

An Italo-Romance perspective on heritage languages

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Heritage languages have received considerable attention from linguists coming from different subfields, because of their structural properties as well as for the salient sociolinguistic features of the communities in which they are spoken. In this paper, we provide a critical review of the existing readership that specifically deals with Italo-Romance heritage language communities. We subsume under this heading communities characterised by a heterogeneous set of linguistic resources, which include Italian, Italian dialects and minority languages spoken in Italy. We then proceed to identify a number of critical points that in our view should receive particular attention in future studies.

KEYWORDS: heritage language, Italo-Romance, migration, cultural heritage, multilingualism.

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of the growing interest towards heritage languages and heritage speakers, in this paper we aim to identify and discuss a number of theoretical and empirical problems that arise in the analysis of Italian heritage language communities around the world. Here, we propose to use the term 'Italo-Romance varieties' to include, on one hand, standard Italian along with its regional and social varieties (e.g. *italiano popolare*) and, on the other hand, all the varieties that are likely to be part of the migrants' linguistic repertoire: in this perspective, all the dialects and minority languages that the speakers learnt before and during their mobility are included within the same broader category.

We focus on the types of factors that shape Italo-Romance varieties used as heritage languages in different migratory settings. Therefore, we set out to discuss the role played by language contact, variation and change with respect to the homeland varieties, as well as processes of linguistic and cultural revival. Based on a review of the current state of the art on heritage languages, and specifically on Italo-Romance varieties, we identify a number of critical points that in our view should be taken in greater consideration for future investigations.

In §2, we review some recent works on the topic of heritage languages (HLs henceforth); in §3, after presenting our theoretical approach to of Italian HL communities, we provide a state of the art of the current documentation of and existing studies on Italian HL communities and discuss a number of theoretical and methodological questions. In §4, we move to the discussion of some relevant issues brought out by more recent works on single Italian HL communities. In §5 we conclude by identifying a number of key points that in our view should be implemented in the future research agenda.

2. *On heritage languages: an overview*

The framework that we adopt for heritage languages is largely based on recent works such as Rothman (2009), Benmamoun *et al.* (2013), Nagy (2014), Polinsky (2018), Aalberse *et al.* (2019), Polinsky & Scontras (2020). While coming from different theoretical backgrounds and posing (partially) different goals, all these studies have in common the fact that they consider as heritage languages those varieties of a language that are developed within a migrant community. They are therefore spoken, and in most cases passed on through generations, in a setting where the dominant language in the society is different from the one learned within the household. Since this scenario displays substantial differences from the homeland, both in acquisitional and sociolinguistic terms, HLs are often object of scientific interest because they display features that are absent, or rarer, in the corresponding homeland varieties. In other words, HLs are expected to be to some extent divergent in their grammar with respect to homeland varieties, even if the possibility of full language maintenance is not ruled out (see Thomason & Kaufman 1988). Furthermore, since the sociolinguistic scenario in which a HL is spoken is radically different from the one observed in the homeland, also the dynamics of synchronic variation and diachronic language change that may be observed are specific to the HL.

Among the constellation of theoretical and methodological approaches that have addressed the topic of HLs, a broader distinction can be made between sociolinguistic and contact-based studies on the one hand, and studies on bilingualism and language acquisition on the other hand.¹ The first have focused more on variation and change with respect to the corresponding homeland variety, triggered by known sociolinguistic dynamics occurring in the HL scenario such as contact with the dominant language (Aalberse *et al.* 2019), dialect mixing and leveling (Trudgill 2004) and linguistic simplification (Aikhenvald 2007).

The latter (see e.g. Benmamoun *et al.* 2013, Polinsky 2018, Polinsky & Scontras 2020 among others) have been characterised by a stronger focus on those features that arise in a HL as a consequence of the peculiar learning trajectory that characterises heritage speakers. In the typical scenario, heritage speakers acquired, or started acquiring, the HL as an L1 within the household, but at a later stage, their learning process has been interrupted as the exposure to the dominant language increases. The dominant language in the society ends up being also the dominant language of heritage speakers. For this reason, HLs are different in many respects from the baseline, which is represented by adult native speakers; they will in fact show traces of incomplete L1 acquisition, as well as of L1 attrition over the lifespan. At the same time, typical L2 features are also likely to be observed, especially in terms of transfer from the dominant language.

While the two approaches can be said to be complementary in several respects, we find one point in which they differ the most. In sociolinguistic studies, the label ‘heritage speaker’ also applies to first-generation speakers, under the implicit assumption that significant changes in language use over the individual’s lifetime may have an impact on their representation of grammar; conversely, in acquisitional studies, a heritage speaker’s linguistic knowledge is seen as substantially different from that of an adult L1 speaker. Hence, this definition can only apply from the second generation onwards. We may observe, in this respect, that there are indeed structural features of heritage languages that only emerge in the variety of second-generation speakers. At the same time, in accordance with usage-based models of language (see, among many others, Bybee 2010), we argue that structural changes in grammatical knowledge of the HL may actually intervene after L1 acquisition, and throughout the individual’s life. Moreover, in our view more attention should be given to the fact that other events specifically occurring during adulthood may interfere with ‘linear’ intergenerational transmission, like language revival, late literacy in the HL, transnationalism etc. These may actually play an important role in shaping the heritage speakers’ linguistic knowledge. Further arguments against a rigid distinction between generations are also presented, from a different perspective, in Turchetta (2018, 2019). For this reason, even though intergenerational variation is indeed observable in several HL scenarios, we suggest to consider it as one of the dimensions of ‘ordinary’ sociolinguistic variation, without assigning any theoretical primacy to this aspect.

Another matter of current debate is whether the notion of HLs should be used also for situations of unbalanced bilingualism that were created in contexts other than immigration and include for example

varieties observed in language shift scenarios, typically from a local minority language towards the national or colonial language (among these scholars, Aalberse *et al.* 2019). For example, the category of semi-speakers identified by Dorian (1981) or ‘vanishing speakers’ (Moretti 1999) has several points of contact with heritage speakers (see Polinsky 2018 for a discussion), and it is undeniable, more in general, that parallelisms are to be found between the notions of heritage language and minority language. At a general level, thus, we acknowledge that a joint research programme should take into account those linguistic minorities that originate in migration flows and those of other origin, regardless of the overarching hypernym that is used. However, we also emphasise the fact that Italo-Romance speaking communities outside Italy are with very few exceptions migrant or post-migrant communities. Therefore it is only in this sense that the term will be used throughout this article and in the rest of this special issue.

To sum up, in our view there are three orders of factors that influence the structure of heritage languages, which define as many perspectives of analysis. These are summarised in Table 1.

	DESCRIPTION	LINGUISTIC FEATURES
Input-related features	Language shift towards the dominant language of the host society at community level. Limited input in the HL. Absence of normative varieties of the HL.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • divergent attainment of young learners with respect to adult native speakers; • incomplete L1 acquisition; • L1 attrition; • lack of intergenerational transmission and language loss.
Contact-related features	language contact with the dominant language; contact between the other languages used in the host society and between mutually intelligible Italo-Romance dialects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contact-induced variation and change; • structural convergence towards the dominant language; • code-switching in conversation; • code-mixing/borrowing • dialect-mixing and levelling; koineisation
Language variation and change	Variation with respect to the homeland varieties; variation within the heritage language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘spontaneous’ innovations independent of language contact; • structural simplification;

Table 1. Factors affecting Heritage Languages and types of linguistic features.

If we consider the experience of a heritage speaker, we can assume that their knowledge of the HL will be first of all influenced by the type

and the amount of input received in this language. Therefore, under input-related features we subsume all those features that arise in HLs due to their specific acquisitional trajectory, and which result in divergent or non-target attainments in production, where the target is ideally represented by adult L1 varieties. As pointed out by Benmamoun *et al.* (2013), incomplete L1 acquisition and attrition over the lifespan are the most typical acquisitional features of HLs. However, we propose to add to this category also other types of processes that are more closely related with the ethnography of specific communities. These include for example cases of language revival that may result in structured learning of the HL during adulthood, and hence late exposure to its normative varieties.

At the same time, heritage speakers are exposed to the dominant language of the society in which they live: HLs are by definition always embedded within a set of bi- or multilingual practices and are therefore subject to dynamics of contact-induced variation and change. Typical phenomena will thus be the occurrence of code-switching in conversation (Auer 1984, 1998), code-mixing and lexical borrowing (Muysken 2000, Poplack 2018) and grammatical interference (Matras 2009). Moreover, we propose to include here also contact occurring within the HL community, between different regional and/or social varieties of the HL, which may result in dynamics of dialect mixing and levelling as described by Trudgill (2004).

Finally, HLs will also be exposed to ‘ordinary’, or ‘non-contact induced’, processes of variation and change that cannot be directly related to either of the previous two categories. These can reflect patterns of variation and incipient changes already present in the homeland varieties or involve the emergence of spontaneous innovations within the HL community.

A fourth dimension, which has not been included in Table 1, can be represented by the development of processes of linguistic and cultural revival within the community. This may lead to a renewed interest for the HL after language shift has set in, and to specific linguistic behaviours such as changing orientations towards the homeland norms, acceptance *vs* refusal of a monolingual habitus, structured learning of the HL, late literacy, and the creation of transnational relations (see §3.5).

To sum up, a number of features characterising HLs depends either on the typical learning trajectory of a heritage speaker, or on the socio-linguistic environment in which the language is spoken. In other words, while the outcomes are community-specific, the processes appear to be highly general.

However, moving to the topic of this special issue, we proceed to a more specific question and ask whether Italian HL communities may represent a coherent subset within the broader category of HLs, and, if so, on which basis. As will be argued in the next sections, the peculiar structure of the Italian linguistic repertoire adds another layer of complexity to most Italian HL scenarios, which requires a systematic treatment within most accounts of Italian communities outside Italy. We thus propose to further elaborate on these aspects as another dimension that integrates the ones that were previously identified, and which specifically characterises Italo-Romance speaking HL communities.

3. Italian heritage language communities

3.1 Italo-Romance heritage languages

Given the outline of heritage languages discussed in §2, we now turn to the central issue of this paper. This is related to the identification of the specificities that characterise HL communities of Italian origin. One of the main common denominators that we find in this respect concerns the fact that the repertoire of Italian migrant communities is intrinsically plurilingual, as it reflects the structure and diachronic evolution of the Italian linguistic repertoire. Therefore, we introduce the term Italo-Romance Heritage Languages (IRHL henceforth) in order to jointly refer to a heterogeneous set of linguistic resources that, to some degree, characterise the Italian linguistic repertoire, and whose distribution is likely to be reflected within the heritage language scenario, both in the communities' linguistic behaviour and in language ideologies. These resources include three main components:

- Standard Italian (with its array of geographic and social varieties)
- Italo-Romance dialects
- minority languages spoken in Italy

As is well-known from several studies in Italian sociolinguistics (De Mauro 1963, Berruto 2012, Auer 2005, Cerruti *et al.* 2017), Italian spread as a spoken language in Italy only in the second half of the 20th century. Before then, most of the population had other Italo-Romance varieties as their L1: these arose from the Middle Ages onwards through geographic differentiation of spoken Latin, and are therefore sister languages of Italian. In the Italian sociolinguistic tradition, the term 'dialect' is used to refer to such regional, or sub-regional, Romance lan-

guages which lack official recognition. The term ‘minority language’ refers instead to the languages spoken by sociocultural minorities which have an official recognition in Italian regulations, such as Sardinian and Friulian. Some of these are Romance languages, some others are not (e.g. Croatian, Albanian, Alemannic), however, the latter are hardly attested in any migrant setting and hence not immediately relevant for a characterisation of IRHL varieties.

‘Traditional’ Italian sociolinguistics, especially from the 20th century, has often proposed a view where dialects and minority languages are geographically limited to their original territory, assuming thus a relatively static view of linguistic repertoires. Internal migrations, though, have added an overlay of complexity, as they multiplied the amount of linguistic resources available to an Italian speaker, resulting in the formation of new varieties (see e.g. the debate on ‘italiano composito’ (Canepari 1983, Cerruti 2011, Fontanot 2019) and providing Italian dialects with new semiotic values (Berruto 2006, Gorla 2012). Similarly, migration from other countries has introduced new varieties in the repertoire, which over time may lead in turn to the formation of ethnolects or, more in general, new varieties of Italian (see Vietti 2005). Furthermore, recent works (Lupica Spagnolo *this issue*) have demonstrated that fossilised learner varieties of Italian developed within particular migrant communities are also retained and used outside of Italy, after the community relocates to another country.

Thus, the major point in referring to a category of IRHLs stems from the observation that the repertoire of Italian migrants observed in most situations is intrinsically plurilingual, as it will include more than one of the three components identified above (see Vedovelli 2011), in the same way as these linguistic resources are mutually present in a large part of Italy. Furthermore, Italian immigration spans over a period of time where the linguistic repertoire underwent a substantial restructuring, along the well-known path leading from *diglossia*, through *spoken diglossia*, to *dilalia* (Berruto 2012) or *diaglossia* (Auer 2005). The repertoires observed in migrant communities will therefore reflect the various stages of this transition, depending on the history of the single communities.

Studies on Italian communities have mainly focused on single varieties of Italian (regional, popular) or dialect, without any particular attention to the type of multilingualism of the speakers. This issue becomes of primary importance especially if we look at more recent migrations from Italy, which involve social categories that strongly differ from the traditional view of Italian migrants from the 40’s and 50’s (see e.g. Marzo *et al.* 2021, Marzo & Natale *this issue*). Moreover, among

the varieties of Italian spoken abroad, we must probably add those varieties acquired as L2 by migrants arrived in Italy who then moved to another country (see Lupica Spagnolo *this issue*, Goglia 2021). These trends, which are directly related with the evolving patterns of mobility in the contemporary world (see e.g. the introduction in Canagarajah 2017), invite for a general reconsideration of what we know about the formation of Italian-speaking communities abroad, both in terms of linguistic repertoires, as proposed also by Turchetta (2018).

To conclude, by introducing an overarching category of Italo-Romance HLs, we are able to look comparatively at different Italian migrant communities, without imposing an aprioristic view on what the resources forming this repertoire should be. In our opinion, this approach can shed light on the peculiarities of Italian communities abroad, as well as the common tendencies that IRHLs share with other HLs in different settings.

3.2 *Earlier approaches to Italo-Romance varieties abroad*

The interest in Italian communities abroad, whose linguistic practices may include, as said, a complex array of linguistic resources, goes way back in the tradition of Italian linguistics, as attested by early studies (Vaughan 1926, Menarini 1947). But even considering the massive readership that has been produced on this topic, of which some critical reviews are presented by Vedovelli & Villarini (1998), Bettoni & Rubino (2010), Di Salvo & Moreno (2017), very few studies have considered Italo-Romance varieties spoken in these contexts as heritage languages in the sense discussed in §1. Comprehensive accounts of Italian communities abroad like Turchetta (2005) or Vedovelli (2011) are in fact still rare and mostly focused on external socio-historical dynamics rather than on linguistic structures.

Some data on linguistic structures are given by pre-scientific works by Menarini (1947), who mainly described the output of language contact as it emerged in the spontaneous speech of first generation migrants in the USA. In these early approaches, little information is given on the position of Italian and Italo-Romance varieties into the migrants' repertoires or on the type of exposure to English. It must also be considered that works such as Haugen (1953) and Weinreich (1953) are among the first works that propose a scientific analysis of language contact, and sociolinguistic theory itself was in its early days. Thanks to the theoretical and methodological progress in this field, the theme of Italian abroad came to be investigated under different scientific approaches which can be linked to a number of different areas. First of all, historical and socio-

demographic accounts (Vedovelli 2011, Lorenzetti 1994) focused on the history of Italian and Italo-Romance varieties abroad. According to this theoretical perspective, the *fil rouge* of these surveys is the elicitation of sociodemographic data concerning Italians and Italian speaking individuals in a given society, also through the analysis of the position of Italian within the local linguistic landscape: actual linguistic practices are not an object of investigation. Secondly, a number of studies has concentrated on macro-sociolinguistics aspects of Italian communities, especially focusing on the language shift perspective pioneered by Fishman (1965). The position of Italian and Italo-Romance varieties in multilingual repertoires in different migratory settings started to be investigated through the use of questionnaires based on speakers' perceived competence and use (Bettoni & Rubino 1996, Di Salvo 2011, Moreno & Di Salvo 2015). Since this kind of investigation enables the researcher to compare different situations through the use of the same task, the researcher has the chance to elaborate models of intergenerational language shift. Third, the language contact approach has been often applied to the study of Italian and Italo-Romance varieties abroad, starting from the works by Timiras (1955), Franceschi (1970) Meo Zilio (1995) and, for code-switching, Auer (1984), Auer & di Luzio (1984), di Luzio (1991), Schmid (2005). This topic has been further investigated in the UK (Di Salvo 2012, 2018) and in other migrant settings (Rubino 2014a, Di Salvo 2017, Gorla 2015, Cerruti & Gorla 2021) both from a structural perspective and from a communicative one. The first approach includes the studies on contact-induced change, loanwords, calques and bilingual pragmatic markers (Di Salvo 2013); the latter adopts instead the constructivist perspective (Antaki and Widdicombe 1998), which is at the base of a relevant number of works all of which highlight how multilingual resources are used by speakers to express their own identity (De Fina 2007, Giampapa 2001, 2007, Fellin 2007, Ciliberti 2007, Pasquandrea 2008, Rubino 2014b, 2015).

Finally, a number of studies has concentrated on the phenomenon of L1 attrition. Seminal studies in this field are Gonzo & Saltarelli 1983, Bettoni 1991, Kinder 1994, Sorace 2004, Raso 2004, Scaglione 2000, Celata & Cancila 2008). In this perspective, the loss of features in migrants' Italian or Italo-Romance varieties is put centre stage. For example, in her study on the Italian community from Lucca in San Francisco, Scaglione (2000, 2003) demonstrates that phonology is the area of grammar that appears more exposed to language attrition, while L1 morphology is relatively stable. Attrition however appears also sensitive to other dimensions of linguistic variation, such as age, in terms of differences between the first and the second generation, and gender.

4. Recent developments on IRHL varieties

While all the studies mentioned so far have greatly contributed in expanding our views on IRHL communities, in this section we provide a more in-depth view on some recent case studies, not so much on account of their findings, but because of their agenda-setting potential. Most of them in fact discuss topics or adopt methodologies that have received little attention so far in the study of IRHLs, and that could possibly reveal new perspectives of analysis.

4.1 An updated view of linguistic repertoires

Among the most significant improvements in a theory of Italian migration abroad, we must include the project by Turchetta & Vedovelli (2018), dedicated to the presence of Italian in Toronto and the Canadian Ontario. The authors introduce a novel approach in the study of Italian and Italo-Romance varieties abroad: since the data of Canadian Census (2016) showed a decrease in the use of Italian in families with at least one Italian ancestor, the team aimed to discuss the concept of linguistic space, introduced by De Mauro (1980) and continued by Banfi (2008) and Vedovelli (2013). Vedovelli suggests that a linguistic space must be able “to recompose past events (starting from the Unification of Italy) with recent ones concerning Italian migration” and “to interpret appropriately what is happening in terms of migration movements and population shifts in the current global world” (Vedovelli 2013, 308). Through the integration of different perspectives that were previously kept separate, the authors identified a multicultural context where IRHL varieties are embedded in a complex set of multilingual practices. The authors propose then to focus on:

- (a) the position and the role of Italian and Italo-Romance varieties in multiple (individual and social) repertoires and linguistic landscape;
- (b) an investigation of language shift using both a macrosociolinguistic perspective and the variationist approach;
- (c) an extension of the analysis also to the use of Italian by speakers of different cultural heritage.

The last point is of particular interest, as it develops a perspective previously emerged in the data from De Mauro *et al.* (2002), on the increased use of Italian without genetic affiliation. In Toronto, Italian has in fact become a foreign language both for Italian descendants and for speakers of other origin, who learn the Italian language

because of the range of semiotic values associated to it.² Therefore, this study is perhaps the first one to emphasise the fact that IRHL varieties are spoken in plurilingual and superdiverse contexts (Vertovec 2007, Blommaert & Rampton 2011), that are difficult to categorise according to the traditionally established categories of language maintenance and language-shift, and which demand a broader looking perspective on linguistic repertoires. In other words, according to Fishman (1965), language shift generally occurs in three generations and involves a ‘linear’ loss of knowledge of the HL in 2nd and especially 3rd generation members. However, countertendencies may be identified: one example is the case where 3rd or even 4th generation members decide to acquire their HL because as a symbol of their ancestral roots (Goria & Gasparini, *in preparation*). Furthermore, given the strong connection between Made in Italy products and brands and Italian language, speakers without any ethnic affiliation to Italy declare to acquire Italian (and sometimes even a local dialect) in order (1) to get a job related to the Made in Italy culture and to specific areas (mainly food and wine); (2) to better appreciate the Italian tastes and culture. So, as shown in a recent study by Turchetta, Di Salvo & Ferrini (2021), those speakers who, independently from their cultural origin, use Made in Italy products tend to learn (if not Italians) or maintain (if Italians) IRHL varieties. This is why it seems to use that Fishman’s model of language shift is not fully observable in Italian communities abroad, where ethnic revival and the use of language for work motivations or cultural affiliation may favour language maintenance across generations and even across speakers without an Italian origin.

4.2 Language variation and change

Significant contributions have been given to the study of IRHLs also within sociolinguistic theory. An example is represented by Naomi Nagy’s project on *Heritage Language Variation and Change in Toronto* (<ngn.artsci.utoronto.ca/HLVC/0_0_home.php> – Nagy 2009, 2011, 2015), which focuses on a comparison between 11 HLs spoken in Toronto and their corresponding homeland varieties. According to the sociolinguistic approach for the study of HL (Aalberse *et al.* 2019), the comparison between a heritage language and the corresponding homeland variety reveals that the relevant features of a HL are not to be intended exclusively as a product of language contact. In fact, innovations may arise as a result of a different patterning of the sociolinguistic variables within the HL scenario, regardless of influences from the dominant language. An example is offered by the study of the aspiration

of voiceless stops in C.CV contexts in the corpus of Calabrese Italian in Toronto carried out by Nodari *et al.* (2019), who provide a comparison between internal sociophonetic variation and contact-induced variation. The authors conclude that, for what concerns the aspiration of voiceless stops, the changes observed across generations of HL speakers for VOT (voice onset time) in C.CV contexts, are inherent in heritage Calabrese and independent from local English.

This is why the scholars focusing on variation and change include first generation migrants among heritage speakers, rejecting the position held in several acquisitional studies, whereby, following the generative approach, these speakers are considered as attriters or as baseline speakers who provide the input for the next generation. This point is clearly expressed by Polinsky (2018: 4) who distinguishes between a linguistic (formal) approach and a sociolinguistic one, stressing that determining “whether the first generation grammar shows any of the non-standard properties attested in the heritage language” should be the goal of sociolinguistic research while the one of formal approach should be the investigation of an ideal heritage (2nd generation) speaker grammar.

4.3 Contact between IRHL varieties

Another salient feature that characterises Italian communities is the occurrence of frequent contacts and relations between Italians from different parts of Italy who are likely to be speakers of different dialects. This second dimension of language contact has been perhaps overlooked in most studies on IRHL varieties, and Bettoni & Gibbons (1988) argue that in Australia, instead of promoting language change, this is in fact one of the main factors that favour language shift towards English.

Processes of dialectal levelling and linguistic convergence, which are defined by Erker and Otheguy respectively as “the intergenerational reduction of regionally differentiated linguistic behaviour” and “the enhancement of inherent structural similarities found between two linguistic systems” (Erker & Otheguy 2016: 132), have been frequently observed in Spanish communities in the US, but have been rarely analysed for IRHL communities. Few studies have focused on phenomena such as dialect mixing and levelling (Trudgill 1986, 2004) as a key to explain structural innovations in IRHLs, especially in the domains of morphology and syntax. However, Nagy & Di Salvo (*this issue*) and Di Salvo 2022b argue that the fine-grained analysis of the social circumstances in which IRHL varieties are spoken may indeed lead to explanations that identify contact between different Italo-Romance varieties as a major explanation.

Crucially, this further dimension of linguistic variation, that is peculiar to migrant communities and might lead through koineisation to the formation of so-called migrant koines (Kerswill 2006), has been overlooked in previous accounts of heritage languages (e.g. Polinsky & Scontras 2020; see §1.1 above).

Based on a vast bibliography on dialectal levelling in Spanish-speaking migrants in the US, some recent studies have focused on innovations due to the contact among different (Italian) dialects abroad. Di Salvo (2021) discusses the case of a community from the small village of Montefalcione, in Irpinia, settled in the English city of Bedford, UK. From the 50s, Italians were recruited for the local brick companies which encouraged the immigration of young unskilled male adults from the poorest areas of Southern Italy. They were from Campania, Molise and Sicily. In England, these people had daily contacts with migrants from other areas of Campania and of Southern Italy, with the consequence that they were influenced in their linguistic behaviour by the varieties spoken by migrants from other parts of Italy. This is clearly observable through the analysis of a corpus collected in a group of heritage speakers of Montefalcionese dialect: a study on two different phonological features of Montefalcionese (the rhoticity of the Latin cluster -LL- and the maintenance of the labiovelar approximant /w/ in the demonstrative *kwiro/kwira*) shows that 1st and 2nd generations speakers produce variants that can only be explained in terms of contact with other dialects and subsequent language levelling (Di Salvo 2022a). Also due to the pressure of Neapolitan dialect, which for many 1st generation migrants represents a variety of higher prestige that works as a normative model, this levelling process has a crucial consequence: the behaviour of 1st generation migrants differs from the one attested in homeland varieties.

In general, exposure to higher-prestige or normative varieties of the HL is a topic that needs further attention in this field of studies: on one hand, as argued above, the HL setting partially replicates attitudes and patterns of prestige associated to specific dialects similar to those observed in the homeland; on the other hand, heritage speakers may deliberately seek access to codified normative varieties of the HL, especially in cases of language revival, where formal teaching of the HL becomes more common.

Similar evidence of a process of dialect mixing and levelling was also found in a qualitative study on differential object marking (DOM) in a corpus gathered with migrants from Campania, Puglia and Calabria and their descendants in Bedford (UK), London (UK) and Toronto (Ontario, Canada). In these three settings, Italo-Romance dialects that

have DOM are in contact with a language that lacks this feature. Di Salvo (2022b) shows that DOM is maintained by 1st and 2nd generation migrants, therefore there is no evidence of attrition, or a lesser use of the preposition *a* due to language contact with English. Furthermore, DOM is also attested with types of direct Objects which in the homeland varieties cannot be introduced by the preposition *a*, such as [-animate] and [-definite] ones (Di Salvo 2022b). This non-canonical use of the preposition may be seen in two different ways: on one hand, since Calabrian dialects, also present in the communities investigated, may have the preposition *a* before [-animate] and [-definite] objects, this pattern in Sicilian, Campanian and Pugliese migrants may be due to dialect contact and convergence. On the other hand, it may be supposed that non-canonical uses of the preposition are due to overgeneralisation: in this perspective, speakers may no longer be sensitive to the semantic and pragmatic features that affect DOM, as suggested in previous studies on Spanish used as HL (a vast review of the readership on DOM in HLs is offered by Nagy & Di Salvo *this issue*).

To sum up, the two surveys by Di Salvo (2017, 2022b) demonstrate that:

- (1) the comparison with homeland varieties is a fruitful method to identify innovations in HL varieties;
- (2) the innovations in the HL revealed by this comparison may also emerge as a product of patterns of mixing and levelling (Trudgill 1986, 2004) between different, and possibly mutually intelligible, Italo-Romance dialects present in specific migratory settings.

4.4 Comparative studies and the documentation of IRHL varieties

It must be noted, at a general level, that comparative studies taking into account phenomena such as levelling, convergence and attrition in different IRHL communities are relatively rare. This leads us to one of the major points of this paper: in order to carry out comparative studies between IRHL communities, a considerable amount of data is required. Therefore, it is worth noting that IRHLs are also underrepresented from the perspective of language documentation. To our knowledge, a reference work for the documentation of linguistic practices of Italian communities abroad is still a *desideratum* in this area of research: there has not been so far a joint effort from researchers operating in this field to create a corpus or an atlas of IRHLs, whereas similar tools exist for languages like English with a more developed tradition for the study of overseas varieties, and include for example the eWAVE atlas (Kortmann *et al.* 2020). A partial exception to this observation is represented by the atlas created in the framework of the ERC project *Microcontact* (see Andriani *et al. forthcoming*) and available on the project's website

<microcontact.sites.uu.nl/atlas>: the resource represents in fact a first attempt to bring together data from different situations involving Italo-Romance HLs as well as homeland varieties. However, HL varieties are still excluded from existing corpora of Italian and all the projects carried out so far have not developed, to our knowledge, an extensive reasoning on how to collect, organise and share this type of data (see Gorla & Ciccolone 2020 for a recent overview on the Italian situation).

An example of comparison between different communities is offered in Di Salvo (2012), who compares the Italian communities in Bedford and in Cambridge. The results of this study gave evidence of a faster shift to English in the latter since in Cambridge (but not in Bedford) Italian first generation migrants live in close connection with English and people of different cultural heritage. Living in a multicultural society has had a major impact on patterns of language use in the Italian community, which will in turn have an influence on structural features. Italians in Bedford and Italians in Cambridge display a different knowledge of English, dialect and Italian, therefore heritage speakers of the two communities are exposed to qualitatively and quantitatively different inputs in each language with consequences on their IRHL varieties that still need to be described. This is a crucial point in the debate on HLs. In sociolinguistic research, the trend of comparing different ethnic groups settled in the same migratory setting is predominant, but it seems to us that also the comparison of the same ethnic group in different migratory settings will be necessary in order to understand the importance of external factors in language shift, language contact and language revival. This confirms that “[l]ike all languages, an HL exists in a social world, and it is the reality of the world that determines what happens to language. It is, therefore, useful to examine HLs in their social context. [...] the scenario approach focuses on the idea that there are specific socially determined language contact settings with specific linguistic outcomes. That is if language A and B come into contact, the outcome of this contact depends on the social situation” (Aalberse *et al.* 2019: 43-44.).

What can be concluded from the illustration of this case study is that, even from a small-scale comparison such as the one presented, relevant sociolinguistic patterns may be identified. However, this is only possible if similar methods of observation and data collection have been adopted. In the case of the previously mentioned study, for example, deep knowledge of the social networks existing in the two scenarios, and of the cultural values associated to each language has proven crucial to identify otherwise unnoticed patterns of linguistic behaviour. This stresses the importance of long-term ethnographic observation of the scrutinised communities. But, more

in general, it allows us to emphasise that fieldwork methods used in IRHL research play a fundamental part in determining how the data will look like; hence the need for a more polyphonic debate on the research methods to be applied in IRHL research and on heritage languages in general.

4.5 IRHLs and cultural heritage

Most studies on Italian abroad have focused on (groups of) individuals rather than on heritage language communities: for example the already mentioned works carried out by Celata & Cancila (2008), or by Caruso (2010), focused on linguistic abilities of attriters, who are speakers who lost part of their knowledge of the HL. However, such an analysis is not often counterparted by a comprehensive account of linguistic practices in the whole community, nor is the presence of a heritage language related to the broader set of practices that characterise cultural heritage. A focus on the community rather than individuals is rare, even if some surveys gave evidence of the importance of local dynamics in language maintenance and shift as well as in language contact outputs. We argue that this dimension should receive greater attention in future studies.

Recent works by Gorla (2015, 2021) on the Piedmontese community in Argentina demonstrated the interdependency between cultural heritage and language revival in the community. A recent analysis of the linguistic biographies of Piedmontese heritage speakers reveals in fact a peculiar trajectory in the use of Piedmontese as a HL. Several speakers with a weak genealogic connection with Piedmontese, such as 3rd or 4th generation descendants of migrants from Piemonte, and fully integrated within the Argentinian society, declare having been exposed to Piedmontese in their early childhood, and then taking it up again in adult age for cultural reasons, also resorting to amateur courses and conversation groups explicitly aimed at language revitalisation. Consider the following example:

We gave up speaking Piedmontese. My brother and my sisters and all of my family have not known anything of Piedmontese <12 sec.> after twenty-two, twenty-three years, I noticed that on the television they were scouting people to sing in Piedmontese, in a Piedmontese choir, the *cantata Piemontesa*. <11 sec.> So I got closer, I went in touch with the *Familia Piemontesa* <6.5 sec.> I heard once again speaking Piedmontese. After twenty-two, twenty-three years, we took up Piedmontese. I have been speaking Piedmontese for fourteen, fifteen years.³ (Fieldwork data, Gorla, 2019)

The autobiographic evidence brought by this speaker reveals that, in the case of Piedmontese in Argentina, at least for some speakers, the

use of the heritage language exists almost exclusively within a process of cultural revival, and alongside with other non linguistic elements of Piedmontese heritage, which include traditional cuisine, choir singing, transnational relations with Italy and so on. It is therefore problematic to consider processes of language maintenance vs language shift as discrete categories, without any reference to this broader social context. The way heritage speakers enact and reinterpret their identity will have a concrete influence on the observed linguistic practices.

5. Discussion: an agenda for future research on IRHLs

The discussion addressed in §3 and §4 has highlighted a number of theoretical issues specifically concerning IRHLs, which should receive particular attention in future studies. As emerges from the previous sections, the various perspectives presented so far are on the one hand difficult to disentangle from each other, as in some cases they represent multiple ways of dealing with the same linguistic topic or phenomenon (consider for example the way in which language contact is dealt with in sociolinguistic and in acquisitional studies on HLs). But different approaches are also grounded on specific linguistic paradigms (e.g. generative linguistics, functionalism) which bear strong theoretical implications on each framework, and which makes them, on the other hand, less similar to each other. On this respect, based on the critical review presented in this paper, we may conclude that a strong division between paradigms or areas of knowledge is not very productive. On the contrary, we advocate for an integrated approach such as the one summarised in Table 1, which identifies IRHLs, and more in general HLs, as complex objects which may be analysed from a range of different perspectives, without aprioristically committing to any specific theoretical position.

Based on this discussion, we may now ask ourselves how the research agenda may, and should, be updated in order to take into greater consideration such pending issues. In this section we present four major points that in our view should be implemented in any research programme dealing with Italian heritage language communities. The first three points are related to the type of data (and hence communities) to be included in future research on IRHLs, and call for specific attention on: (a) new migrations; (b) L2 Italian outside Italy; (c) complex repertoires. The final point (d) invites instead a more systematic reasoning on the methodological tools needed for future research on HLs.

First of all, the current state of the art presented in this paper invites, in our view, for a general update in the traditional view of

Italian as a heritage language. This traditional view is in fact largely based on the analysis of historical migrations, which were in turn depending on the patterns of mobility available in the first half of the 20th century. As De Fina (2016) points out in her theoretical overview, the mobility patterns that characterise the late 20th and early 21st century have led to the formation of new identities that escape the theoretical grid of contact linguistics. To give but an example, the phenomenon of transnationalism, as a product of globalisation, invites a partial reconsideration of linguistic studies based on a rigid distinction between first and second generation of migrants as well as on the three-generation shift model (see Fishman 1965). In fact, this distinction is blurred in the case of transnational families, (some of) whose speakers have maintained a relationship with the homeland and are at the same time first and second generation migrants. Transnationalism, more in general, also provides more direct access to the linguistic resources of the homeland, and may foster language revival. Furthermore, new mobility patterns also include speakers with more heterogeneous sociolinguistic profiles. As Marzo *et al.* (2021) and Marzo & Natale (*this issue*) point out, the Italian migrant's profile has radically changed in the post-2008 crisis migration wave, and came to include also highly educated individuals and trained professionals (the so-called *élite migrants*), whose linguistic behaviour and ideological orientations are still relatively understudied.

The second point deserving attention, in our view, is an extension of the notion itself of Italian community abroad, to include also those communities where the use of Italian has developed without an ethnic affiliation to Italy of their members. Probably the most well-known case is represented by *Fremdarbeiteritalienisch* described by Berruto (1991), who documented the use of a learner variety of Italian as a lingua franca between workers of different origin in the German-speaking Switzerland of the 80's. But this is also the case of what Lupica Spagnolo (*this issue*) refers to as 'Italian in Transit': migrants who, after settling in Italy, left to other European countries in some cases retain an L2 variety of Italian that is still sometimes used in the new environment. Especially in this latter case, a strong conceptual link is established between migration to and from Italy. Furthermore, such a perspective also takes into account how the Italian linguistic repertoire is perceived, restructured and partially re-functionalised by speakers of other origin (see for example Della Putta 2021).

Third, more attention should be given to the emergence of complex repertoires (see Blommaert & Backus 2013) in IRHL communities, especially in contemporary societies. Multiple factors contribute to determining what the linguistic resources at play are for a specific heritage language community: they are often relevant on a local level and include

for example the policies of immigration in the host country (Turchetta 2021), the structure of social networks, feelings of belonging (Di Salvo 2012) and the construction of identities.

A final point in our agenda should be the generally poor status of documentation of IRHL varieties. Most data collections, even on historical migrations, were in fact carried out in a period when digital treatment of linguistic data was rather uncommon. Therefore, at present there are no linguistic corpora or archives dedicated to Italian varieties abroad. The work by Garcia & Brambatti Guzzo (*this issue*) represents a major advance in this respect, as it adopts a strongly corpus-based methodology for the analysis of phonological patterns of Italian. The need for a richer documentation is obviously more urgent for lesser known situations and for communities where language shift has already reached an advanced stage.

Abbreviations

DOM = Differential Object Marking; HL = Heritage Language; IRHL = Italo-Romance Heritage Language.

Notes

¹ As an anonymous reviewer suggests, this distinction bears broader theoretical implications than one could expect, as ‘sociolinguistic and contact-based studies’ appear to be more closely related to the structuralist tradition, while acquisitional studies are often close to the generative framework. This also has to do with the special role that L1 acquisition has in generative theories of language change.

² The role of Made in Italy products in the diffusion of ‘non-heritage Italian’ abroad has been the object of the subsequent PRIN project 2017 funded by Italian Ministry of Education “Lingua italiana, mercato globale delle lingue e impresa italiana nel mondo: nuove dinamiche linguistiche, socioculturali, istituzionali, economico-produttive”.

³ For reasons of space, the original transcript of the recording has been omitted from the text. It is given here:

L’oma lassà de parlé piemontés.(0.2) *l’oma lassà.* (1.1) *mi: (0.9) mi fratel, (0.3) e mia frate- e mia sorele, eh tute (.) de ma famija, l’han pa capì niente ëd piemonteis*

<12 seconds omitted>

dòpo (1.3) de ventidoi o ventitré agn (1.3) l’hai enterame per (1.4) per la television ch’a (1.1) a ciamavo (0.6) per canté an piemonte:is, un còro da piemonte:is (1.3) la cantata piemonteisa.

<10 seconds omitted>

entonces digo coma (0.8) l’hai acércame (1.0) l’hai tacà a cognose la famija piemonteisa,

<6.5 seconds omitted>

e (.) i l’hai (0.6) l’hai sentì un aotra volta parlé (.) a parlé a (.) ël piemonteis. (0.8) dòpo de ventidoi ventitré agn l’oma tacà ël piemontés. (0.4) son quatordes quins agn che parlo ël piemonteis.

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