

Foreword

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The present special issue of the *Italian Journal of Linguistics* is the result of a selection of papers from the workshop on 'Italian heritage language communities: multiple perspectives' held during the 2021 meeting of the *Societas Linguistica Europaea*. That occasion brought to the light an unforeseen variety of topics and research perspectives connected to the linguistics of Italian immigration, and at the same time made us realise that a collection of papers summarising old and new trends in the linguistic behaviour of Italian – or Italo-Romance – speaking communities worldwide was still a desideratum. This is thus the main criterion that was adopted to organise the special issue.

The study of Italian emigration has attracted growing interest among linguists over the last decades, and we can now count on a number of case studies describing the linguistic features of specific Italian communities abroad, as well as extensive overviews on the subject. However, most immigration settings involving communities of Italian origin are still poorly described, with data becoming more and more difficult to retrieve due to ongoing language shift towards the national language; currently, existing corpora are relatively small and hardly available online. At the same time, not unlike other immigrant communities, research within this field needs to keep up with the constant evolution of migration flows over the years; in fact, changing mobilities create new multilingual societies and new heritage language scenarios that in most cases require an adaptation of the categories of analysis used for past migrations. Furthermore, a promising line of research is represented by the identification of those features that virtually characterise all Italian heritage language communities. For one, the debate on complex repertoires characterised by the presence of one or more dialects, and not necessarily of Standard Italian, seems to be a common aspect of several research works in this field. However, as some authors included in this special issue have pointed out, differences are also to be expected between old and new migrant communities in terms of orientation and use of the different varieties of the Italian repertoire. Contact with the dominant language is also a point that emerges in most contributions in this special issue, to which we must add the perhaps less obvious topic of contact occurring WITHIN the migrant community, between different dialects and/or varieties of Italian. Finally, some contributions reflect on how the notion of heritage language could be extended,

on one hand, to historical minority languages of Italy, when they occur in a context of internal or external migration, and, on the other hand, to fossilised learner varieties of Italian, which may be retained after transnational migration outside Italy.

As a major defining aspect of this special issue, all the papers, except for Gorla and Di Salvo's, are strongly data-oriented and build on the discussion of single case studies and research experiences. At the same time, each scenario leads to insightful theoretical and methodological observations that indeed may help re-defining the state of the art on Italo-Romance Heritage Languages. The issue begins with two papers addressing relatively old Italo-Romance communities. Del Vecchio describes code-mixing in the Italian community of Bletchley (UK), while Nagy and Di Salvo compare differential object marking in the Italian communities of Toronto (Ontario, Canada) and Bletchley (UK). Duarte Garcia and Brambatti Guzzo also analyse a relatively older Italo-Romance variety spoken in Brazil, namely Talian, but an important part of their contribution discusses the methodological challenge of designing a corpus of an underdocumented heritage language. Similarly, Ferrini reflects on how the perspective of linguistic landscapes can contribute to our understanding of the dynamics of a long-established Italian community like Manhattan's Little Italy. The last three papers set off from better-known cases: Pisano, Ganfi and Piunno take an innovative direction, as they propose to use the heritage language framework not only to analyse Sardinian communities in France, but also Sardinian communities in other parts of Italy. While the latter case is different in principle from heritage language scenarios *stricto sensu*, because these speakers are not exposed to an entirely alien dominant language, it is true that subtle contact dynamics may be brought to light by this new approach. From a very different angle, Lupica Spagnolo analyses the retention of L2 Italian in Germany among migrants from West Africa who have previously resided in Italy, and thus significantly broadens the notion of heritage speakers to L2 speakers in continuing migration. Finally, Natale and Marzo take into account restandardisation of Standard Italian, a key topic in Italian sociolinguistics, considering data from the new wave of skilled Italian migration in German-speaking Switzerland.

As the guest editors of this special issue, we wish to express our gratitude to all the authors that have contributed to its realisation, to the anonymous reviewers, and to the editorial board of the *Italian Journal of Linguistics*, for revising the early draft of this proposal and providing assistance and consultancy throughout all the stages of the process.