Language attitudes among mobile speakers

Evidence from Italian speakers living abroad

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This paper explores the variability of belief systems that underpin standardization dynamics by investigating the effect of international mobility on attitudes of Italians towards standard and regional Italian. Research has shown that standard Italian is converging toward spoken or regional varieties, leading to the emergence of neo-standard Italian. While previous studies focused exclusively on Italians in Italy, we investigate how attitudes towards neo-standard Italian develop for Italians abroad. A matched-guise experiment carried out with Italian speakers living in Switzerland and Belgium is compared to an experiment carried out in Italy. Our results show a change in the social meaning of standardization among mobile communities, as Italians living abroad seem to neutralize the prestige that Italians in Italy attach to Milanese Italian and instead upgrade Neapolitan Italian, which had been downgraded by young Italians in the previous experiment.

Keywords: mobility, migration, standard language ideology, prestige

1. Introduction

The influence of international mobility on language attitudes, in particular on standard language ideology, is investigated in the present study with respect to the impact of migration among highly-educated speakers living outside their home countries in international contact settings. Migration and international mobility mean that speakers are in situations where languages which are not their homelands' national languages are dominant, but also where other regional varieties than their own become dominant. This language-contact setting has been shown to correlate with processes of change. In recent years, this type of language change has been investigated in detail in the field of heritage-language research (Polinsky 2018), which has been developing rapidly across various sub-disciplines, e.g. studies on language attrition (Schmid 2011), structural linguistics (Benmamoun, Montrul

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and Polinsky 2010, 2013) and variationist linguistics (Nagy 2015). While these research areas provide comprehensive overviews on grammatical knowledge and language change in language-contact settings, less attention has been placed on the linguistically relevant dynamics in communities migrating into international (elite) contexts and their attitudes towards their homeland's standard language and regional varieties.

This study therefore draws attention to the role of attitudes towards standard and regional language varieties, focusing on the role migration has on the evolution of these attitudes. More precisely, the study aims to answer the following questions: What effect does language contact in the new international context have on the attitudes of speakers towards (1) the national standard language, and (2) the regional varieties of their home country, when compared with speakers who did not leave their home country. An underlying assumption to these questions, in line with Coupland and Kristiansen (2011), is that language attitudes constitute a crucial factor in the attribution of *standardness* in language standardization processes across Europe. The combined role of *attitudes* and *standardness* lies thus in the "basic assumption […] that change in ideology is a main factor behind changes in use, and that the idea of 'best language' is a main factor in language standardization" (Kristiansen 2016: 95). Although appeals to language attitudes as an explanatory factor in standard language change is already a rich area of inquiry in variationist sociolinguistics (Kristiansen 2010; Coupland and Kristiansen 2011; Kristiansen and Grondelaers 2013), little is known about the relationship between attitudes and change in a mobility setting. Phenomena underlying *standard language change* have been documented over recent decades for several European languages, leading to what is referred to as "downward convergence" (Auer and Hinskens 1996; Auer 2005). Significantly, however, migration and mobility have not been analyzed in sociolinguistic terms. As such, the overall theoretical question underpinning the present study is as follows: How variable are belief systems that underpin standardization dynamics among highly mobile speakers who live outside their home country and in a contact situation?

As a case in point we investigate the current rich setting represented by the ongoing wave of emigration of Italian speakers to Belgium and Switzerland. The linguistic effects of previous migration from Italy to Belgium and Switzerland have been largely documented in earlier studies and international projects (see Berruto 1991; Berruto, Bluntschli and Carraro 1993; Marzo 2019). To the best of our knowledge, however, contemporary emigration has received limited scientific attention in the linguistic community. In particular, the ongoing emigration wave of highly educated Italian speakers constitutes an ideal test case for investigating its effects on standard language ideology, given its status as a recent and still ongoing

phenomenon for this sociological group. It allows for a real-time comparison between Italian speakers that leave their home country (mobile Italian speakers) and those that stay.

In line with exponents of what is termed the *spatial turn*, such as Lefebvre (1991) and Massey (2005), we categorize Italian communities abroad as a singular space, specifically a "qualitative context, situating different behaviors and contending actions" (Prinsloo 2017: 366). From this standpoint, Italian communities abroad are spaces where language ideologies are constructed and where interactions with members from different regions in Italy may influence attitudes towards Italian regional varieties. In studies carried out in Italy, the convergence towards spoken, regional and informal (i.e. a regionally flavored neo-standard Italian; see Sabatini 1985; Berruto 2012, 2005; Cardinaletti 2004; Cerruti 2011) has been described on the basis of investigations into the phenomena of neo-standard Italian *within* national borders (see Iacobini and Masini 2009; Marzo and Crocco 2015). Little is known, however, about how these processes evolve in Italian communities *outside* Italy. In other words, the purpose of the proposed study is to analyze the effect of migration on the evaluation of the standard language and regional standards. The aim is to investigate whether the variety spoken in Milan, which has emerged in the 1980s as the most prestigious candidate for a new standard (see Galli de' Paratesi 1984; see Section 3 for details) would also be viewed as a reference variety abroad. Results for Italian speakers living in Switzerland and Belgium will be compared with attitudes measured in recent studies in Italy (see De Pascale, Marzo and Speelman 2017).

Apart from being a breeding ground for language attitudes evolving abroad, the new wave of Italian migration is highly relevant from a broader sociolinguistic point of view. Compared to earlier waves of migration, the sociodemographic profile of the Italian emigrants has changed markedly, as they are now largely highly educated and highly skilled, and often younger. Moreover, the new pattern also involves increased mobility both on a social, physical and virtual level (see Section 2 for a detailed description). This heterogeneity, compared to earlier waves of migration, presents a pertinent context for the description of linguistic repertoires of new Italian emigrants, considering that *mobility* as a sociolinguistic variable can "shed important light on the direction and social embedding of language change" (Britain 2013: 488). The present study is the first step in this direction. It focuses on international mobility in terms of long-term physical displacement, though it does not yet consider virtual mobility.

The following article is structured as follows: Beginning with the facts and characteristics of the new wave of Italian immigration, a comparison is made to previous emigration to Belgium and Switzerland in the '50s and '60s of the 20th

century. The third section deals with standard language ideology in Europe, highlighting traditional language attitude research in Italy. In the fourth section, we outline the methodology used, and the following section (Section 5) presents the results obtained. In Section 6 we discuss the results and Section 7 includes the overall conclusion, as well as plans for a further project.

2. Emigrating to Belgium and Switzerland: In the past and present

The phenomenon of Italian emigration is closely linked to social and economic events that occurred in Italy and represents an important factor in Italian history. The first major migratory waves from Italy to foreign countries date back to the period shortly after the unification of Italy, and culminate in the so-called 'great emigration' that occurred towards the end of the 19th century, lasting into the 1920s. After the Second World War, a further exodus occurred which reached its peak in the '60s and '70s. Compared to the first wave, in which migrants mainly went overseas (for example the multiple waves of emigrants to the United States, Brazil or Argentina), emigration in the '60s and '70s flowed to European countries such as Germany, Switzerland or Belgium, as a consequence of the economic boom during this period. A third wave from Italy to northern European countries most recently started following the economic crisis that began in 2008. According to the 2017 Italian World Report (Fondazione Migrantes 2017), the most frequent destinations of this 'new migration' are the United Kingdom, Germany and Switzerland.

The most significant, in terms of number of units, is the wave of emigration of the '60s and '70s. Switzerland was the European country with the highest rate of immigration on the continent over this period (even higher than that of the United States, the target of emigration par excellence), accounting for almost half of the Italian migrants in the post-World War II period (Ricciardi 2018: 11). Following the peaks recorded in the '60s and '70s, however, migration to Switzerland then ceased. In fact, the number of returns exceeded those for emigration to Switzerland. Migration regained positive numbers in 2007[1] with the expression of what we can refer to as the 'new emigration wave'. The causes that led, and are still leading to this new phenomenon can be linked once again to economic factors (the unemployment rate in Italy, as an indicator of the country's slump, doubled from a record low of 6.1% in 2006 to 12.7% in 2014). Compared to earlier migrations, however, the profile and socio-cultural background of the present migrants has changed

1. See the *Report of foreigners in Switzerland 2008* published by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office. https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/kataloge-datenbanken/publikationen.assetdetail.346751.html

profoundly. While the previous groups of migrants were characterized mostly by unskilled laborers, the 'new Italian migration' is rated as more heterogeneous with respect to *education* since it involves highly specialized workers in different sectors, as mentioned above. In fact, 30% of Italian emigrants had a university degree or equivalent in 2018 (see survey the Italian Centre of Statistics ISTAT[2]), and it is precisely in allusion to this that several Italian media refer to this phenomenon as a 'brain drain'. This applies both for Italians moving abroad (e.g. Recchi, Barone and Assirelli 2016; Fondazione Migrantes 2017) and for those leaving from southern to northern Italy (Panichella 2012; Impicciatore and Panichella 2019). Typical fields of employment for these new Italian immigrants are in senior management, research institutions or university research departments (see Bianco, Krakenberger and Natale 2017, Natale and Krakenberger 2017).

In addition to their educational status, the geographic origin of the new emigrants also contributes to the heterogeneity of this group. While previous emigrants were mainly from southern Italy, current emigration registers departures from all over the country. This includes young people from northern Italy, which has been, and still is, a target for internal migration as well. Another relevant aspect that differs between the earlier periods and the recent migration settings is the higher degree of mobility, which is not only characterized by physical movement, but takes place at a virtual level as well. In the past, visits to Italy were sporadic and mainly took place during the summer months. Low-cost flights and train connections, however, now allow emigrants to return to Italy on a regular basis. In a survey conducted in 2017 in Bern among the community of the so-called *cervelli in fuga* (translatable as 'brains on the run', an ideologically-oriented term used to describe the phenomenon of the Italian 'brain drain'), it was shown how some informants travelled to Italy on a monthly and sometimes on a weekly basis (see Natale and Kunz 2019). This allows them to maintain relationships and a strong "communicative behavior towards their home country" (Auer 2013: 20). Furthermore, virtual mobility is now highly relevant, thanks to advances in technology that allow one "to remain connected on the move and to cross borders virtually at the click of a mouse or swipe of a finger" (Hua 2017: 119). A glance at their social networks demonstrates how easily migrants nowadays can take part in ongoing political or social debates in their home country. The 'Facebook groups' created by Italians abroad such as *Italiani in Svizzera* ('Italians in Switzerland') and many others restricted to specific geographic areas (Italians in Zurich, Berne, Geneva etc.) all reveal that virtual participation in ongoing debates concerning Italy is very frequent. These online debates are often characterized by disputes not only between people

2. https://www.istat.it/it/files//2019/12/REPORT_migrazioni_2018.pdf

expressing different political ideologies, but also between members of the 'old' and 'new' Italian community, who differ with respect to their linguistic and cultural identities (Vedovelli 2018).

From a linguistic point of view, the major difference between the old and new emigrants concerns their linguistic repertoires. The emigrants of the '60s and '70s generally spoke dialects, and their main contact with 'standard Italian' was abroad. More precisely, their main language contact was with a regional variety of Italian, called *popular regional Italian*,[3] when speaking with other Italians from different geographic areas (see Berruto 1991 for the case of German-speaking Switzerland and De Mauro 1970 for the impact of emigration on Italianization processes in general). By contrast, the linguistic repertoire of recent Italian emigrants reflects the substantial changes that occurred in Italy after the Second World War, showing a massive regression of dialects acquired as a first language. In a survey conducted in 2017 (see Natale & Kunz 2019) with new Italian emigrants, 64 out of 65 respondents (98.5%) indicated Italian as their first language and only 18 out of 58 respondents declared native level competence in an Italo-Romance dialect as well (31.0%). These findings are in line with surveys on language use in Italy by the Italian Centre of Statistics (ISTAT), which support the hypothesis that the most conspicuous aspect of these 'new migrants' linguistic repertoire involves standard Italian, or more precisely, neo-standard Italian (see Cerruti, Crocco and Marzo 2017).

The changes in migration contexts, as well as the heterogeneous sociocultural backgrounds of the migrants, present a relevant testing environment for analyses, to the extent that they could affect the language attitudes of the speakers. The impact of new forms of mobility on standard language change will contribute to a *sociolinguistics of mobility*, as put forward by Auer (2013), taking "into account the new, multiple migrants, the superdiversity of migratory contexts, and the typically uninterrupted flow of people, media, products and verbal interactions from and to 'home'" (ibid.: 26).

Regarding Italian in the context of emigration to Switzerland and Belgium, a considerable number of studies have been published on phenomena involving *language contact* (see Rovere 1977; Schmid 1993; Dal Negro 1993), the constitution of *social networks* (Berruto, Bluntschli and Carraro 1993; Marzo 2019) and the *dynamics of changing linguistic repertoires* (see Berruto 1991). As noted above, however, attitudes as a factor in standard language change have not yet been taken into account.

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3. Popular regional Italian (*italiano popolare regionale*) is a low diastratic variety differing from the standard with respect to several levels of analysis (Berruto 2005).

3. Standard language ideology in Italy

As mentioned above, processes underlying standard language change over recent decades that characterize different European languages also hold true for the Italian peninsula. As with other European languages such as German or Danish, procedures of "downward convergence" (Auer 2005), that is, orientation towards orality, informality, and to a certain degree regionality, all characterize neo-standard Italian (see Cerruti, Crocco and Marzo 2017). This means that the status of standard and regional varieties has changed, thereby blurring the traditional dichotomy between standard vs. non-standard. This has caused the emergence of hybrid contact varieties through processes of convergence, as well as the constitution of regional standards. With respect to standard language change, language attitudes provide insight into processes of de- or restandardization, as belief systems are reorganized and standardization dynamics are thus reinforced (Kristiansen 2009; Coupland and Kristiansen 2011).

With regard to Italian, the actual coexistence of regional standard varieties (Cerruti 2011) does not imply that regional accents are all accorded the same prestige (Crocco 2017). Over the past five decades, attitudes towards regional pronunciations have been investigated on the basis of different methodological approaches (see De Pascale, Marzo and Speelman 2017 for an overview), all of which showed how language ideology has undergone substantial change in the course of Italian language history with regard to prestige. Starting from the distinction of four geographic macroregional varieties proposed by De Mauro (1970), who classifies the urban centers of Milan, Florence, Rome, and Naples as reference points, we can state that in the past, and up to the '70s, the Florentine variety was conferred a high degree of prestige. This was based on its historically predominant role in the constitution of a literary and written standard. During the '50s and '60s, as De Mauro (ibid.) quotes, the prestige of the Roman variety increased, thereby overtaking Florentine. This development has been attributed to the influence of the motion picture industry based in Rome. In an empirical study, Galli de' Paratesi (1984) documented a new trend in the '80s in terms of prestige: the rise of the Milanese variety. This was associated with economic success, showing a major developing role at this level, together with northern Italian varieties, with respect to the formation of a standard pronunciation (Baroni 1983; Galli de' Paratesi 1984; Volkart-Rey 1990). Di Ferrante (2008), in a further study involving a different frame of reference (with native and non-native accents), pointed to the lower prestige attributed to the standard pronunciation when compared to English-accented Italian, thereby testifying to further devaluation of standard Italian. In terms of prestige, the Neapolitan variety consistently occupies the lowest position in these putative attitudinal prestige rankings, as it is always associated with negative or condescending ideas.

In line with traditional language-attitude research in Europe, evaluations of *prestige* dimensions can contrast with the dimension *solidarity*. De Pascale, Marzo and Speelman (2017) showed that the Milanese accent ranks second-best, after standard Italian, among younger and middle-aged Neapolitan speakers in terms of *speech prestige*. However, its rankings are relatively low, especially among the older participants, on *solidarity*. Similar dynamics were found in other European contexts. In Belgium, studies have shown that vernaculars such as Tussentaal are downgraded on *prestige* (*superiority*) but have high scores on *dynamism* (Grondelaers and Speelman 2013; Rosseel 2017), a young and modern form of prestige that is considered as one of the driving forces of a number of European non-standard varieties Kristiansen (2009).

Against this background, the aim of the present study is to provide an answer to the following two research questions. On a broader, theoretical sociolinguistic level, the question is how variable belief systems are that underpin standardization dynamics among highly mobile speakers who live outside their home country and in a contact situation. On a more specific, empirical level, the main focus is to measure the current effects of the new international mobility of Italian speakers on the prestige of standard Italian and regional standards. In particular, we will investigate whether the increase in prestige of Milanese, as found in a Southern Italian community in Italy (De Pascale, Marzo and Speelman 2017), remains stable among Italians living abroad.

To this end, a speaker-evaluation experiment has been set up in two international Italian communities in Belgium and Switzerland, the results of which will be compared to the findings of De Pascale, Marzo and Speelman's study in 2017.

4. Method

4.1 Speech stimuli

The stimuli consisted of five audio clips which included two 20 second samples of each of the four main regional Italian varieties (Milanese, Florentine, Roman and Neapolitan flavored Italian), along with a sample of standard Italian. The fragments for the regional varieties were all extracted from the spoken component of the Italian CLIPS corpus (Albano Leoni, Cutugno and Savy 2006). In these samples, male speakers are involved in so-called 'map tasks', that is, conversational events where one participant (who is selected for the sample) explains how to get from A to B, but using a map that contains reference points that differ to some degree, or that are differently positioned, from the map given to the other participant. The standard Italian fragment was obtained by recording an Italian diction teacher presenting the

content of a discarded audio sample in a natural way in this first pilot study. The content of the samples was not identical, as the recordings were all different sections of a map task experiment, but they were all highly similar (someone explaining the way) and neutral. On the linguistic level, the recordings differed exclusively in terms of accent (pronunciation and prosodic aspects). No lexical or morphosyntactic differences were recorded, as these might be perceived as too salient.

Although verbal guises could bring undesired individual variation to the experiment, falling back on a matched guise design was not viable, since the aim was to bring in speakers from different regional backgrounds. We therefore selected five male speakers with a very similar tone of voice, speaking in a similar rhythm. In order to achieve maximum reliability for the experimental set-up, each stage in the construction of the experiment was subjected to pilot tests. With regard to the selection of the stimuli, the aforementioned ten fragments were chosen after an initial pilot study was conducted to check whether the audio sample indexed the speaker's regional provenance to an adequate extent, without being deemed too markedly dialectal at the same time. The organization of the samples is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Organization of the samples

Milanese accented Italian	Florentine accented Italian	Roman accented Italian	Neapolitan accented Italian	Standard Italian
clip 1	clip 2	clip 3	clip 4	clip 5

4.2 Evaluative scales and factor analysis

The selected auditory stimuli were evaluated by means of a set of statements and their respective ratings on 7-point Likert scales. This started initially with 20 statements that were mainly taken from a previous experiment that was carried out in Italy (De Pascale, Marzo and Speelman 2017), in order to guarantee maximum comparability between mobile and non-mobile Italian speakers. Based on our experience with the experiment in De Pascale, Marzo and Speelman (ibid.), we included four assertions linked to the language heard in the clip. Previous guise experiments (e.g. Grondelaers and Van Hout 2010) have already proven that experiments containing both speech- and speaker-related scales yield results that are almost identical to those containing only speaker-related ones. The advantage of working with speech-related scales is that attitudes related to 'correct speech' as well as 'best language practices' can be pinpointed more specifically.

In line with De Pascale, Marzo and Speelman (2017), an initial list of 20 assertions was compiled with scales for the dimensions SUPERIORITY (*this person is competent, successful, has a good job, has a university degree, speaks in a proper way*),

SOLIDARITY (*this person is pleasant, sociable, joking, attractive, has a nice voice*), DYNAMISM (*this person is fashionable, perspicacious, self-confident, open-minded)* and INTEGRITY *(this person is generous, trustworthy, honest, warm-hearted, kind)*. Following a pilot test and an exploratory factor analysis, four of the speech-related scales were eliminated, because they loaded on several dimensions (i.e. *speaks in a proper way, has a nice voice, open-minded* and *kind*). The final experiment was therefore conducted with 16 scales.

4.3 Procedure

The experiment was conducted online, by means of an online survey platform (Qualtrics), which allowed us to easily rotate and present the samples in a random order. After answering the experimental scales for each of the five stimuli, the respondent had to answer direct questions pertaining to the socio-demographic background (viz. gender, age, education, province of origin in Italy) and in particular to the new contact situation (new city of residence, professional activities). The general instruction, provided for all respondents, was that they were participating in the selection of the best voice for a new travel app. No references were made to language or, more generally, the actual purpose of the experiment.

4.4 Respondents

For the present study, we selected a sample of 63 listener-judges to complete the experiment. The sample was almost equally distributed between the two countries of residence (Belgium and Switzerland), but less well distributed for the regional provenance in Italy: 20 respondents came from northern Italian regions, 28 from southern Italian regions and only 7 came from central Italy (while 8 participants mentioned another birthplace). The majority of the respondents left Italy more than ten years ago (n = 39), the other respondents have been living abroad for less than ten years (n = 24). Finally, the group of respondents was more or less equally distributed across gender (39 female, 23 male and one neutre respondent) and age (with 37 respondents between 20 and 40 years old and 26 respondents between 40 and 60 years of age).

5. Results

5.1 Factor analysis

On the ratings matrix, an initial factor analysis (performed in R;[4] factors were retained if their eigenvalue > 1 after applying varimax rotation) yielded a three-component solution. The model accounted for 66% of the variance of the data, but there were several problems: the scales *trustworthy* and *modern* loaded on two (*trustworthy*) or three (*modern*) factors, while the scales *fashionable* and *generous* showed an overwhelming majority of intermediate (i.e. 3's) scores on the Likert scale (which could indicate a generalized difficulty in conceptualizing the given property for *any* voice). The second factor analysis, without these three scales, yielded a two-component solution that accounted for 62% of the variance of the data. This model yielded two robust factors: the first one clustered the scales related to speaker SUPERIORITY and DYNAMISM (viz. *successful, competent, good job, perspicacious, university degree* and *self-confident*), the second one clustered scales related to SOLIDARITY (viz. *warm-hearted, pleasant, sociable* and *joking*). Since the factor analysis did not find a separate DYNAMISM factor, and the scales that were clustered in factor 1 were mostly factors related to SUPERIORITY, this factor was given the broad label PRESTIGE. The results of the final factor analysis are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of final factor analysis

	Prestige	Solidarity
successful	0.84	0.23
competent	0.85	0.21
good job	0.88	
perspicacious	0.73	0.43
university degree	0.77	
self-confident	0.66	0.25
warm-hearted	0.26	0.77
like to know	0.53	0.63
pleasant	0.23	0.86
sociable		0.79
joking		0.76
honest	0.44	0.30
generous	0.41	0.48
SS loadings	4.51	3.60
Proportion variance	0.35	0.28
Cumulative variance	0.35	0.62

4. R is a free software environment for statistical computing and graphics (https://www.R-project.org).

5.2 Average scores and scaling

In order to investigate the influence of the properties of the audio samples (i.e. the varieties) and the participants on each attitudinal dimension, we first standardized the scores of the original rating scales into z-scores (with the *scale*-function in R) and then averaged these standardized scores per grouping of scales that received the highest loadings on a factor (i.e. the shaded scales in Table 2).

5.3 Effects

Mixed-effects linear regression analyses, with participants as random effects, were used to measure the correlation between the scales and the varieties in our samples.

Figure 1 shows the average standardized prestige score for the five speaker guises (and thus the five varieties). The plot in Figure 1 shows that both Florentine Italian and Neapolitan Italian (both at around 0.2) were rated as the most prestigious. This suggests, in line with previous studies, that Florentine Italian has preserved its historic literary prestige among Italians living abroad. The high prestige value observed for Neapolitan, however, was not expected and suggests not only

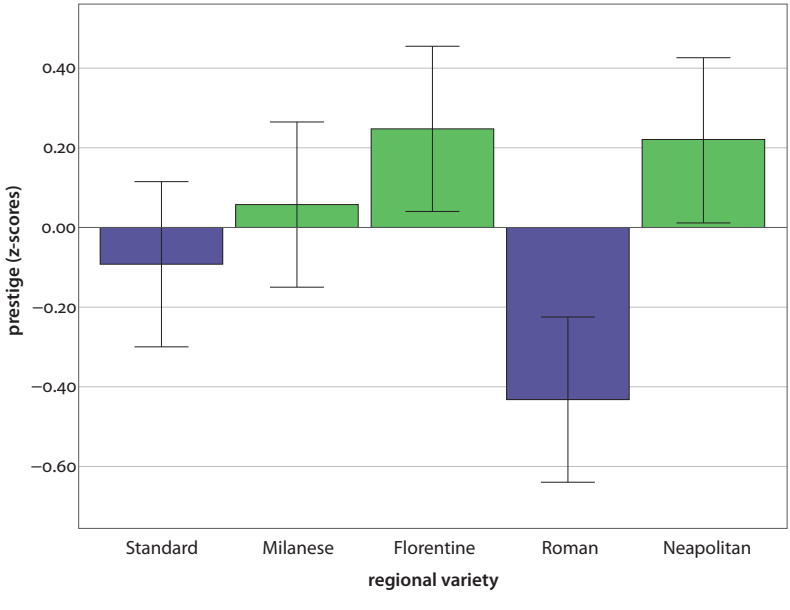

Figure 1. z-scores of the five varieties for *prestige*, with purple plots for negative z-scores, and green plots for positive z-scores

neutralization of the stigma, but also increasing sympathy for the cultural identity associated with the variety (music, theatre, …).

The plot also shows a significant devaluation for Roman Italian (around −0.4), whereas for standard Italian and Milanese, responses did not show significantly positive or negative evaluations for prestige (i.e. the error bars around the average scores include the zero point of the scale).

On the *prestige* dimension, age (younger vs. older) was found to have a significant effect ($p < 0.5$) for the Florentine variety (see Figure 2): younger respondents rate the variety much more favorably than the older generation. In order to find out how stable these evaluations are across the three different regions of origin, we stratified the ratings according to the three main areas of origin of the respondents (northern, central and southern Italian regions). However, no area origin effect was found. This means that the somewhat unexpected positive prestige attitudes towards Neapolitan cannot be attributed to the areas of origin.

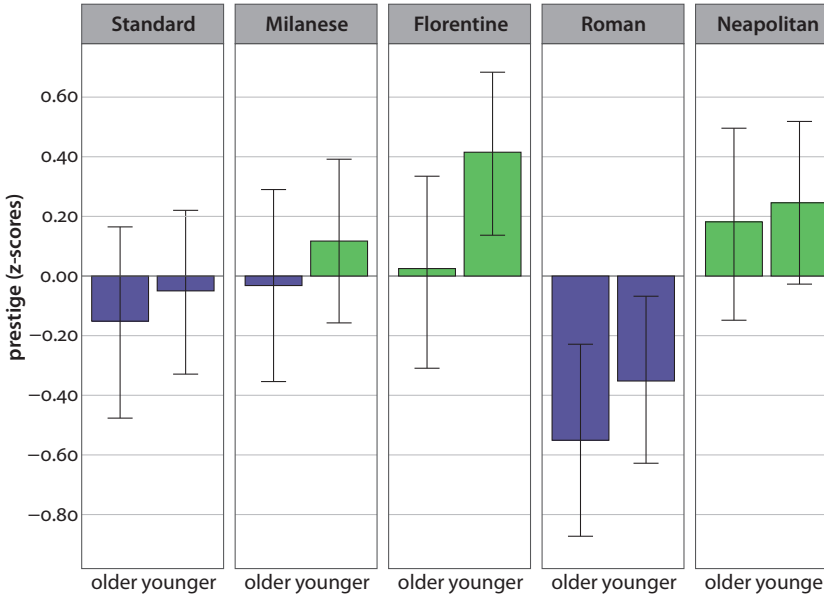

Figure 2. Age group effect for *prestige*, with purple plots for negative z-scores, and green plots for positive z-scores

Figure 3 shows the mean score for the *solidarity* dimension. Roman and Florentine Italian are deemed significantly more pleasing than standard, Milanese, and Neapolitan Italian, which are rated negatively on this dimension.

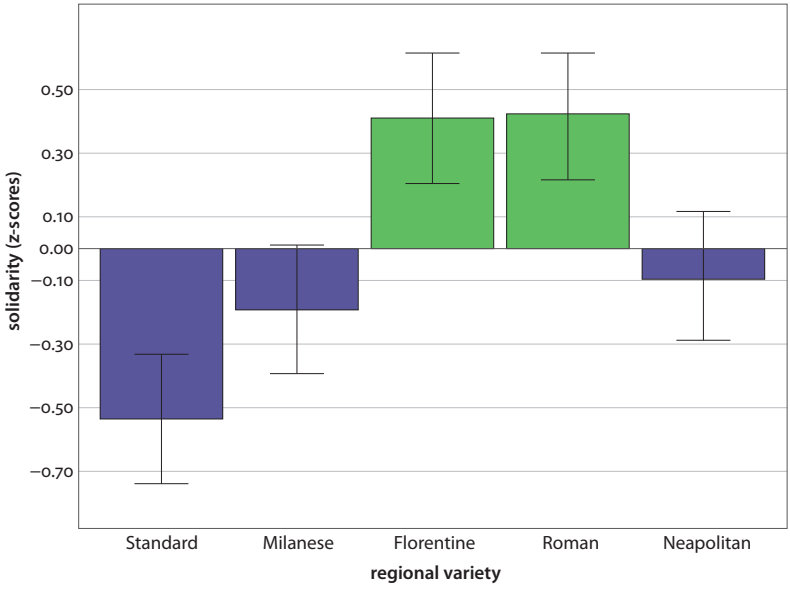

Figure 3. z-scores of the five varieties for *solidarity*, with purple plots for negative z-scores, and green plots for positive z-scores

In other words, our data suggest an increasing sympathy for Roman and Florentine, but low solidarity for Neapolitan, which was deemed highly prestigious, and low solidarity for Milanese and standard Italian, although only for the latter variety the observed trend seems significant.

As for the *prestige* dimension, a slight age group effect was found, this time for the Roman and Neapolitan variety, both evaluated more positively on the *solidarity* dimension (see Figure 4) by the younger cohort of participants. No regional origin effect was found.

In summary, a traditional attitudinal pattern was found for the Roman variety, since it was evaluated high on *solidarity*, but low on *prestige*. With standard Italian and Milanese, however, the pattern observed is new, since both varieties were rated as non-prestigious and non-pleasant at the same time. The high scores for Neapolitan Italian were also rather unexpected, whereas no distinct attitude toward this variety was found on the *solidarity* dimension.

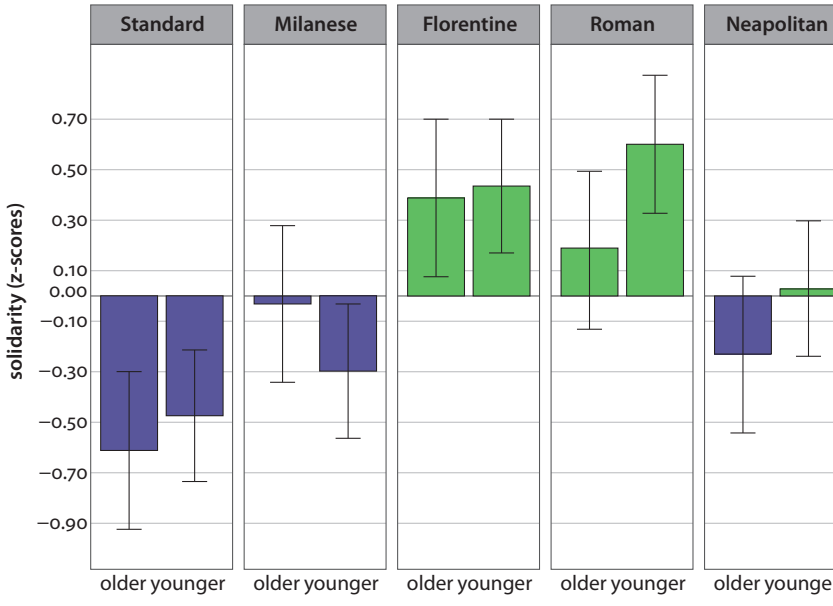

Figure 4. Age group effect for *solidarity*, with purple plots for negative z-scores, and green plots for positive z-scores

6. Discussion

The findings above will now be reviewed in light of the overall research question asking how variable belief systems are that underpin standardization dynamics among highly mobile speakers who live outside their home country and in a contact situation. We start with a comparison to the findings of previous measurements carried out in Italy (De Pascale, Marzo and Speelman 2017).

Although the rating scales used in this study were taken from De Pascale, Marzo and Speelman (ibid.), in order to allow a close comparison of the attitudes between Italians abroad and in Italy, the results of the factor analyses conducted in both projects diverge in a number of ways.

The two studies share the same absence of a distinction between *speaker dynamism* and *speaker superiority* within the prestige dimension, even though different types of scales targeting those two aspects of prestige were specifically included in both experiments. It may be the case that Italian speakers, both abroad as well as 'at home', do not tap into two different conceptual systems when evaluating their fellow countrymen on questions related to status/prestige. Consequently, only one factor emerges from the analysis that subsumes both types of prestige. On the other hand, the analysis by De Pascale, Marzo and Speelman (ibid.) yielded two prestige-related

factors, a speech-related and a speaker-related prestige factor. For the following analysis, however, this means that the one prestige factor resulting from our analysis on the Italian expats can only be compared with the speaker-related prestige scores of the Italians living in Italy.

In terms of *prestige* scores for the different regional varieties, there are marked differences between the attitudinal patterns of the Italian speakers abroad and the Italian speakers in Italy. For example, the older and younger generations in Italy show very different patterns in behavior, while the patterns between the two age groups living abroad are surprisingly aligned to a great extent. For younger Italians living in Italy, the speakers of central varieties (i.e. Roman Italian and Florentine Italian) enjoy the most prestige, while Neapolitan speakers, as well as Milanese speakers, occupy the lowest ranking and standard Italian a middle ranking. Older participants clearly ascribe the most prestige to the standard language and Neapolitan Italian, and rate speakers of the central varieties lower. These results contrast with the younger respondents.

The picture is completely different, however, for the Italians living in Belgium or Switzerland. First of all, the central varieties do not form a homogenous group, since Roman Italian speakers have the lowest prestige scores across generations, while Florentine Italian speakers have higher ones. Furthermore, Neapolitan Italian which was downgraded among younger respondents living in Italy, seems to regain prestige in all the age groups living abroad. In this respect, Italian speakers living abroad lean more towards the attitudinal preferences of the older generation in Italy (with the exception of standard Italian, which is considered highly prestigious by the older cohort in Italy, but not to the same extent by young and old respondents living abroad).

A point of continuity is the clear emergence of the dimension of *speaker solidarity*, which clusters almost exactly with the same rating scales in both experiments (*pleasant, sociable* and *joking*). The *solidarity* scores are also distributed in a highly similar way to those in De Pascale, Marzo and Speelman (2017). Both older age groups rate speakers of Florentine Italian as the most sociable, closely followed by Roman-accented speakers; Roman and Neapolitan-accented speakers are almost judged on par by older participants living in Italy, while there is a slight preference for the Roman speakers in the data for Italians living abroad. Finally, Milanese Italian and the standard language again occupy the lowest position on the SOLIDARITY scale for both older generations. The only difference is that speakers of standard Italian seem to be rated more negatively on the *solidarity* dimensions to a higher extent by older Italians living abroad than by older Italians living in Italy, for whom the Milanese speaker is clearly the least friendly.

Comparing the younger cohorts (i.e. age younger than 40) to each other, there is again a striking resemblance. Roman Italian speakers are clearly rated as the most

pleasant speakers, surpassing the Florentine speakers (and thus in contrast to the attitudinal preferences of both older generations). A difference between younger Italians living abroad and in Italy can be observed in the scores for Milanese Italian and Neapolitan Italian. The Milanese speakers seem to have a higher rate of appreciation by the younger cohort in Italy compared to those abroad, where the Milanese speakers rank lower than Neapolitan Italian speakers. In contrast, Neapolitan speakers have lower solidarity scores among the Italians living in Italy compared to those in Belgium or Switzerland. It should be mentioned here that the expat groups include respondents from all over Italy, while in the study by De Pascale, Marzo and Speelman (ibid.), the participants were only from southern Italy. The varying number of respondents that identify with the Neapolitan variety in the two samples might explain the differing levels of appreciation for speakers of that variety in the attitudinal experiments. However, the lack of effect of the respondent's region of origin on the prestige evaluation suggests that this variation in appreciation is not simply or at least not only due to the difference in regional stratification of the samples in both studies. We acknowledge that the areas of origin are rather broad categories and that further research needs to be carried out in order to gain deeper insights into the role of local regional provenance on the prestige evaluations of the varieties. For now, our data suggest that the area of origin is not a strong determinant in the change of the appreciation of Neapolitan Italian.

In general, the situation for the *solidarity* dimensions remains quite stable, both across generations and across mobile and non-mobile Italians: Italian expats, across generations, display similar solidarity-based attitudinal patterns to those found for respondents living in Italy; the central Italian speakers show rankings which are higher compared to the standard and Milanese-accented speakers, which are lower. By contrast, the position of Neapolitan Italian fluctuates with a moderate cross-over effect; the appreciation increases by age for those living in Italy, but decreases for those living abroad.

7. Conclusions

The answer to our empirical research question on the effect of the new international mobility of Italians on the prestige of standard Italian and regional standards is that there are clear differences compared to the attitudes of non-mobile Italians, as found in Galli de' Paratesi (1984) and De Pascale, Marzo and Speelman (2017). The most striking results concern the disappearance of the belief that Milanese is the new best way of speaking, on the one hand, and of the stigma associated with Neapolitan on the other hand.

Furthermore, Neapolitan Italian, which was downgraded among younger respondents living in Italy, seems to regain prestige in all the age groups living abroad. We assume that this surprising result is not due to Naples per se nor to a shift in perspective with respect to its cultural charisma. Rather, we assume that Italians living abroad who encounter cultural generalizations regarding Italy find that stereotypes toward Italy correspond in large part to stereotypes toward Naples. As a consequence of self-categorization and self-stereotyping processes (Hogg & Turner 1985), the positive and well-known stereotypes associated with Naples might lead to a "positive differentiation on the in-group from selected out-groups" (Tajfel 1981: 156), modifying the original auto-stereotype (Villano & Passini 2018). We do not go so far as to consider Naples as representative of Italy, but we assume that the correspondence of stereotypes about Italy with stereotypes about Naples has not only mitigated its stigma but even positively influenced its prestige.

The answer to the more theoretical research question, asking how variable believe systems that underpin standardization dynamics are, can be tentatively expressed as follows: international mobility in terms of international migration can affect the social meaning people attach to regional varieties. Northern and southern varieties receive the most polarizing judgments, namely Milanese and Neapolitan. For speakers abroad, the evaluation of these regional varieties seems to undergo a substantial change: whereas Milanese is considered the most prestigious regional variety in Italy, its prestige abroad is significantly lower. In contrast, the Neapolitan variety, which was downgraded in terms of prestige among younger speakers in Southern Italy, is significantly more highly valued among Italians abroad.

The precise reasons for this change require further investigation. What has emerged so far, however, is that language beliefs change in the context of mobility, and that factors arising from the context of migration, such as 'expat nostalgia', modify the belief systems that underpin standardization dynamics. This testifies once again to the fact that social meaning is not static but dynamic, since it constantly evolves depending on the context, not only on social interaction. In follow-up studies, the variable *mobile speakers* will be differentiated further, taking into account their social networks (local, international, Italian) as well as their exposure to Italian through virtual mobility (frequency and duration). This will allow us to gain further insights into the question of how migration affects language attitudes.

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