns of animals
  8. common nouns of objects
  9. mass nouns
  10. abstract nouns

However, within this hierarchy, there are differences in which factors are reported to trigger optional vs obligatory contexts for DOM, both among varieties and among reports for a single region. Although DOM has been the subject of many synchronic and diachronic studies, little large-scale empirical work is available for this feature of Italian varieties. The commonalities and divergences of these reports is discussed next, with attention to Calabrian and Campanian varieties, the source of the data examined in this paper.

DO-marking is expected when the direct object is specific and human, regardless of whether it is definite, while no DO-marking prepo-



sition is expected if the direct object is non-specific or inanimate. These generalizations are true in the majority of Italian dialects and regional Italian (see Manzini & Savoia 2005 for Italian dialects; Telmon 1993 for Southern varieties of regional Italian).<sup>5</sup> In Southern Italian and in most Southern Italian dialects, the prepositional object is mandatory with definite nominals such as first person pronouns (Loporcaro 2009: 131) or proper nouns, but is optional with [+human] common nouns, as in (3) (Guardiano 2010). Sicilian dialects are also reported to mark only human and definite objects (*ibid.*).

In most Calabrian and Lucanian (but not Campanian) dialects,<sup>6</sup> in contrast, DOM is possible with [+definite] and [+human] objects, but it is mandatory with 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronouns and with proper names and kinship names, while it is optional with other kinds of human and definite objects. Ledgeway (2018) notes that in these dialects, the use of the preposition is also possible with [–human], [–definite] and [–specific] objects.

Ledgeway *et al.* (2019) and Manzini & Savoia (2005) confirm the importance of the humanness, definiteness and specificity of objects in DOM but they highlight microvariation in Lucanian and Calabrian varieties: DOM is mandatory with 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronouns but exhibits microvariation in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person. They note that some Calabrian varieties, such as that spoken in Cosenza, may use the preposition *a* to mark [+/–human] and [+/–definite] objects (Ledgeway 2018), while some other dialects use DOM only for [+specific] objects, even if animate. In the Neapolitan dialect, it is possible to mark only [+definite] and [+human] objects, as in (5a), while it is not possible to use the preposition before [–human], even if [+definite], objects, as in (5b). In contrast, in some Calabrian dialects (5a) is possible, even if not mandatory (Ledgeway, Schifano & Silvestri 2019). For the Neapolitan dialect, Ledgeway, Schifano & Silvestri report the following examples (2019: 2) that have in common the cataphoric object pronoun at the left edge of the sentence (with the topicalized object after V):

- (5a) *o verette a Mario*  
 him/it.O saw.3SG DOM Mario  
 ‘I saw Mario.’
- (5b) *o verette o libro*  
 him/it.O saw.3SG the.M.SG book  
 ‘I saw the book.’

As we will see further in this paper, there is evidence of variation in terms of the type of objects and, particularly, the role of pragmatic and semantic parameters (Di Salvo 2017). Di Salvo & Nagy (2022) summa-

rize the features affecting DOM, based on the studies on Southern Italian dialects just discussed, see summary in Table 1.

TYPES OF OBJECTS	CAMPANIA, PUGLIA AND SICILIA	CALABRIA
[+ definite], [+ human], [+ /-specific]	+	+
[+ animate], [-human], [-specific]	-	+
[+ /-definite], [-animate], [+ /-human]	-	+
[+ specific] even [-animate]	-	+

**Table 1.** Prescriptively obligatory DOM contexts according to type of objects in Southern Italian dialects.

2.2. *Semantic features of the verb*

The type of verb and the word order also play a role in DOM. Previous studies have evidenced the importance of the diachrony of the verb since DOM appears most often with those verbs that exhibit oscillation between the dative and the accusative construction from as far back as Late Latin, such as *ascoltare* ‘to listen’, *audiri* ‘to hear’, *clamari* ‘to call’, *confortari* ‘to comfort’ (see Sornicola 1997, 1998 and Fiorentino 2003). With regard to Italian, Berretta (1989) points out that DOM occurs with psychological (Psych) verbs and with causative *fare* (‘do’/‘make’).

2.3. *Morphosyntactic features of the clause*

In terms of morphosyntax, Renzi (1988, see also Berretta 1989) demonstrates that DOM is more likely (although not obligatory) if the object consists of a deictic pronoun, as in (6a), is left-dislocated and consequently separated from the rest of the verb phrase as in (6b), or is referred to by an unstressed pronoun in the body of the phrase, as in (6c). These examples come from the data collected in Bedford with Campanian heritage speakers:

- (6a) (io)chiamo a lui ogni sera  
(I) call.1SG DOM him each evening  
‘I call him each evening.’
- (6b) a lui ho incontrato ieri  
DOM him have.1SG met.M.SG yesterday  
‘I met him yesterday.’

- (6c) *a me ha chiamato mamma*  
 DOM me have.3SG called.M.SG mum  
 'Mum called me.'

Although without supporting quantitative analysis, Leonetti (2008) claims that DOM more often occurs in structures with a marked order of the constituents, and in particular with left dislocation. However, the type of verb and the presence of left dislocation are not extensively addressed in the literature regarding DOM in Southern dialects.

### 3. DOM in heritage languages and in contact situations

Earlier studies of DOM in heritage languages have predominantly relied on experimental elicitation. These studies mainly examined Spanish in the US. The studies of first-generation adult immigrants highlighted a considerable tendency to omit the prepositional marker (in up to 50% of the possible contexts). There are, however, noteworthy differences in rates of DOM production, with an average incidence of 30% 'incorrect' omissions of the prepositional marker noted for heritage speakers (Montrul & Sanchez-Walker 2013; other surveys cited in Irizarri van Suchtelen 2016: 102). Divergence between homeland and heritage varieties has been attributed to incomplete acquisition (cf. Montrul & Bowles 2009: 381), properties of a bilingual variety (Di Venanzio *et al.* 2016) or to contact with DOM-less English (cf. Montrul & Bowles 2009: 368; Montrul & Sánchez-Walker 2013).

The issue of language contact has also been explored in Mardale & Karatsareas (2020) who adopted a contact approach to investigate DOM in heritage communities. Their approach considered situations where two languages are in contact in order to understand if influence from one language to the other is possible and if there are some patterns of language change, variation and acquisition. This approach contrasts two scenarios: in the first case, the contact situation is between two languages with different DOM systems; in this situation, they propose two possible language contact outputs:

- (7a) The two DOM languages influence each other reciprocally and both DOM systems undergo change.  
 (7b) Only one of the two DOM languages influences the other. The DOM system of the influencer language remains diachronically unchanged, whereas the DOM system of the influenced language undergoes change (Mardale & Karatsareas 2020: 3).

In the second scenario, language contact involves two languages but only one has DOM, as in our study. In both migratory settings, Italo-

Romance varieties with a DOM system are in contact with English, a DOM-less language. In this kind of asymmetric scenario, they propose two possible outputs:

- (8a) The DOM language influences the DOM-less language. As a result, the DOM-less language begins to exhibit DOM;
- (8b) The DOM-less language influences the DOM language. As a result, either the DOM system of the DOM languages is weakened or the DOM language loses DOM altogether (*ibid.*).

There are few studies of DOM in Heritage Italian. Di Salvo's (2017) survey of 50 native speakers of Campanian dialects resident in the city of Bedford (UK) evidences how DOM is present as it is in Italy, and, in doing so, reveals that there was no attrition in Gen1 migrants. Further studies of DOM in the Italian community in Bedford show the extension of the prepositional marker to contexts where, according to descriptions of spoken homeland Italian the preposition would not be expected, given the features of the object (Di Salvo 2017, 2019). A small number of similar non-canonical cases of DOM were found in Calabrian Italian spoken in Toronto, the only variationist study of DOM in Heritage Italian (Di Salvo & Nagy 2022). Furthermore, the lack of correspondence between rates of DOM use and speakers' reported ethnic orientation, social networks, education and language practices challenges a suggestion that speakers are doing identity work with this variable, confirming a trend reported with each previous variable examined in the Italian data from the HLVC Project. For (Calabrian) Italian in Toronto, there is evidence of speakers' stochastic sensitivity to a range of syntactic and semantic factors described in the theoretical literature.

#### 4. Methods

We compare models of the behaviour of DOM between the Homeland and Heritage speech samples and between the Campanian/Bedford and Calabrian/Toronto communities. The discussion of these factors contributes to our understanding of how variation and change operate in heritage language situations by contrasting a more insular to a more dispersed heritage-speaker community, allowing space for the effect of different rates of input, and/or different conditioning effects, in the heritage variety to emerge. We compare patterns of variation (use of DOM vs its omission, or, more explicitly, *a* + object vs bare object) in samples of spontaneous utterances from the four groups listed in (9), each represented by eight speakers.

(9) Groups compared in this paper

Bedford, UK (Di Salvo 2017)

homeland group in Campania, recorded 2015-2016

Campanian heritage group (Gen1, Gen2, Gen3), recorded 2009-2017

Toronto, Canada (Nagy 2009, 2011, 2015)

homeland group in Calabria, recorded 2013

Calabrian heritage group (Gen1, Gen2, Gen3), recorded 2009-2011

Our homeland speakers have always lived in Calabria or Campania, Italy, and were recorded in conversation with other speakers of the same variety. The Gen1 speakers were born and raised in those same Italian regions, until at least age 18 but subsequently moved to Toronto or Bedford and have remained there for at least 20 years. The Gen2 speakers were born in Toronto or Bedford (or arrived before age 6), and their parents qualify as Gen1.

All data was collected following the standard Labovian sociolinguistic interview protocol (cf. Labov 1984), designed to elicit relaxed, conversational speech in an ecologically valid context. All interactions were initiated and recorded in Calabrian Italian for the Toronto corpus and Campanian Italian for the one from Bedford. Interviews average an hour in length.

Analysis follows comparative variationist sociolinguistic methodology. Verbs that require an animate object were exhaustively selected from the transcribed interviews of these 32 speakers for analysis, yielding 509 tokens in all. Since Calabrian and Campanian dialects differ according to the kind of objects which may be introduced by the preposition *a*, we did not investigate the role of the specificity of the object and included in the analysis only [+animate] objects. This allows us to compare the rates of DOM in the two communities and in the two groups of homeland speakers in the same envelope of variation. Each token was coded for the binary dependent variable: whether the direct object was preceded by the preposition *a* or not. The analysis considered the following three linguistic and three social parameters, discussed in more detail in Di Salvo & Nagy (2022).

<b>DEFINITENESS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• proper nouns and personal pronouns</li><li>• other pronouns</li><li>• kinship terms preceded by a possessive</li><li>• common nouns referring to people</li></ul>
<b>TYPE OF VERB</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• dative/accusative alternating in Late Latin</li><li>• psych</li><li>• telic</li><li>• other</li></ul>
<b>CLAUSAL POSITION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• dislocated object</li><li>• <i>in situ</i></li></ul>
<b>LOCATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bedford/Campania</li><li>• Toronto/Calabria</li></ul>
<b>GENERATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Homeland: Speakers who remained in Italy</li><li>• Gen1: Immigrants who grew up in Italy, then moved to Toronto/Bedford</li><li>• Gen2: Children of immigrants, who grew up in Toronto/Bedford</li></ul>
<b>GENDER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Female</li><li>• Male</li></ul>

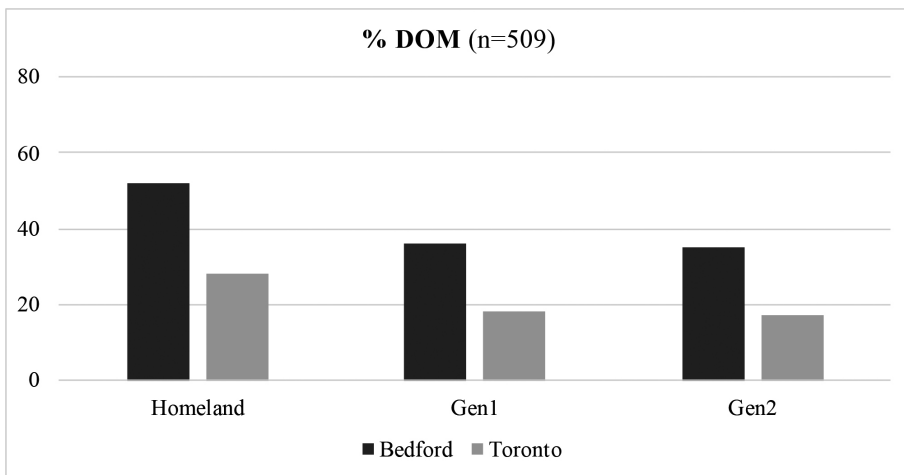
**Table 2.** Linguistic and social predictors examined, with levels of each.

The above factors are coded in part to determine whether their effects differ across the four corpora we compare. But, equally importantly, they must be taken into account before comparing the rates of use of DOM across the groups, given the differences in distribution across tokens extracted from the four corpora. Using Mixed Effects Models, we compare rates and constraint hierarchies of homeland and heritage groups in the Campanian and the Calabrian groups, as well as comparing those varieties' behaviours. The constraints are the linguistic and social factors introduced above. In all analyses, Speaker is included as a random effect to mitigate the effects of any outliers.

The cross-variety comparison between the models of the Campanian and the Calabrian groups allows us to examine whether linguistic variation and change patterns differ between the more diffuse and more insular communities. Because the two heritage communities speak Italian varieties in (greater or lesser) contact with English, which lacks DOM, we anticipated a decrease in the rate of use of DOM in both, but a greater reduction in the more integrated (Calabrian/Toronto) group.

## 5. Results

We note first that, in the sample as a whole ( $n=509$ ), 29% of animate objects appear with DOM. A vanishingly small number of inanimate tokens ( $< 5$  in the two corpora) appear with DOM. (As noted above, these inanimate contexts are not included in our analyses.) In a first model for all the speakers together, City emerges as a significant predictor, meaning that the two varieties have significantly different rates of DOM. The overall rate of DOM for Toronto/Calabrian is 19%, while for Bedford/Campanian it is 37%. Figure reports raw percentages and does not tease out any effects of different distributions across the linguistic predictors among the speaker groups. Here we see that, for each generation, including Homeland, Bedford speakers use more DOM than Toronto speakers. We also observe small decreases between Homeland and Gen1, within each city, but stability between Gen1 and Gen2, again within each city. The inter-community, but not inter-generational, differences are supported by the statistical analyses below.



**Figure 3.** Raw rate of use of DOM on animate objects, by City and Generation.

Because of this consistent inter-city difference, we next compare separate models for the Bedford and Toronto data, including both Homeland and Heritage speakers. Comparing a series of models that included the predictors listed in Table 2 (except City), we select the model with the best fit (according to the corrected Akaike Information Criterion, AICc) for each city and discuss them here. We report only on

the factors that emerged as significant in the best-fitting model for each community.

Toronto/Calabrian (input = 0.44, 19% marked)				Bedford/Campanian (input = 0.80, 37% marked)			
	n	% DOM	FW		n	% DOM	FW
<b>Definiteness</b>	(p < 0.001, range = 66)				(p < 0.001, range = 83)		
Proper Nouns & Personal pronouns	42	62	0.82	Proper Nouns & Personal pronouns	50	94	0.91
Other pronouns	33	33	0.61	Kinship terms	15	80	0.73
Kinship terms	17	18	0.42	Other pronouns	35	43	0.33
Common nouns	155	05	0.16	Common nouns	162	15	0.07
<b>Type of Verb</b>	(p = 0.008, range = 53)				(p < 0.001, range = 46)		
Dative/Accusative	24	54	0.79	<b>Psych</b>	58	55	0.73
Psych	17	24	0.46	Telic	51	51	0.59
Telic	137	18	0.46	Dative/Accusative	47	45	0.42
Other	69	09	0.26	Other	106	18	0.26
<b>Clausal Position</b>	(p = 0.004, range = 48)				(p = 0.003, range = 42)		
Dislocated	15	53	0.74	Dislocated	34	79	0.71
<i>in situ</i>	232	17	0.26	<i>in situ</i>	228	31	0.29

**Table 3.** Best-fit mixed-effects models for the two cities, showing count, rate of DOM-marking and factor weights for significant factors only (Toronto n = 247; Bedford n = 262).

While the overall DOM rates differ, the constraint hierarchies, or set of predictors that influence DOM, are similar across the two communities. The same three linguistic predictors emerge as significant, ranked in the same order according to their ranges (the difference between the factor weight for the most and least favouring level in each predictor). That is, Definiteness has the biggest effect in both models, with proper nouns and personal pronouns exhibiting the most DOM and common nouns the least.

The two cities differ slightly in the ranking of the levels of the Definiteness factor. Interestingly, the Calabrian results fall exactly in line with Guardiano’s (2010) description of Sicilian varieties, regarding



the rank order by Definiteness of the four types of objects considered. In contrast, the Campanian data place the kinship terms higher up the definiteness hierarchy than other pronouns. We account for the difference as follows: among the two categories that appear in the lowest positions in Guardiano's (2010) hierarchy (other pronouns and common nouns), there are almost twice as many indefinite tokens in the Campanian data as in the Calabrian data: 17% vs 10% of the sample. Thus, these two categories are, in a sense, more loaded with indefinite tokens in the Campanian sample, pushing them down the hierarchy. As a result, kinship terms appear in a higher position.

Similarly, the Type of verb is the second strongest predictor in both cities, with the three types of verbs that have been reported to favour DOM (Dative/Accusative, Psych and Telic) more than other types of verbs, but with different ordering of the favouring levels in the two cities. Finally, Clausal position has a robust effect in both cities, with dislocated objects favouring DOM more than those appearing *in situ*. In neither model did Generation or Gender emerge as significant.

Two additional models were examined (but not shown here), one for Campanian/Bedford and one for Calabrian/Toronto. In these, interaction factors for Generation (Homeland, Gen1, Gen2) and each of the three linguistic predictors were tested, along with Speaker as a random effect. No interaction factors emerged as significant in either community, indicating a lack of cross-generational differences in the constraint hierarchies (the effects of the linguistic predictors), mirroring the lack of an effect of Generation on the rates of DOM use in the models shown above.

## 6. Discussion

We have compared the use of DOM in two Italian communities abroad (one in Canada, one in the UK) in order to verify if and to what extent the amount of language contact with a DOM-less language such as English triggers change in the use of the preposition *a* before direct objects. The comparison contrasted two homeland varieties in order to understand the effect of input on heritage varieties. That is, are differences observable in the input retained in heritage varieties? Or does 'attrition' remove such inter-variety distinctions from heritage languages?

In answer to our first research question, all three linguistic predictors tested exert significant effects on DOM: the more definite the direct object, the more likely it is to be marked; the 'special' categories of

verbs (Dative/Accusative, Psych and Telic) are more likely to be marked than other types of verbs; and objects in marked positions (dislocated) are more likely to be marked than those found *in situ*. With minor differences in rank order that we attribute to fluctuations due to the small size of the data set, these effects are consistent across communities and are consistent with the descriptions in the literature discussed in Section 2.

Our second research question was about intergenerational differences that might point to a pattern of attrition or effects of language contact. No such change was found. In neither Bedford nor Toronto did we find intergenerational change in the rates of use of DOM. Additionally, the same internal factors that affect DOM in the homeland varieties also affect it in the respective heritage language communities. The models that included interaction effects for Generation crossed with each linguistic predictor indicate consistency of constraint hierarchies in each generation.

Our third research question related to the expectation that different policies of immigration (multiculturalism in Canada vs assimilationism in the UK) would have an impact on DOM in the two heritage communities. Our results do not support this finding. Differences in rates of DOM were found between the two homeland communities (52% in Campanian homeland, 28% in Calabrian homeland), but these were carried over to their respective heritage varieties. The inter-community difference cannot be induced by the difference between Campanian and Calabrian dialects: in Campanian, it is possible to mark only [+definite] and [+animate] objects, while in Calabrian [-animate] and [-definite] object may also be marked by the preposition *a* (see Section 2). However, there are only five DOM-marked indefinite objects in the corpus, so this small number cannot account for the disparity in DOM rates between the communities. Furthermore, the larger context for DOM in Calabrian would lead us to anticipate a higher rate of DOM-marking in Calabrian than Campanian varieties. That is, if more types of sentences (more combinations of semantic features) can accept DOM in Calabrian than Campanian varieties, we would anticipate more tokens of such sentences in the Calabrian dataset. However, we instead find a higher percentage of DOM in Campanian Italian than Calabrian. Further investigation may reveal whether it is possible to attribute the different rates of DOM in the two homeland speakers' groups to some other distributional difference in the datasets.

So, while the two heritage communities differ in rates of DOM, this difference can be traced back to the higher use of DOM in (homeland) Campanian dialects than in Calabrian. Thus, it is not possible to interpret the different rates of DOM in the two heritage settings as due to any differences in their immigration contexts. While Italians in Toronto feel

more integrated than those in Bedford, they maintain this aspect of their heritage language equally robustly. Our data do not support the idea that these different policies of immigration influence linguistic behaviour, at least for the use of DOM, a finding which surprised us.

We are not able to verify if the different rates of DOM in homeland Calabrian and Campanian speakers are due to the different parameters that, in the homeland varieties, influence the use of the preposition or to other factors. Further studies should investigate, within the variationist framework, this variability in Italian dialects and regional Italian. The recent work by Ledgeway (2018) and Ledgeway, Schifano & Silvestri (2019) gave evidence of strong micro-variation affecting the Calabrian dialects but no similar studies have been based on Campanian dialects. A deeper investigation of other less well-described regions (such as Campania) are needed to develop a better comprehension of DOM in Italo-Romance varieties.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, even for those areas that are well described such as Calabria, the data were collected via tasks based on acceptability judgments and, so, even in this case, more studies based on spontaneous speech will be useful in order to understand the variation across speakers and varieties.

What does emerge clearly is this: since attrition is often attributed to reduced input in the heritage variety, it is surprising that in two heritage communities with such different types of relationships to the homeland language and culture (e.g. differences in rates of use of Italian, distance from homeland, frequency of interaction with or travel to the homeland, sense of integration, immigration policies) we are not able to see different paths, indeed any paths, toward attrition of a complex morphosyntactic phenomenon that has no reflex in the host language.

### *Abbreviations*

1, 2, 3 = first, second, third person; AICc = Akaike Information Criterion (corrected); C.CV = context of post-consonantal stops in unstressed syllables only; DO = Differential Object; DOM = Differential Object Marking; FW = factor weight; Gen1 = immigrants who grew up in Italy, then moved to Toronto or Bedford; Gen2 = children of immigrants, who grew up in Toronto or Bedford; Gen3 = grandchildren of immigrants, who grew up in Toronto or Bedford; HL = heritage language; HLVC = Heritage Language Variation and Change in Toronto Project; IMP = imperative; INF = infinitive; IPF = imperfect; M = masculine; n = token count; O = (direct) object; p = the probability that the distribution occurred by chance; PL = plural; Psych = Psychological Verbs; SG = singular; VOT = Voice Onset Time.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a definition of regional Italian, see Berruto (2006), D'Agostino (2012), Telmon (1993).

<sup>2</sup> A discussion of the internal parameters affecting DOM in Italian dialects and Regional Southern Italian is provided in Di Salvo (2019). See also Cennamo, Ciconte & Andriani (*in press*).

<sup>3</sup> Except where otherwise noted, all examples are from the HLVC Corpus (Nagy 2009, 2011). Speaker codes identify the language, generation, sex and age of the speaker.

<sup>4</sup> A similar scale is offered by Aissen (2003).

<sup>5</sup> There are, thus, some categories, such as animals (animate but not human) as well as certain verbs which reject DOM (Irizarri van Suchtelen 2016: 100).

<sup>6</sup> Some differences in DOM in Calabrian, Lucanian and Campanian dialects are discussed in Manzini & Savoia (2005). All the dialects may mark objects with the preposition *a* if they are [+animate, +definite] but some differences are found regarding specificity: in some Calabrian and Lucanian dialects the use of the preposition is mandatory with less specific objects.

<sup>7</sup> Literature on Neapolitan dialects mainly adopts a diachronic approach (cf. Fiorentino 2003, Sornicola 1997, 1998).

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