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Language contact, variation and change across the Italian communities of Bedford, Peterborough and Loughborough in the post-Brexit era

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Language contact, variation and change across the Italian communities of Bedford, Peterborough and Loughborough in the post-Brexit era

by *Siria Guzzo**

Abstract

In the wake of previous research about the Italians in the UK (Balirano & Guzzo, 2011; Guzzo, 2014; Di Salvo, 2012), the present contribution investigates the multi-layered relationship between migration, identity and linguistic diversity in England and starts questioning the complexities of self- and other-identification as well as belonging of members of a heritage community in the UK in light of a more overt rise of anti-immigration sentiments since the EU referendum. The analysis draws upon a corpus consisting of a set of 12 ethnographic interviews, collected by means of audio recording as well as qualitative data elicited by means of a questionnaire survey distributed to second and third generation Anglo Italians of Bedford, Peterborough and Loughborough from July to December 2017. Data are analyzed by using a combination of variationist sociolinguistics and deductive content analysis; comparable data from previous research are used to contrast the present corpus. The findings provide mixed and multi-layered behaviors which act as a reflection of their identity construction as well as throw light on their level of integration.

Keywords: Language contact, Anglo-Italian communities in the UK, Sociolinguistic variationist analysis, Ethnographic survey, Identity perception, Heritage community, Migration.

I

Introduction

The language, culture and identity of Italian migrant communities abroad have been the subject of numerous studies over the last few decades (e.g. Turano, 1932; Cascaito & Radcliff-Umstead, 1975; Hall, 1980; Tosi, 1984; Guzzo, 2007; 2014; Balirano & Guzzo, 2011). Many of these studies have focussed on second language acquisition, the outcomes of language contact, as well as the emergence of trans-nationalism because of the increased impact of globalization on multilingual societies. Indeed, Hall (2006) claims that the way we project ourselves onto our cultural identities has become increasingly problematic and pulls in multiple directions, consciously shifting from one identity to another, becoming multiple people in multiple places, sometimes performing overlapping identities (Byrd, 2007; 2009) according to the context and social interactions with different interlocutors (Guzzo, 2010).

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In the UK, the town of Bedford in the East of England has the largest Italian diaspora community as a proportion of its population (Office of National Statistics, 2011). This is the result of the arrival of more than 10,000 mostly Southern Italian immigrants starting in the early 1950s until the 1960s in search of employment in the local brickworks (Tosi, 1984; Sponza, 2011). Other large Italian communities which followed a similar immigration pattern to that of Bedford are found in Peterborough in Cambridgeshire and Loughborough in Leicestershire.

In the wake of previous research regarding Italians in the UK (Balirano & Guzzo, 2011; Guzzo, 2007; 2014; Di Salvo, 2012), the present contribution investigates the multi-layered relationship between migration, language, identity, and linguistic diversity in England, with a particular focus on the three urban centres of Bedford, Peterborough and Loughborough. This paper begins by tracing the history of Italian immigration to the UK, including the trends in language maintenance and linguistic integration. Subsequently, the focus shifts to the contemporary sociolinguistic situation of Anglo-Italians¹ in Bedford, Peterborough, and Loughborough in light of the current post-Brexit period. This in turn leads to a line of questioning into the complexities of *self* and *other* identification and a sense of belonging as members of a heritage community in the UK, particularly in view of a more apparent rise of anti-immigration sentiments following the so-called Brexit or EU referendum in 2016. Furthermore, the question arises as to whether findings based on informants surveyed in the current climate align or contrast with previous findings in terms of heritage and ethnic identity perceptions.

A new preliminary corpus consisting of ethnographic interviews and surveys was collected from the urban cohorts. Data are analysed by using variationist sociolinguistics, qualitative analysis, and comparable data from previous research (Guzzo, 2007; 2010; 2014) which are used to contrast the present corpus.

The findings presented highlight the mixed and multi-layered behaviours which act as a reflection of their identity construction as well as throwing light on their level of integration. The contribution concludes by discussing the implications of the findings for the future of Anglo-Italians in Bedford, Peterborough, and Loughborough.

2

History of Italians in the UK and the Italian communities of Bedford, Peterborough and Loughborough

Throughout history there have been different waves of Italians migrating to the UK. There was, for instance, a mass wave of poor migrants between 1880-1920. A subsequent wave, of specific interest here, occurred following WWII during the 1950s and 1960s when the British Ministry of Labour signed an intergovernmental agreement with the Italian government to encourage immigration from Italy in order to bolster the British labour workforce (Colpi, 1991; Guzzo, 2007; Sponza, 1993; 2011).

This post-war wave of migration generally involved volunteer workers, who were recruited in large numbers from the poorest areas of Southern Italy and encouraged

by the Italian government to travel to the UK in the hope of easing significant demographic pressure in these non-industrialised areas. The main recruitment agencies were in Naples and Palermo (Stubbs, 1985) leading to the majority of workers migrating from Campania, Calabria, Apulia and Sicily to British industrial areas where they were largely employed in the brickwork industry (Tubito & King, 1996; Cereste & Bagnoli, 2001; Guzzo, 2007; 2011). Initial migration in this phase started in the summer of 1951 but was followed by a second phase driven by a desire for family reunification whereby chain migration replaced the official recruitment scheme (Cavallaro, 2008; Cereste & Bagnoli, 2001). Employment and family reunion remain the predominant motivations for migration between the two countries today (Di Salvo, 2011).

Obtaining an overall vision of the numbers of Italians of first, second and third generation in the UK today is no easy feat for various institutional and statistical reasons. However, according to the last national census of 2011 almost 100,000 people in England and Wales identified Italian as their main language, 125,000 claimed Italian as their ethnic group, with over 130,000 born in Italy (Office of National Statistics, 2011).

There are today several areas of the UK with substantial numbers of Italian communities who migrated following WWII, settling down in medium size industrial towns and cities where they were able to find work (Zontini, 2004), for the most part in the Southeast of England in Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire. These communities, hosting around 60% of the Italian migrants arriving in the post-war period, have also been defined as 'Britalian' (Palmer, 1982) while other Italian migrants settled in the Midlands, particularly Loughborough, as well as other cities in the UK including Bletchley, Nottingham, Coventry, Sheffield and the steel towns of South Wales (Tubito & King, 1996).

As previously noted, Bedford has the largest Italian diaspora community within the UK as a proportion of its total population. 28% of Bedfordians, numbering some 42,261 in a city of 147,913 residents, are of Italian origin, while the related communities of Peterborough (8,000 Anglo-Italians, some 4.5% of its 118,975 residents) and Loughborough (59,932 inhabitants² – Census 2011) also have substantial numbers and are considered the largest Italian communities in the UK in total numbers, excluding London (Guzzo, 2007; 2011; Di Salvo, 2012). These three Italian communities mainly established themselves through recruitment and employment in the brickwork industry. The primary reasons for Italian migration to the UK lie, on the one hand, in the British brick industry's desperate need for labour and, on the other, in the Italians' need to seize all employment opportunities in order to earn money to support their families. In the 1950s, the world's largest and best-known brick factory, Marston Valley Bricks Co., suffered from a severe shortage of English labourers willing to work in the brickfield (Colpi, 1991; Guzzo, 2007; 2010). Many Italians stayed, and today Bedford and its surrounding area are home to three generations of Italians (Kyambi, 2005). Following the expiry of their work contracts, these migrants subsequently undertook a more entrepreneurial approach moving on to set up their own businesses,

particularly in the food and catering industry. Indeed, Italian restaurants and pizzerias are still prevalent in Loughborough representing crucial landmarks for the Italian community there (Guzzo, 2007; 2011; Guzzo & Gallo, 2019). Italians in Bedford and Peterborough also followed a similar pattern to that of Loughborough by opening their own businesses. The presence of Italian businesses in British neighbourhoods all aided in further fostering their sense of community, as well as integration. This was also strengthened by the opening of Italian consular offices in these areas, first in Bedford in 1954, and later in Peterborough in 1985 along with the establishment of some Italian churches and associations such as *The First-Generation Association* in Bedford and *The Fleet* in Peterborough.

In addition to wide cultural and linguistic variability within the Italian communities under consideration (Fortier, 2000, p. 37), migrants generally originated from underdeveloped and underprivileged areas with relatively low levels of education and many only spoke their local or regional dialect as their mother tongue with limited or no oral proficiency in Standard Italian, as taught formally in schools in Italy and the UK (Guzzo, 2007). In terms of intra-community communication and second language learning for second generation children, discrepancies arose between the language spoken at home and the Standard Italian promoted in local schools with Italian government assistance. As a result, whereas second and third generations have been more consistently exposed to Standard Italian through schooling, the first generation continued to speak their homeland dialect. However, despite this discrepancy, the proximity of Italian families within their new communities in the UK still led to a sense of united identity and they perceive themselves today as a tight-knit community with a strong sense of belonging (Guzzo, 2014). This sense of belonging and kinship is of fundamental importance in transnational Italian communities (Zontini, 2004, pp. 12-3) and is reinforced through the family bonds which play a key role in the social definition of these communities aiding to strengthen intra-community ties and, despite the natural language shift towards the host society, the Italian communities continue to preserve their culture and heritage (Guzzo, 2014).

3

Historical Patterns in Language, Linguistic Variation and Identity

To date most sociolinguistic investigation into Italian communities has been centred largely on Italian migrants in Australia, Canada and the USA (e.g. Cavallaro, 2008; Horvath, 1985; Hoffmann & Walker, 2010; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2011) and sociolinguistic studies in the UK have generally analysed Italian communities from a sociological or anthropological perspective (Cervi, 1991; Fortier, 2000; Zontini, 2004). However, some research on language and identity has also been carried out in the UK (e.g. Tosi, 1984; Guzzo, 2007; 2010; 2014; Guzzo & Gallo, 2014; 2019; Guzzo & Di

Salvo, 2019). There have also been studies which have examined online community-identity construction (Balirano & Guzzo, 2011), digital identity marking in online communication (Guzzo & Gallo, 2019) as well as how food practices and language devices in Italian diasporic communities in the UK and in the USA represent Anglo-Italian identities abroad (Balirano & Guzzo, 2019).

Previous findings regarding the Italian community in Bedford highlight that English is the first language of most of its second and all third-generation members while they maintain a passive competence in Standard Italian and dialect (Guzzo, 2007; 2014). However, they also maintain an extremely strong sense of ethnic Italian identity and while Guzzo's (2007) study initially focussed on the phonology and morpho-syntax of English spoken by Italian descendants in the UK, her work revealed a wide-spread use and understanding of Italian within the composite hybrid community of speakers. A particularly interesting phonological anomaly was found within this study group in the third-generation male cohort demonstrating some L2 features in their English which had been indigenised by young speakers moving in the direction of a pan-ethnic dialect with features in common to other minority groups, such as Pakistani and Bangladeshi. One such feature involves hiatus resolution, mostly after definite and indefinite articles followed by a vowel (e.g. the/an apple) in which a glottal stop was found to be the preferred resolution for the speakers under scrutiny.

Finally, other unexpected features were revealed in the English of this same cohort connected to the use of foreign (usually Italian) loan words, the Anglicisation of other Italian lexical items (mainly culinary terms) with English plural marking, e.g. rosettes, cappuccinos, nonnis, a lack of inversion in question formation and third person singular present tense zero marking (Guzzo 2011).

The question of language maintenance and shifting in these Italian communities has also been the subject of further investigation (Guzzo & Di Salvo, 2016). An investigation was undertaken into the use of code-switching (Gumperz, 1982) in first generation migrants between Italian, Italian dialect and English and into the use of English quotatives in third generation migrants. Results showed that first generation migrants preferred using an Italo-Romance variety, switching most often between some form of Standard Italian and Italian dialect along a linguistic continuum with English having only a secondary role and with greater resistance shown to its use. Third generation migrants, in this case adolescents, were shown to be predominantly English speakers who most frequently opted for the traditional quotative *say* and a female gender preference for the use of *be like* was also identified (Guzzo & Di Salvo, 2016).

3.1. Return Migration Linguistic Variation

More recent studies (Di Salvo & Guzzo, 2019; Guzzo & Di Salvo, 2019) have been carried out into the Italian migrants with a comparison of those who continue to reside in Bedford and return migrants who have repatriated to their hometown, Montefalcione in the Irpinia sub-region of Campania in Southern Italy. The studies

investigated the linguistic variation present in the Italian dialect used by return migrants and the dialect variety used by Bedford Italian migrants from the same hometown but who have remained in the UK.

Di Salvo & Guzzo (2019) explored 6 dialectal features of the Montefalcione dialect looking to identify whether emigration had impacted on its maintenance or had indeed favoured its loss. Findings indicated that return migrants tended to adopt a more standard dialect variant, influenced by contact with Italian, rather than a traditional form. However, of note is the fact that the migrants who continue to live in the UK use a more conservative dialectal variant, particularly among the female cohort. Furthermore, the return migrants are also able to recall more archaic lexical forms (in spite of their tendency to use more standard forms) highlighting that they adopt a more innovative behaviour than Montefalcione residents who have never emigrated. In particular, further investigation revealed a significant variation across genders among the Montefalcione migrants who are still in Bedford regarding the local dialect equivalent of the Italian distal demonstrative *quello* which is marked by dropping the labiovelar as well as possible rhotacization (*killo* and *kiro*) which female participants do not produce. They opt instead for the more conservative (*kwiro*) which is closest to the Italian form (*kwello*) with respect to historical labialization and is also most often chosen by first generation speakers. However, this form is used less in the second generation who fluctuate between the two more dialectal forms *killo* and *kiro*.

The results of this study (Di Salvo & Guzzo, 2019) led to further investigation into transnationalism and to considerations regarding how migration does not end with the return to one's birthplace but is a continuing process (cf. Baldassar, 2009). In light of this, Guzzo and Di Salvo (2019) pursued a line of enquiry into transnational effects in the identity-marking process of return migrants from mixed-identities, reconstructing migrants' memories in order to identify specific relevant variables which play a role in their identity perception. This was achieved by studying their linguistic behaviour in patterns of code-switching (CS) between the UK migrants and return migrants as well as analysing the dialect variable shift drawing parallels between the return migrants and the local residents of the hometown (who had never migrated).

Findings in terms of CS showed a greater tendency towards the use of English loanwords and discourse markers in the speech of return migrants (of both generations) than in UK migrants, but inter- and intra-sentential codeswitching and mixing seemed to characterise the speech of those still living in the UK much more than the returners.

As for specific dialect variants in particular the equivalent form(s) of the Italian distal demonstrative *quello* discussed above, Bedford based migrants are more inclined than returnees to use the dialect variable, *kwiro*, which has arisen from an adaptation of Southern Italian dialects present in the UK. This enables easier communication among diverse Southern Italian speakers, and forges greater unity and shared identity, rather

than using Standard Italian or their original local dialect. Indeed, this same adoption of the non-local dialect variants, in this case *kwiro* (closest to Italian *quello* in terms of labialization) is still used by the return migrants, on their return, particularly if second generation, along with a preference for Italian over the local dialect variety. This is hypothesised as being indicative of constructing one's own hybrid identity through their linguistic behaviour (Guzzo & Di Salvo, 2019). This study highlights how migrants' hybrid identity is confirmed and reinforced by a new form of reconstruction due to relocation and recontextualization.

3.2. Contemporary sociolinguistic situation of UK Italians and their Identity in the post-Brexit era

Questions of identity and linguistic behaviour leading to the construction of one's identity and reflection on one's ethnic background and heritage are widely discussed in the research literature. The inclusion or exclusion of a heritage or a community forging a sense of belonging is a global phenomenon (Meinhof & Galasiński, 2005). Multiculturalism within the UK ideally implies the co-existence of a variety of heritages and cultures seamlessly integrated into one nation with different ethnic groups living together (Nandi & Platt, 2013; Parekh, 2000a; 2000b). However, the reality is that this raises rather complex issues of identity and questioning the concepts of *self* and *other* is ever present among members of heritage communities in the UK. This is often reinforced by a sentiment among the different communities of *us* and *them*, seeing heritage community members morphing and adapting their sense of *self* and *other* dependent on the context in which they find themselves. In the case of UK Italian communities, and in light of more recent anti-immigration sentiment following the EU referendum, discussion surrounding British identity has been ample, particularly regarding whether this identity had been under threat both prior to and following the British vote in 2016 to leave the European Union, i.e. Brexit.

Therefore, gaining further understanding into the Italian heritage community's negotiation of identity construct and its own hybrid ethnic identity and sense of belonging would be insightful, particularly as these same issues are frequently negotiated, challenged and discussed among different heritage communities (Farrell, 2008).

There is much discussion in sociolinguistics on the issue of language variability, and how this variability is structured (Fought, 2006). At the same time, we can deduce that cultural or ethnic identity cannot exist in a pure form and there is no such thing as a pure cultural or ethnic identity. This holds even more so when we discuss heritage and translational communities. There are many complexities related to identification within diasporic communities and the concept of hybridity is ever present (Raab & Butler, 2008).

Therefore, the way in which Anglo-Italians in Bedford, Peterborough and Loughborough perceive their inclusion/exclusion and sense of belonging in the post-Brexit era and how they define their *self* or *other* is of utmost relevance within this context.

4

Corpus and Data Collection

In order to explore the contemporary sociolinguistic situation of Anglo-Italians in England in the post-Brexit era (through a three-city case study), the present investigation has been carried out following an ethnographic approach as applied by variationist sociolinguists to the study of language (Blom & Gumperz, 1972; Milroy, 1987; Wei, 1994). The methodology is based on a combination of participant observation and ethnographic data collection by means of a questionnaire survey and audio recordings which took place from July to December 2017 and again from July 2019 to the present. The analysis of the present corpus draws upon both quantitative and qualitative methods, and it pays attention to different sociocultural contexts among the Anglo-Italians under investigation. Comparable data from previous research are used to contrast the present corpus (Guzzo, 2007; 2010; 2014).

In the course of the present research, a questionnaire survey revealed interesting patterns. The questionnaire was distributed ethnographically as well as submitted online, making use of informal network links among friends and acquaintances and social media, such as Facebook and WhatsApp. A total sample of 73 questionnaires was distributed randomly and completed across gender, generations and in the three cities under investigation (Bedford, Loughborough and Peterborough).

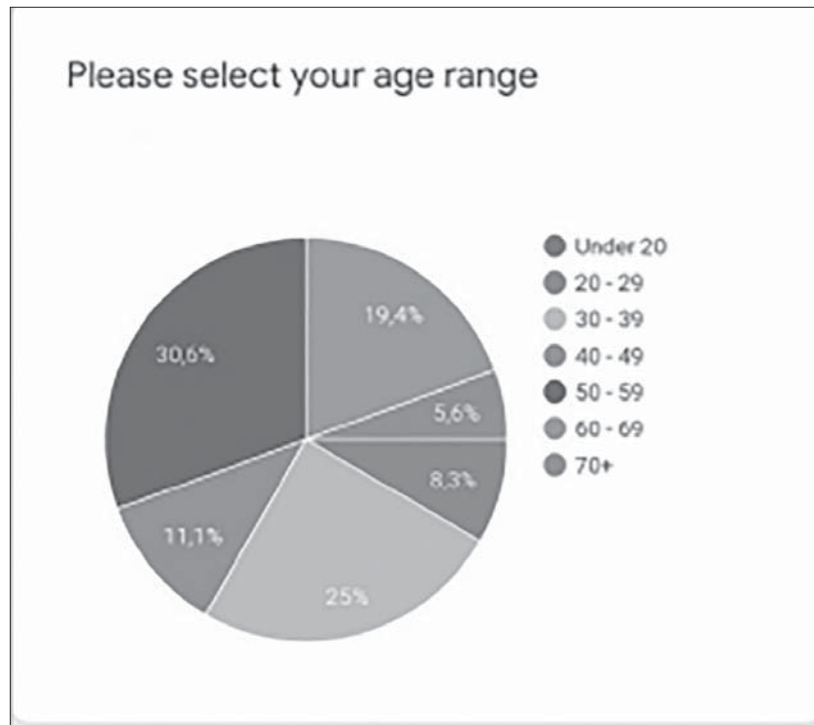
The overall aim of the questionnaire survey was:

- (a) to monitor and compare the Anglo-Italians' competence in the two languages, English and Italian, with previous results from 2005
- (b) to verify their level of ethnic identity perception as well as their sense of belonging to the European community, and
- (c) to outline their choice of vote in the so-called EU Referendum, i.e. on Britain remaining within the European Union (EU), as well as opinions and shared experiences through observations regarding their sense of identity and belonging before and after Brexit and the referendum.

Based on the answers to the questionnaires consisting of a set of 18 questions, some assumptions have been made.

As figure 1 below shows, the informants' range in age between 20 and 70+, although the highest percentage of responses arrived from the second-generation female participants in their fifties.

FIG. 1
Age range of informants (n=73)



As for the different generations, there is a well-represented spread of the informants in the three main cohorts of Anglo-Italians in England, as Table 1 below suggests.

As for the participants who took part in the present survey are predominantly female as the survey was randomly distributed (Table 1).

A complementary method used for the whole study consisted of informal one-to-one interviews conducted in English and Italian with an initial group of 12 Bedford Italian male informants, leading to an overall corpus of 9 hours. As in casual conversations, no set questions were established in advance and no effort to control the conversation was made on my part in my role as researcher; free and random speech was the most common result of the interaction. Both the interviewer and the interviewees were free to engage in everyday conversation among friends, aimed at obtaining the most spontaneous speech data possible (Milroy & Gordon, 2003). Nonetheless, some specific issues, such as Brexit and the referendum, were regularly touched upon during the conversations, leading to some final considerations concerning *self* and *other* identification, a sense of belonging as members of a heritage community in the UK and integration.

TAB. 1
Representation of gender distribution, age range and generation of participants (n=73)

	Age Ranges						Generation			
	<i>20-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60-69</i>	<i>70+</i>	<i>First</i>	<i>Second</i>	<i>Third</i>	<i>Fourth</i>
Male (33.3%)	2.7%	5.5%	5.5%	8.3%	8.3%	2.7%	11.1%	16.6%	5.5%	0%
Female (66.7%)	5.5%	19.4%	5.5%	22.2%	11.1%	2.7%	19.4%	30.5%	13.8%	2.7%
<i>TOTAL</i>	8.2%	24.9%	11%	30.5%	19.4%	5.4%	30.5%	47.2%	19.4%	2.7%

The interviews were usually conducted in a quiet indoor area where noise did not affect the recording or in a café chosen by the informants. All interviews were of the same length lasting about 45 minutes and were as totally informal and spontaneous as casual conversations. As the corpus is still preliminary, a more specific analysis of the linguistic variables could not be carried out and will be presented at a later stage. The data collected through the audio recordings is presented here in support of the quantitative and qualitative findings provided by the questionnaire survey.

5 Analysis, Findings and Discussion

To obtain an overall contemporary picture of today's Anglo-Italian communities in the cities in question, their Italian language competence was reinvestigated 15 years after my initial fieldwork in Bedford and results reveal that it is still well maintained. The community's social network has always been, and still is, strong and close, as its members tend to spend their time with community members and other minority groups more than with native British English speakers belonging to their host community. For this reason, they continue using Italian and maintain a reasonably good overall linguistic ability.

Some significant insights arise from the questions concerning the speakers' Italian and English language competence which were intended to produce evidence of the level of awareness the speakers have regarding their speaking, reading, writing and comprehension abilities in both languages. All speakers appeared confident while answering the questions regarding their English skills, hence there is no necessity to discuss them further.

However, findings concerning Italian seem more noteworthy. Indeed, considering the Southern Italian origins of the language transmitted from the first-generation speakers to their children and grandchildren, Standard Italian in any form is not the language they are used to speaking at home. This is also explained by the fact that the first-generation Italian immigrants spoke village dialects as their mother tongue on their arrival and once in Britain, they had to acquire English as

a foreign language in the host country. Most of them had limited schooling and spoke poor Standard Italian; those who had had the chance of completing primary education were mostly males, while most females had never completed primary school. The vast majority were, therefore, almost illiterate, and their poor ability in reading was only slightly better than their writing skills (Tosi, 1984). Once those people moved to Britain in the 1950s their contact with the national language decreased dramatically and they rarely improved their language skills in Standard Italian. Their competence in the standard is to be related more to their exposure to the language rather than to any formal education received (Guzzo, 2007). Thus, as for the language contact situation in the communities under scrutiny, the most influential dialect was found to be the Neapolitan dialect (Guzzo, 2007; 2014.). Therefore, the Italian, which is referred to in this study, as in the previous ones, is mostly a form of Campanian dialect, more specifically a Neapolitan-based form of their original village dialect³.

In the ethnographic questionnaire, informants were requested to answer four questions concerning their speaking, reading, writing and comprehension skills in Italian. Questions were preceded with *How well can you...?* in relation to their individual linguistic competencies and *Not at all, very little, quite well, well, and perfectly* were the possible answers. As can be seen from Table 2 below, the participants feel quite confident in assessing their overall good competence in Italian (i.e. dialect) and this is a remarkable confirmation of previous findings (Guzzo, 2007; 2010; 2014). Considering that the highest percentage of respondents are second generation females in their fifties, the trend also seems to be confirmed after 15 years. The picture which emerges tells us that Anglo-Italians in England still have a high competence in the three abilities of understanding, speaking, and reading but display slightly lower percentages in their writing skills. Even though writing is identified as their lowest performing skill, it is still a noteworthy result considering that the sum of the lowest indicators ('not at all' and 'very little') come to a total of almost 30%. If we consider that the members of the Anglo-Italian community left Italy around 70 years ago, or were born and raised in the UK, and that, apart from a few exceptions who studied Italian at school level, they are mostly exposed to the language only when they travel back to Italy for holidays or if the first-generation members use their village dialect. This result regarding one of the most difficult abilities to acquire and preserve still shows 70% of responses who claim to be able to write in Italian 'quite well', 'well' and 'perfectly' and is extremely interesting and promising in terms of the future preservation of their homeland language. Indeed, further investigation into the ways they use written Italian in the UK, would provide important insight into the heritage community's language use.

TAB. 2
A comparative table of language competence in Italian

	How well can you...			
	SPEAK Italian?	WRITE Italian?	READ Italian?	UNDERSTAND Italian?
Perfectly	25%	19.4%	22.2%	38.9%
Well	36.1%	19.4%	36.1%	38.9%
Quite well	22.2%	33.3%	25%	13.9%
Very little	16.7%	22.2%	16.7%	0%
Not at all	0%	5.6%	0%	0%

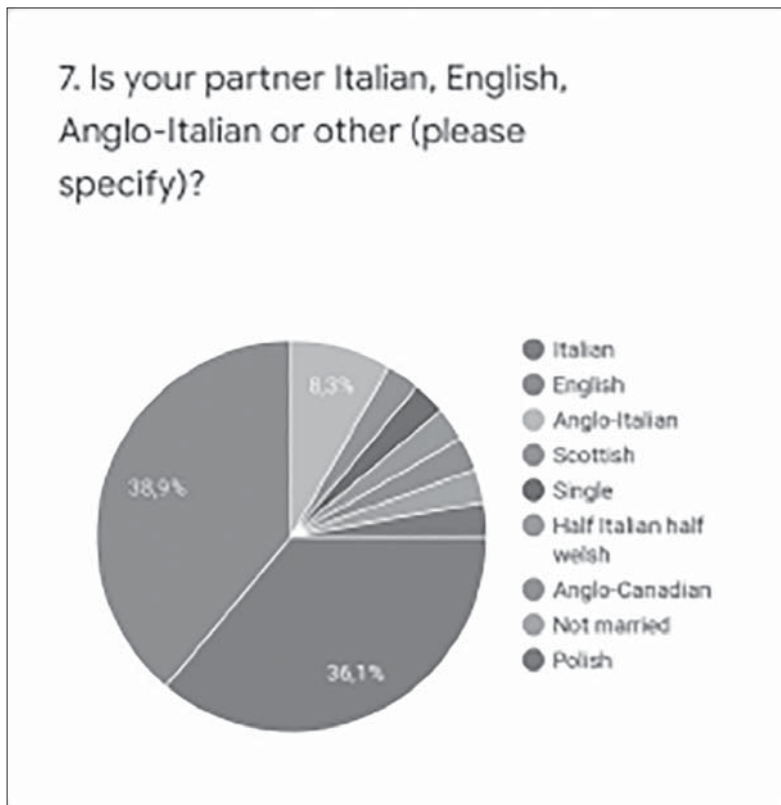
As regards the family networks (Table 3) in order to reconstruct the origins of the respondents, it would be pertinent to make some considerations. The paternal side of the family is most strongly marked by an Italian origin. As widely reported (Tubito & King, 1996; Cavallaro, 2008; Cereste & Bagnoli, 2001; Guzzo, 2007; 2011), migrants to our three cities were mostly men coming to work in the English brick factories. They were usually followed by their wives some years later as confirmed by respondents. When looking at their paternal kinship, both their grandparents (97.2%) and fathers (91.7%) are predominantly Italian whereas when looking at their maternal relationships, the percentages related to their Italian roots, show an evident fall to 86.1% with reference to their grandparents and to 83.3% to their mothers. Assuming that their grandparents lived in Italy or were first generation migrants who had just settled in England and that their fathers and mothers already lived in the UK, most likely belonging to a second generation, the trend shows a slightly but significant decrease of 'Italianness' from their maternal side of the family in favour of an initial and an important sign of mixed marriages which facilitate linguistic integration.

Interestingly, when looking at the Anglo-Italians' marital status today, as in Figure 2 below, a much more mixed and multi-layered picture appears. Anglo-Italians are now predominantly in a relationship with English partners (38.9%) followed closely by Italians (36.1%) or Anglo-Italians (8.3%) in a more general framework of several different other varied unions which has produced some consequences in terms of language maintenance as far as the speakers' use of Italian too. Future analysis will explore in more detail this result across age groups but what has emerged at this stage seems very promising in terms of integration and inclusion if they pass through to marriages and unions.

TAB. 3
A comparative table of family networks

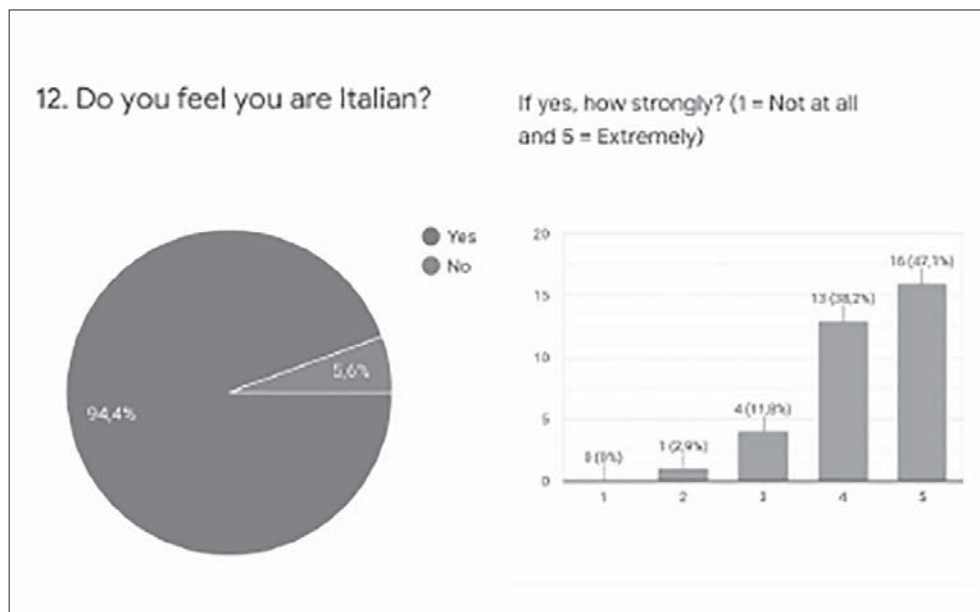
	How would you define the ethnicity of your					
	maternal grandfather?	maternal grandmother?	paternal grandfather?	paternal grandmother?	father?	mother?
Italian	86.1%	86.1%	97.2%	97.2%	91.7%	83.3%
English	8.3%	11.1%	2.8%	0%	0%	16.7%
Anglo-Italian	0%	0%	0%	0%	5.6%	0%
Irish	2.8%	2.8%	0%	2.8%	0%	0%
Welsh	2.8%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Anglo-Irish	0%	0%	0%	0%	2.8%	0%

FIG. 2
Ethnic background of partners



Considering the concepts of *self* and *other* identification and aiming at investigating the Anglo-Italians' sense of belonging as members of a heritage community in the UK as well as their integration, respondents were asked about their ethnic identity perception and in line with Guzzo's (2007) questionnaire survey, *extremely, very, quite, very little, not at all* were the possible answers. The aim behind these questions was to see whether they felt a dominant ethnic identity existed, its strength and level of awareness. As Figure 3 shows, their Italian identity perception is still extremely high. Most of the respondents claim to feel Italian (94.4%), and those who also answered the subsequent related question about how strongly they perceive this revealed that *extremely* (47.1%) and *very* (38.2%) confirm that their perception of being Italian is unaltered when compared to previous results (Guzzo, 2007). Identity is the key factor as it was in previous research (Guzzo, 2007). Despite any recent circumstances as the Brexit, identity goes beyond the geographical location of Anglo-Italians in Bedford, Peterborough and Loughborough.

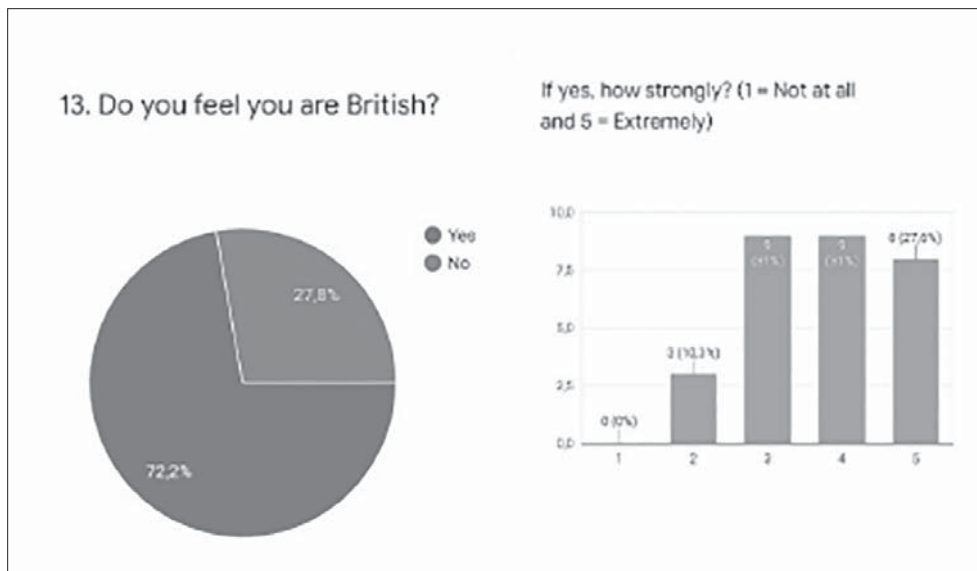
FIG. 3
Reported Self-Perception of Italian Identity (n=73)



As far as our respondents' British identity is concerned, the results show that their reported feeling of 'Britishness' is consistent (72.2%) and much higher than in the past, despite being less marked compared to their self-perception of Italianness.

It is important to note that our Anglo-Italian cohort from the towns of Bedford, Peterborough and Loughborough have spent their entire lives in England and their language ability is much stronger in English than in Italian. The present result shows a more positive attitude towards a British identity, which is highly significant in terms of social integration. Nonetheless, the study reveals that the participants of this Anglo-Italian cohort perceive themselves first and foremost as Italian and then as British (see Figure 3 above and 4 below). Moreover, those who also answered the related question about how strongly they feel British show a more levelled response; they feel *extremely*, *very*, *quite* but also *very little* British, revealing less strength and enthusiasm in identifying themselves as British if compared to the answers provided about feeling Italian.

FIG. 4
Reported Self-Perception of British Identity (N=73)

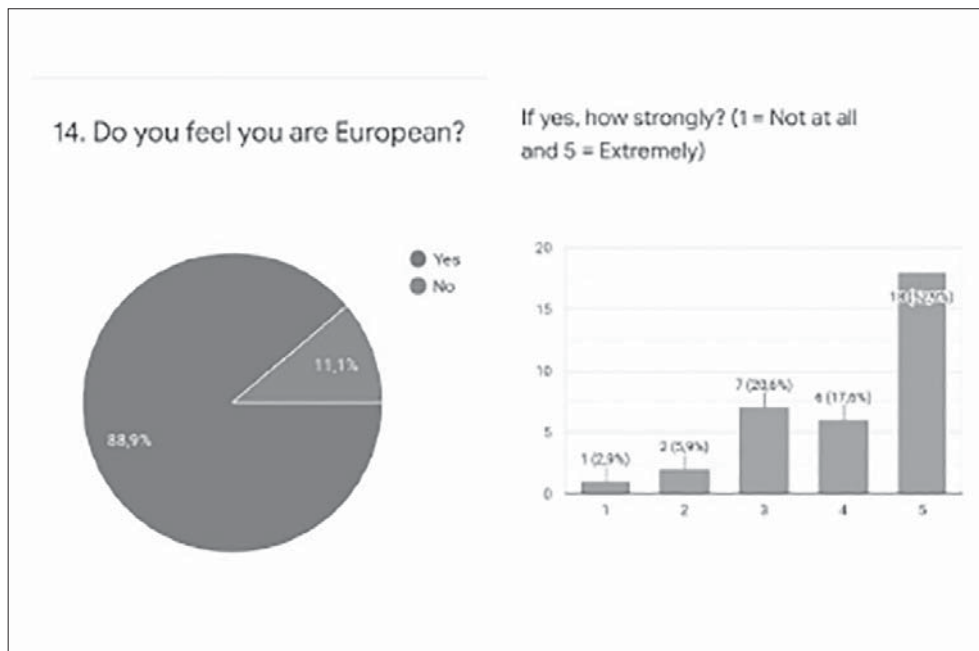


The United Kingdom left the European Union on 31st January 2020, more than three and a half years after the country narrowly voted for Brexit in the June 2016 referendum. Since then, the UK has wrestled with the consequences and remains deeply divided by its outcome. It has not been a smooth process and has caused a political earthquake across Europe as well as many episodes of violence and discrimination towards people of origins other than English have been reported since then in the UK. By looking at the Anglo-Italian community in the selected towns under scrutiny since the historic vote in June 2016, the aim is to gain an insight into their social and political positioning,

their feelings towards Europe as well as their feelings towards their place within the UK following the result.

As for the positioning of the Anglo-Italian community's European identity, almost 90% of respondents identify as European (Figure 5) and among those, more than half of them identify as strongly European as shown in the graph below on the right. This result is noteworthy as it would imply that the heritage community itself identifies as most predominantly Italian, but they consider themselves to be more European than they are British. A sense of Europeanism could be related to the fact that their motherland is indeed within Europe or it could also be fuelled by the aftermath of the Brexit result and the desire to reinforce a sense of both Italianism and Europeanism above their sense of Britishness. Their identity seems to be fluid and adaptable and sometimes even shifting and overlapping, reinforcing their own as a clear example of multiple identities (Hall, 2006; Byrd, 2007; 2009). They are Italians at heart, British in substance and European in mind.

FIG. 5
Reported Self-perception of European Identity



Regardless of the community's sense of belonging within the European context, on closer inspection, the actual way in which they voted, and their perception of Brexit is more varied.

Approximately 80% of respondents confirm that they did not agree with Brexit at the time of the referendum and continue to disagree with it today (Figure 5). What is however of great interest is that although the remaining 20% voted Leave in the referendum, confirmed also by their agreement with leaving Europe, this contrasts with a smaller percentage of respondents who do not identify as European. Indeed, only 11% of the respondents do not identify as being European (Figure 4) signifying that there is not necessarily a connection between a sense of identifying as European and the choice to support Brexit.

Since the EU referendum, there have been fears among minority groups in the UK that Brexit would give rise to discrimination and polarisation of minority heritage communities, data show that in this cohort 17% of respondents have experienced discrimination for being of Italian origin. Despite this number not being particularly high, further comments were offered in terms of their real-life experience in the transcriptions Figures 6.

Interestingly, when asked to provide some comments about their experiences related to Brexit, as can be seen in the sample transcribed participant responses, the Anglo-Italian respondents provided insightful outlooks.

What is worthy of note from their qualitative answers is that they self-identity as 'Italians', in some comments, more than as Anglo-Italians and they feel well accepted and not discriminated against in their towns. Indeed, when they think of themselves, the first picture they portray in their own minds is still that of an Italian who has settled down in the UK.

Nonetheless, from one respondent we learn that a sense of racism exists and has grown worse and that being able to camouflage helps them feel safe. A clear sense of fear and insecurity is perceived in the following conversation:

Respondent X: I'm from Bedford but my family is from the province of Avellino. Bedford has a long history of Italian immigration from Avellino and Campobasso and a large percentage of the population is Italian and accepted by the town.

Respondent Y: Disappointed.

Respondent W: All the confusion and we still don't know what's happening.

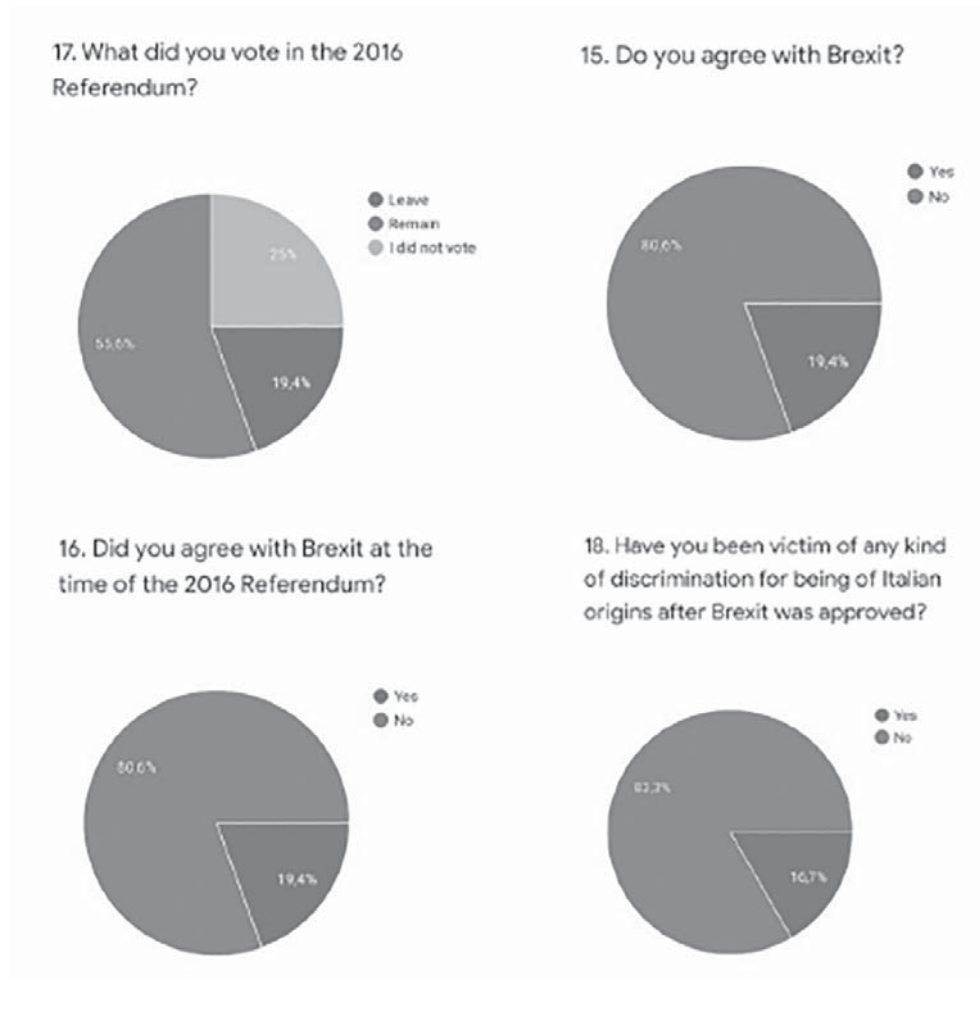
Respondent I: Racism towards other European countries has been heightened. For example: Polish, Romanian etc. As I speak English perfectly and in a professional job with a Welsh accent, people presume I'm Welsh and I'm married to an Italian because of my surname.

Finally, written responses collected as part of the survey are also very representative of the leitmotifs heard during the interviews with my informants.

Respondent E: I disagree with Brexit, but not "5/5 strongly." I also feel 4/5 Italian when I am in the UK but 3/5 Italian when I am in Italy.

Respondent F: I wasn't allowed to vote as I'm an Italian national not British. I would have voted remain. My dad has been in England for more than 60 years and now he has to request to stay here. Vergonia!!!

FIG. 6
Brexit voting experience



Many Anglo-Italians report they had no right to vote despite having lived in England for more than 60 years or being born there, as only British, Irish and Commonwealth citizens who live in the UK, along with Britons who have lived abroad for less than 15 years, remain eligible to vote and many Anglo-Italians still do not hold British citizenship.

These are demonstrations of just how versatile and adjustable their identity perception is, as many of them feel. The perception of being more Italian in the UK and less so when in Italy and I quote, “4/5 Italian when I am in the UK, 3/5 Italian when I am in Italy”. This is a very common phenomenon among transnational communities

since Anglo-Italians show a stronger perception of their Italianness when in England which decreases when they travel to their homeland. Being ‘Italian abroad’ reinforces their identity which is often also enriched with stereotypes as well as false ideas of what the Italians, or being Italian, picture in their minds. It is quite common therefore for them to believe, and portray, the image of a country which is better than it actually is, preserving traditions, such as food-related ones, which appear to their minds as the best in the world more than they actually are, for instance. Once they arrive back in Italy, whether it is for holiday or a permanent return (Guzzo & Di Salvo, 2019), they are faced with reality, which includes negative related aspects as well, and start feeling more British than Italian and less Italian than they felt while being in their English towns, revealing and disclosing indeed how unique they are in being part of a heritage community abroad, being Anglo-Italians and not only Italians anymore.

Lastly, and sadly, quite worrying signal of hatred has come to the fore in many of my respondents’ comments, as exemplified here:

Respondent X: Post Brexit seemed to have bought out the right wing hate in people, people felt it was ok to start telling people “to go home” or “this is my country.” The plan for division seems to have worked well.

This seems to be a generalised issue affecting many countries these days, nonetheless, an anti-immigrant sentiment seems to exist and be quite consistent, beyond any political view, in the current post-Brexit England. The cities under investigation appear to be divided, ‘us’ and ‘them’ seem to be the new trend which goes against any form of integration even when a heritage community like the Anglo-Italian one of Bedford and its related communities of Peterborough and Loughborough has been there for 70 years.

6

Conclusions

The present contribution explored the contemporary socio-linguistic situation of Anglo-Italians in Bedford, Peterborough, and Loughborough before and in light of the current post-Brexit time which brought to question the complexities of *self* and *other* identification and a sense of belonging as members of a heritage community in the UK. The rise of anti-immigration sentiments following the EU referendum seems to have affected the informants surveyed both confirming and contrasting with previous findings in terms of heritage and ethnic identity perceptions.

The findings presented highlighted some substantially mixed and multi-layered behaviours of Anglo-Italians in the three English cities under scrutiny in our sample. The main trend seems to hold with previous results dated in 2005 that Anglo-Italians in England still have or at least claim to have a quite consistent competence in Italian as far as the three abilities of understanding, speaking, and reading are concerned, showing slightly lower levels in their writing skills. These results are somewhat remarkable –

given the communities have been established in English-dominant setting for some 70 years now, with 2nd and 3rd generations locally educated.

The present investigation aligns with previous findings (Guzzo, 2007; 2010; 2014) in terms of a strong Italian identity but has also revealed a more positive attitude than in earlier studies towards a British identity, which plays a key role in terms of social integration. At the same time, Europeanness is also extremely highly valued. The present data have so far revealed that Anglo-Italians perceive themselves first and foremost as Italian, quite strongly identify as European, then to a somewhat lesser degree as British. They appear to feel more integrated than they even believe, going beyond the small-minded dichotomy ‘Us’ and ‘Them’. They have suffered discrimination in the past as immigrants when they first arrived in the fifties and, unfortunately, this trend has recently returned, sometimes making them feel undesired again. Nonetheless, the (former) migrants’ hybrid identity is confirmed and reinforced by a new form of reconstruction due to recontextualisation in a new post-Brexit era. Listening, as a social and political process (Bassel, 2017), can help fighting the destructive binaries of ‘Us and Them’, gaining further understanding into the Italian heritage community negotiation of identity construct and their own hybrid ethnic identity and strengthening their sense of belonging.

Further quantitative linguistic analysis will follow. The socio-linguistic future of Anglo-Italians in Bedford, Peterborough, and Loughborough in terms of inclusion and exclusion as well as linguistic diversity is still largely unwritten and deserves further attention. Heritage communities often struggle, especially in difficult times, and so does the Anglo-Italian Community in the above-mentioned cities in order to create a space of their own in post-Brexit England.

Notes

1. Anglo-Italians is used in this contribution specifically in reference to Italian heritage communities under investigation specifically in the three towns that are identified.
2. Unfortunately, no statistical breakdown of Anglo-Italians is available for this town with respect to census data.
3. I will refer here to the definition of dialect commonly adopted in variationist sociolinguistics as suggested by Trudgill (2000) according to whom, dialects are varieties of a language, however, in this contribution, only including regional dialects. Differences between the dialects are found in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary.

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