

Intonation in Language Contact: the case of Simultaneous Italian-Dialect Bilingualism

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Background: Italy features a multifarious linguistic landscape characterised by the co-existence of a national official language (Italian) and Italo-Romance dialects (Grassi, Sobrero & Telmon, 2007; Berruto, 2008), giving rise to a widespread simultaneous bilingualism situation (Berruto, 1987, Dal Negro & Vietti, 2011). From the functional point of view, Italian dialect-bilingualism can be defined as a “dilalic” (Berruto 2008) rather than as a diglottic (Ferguson, 1953) configuration. In dilalia, the strong functional differentiation between a High and a Low variety featured by diglossia is absent, because the bilingual speaker uses both varieties (in this case Italian and one Italo-Romance dialect) in informal contexts. Such a linguistic co-existence engenders a range of locally/regionally tinted varieties of Italian, especially in speech, in which one can say that “everyone [in Italy] has an accent” (Crocco, 2017).

A particular instantiation of Italian bilingualism is represented by Campania (South of Italy) where sundry dialects are spoken, among which Neapolitan. This dialect is actively used by old as well as young speakers (De Blasi, 2006). In this study, we focus on the intonational interaction between Neapolitan and the variety of regional Italian spoken in the metropolitan area of Naples (Neapolitan Italian). We approach the study of prosodic contact by taking the single bilingual speaker as the starting point of interaction, along the lines of Matras’ (2020:3) claim that “*The relevant locus of contact is the [...] individual multilingual speaker*”. Therefore, we examine Neapolitan intonation taking the productions of individual bilingual speaker as a vantage point and focus on the outcomes of such contact at the prosodic level. We will show that prosodic contact between the Neapolitan dialect and Neapolitan Italian can result in pattern replication (Matras & Sakel, 2007), and that, overall, it complexifies the intonational phonology of the involved varieties (cf. Trudgill, 2011).

Research questions: The research questions raised are:

- a) Relative to the body of research on the intonation of Italian varieties, and especially with a view to Neapolitan Italian, what is **the import that each single speaker provides** in the apprehension of the relationship between intonation and contact?
- b) Can we, in the long run, identify, through the observation of each speaker’s behaviour, intonational **patterns specific to Neapolitan or to Neapolitan Italian, or common to both**?
- c) Can we talk about a sort of **intonational complexification/simplification of the two varieties under scrutiny** in Trudgill’s (2011) terms by observing the behaviour of each speaker in the two examined varieties?

Method: We rely on a corpus of declarative sentences by 9 bilingual male speakers of Italian and Neapolitan. Unlike most studies on Italian intonation, we examine speakers who are not university students but speakers with a secondary school education level, namely with a technical/vocational background.

We rely on a *kml* (*k-means for longitudinal data*) clustering algorithm (Genolini et al., 2015) which groups together F0 trajectories associated with the intonational nucleus through the. By doing so, we are able to give a representation of the “tonal space” for each speaker, whose

observation provides a close-up onto how each one of them organises his intonational realizations across varieties.

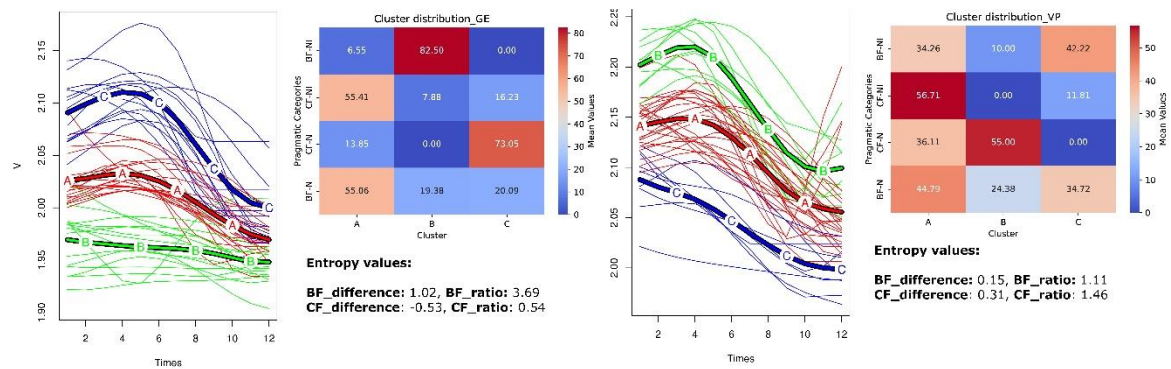


Figure 1 – Example of tonal spaces generated with the kml package in R (Genolini et al., 2015).

Preliminary results: While some speakers seem to differentiate fairly well between Neapolitan and Italian in terms of intonational realisations, showing a strong association between specific tonal variants, pragmatic conditions, and variety (e.g., they use a specific tonal pattern for broad-focus declaratives in Italian and another for the same type of sentence in Neapolitan), others exhibit less clear-cut correspondences, which can be analysed as tonal repertoires more closely aligned with either Italian or, conversely, Neapolitan. In these cases, a pattern found in one variety often appears in the other, sometimes with different functions (pattern replication). Overall, this interference seems to create a more complex range of intonational possibilities available to speakers.

The observation of each speaker’s intonational space has highlighted that each one can greatly contribute to gaining insights into how the contact between closely-related varieties can bear on the intonational realizations thereof. We have further shown that individual-level pattern realisations and intonational behaviours may go unnoticed or even lost when considering the speakers as a whole, in that this would mean that generalisations override specification. Through this single-speaker approach, we were able to identify Neapolitan-specific intonational realisations and Italian-specific intonational realisations.

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