

Language conflict, glottophagy and camouflage in the Italian cinematic city

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Abstract: In this paper, I would like to present an analysis of the social environment of language contact in Italy exploring how historically the language policy in the era of fascism produced a complex idea of the Italian language community. I will use the notions of spatiality, glottophagy and camouflage to indicate, describe and analyse how this came to be and still is the case, and I will try to contextualize this process in the fascist history of Italy. In the second part, I will focus on the relationship between language, space and society as represented in Italian cinema, unpacking the relationships between fascism and Italian language policy and the language structured by socioeconomic and cultural conflicts. Discussing the language structure in three cinematic cases, I want to demonstrate how Italian cinema has interpreted the relationship between different languages and conflict in the repertoire in the moment when social conflict started to be filmed by some film directors at the end of the Second World War.

Keywords: Multilingualism, fascism, cinematic discourse, social space, language conflict.

1. Introduction: fascism and languages

This article is divided into two parts. The first part is focused on presenting and discussing an analysis of social environment in relation to language contact in Italy: starting from a historical reflection upon language policy during fascism and an analysis of the complexity of the Italian language community, I will introduce the concepts of spatiality, glottophagy and camouflage. These three concepts could be useful to reproduce a language contact model working in the Italian language space. In the second part, I will try to examine the different ways the urban sociolinguistic complexity and the relationship between language, space and society are represented in Italian cinema, focusing on the cinematic discourse¹ in some case studies that share a connection with fascism and its language policy.

Between 1922 and 1943, Italy experienced the so-called *ventennio fascista*, a period of dictatorship and deprivation of liberty in different ways, which included an autarchic idea of the language: inspired by theories of language purism, the myth of Latinity and the myth of the *Risorgimento*, Mussolini aimed to submit language policy to the authority of the state. The idea behind the fascist language policy was to build the new Italian Nation in relation to only a single language. The complex multilingual Italian space - the vast variety of dialects, regional languages and, most of all, the large number of minority languages - had to be reduced to a single language space, dominated by the language of the Italian classical literary tradition. This language coincides with the language of the ruling class, which holds the cultural and economic power. Mussolini's attempt was, obviously, not successful, partly because of the lack of a concrete language program, and Italian society remained basically multilingual.

One of the consequences of this language policy could be detected in people's perception of dialects or of any other variety different from a standard and from a norm: fascism reinforced a status of *diglossia*, which more often, in concrete situations, can lead to *dilalia*. As Berruto (2012: 560) stresses, in a situation of co-presence of two languages (High language and Low language) in

¹ I use the term according to Jannis Androutsopoulos (2012: 140): “‘Cinematic discourse’ pinpoints a contextualised approach to film as a site of sociolinguistic representation, including its relations to production and/or reception and the sociolinguistic knowledge that it articulates and presupposes. This is not trivial from a language studies perspective, since film-as-text is already difficult to handle analytically with regard to the role of language in a complex system of audio-visual signifiers, which produce meaning in their interrelation”.

everyday speech, we can have *dilalia* if both the H language or variety and L language or variety are used in ordinary conversation. On the other hand, we have *diglossia* if only the L language or variety is used in ordinary conversation, and the H language or variety is used in official and formal conversation. The condition of *dilalia*, in fact, occurs when the speakers in their daily communication are not always acquainted with the social rules that determine sociolinguistic appropriateness, suitability and acceptance, due to their sociolinguistic competences. According to Ferguson (1959: 328), indeed, one of the most important features in a situation of *diglossia* is not a separation between the two languages, but a specialization of their functions. The quality of social appropriateness, recognized for the dominant language in public spheres, enforces the idea of a language hierarchy. In *dilalia*, a community of speakers live in a chaotic language space, where a large number of individuals cannot recognize and keep the main languages and language varieties of their linguistic repertoire separated in their linguistic uses.

Furthermore, in schools, many Italians have been educated according to an ideal monolingualism, and to a hierarchical idea of the relationship between languages and language varieties, where Written Standard Italian occupies the top position, whilst spoken local varieties are on the bottom (cf. De Mauro 2016). According to this idea, every sociolinguistic stratification concerns and reproduces the hierarchical structure of society.

The status of language conflict created during the *Ventennio*, influencing dialect and local languages perception, esthetic evaluation and social discrimination, made possible the fact that even today language variation is often perceived as socially harmful, and dialects are corruptors of a pure language. Multilingualism, which is one of the main topics of this issue of *Globe*, and intralinguistic differences can be perceived as chaotic and, consequently, one of the reasons of an assumed extreme complexity of the Italian language (cf. Korzen 2021).

2. Language variation and space: spatiality, glottophagy, camouflage

There are two theoretical points I would like to stress at this point to frame the object of my argumentation:

1. Social differences are intimately connected to sociolinguistic variation, and language stratification designs and it is designed by the social space, i.e. the system of relations among individuals, based on cultural or economical networks and regardless of the physical space;
2. The effects of the political process during fascism are that the internal social structure generates and supports language conflict and language appropriation, with the result of a situation of complex *dilalia* where, in ordinary speech, the two languages and their social varieties tend to blend into each other.

To discuss the relationship between linguistic variation and space, it is necessary to analyze the definition of spatiality, a concept useful to understanding the complexity of a three-dimensional space.

Space is a necessary condition for interaction and linguistic action and plays a fundamental role in shaping linguistic variation. This role is not limited only to the relationship between regional variation and geographical space, but it generally involves the relationship between variation and space, between language as a social tool and spatiality.

To analyze spatiality (Britain 2013a: 472-473), we must observe space focusing on its three-dimensionality: the Euclidean space, the social space and the psychological and perceived space. Spatiality is the 3D model that offers the opportunity to consider variation in relation to the geographical representation in Euclidean terms - which means in physical proportions - to the effects of the relationships between the linguistic elements in the social space and to the cultural and psychological representation of these relationships. Referring to Lefebvre could be useful to make

the concept clearer:

(Social) space is a (social) product [...] The space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action; [...] in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence domination, of power; yet as such, it escapes in part from those who would make use of it [...] Social space will be revealed in its particularity to the extent that it ceases to be indistinguishable from mental space (as defined by philosophers and mathematicians) on the one hand, and physical space (as defined by practico-sensory activity and the perception of ‘nature’) on the other (Lefebvre 1991: 26).

Language, indeed, is a social fact which needs spatiality to act, i.e. to exist: spatiality reproduces and shapes sociolinguistic relations.

In fact, if we consider what Lefebvre has stated about the way societies produce space, we can figure also the way languages produce social spaces as follows:

The spatial practice of a society secretes that society’s space; it propounds and presupposes it, in a dialectical interaction; it produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it. From the analytic standpoint, the spatial practice of a society is revealed through the deciphering of its space (Lefebvre 1991: 38).

The deciphering of space is possible because languages produce and shape spatiality. From this perspective, sociolinguistic varieties play a fundamental role in determining the composition and in setting or redressing the balances of the spatial social structure. Furthermore, following David Britain (2010: 76), we can consider space as a process in constant evolution, since it also takes shape from linguistic varieties and socio-communicative interaction:

All interaction is spatialised. The coming together to engage in face-to-face interaction involves both movement through (socially created) space and the overcoming of “coupling” (constraints on people’s abilities and resources to participate in face-to-face interaction) and “steering” (or “authority”) [...]. The interactions themselves take place within normatively defined spaces (routinely, we adhere to these norms of where we talk – we talk intimately with lovers in bedrooms, over a candlelit meal or perhaps on a secluded beach, we don’t answer our mobile phone in the middle of a church, we don’t give lectures in our bedrooms – failing to adhere to these (culturally defined) norms is socially sanctioned).

A “sociolinguistic model which places interaction at the very centre” (Britain, 2010: 76) allows us to reflect upon social groups in interaction. Using such a sociolinguistic model, the analysis can reveal interesting questions about the way individuals play their roles inside their social-networks, the sociolinguistic rules that enforce the sense of belonging, the way non-belonging individuals are refused and marginalized outside the spatiality of coupling constraints.

The tension between the varieties and the variety considered as standard in the linguistic system causes the most evident social differentiation. In fact, the speakers mark their belonging to their social groups through linguistic uses and spatial occupation: social groups in positions of economic, political or cultural prestige share prestigious varieties, while sub-standard or non-prestigious varieties become symbols of social groups in positions of economic, political or cultural subordination.

The social varieties of a language and the other (minority or regional) languages in contact, in a given area during a specific period of time, structure a certain sociolinguistic space and a network

of relationships that shape a specific architecture of the language/languages (Berruto 2012) into a specific spatiality.

Looking again at the historical facts, I believe that three main cultural effects can still be partially visible in language perception in Italy. These three effects, corresponding to the three main points that Gabrielle Klein (1989: 39) identified in Mussolini's language policy², can be extremely simplified as follows:

- 1) Even though dialects and local languages can have a positive evaluation if considered in a local context and as symbols of cultural identity, a partial sentiment of dialectophobia or negative perceptions of local variation is still quite frequent.
- 2) A popular idea of monolingualism based on the relation "one nation: one language", and a consequent misperception of the connections between language use and language attitudes.
- 3) A contradictory relationship, between repulsion and fascination, with foreign languages and minority languages³.

At this point, I would like to introduce the concept of glottophagy, translated from the French term *glottophagie* described by Louis-Jean Calvet (1974, 2002: 15) as the absorption and/or replacement of a minor language by a major and dominant language. In other words, glottophagy is the result of a relationship of power.

According to Calvet, the process can be observed in two phases. The first phase works on a vertical dimension: language social diversity is manifested following the vertical hierarchy of social classes. The decline of the dominated language (dl) is more evident when the dominant language (DL) is adopted by those who are close to or represent the political, economic or cultural power, and by those who want to become members of that elite, or to look like them. The second phase works on a horizontal dimension, when the linguistic differentiation is visible also on a geographical scale: the city (with DL) against the countryside (with dl). This change of direction is accompanied by a superstructural change, which means the passage from bilingualism (dl and DL) to monolingualism (only DL) in the dominant groups and in the city; the passage from monolingualism (dl) to bilingualism (dl and DL) in the working and under classes and in the countryside. By way of explanation, the upper classes, which for political and social reasons have gained access to the dominant language, tend to abandon the dominated language, whereas the lower classes tend to learn and use the dominant language in diglossia with the dominated language. Concisely, Calvet explains that,

Alors que dans notre premier stade nous avons une classe au pouvoir bilingue et un peuple monolingue, nous avons dans notre second stade une classe au pouvoir monolingue, un peuple citadin bilingue et un peuple campagnard monolingue, ce qui constitue une nouvelle superstructure linguistique⁴.

Based on what has been observed so far, along with the process of glottophagy, we can speculate about a specific phenomenon which intervenes in language behavior and which is caused by the transformation of the sociolinguistic relationships and the languages balance inside the repertoire.

We call this phenomenon *camouflage*. If we observe the speakers in their language behavior

² Cf. Klein (1981, 1986). About language planning during fascism, see Foresti (2003).

³ Cf. Istat, Report 2017. On language behavior and dialect perception in Italy, cf. at least Galli de' Paratesi (1984), D'Achille (2003), Ruffino (2006) and D'Agostino (2002, 2012).

⁴ 'While, in our first stage, we had a bilingual ruling class and a monolingual people, on the second stage we have a monolingual ruling class, a bilingual urban people and a monolingual country people, which constitutes a new linguistic superstructure'. (My translation).

and their perception, not focusing only on the relationship between two or more languages in conflict, we can consider camouflage as a possible sociolinguistic process in action in a situation of language contact. Camouflage is related to the concept of leveling (cf. Dillard 1972), which can be described as the process of eliminating stereotypable features of differences between language varieties (cf. Dillard 1972), and of disguising language elements with strong connotations to avoid social stigma.

According to Kerswill & Trudgill (2005: 198), one of the keywords is,

“stereotypable”. Stereotyping of a feature may occur when it is either demographically a minority form in the new community, or when for some reason it has become ‘salient’, perhaps because it deviates linguistically or because it has become associated with a stigmatised social group.

The other keyword is “disguising”, which suggests the concept of camouflage and the avoidance of social stigma and social discrimination. In his study on Creoles, Le Page formulated his hypothesis about how people accommodate to each other linguistically in their conversational interactions.

Le Page’s *Act of identity hypothesis (and four riders)* (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985) should work as a model of linguistic accommodation. We can paraphrase Le Page’s model (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985: 115) as: The individuals create their system of language behavior so as to resemble those common to the group or groups which they wish to be associated or identified with, and so (second step) they perform an act of appropriation of the language of the group in which they wish to blend. This is an act of *camouflage*.

The minor language speakers are socially solicited to the status of diglossia where the two languages are occupying their own linguistic domain, defining their own linguistic and social space in which other languages are not supposed to be used. The two languages are also blending in spatiality, if there is a complex situation of dilalia where other languages can also occur to get in contact with the two main ones.

What happens when a speaker wants to move from their social space to a more prestigious one? First, they have to change their clothes and habits, which means their language; they must play someone else’s role; they have to learn how to behave, look and, first and foremost, speak the model language of the group which they want to accommodate⁵ to, which they want to belong to.

2.1. *Camouflage and second glottophagy*

Finally, a phase of camouflage, which also involves a risk of ridicule and marginalization, is followed by another type of glottophagy.

The concept of camouflage “originates from biological studies to describe a range of strategies used by organisms to dissimulate their presence in the environment” (Bertolotti, Magnani & Bardone 2014: 65) and this is also useful for human beings, since we are, as individuals, constituents of each other’s environment” (Bertolotti, Magnani & Bardone 2014: 67), which we have called *spatiality*.

As already stated, in this specific situation of language contact, the privileged classes tend to abandon the dominated language for the dominant language, with a consequent sentiment of alienation of the dominated one. On the other side, the lower classes, not totally able to have access to language education, tend to use a “dialectalized” variety of the dominant language in diglossia/dilalia with the dominated language. For the Italian case, Berruto (2005: 83)

drew a distinction between four classes of phenomena: (1) dialectisation of Italian; (2) Italianisation of dialect; (3) koineisation; and (4) hybridisation. The first of these is the

⁵ On language contact accommodation see also Britain (2013b: 209-210).

dialectisation of varieties of the national language, i.e. Italian, in other words situations in which the influence of the dialects on the national language among essentially dialect-speaking people leads to the formation of varieties or variants marked by dialect interference. The result is called *italiano popolare* ‘popular Italian’, or, better still, ‘popular regional Italian’, a low diastratic variety which differs from the standard language on several levels of analysis.

The minor language (dl) only apparently disappears, supposedly devoured by the dominant one. In fact, the minor language (dl) gives ground but it is not completely lost: it starts behaving like a virus, with its variants living quite invisible for a while inside the cells of the major language and eroding some of its forms from the inside, silently and protected in secret language sanctuaries.

A new social space is thus determined by this variation, and a new periphery has been created where the speakers, who do not succeed in their attempt to camouflage, are pushed out. A new structured space, marginalizing the speakers of the new corrupted language, develops from the process of camouflage and second glottophagy.

After a while, the dominant language changes in some parts of its linguistic structure, letting the original social and language conflict develop through different types of interference, redesigning the structure of the social space (i.e. code mixing, code switching, dialectization, hybridization). This space is an illusionistic reduplication of the real dominant space, and it is used by the dominant group to confine the camouflaged group between the center and the extreme periphery.

If we multiply this example of Language DL, language dl and the resulting Language DL (+dl) - for multiple possibilities - the result is a multilingual space, which gives us an idea of the complexity of language variation, languages and language varieties in contact and in relationship to one another.

3. Camouflage and glottophagy in the cinematic city: some case studies

3.1. Case 1: pre-neorealism and neorealism films

The fascist cultural project was focused on building a national identity based on unity and on a traditional view of society, without questioning the class differences, although fascism was originally an anti-bourgeois movement.

On the one hand, language variety was perceived as an obstacle to the concept of national unity; on the other hand, though, dialects were also perceived as traditional languages, in opposition to the cultural and artificial language of the Italian bourgeois. With the autarchic language model, which has its roots in the nineteenth-century purism (Raffaelli 1983), Mussolini aimed to speak to the middle-class, to the petty-bourgeois against the international plutocracy, where the conflict between Italian and regional languages was (and still is) more evident.

The aim of my article is now to analyze the way Italian cinema has interpreted the relationship between different languages and conflict in the repertoire in the moment when social conflict started to be filmed by some film directors at the end of the Second World War.

Although the propaganda films are not many compared to the total number of films produced during the *ventennio*, the cinematic world, more or less tacitly and more or less openly, adhered to Mussolini's ideology (Aristarco 1996). Therefore, the films of the period reflect the social and cultural climate of Fascist Italy also with regard to linguistic ideology, which influenced a political representation of the relationships between the national language, regional and social varieties, dialects and other languages (cf. Argentieri 1979; Rossi 2006, 2016, 2017), although with a lot of contradictions related to the necessity of a populist representation of dialects (Rossi 2015: 31-32).

The fascist cultural policy was focused on representing a new middle-class man, with his feet on the Italian traditional ground. This image also works in reference to languages, as already stated: “Parlare italiano vuol dire pensare in italiano [...] quando noi strappiamo il bambino al dialetto del

suo paese, non gli insegniamo soltanto un linguaggio più educato, ma in effetti lo portiamo in un orizzonte intellettuale e morale che gli era ignoto⁶” (Parente 1937: 388). The school formation of the new fascist man went through the acquisition of pure Italian and the denial of dialects, and the same happened with other cultural agencies.

Indeed, the Italian cinema industry during the fascist regime, especially in the second half of the *ventennio*, supported this project fulfilling its educational and entertainment functions in that direction. Since the foundation of Cinecittà studios in 1937 (Bruni 2017), the national film production developed quickly, opening theatres not only in the cities but also in the provinces, and it supplied more than half of the product in circulation on the national scene, being able to take part in the international market, too (cf. Sorlin 1994 and Brunetta 2009). Some films, like *1860* (Alessandro Blasetti, 1934), *Scipione l'Africano* (Carmine Gallone, 1937), *Luciano Serra pilota* (Goffredo Alessandrini, 1938) *Grandi Magazzini* (Mario Camerini, 1939) are good examples of a project of dissemination that portrayed the different aspects of a country in the process of renovation to modernity following a specific socio-cultural model. For instance, *1860* is a film about the Risorgimento and the unification of Italy, presenting the heroes from the mass who fought against foreign rulers: the two protagonists speak Sicilian and represent the common people's contribution to the building of the nation. Relating the story of a Sicilian family who fought to create their nation, Blasetti wants to relate the story of the Italian family, creating a narrative in which Italians could see the traditional structure of the fascist Italian society. As main characters,

Gesuzza and Carminiddu can be viewed as symbolizing fascist efforts of ruralization and restoration of traditional patriarchal values, it is the role of the female protagonist to synthesize cinematically the fascist desire to reconcile the demands of modernity with the will to maintain a fundamentally traditional society. [...] Blasetti, in fact, proposes the figure of the mother and the trope of motherly love as a focalizing element for his general agenda of endorsement of Risorgimento values. The female character, thus, represented in motherly fashion, becomes a main carrier of Blasetti's cinematic project of Risorgimento myth-making (Romani 2002: 392).

Blasetti, by employing also non-professional actors, filmed a mosaic of regional languages and dialects, in contrast with the Italian, basically literary, of the cultural and political elites and the languages of the foreign enemies. The intention of the film is to explain the Risorgimento as a popular movement that built Italy from below: “Garibaldi ha detto che amu fatto l'Italia⁷” shouted Carminiddu, hugging Gesuzza at the very end of the film. This sentence, in which Carminiddu blends Italian and Sicilian, celebrates the birth of the nation, but marks the passage from the local language to a national language in the making. It is the interlingua resulting from the language never totally acquired by illiterate dialect speakers, an unconscious and unintentional mix of regional and literary language, that fascism will reinforce.

Some late fascist films are already on the way towards neorealism and they are setting people inside an urban social space which represents the social conflict on the verge of exploding in the 40s. I am referring to *I bambini ci guardano* (Vittorio De Sica, 1943) and *Ossessione* (Luchino Visconti, 1943), two films where space and languages are deeply connected and which are opening to a new concept of cinematic reality. Both films criticize the contradictions of the social structure, especially with regard to the family model and the relation between genders, which had been celebrated in *1860*

⁶ ‘To speak Italian means to think Italian [...] When we pull a child out of the dialect of their village, we not only teach them a more educated language, we bring them to an intellectual and moral horizon which was unknown to them’. (My translation).

⁷ ‘Garibaldi said that we have made Italy’. (My translation).

as the foundations of the nation. The language representation in the film is not fully realistic yet, although De Sica and Visconti are clearly moving in that direction (cf. Gargiulo 2019).

The analysis of some specific film cases in which we can identify examples of the cinematic interpretation of space and language contact continues with *Roma città aperta* (Roberto Rossellini, 1945), which can be regarded as the manifesto of Neorealism.

The space shown by Rossellini is a space that must be built again after the social and physical devastations caused by the war, and the problems connected with the enormous number of people, and language varieties, that moved to Rome from the countryside and the South. The war, the bombs, the Resistance and the civil war created a heterotopic space – i.e. a parallel alternative space created to avoid the imperfections of an ordinary living (Foucault 1984, now 2019) – where time is suspended and the distance between the different social classes is momentarily reduced. In *Roma città aperta* a heterotopic space is shown with its complex multilingual urban space, where the different languages represent the vibrant reaction to fascism and to the German Nazi occupation: this means dialects and especially the local Romanesco variety, filmed in opposition to an annoying standard Italian, and to some other dialects and German; used as language of identification and reality, not only for its expressive and theatrical characteristics.

The main subject of neorealist cinematic narration is the postwar reconstruction and the creation of a democratic state in the form of a Republic, which helped to start a restoration of a solid social system and balance the relationship between the social classes, including internal migrants and poor people, economic victims of the war. Each of these groups represents several language communities in search of their own identity.

De Sica's films such as *Sciuscià* (1946), *Ladri di biciclette* (1948), *L'oro di Napoli* (1954), and *Il tetto* (1956) present a new Italian society immediately after the war and during the reconstruction and the beginning of the economic expansion, revealing and analyzing the Italian social and sociolinguistic conflicts. Since the very first scenes of *Ladri di biciclette*, we are struck by a new social structure based on at least three levels and three language/linguistic varieties: the state and the politicians represented by the public administration, the new rururban⁸ landscape which is a chaotic view of buildings growing without control in rural space, the dream of democracy and distribution of job offers to a large number of desperate unemployed people, and their families. The story of the film is known: everything is focused on the desperation of a man and his child in search of a bike, necessary to work and ensure a decent daily life. The language conflict, with Romanesco in close-up, designs a social space which is slowly occupying the new urban space, the conflict between suburbanity and rururbanity. In the final scene of the film, the two characters, Antonio Ricci (Lamberto Maggiorani) and his son Bruno (Enzo Staiola), tired and demoralized, hand in hand, leave the city that has rejected them, to return to their sad life in the suburbs.

The fluctuating social landscape of the periphery and the complex stratification of its multilingualism will be, from now on, one of the most favored cinematic landscapes of Italian film-directors. Inspired by the political esthetics of Neorealism, in the 50s, Pier Paolo Pasolini started his analysis of this social dimension represented by the contradiction of the Italian urban and suburban space; Pasolini elected the so called *borgata*, the working-class suburbs of Rome and their dialects, as his preferred point of observation: a peripheral and out-of-history space where new buildings began to rise here and there, contaminating the rural nature of the landscape. The *borgata* is a specific multilingual space which is neither country nor city, which is probably a heterotopic place bound to explode in different no-places and junk spaces, and where both country and urbanity seem to overlap one another (cf. Rhodes 2007: 75).

⁸ I use the term rururban, and derivatives, to refer to countryside and villages under the impact of the city (cf. Ghurye 1963).

3.2. Case 2: *Mamma Roma*

I have already mentioned the migration movement that affected Rome from the very end of the Second World War, and that influenced the way the reconstruction was planned until the so-called Economic Boom: if some of these new arrivals were members of a possible middle class, moving to Rome to work in the growing public apparatus, many others were desperate peasants who arrived in the city in search of a better future, from the South and the Roman countryside, attracted by the promises of better living conditions, abandoning a destiny of an impoverished rural existence. Pasolini described this situation and deeply analyzed it in many of his essays, journal articles, debates, novels, and since 1961 and 1962 also in films.

For the purpose of this article, I will proceed by taking into consideration the depiction of camouflage and the relationship between languages and social groups in Pasolini's second film, *Mamma Roma* (1962).

The protagonist, *Mamma Roma* (Anna Magnani), is a middle-aged ex-prostitute who has saved up money for about 15 years and bought a place to sell vegetables and fruit at the local food-market. She wants to redeem herself and give a new life to her 15-year-old son, Ettore, who was sent to live in a village in the countryside when he was a little child. *Mamma Roma* also managed to buy one of the new apartments in the buildings that represent the economic boom in the Rome suburbs; she aims to be accepted by the working class, like any other peasant who has succeeded. In the scene where *Mamma Roma* meets her son Ettore for the first time after 15 years, we have an interesting representation of language conflict and the attempt of glottophagy that *Mamma Roma* wants to put in place. First and foremost, she wants to be seen and recognized as a lady from the city when she walks with difficulties on a gravel road; then she argues with her son because of his coarse manners and his rural dialect⁹:

MAMMA ROMA: Mannaggia, 'sta stradaccia, co' tutti 'sti sassi!

'Damn it! Damn the countryside with all these pebbles!'

[...] Quanto sei cresciuto, 'a E'! Me pari 'n'altro!

'How you have grown! I hardly recognize you!'

Ettore: Che, devo restà sempre uguale?

'Did you think I'd stay the same?'

MR: Beh? Che, cjiò un fio burino io? Ahò! Rispondi mejo a tu' madre, sa'!

'Do I have a son who is a hick? Don't talk that way to your mother, you know!'

E: E che ho detto?

'What did I say?'

MR: Meno male che te sò venuta a ripijà, e che te porto subito a Roma! Se no qua te sai come me diventavi...

'Good that I'm taking you back to Rome with me, or who knows what you'd end up like here...'

E: Che me porti a Roma? E che vengo a fà a Roma?

'Why are you taking me to Rome? What am I gonna do in Rome?'

MR: A fà compagnia a Ciceruacchio! Ma che voi passà 'a vita qua, te piace proprio 'a zappa?

'To keep company to the pope! You want to spend your life working the land here? You really like the hoe.'

E: No.

MR: Te sei imparato a legge e scrive, almeno?

'Have you at least learned to read and write?'

⁹ The translation is mine.

E: No.

MR: Annamo bene aò

‘Oh great!’

[...]

E: E che ce vengo a fà io a Roma, io?

‘What am I gonna do in Rome?’

MR: A dritto mica messo al mondo un figlio per farlo diventà un burino! Ma che te dirà il cervello! [...]

‘You cool guy, I didn’t have a child to see him becoming a hick! Use your brain’

In the following scene, the two protagonists are in Rome, and Mamma Roma is introducing Ettore to the new life she has built for themselves:

MAMMA ROMA: Ecchela laggiù casa nostra, la vedi? Quella finestra lassù, la terza, andò batte er sole! Indò stanno quelle mutande stese. All’ultimo piano. Ma guarda che qua stamo solo ’n’altro po’ de giorni! Poi vedrai in che casa te porta tu’ madre! Vedrai quant’è bella! Proprio ’na casa de signori, de gente perbene! In un quartiere de ’n’altro rango!

‘That’s our house over there, you see it? That window in the sun and the panties hanging down. There on the top floor. We’ll only stay for a few days, then you’ll see what a home your mother takes you to, how beautiful. A house of fully respectable, high-class people, a high-level neighborhood’.

[...]

MR: Cjai fame? ‘Are you hungry?’

E: Stamattina me so magnato un tozzo de pane con i papati.

‘This morning I had some bread with some spuds’

MR: Che hai detto? Che hai detto? Che sò ’ste parolacce! Tu devi parlà come parla tu’ madre, no come quei quattro bigonzi, là! Guarda te meno, sa’!

‘What did you say? What have you just said? What’s this language? You have to talk like your mother talks, not like those hicks down there. Or I’ll cuff you one!’

Mamma Roma speaks a Romanesco urban dialect and she wants Ettore to do the same, not to use the rural dialect that makes him sound like a *burino*, a hick. She is trying to make her child devour quickly a new identity and a new language, to complete the process of camouflage she has started. But the transition from one social level to another, from the out-of-history *borgata* to the new urban space is not permitted.

The *borgata* is like a labyrinth in which the two characters are condemned to their existence. The symbolism in Pasolini’s film is here at its beginning, and Ettore is like a poor Christ, damned, like *Accattone* was in 1961. They both die, condemned not to be included in a social and language change, in a fight against spatiality and history. Mamma Roma, who was fighting hard, is doomed to live without her child, and to see that her dream cannot become true.

3.3. Case 3: A special day

The third case is *Una giornata particolare, A special day*, directed by Ettore Scola in 1977, with Sophia Loren and Marcello Mastroianni, playing the role of a housewife and that of a radio speaker, respectively. In this film two narrative levels are present: in the foreground, a special day at the micro-daily life level which is connected with a macro-historical level during a special day in 1938.

The film begins with the presentation of the pompous and monumental rhetorical fascist regime,

using the vintage images taken from a documentary by Istituto Luce, which takes up and comments on the scenes of the gathering organized on the occasion of Hitler's visit to Rome on May 6, 1938, symbol of the radicalization of fascism in Italy. Immediately after the black-and-white documentary images and the example of the autarchic language preferred by fascism, Scola takes us inside everyday life during fascism, more familiar and intimate, also in terms of language. Scola opens the curtains of an Italian window and discovers the fragility of a family as a social system based entirely on a superficial, ambiguous and shaky structure. Therefore, the setting in the dense apartment-complex of Palazzo Federici in Roma, where the story is set, is functional to this way of proceeding that leads the gaze from the external to an internal vision, with an intimate and participatory observation. The images and the architectural structure of the apartment-complex leads us from the historical dimension to the private fact, following a process of disintegration of history that introduces us to the micro-history consumed in a day that will turn out to be special from different points of view (see also Uva 2016: 204).

The cinematic narrative then moves to another level, focusing on the Italian social macro-history, i.e. the question of the position of women in Italian society and the discrimination against homosexual people. Antonietta is a devoted and resigned housewife, committed to her home, her husband and their six children; fascinated with the figure of the Duce, she conducts a simple life without other interests or passions. Gabriele is a homosexual radio speaker who has just been dismissed because of his sexual preferences. The film recounts the meeting of two marginalized solitaires, two members of a society which considers them, in different ways and for different reasons, socially and morally inferior: Antonietta is inferior as a woman, but included in society for her role as a wife and mother; Gabriele is inferior because he does not play any significant social role, he is in fact "neither father, nor man, nor soldier", quoting his words from the script. While Gabriele is an outsider, Antonietta can fall back on a role which can assure her a well recognizable and respectable identity.

As I have already mentioned, the film starts precisely in fascist Rome, and with the images of the city that celebrates the visit of the Nazi dictator to Rome: the language of the documentary is full of rhetoric and, for the historical contest it recalls, ridiculously irritating. The black and white and the fascist propaganda of the documentary leave space to an intimate moment, while the family slowly wakes up to take part in the parade. The scene is immersed in a bittersweet atmosphere spiced with a dash of irony (cf. Gargiulo & Catolfi 2019: 9).

As regards the linguistic framework, we can observe several language varieties spoken by the characters: the rhetorical fascist celebrative Italian; the Romanesco dialect spoken by the family and the caretaker; Neapolitan-Italian which characterizes Antonietta, and plain Italian used by Gabriele.

The encounter between Antonietta and Gabriele, both lonely and trapped in a complex system of signs, will set in motion a profound change, and the same will happen to the languages they speak. In fact, only through the displacement of the symbolic significance assigned to the social labels – the woman as a wife and a mother, the man as a soldier and a father, the two characters manage to recognize each other's reality and become aware of their respective social condition.

According to the language architecture erected in the film, language is also used as a defense tool, because they are both speaking a language useful to interpreting the role that fascist society has assigned them. The defense, which is enabled by language camouflage, falls down when the communication becomes intimate and private, unraveling the fragile structure of a contradictory society. The continuous references to the fascist language policy and to that language which must be *virile* are used to represent the superficiality of their interpersonal relationships, as well as individual and social interrelationships. The grotesque incursions of the gossipy caretaker are used to rebalance the relationship of intimacy between Antonietta and Gabriele, and her language attitude symbolizes the interference of dictatorship in people's private life. In these examples, we can clearly see the representation of camouflage and glottophagy, especially during the family's private conversations

and the intimate dialogues between the two protagonists: the language appropriation in Antonietta and her family is a hybrid language, resulting from the contact between standard Italian, perceived as a model for a good citizen, and the chaos of a dialectal sphere, which became an uncomfortable space; the heterotopic space set up by the two protagonists with their language negotiation is an attempt to escape from the real world.

4. Conclusions

As Manuel Castells (2004: 83) has stated:

Spatial transformation must be understood in the broader context of social transformation: space does not reflect society, it expresses it, it is a fundamental dimension of society, inseparable from the overall process of social organization and social change.

Following Castells, I have used this reasoning for sociolinguistic purposes: space does not reflect the sociolinguistic transformation; space is language transformation's more evident expression, so I would state:

Spatiality, interpreted as the dimension of linguistic variation, is constantly created by human interaction and it is the resultant of the exchange relationship between the linguistic (transform)actions and the space (transform)actions.

In other words, language spatiality is based on the mutual (transform)action between space – which, with its 3 dimensions, gives continuously form to the sociolinguistic categories – and language – which specularly shapes and transforms space. With this concept in mind, I have tried to discuss how the Italian cinematic urban space is defined by the sociolinguistic structure created by multilingualism: a complex relationship of languages, often in conflict, and a social network where people's identities are based on the language varieties they use or are defined by. I have presented some examples based on a sociolinguistic analysis of a group of Italian films related somehow to fascism. In the analysis of these films, I have focused on the different representations of the internal relations in language conflict situations and analyzed some cases regarding the relationship between diversification and unification. Showing the differences in telling and (re)building a pluralistic cultural identity in opposition to a politically standardized dominant identity, I have tried to direct attention to the strategies of language camouflage and glottophagy activated to survive strong language conflicts in the complex Italian system of identities and the interconnection between language identities and urbanity, suburbanity and rururbanity. The thing that these films have in common is the representation of language conflict in a specific condition of an unbalanced and problematic social relationship between center and periphery, urban and suburban space, in and out of society conditions. In other words, the representation of a situation of language and power, language and domination, with different levels of language appropriation, camouflage and glottophagy, which also could be represented, more rarely, in the process of minorization of a standard language by a host of minority varieties, which are dl if taken separately, and together can become DL in relation to a standard, perceived as alien, which could go from a status of DL to a status of dl. My intent is to continue with more recent films, like the new wave of neo neo-realistic Italian cinematic movement, focused on the complexity of a new urban space, and a new definition of urban multilingualism.

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