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Italian emigration and Italian Language in Costa Rica

Emigración italiana y lengua italiana en Costa Rica

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ABSTRACT: In the following article, I present a summary of several aspects of the Italian migration in Costa Rica. First, the typology of Italian migrants, second, a brief description of the language they spoke, third, the diglossic position of languages in their repertoire, fourth, the Italians in Costa Rica, their location of origin in Italy, fifth, their original languages, finally the influence of Spanish and some conclusions found in Franceschi.

KEYWORDS: emigration, emigrants, Italian, Dialect, Standard Italian, Spanish

RESUMEN: En el siguiente artículo, presento varios hechos sobre la migración italiana en suelo costarricense. Primero, la tipología de estos migrantes europeos, segundo una breve descripciópn de la lengua habalada por ellos , tercero la posición diglósica de la lengua italiana en su repertorio linguiístico, cuarto, los italianos en Costa Rica, su lugar de procedencia en Italia, la influencia del Español en Costa Rica en su lengua, y para finalizar, algunas conclusiones encontradas en Franceschi.

PALABRAS CLAVE: migración, migrantes, Italiano estandar, dialecto, Español de Costa Rica

Italian emigration and law in the USA

One of the most important waves of migration in history took place in Europe at the end of the 1800s and continued well into the 20th century. According to Turchetta (2005, p. 4) in Italy alone between 1876 and 1976, **25.8000.000** people had left to search for a better life in almost every corner of the planet. Half of these people migrated before World War I, thus before any legal restriction was implemented, such as the *Literacy Act* enacted by the United States of America in 1917, which read as follows:

> "To exclude aliens over sixteen years of age, physically capable of reading that cannot read the English language or some other language or dialect, including Hebrew or Yiddish."

Later another restrictive law was imposed known as the *Quota Act* which proposed a quota on the number of new immigrants equal to the percentage of migrants already living in the country. With these two laws, of course, the number of Italian migrants in the US decreased onsiderably and in fact increased towards other areas of the world. Turchetta (2005, p. 4) goes on to explain that out of 25,000,000 Italians who left Italy, only 7,000,000 may be considered expatriates because the rest, around 20,000,000, returned to Italy after some time abroad.

Typology of migrants

According to Bettoni (1993, p. 412) the Italian migrants may be classified as follows:

1. Neither the first migrants' grandchildren nor great-grandchidren.

2. Not the very last migrants who had departed from Italy in the 50s and 60s.

The first classification has to do with a socio-linguistic factor, whereas the second has to do with a demographic variable. According to Bettoni, language loss is common in third and fourth- generation Italians around the world. Moreover, migration in the 50s and 60s constitutes a more consistent and very different kind from

264

InterSedes, ISSN 2215-2458, Volumen 21, Número 45, Enero-Julio, 2021, pp. 263-279 (Artículo).

the previous groups before the two world wars given the political and historical environment during those years in Italy and Europe. It is important to note that the colony of San Vito in Costa Rica was founded by Italian migrants during these years.

3. Arrival in either highly rural or industrialized regions or countries.

Italian migrants incorporated into societies such as Canada or USA present different characteristics of assimilation at the linguistic and social level than those incorporated into areas in the process of development or with a basic economy, such as Mexico or Costa Rica. These last Italian migrants into Mexico came alone and showed more unity; they were mostly from Veneto and thus gave birth to "Chipilo," a variant of Venetian Dialect spoken today in the state of Puebla, Mexico. On the other hand, the migrants who colonized the Valley of San Vito had many different places of origin on the Italian peninsula and consequently their linguistic repertoire show important differences as studied later.

4. Those who returned, and those who remained.

5. Arrival in a European or a non-European country.

6. Cultural and economic prestige of Italy in the new country.

7. Language of the new country.

The language of migrants

With regards to the language of migrants and its impact in the peninsula and abroad Vedovelli states that:

> …"150 years have produced profound changes in the linguistic identity of the Italians. Daily use of the commonly spoken Italian and immigrant languages input are the most obvious signs of identity tensions experienced by our society.Linguistic tensions have been carried out by millions of Italians who, at various times, have left the country to "make a fortune" in America or in Australia, Asia and Africa once usually dialectophone, illiterate and poor, now, as "brains on the run", graduates and italophones.What lin-

InterSedes, ISSN 2215-2458,Volumen 21, Número 45, Enero-Julio, 2021, pp. 263-279 (Artículo).

265

guistic changes have affected our emigrant communities? What relationships have had with the Italian language? How has it clashed with the languages of the host country? What has been the fate of the Dialects, once away from their territories? What have Italian governments done with the linguistic identity of Italian communities around the world? And what to do with today's "global market of languages?" (Cover, 2005)

In general terms, and as mentioned by Vedovelli above, migrants are supposed to speak Italo-Romance Dialects as their first language. Moreover, as proposed by Bettoni (1993, p. 415) the Italophony of migrants is considered to be definitively non-standard. In fact, the higher variety constitutes popular Italian variety. According to Turchetta (2005, p. 5) given the historical and political issues inside the peninsula in post Unitarian times, two important characteristics of migrants were illiteracy and higher competence their regional Dialect. On the other hand, competence in the Unitarian dialect was very low or non-existent during this period. Moreover, we need to take into consideration that majority of this population came from economically depressed areas, as opposed to people already living in more industrialized cities. The process of education then began in the new country, first because it was necessary to communicate in a single language with other Italians from different regions, and second because it 10 was necessary to learn to write in order to keep in contact with families left behind. It is important to say that the new country opens the door for the new generations to study in order to integrate them into the new culture, society and economy, as well as opening door to acquiring a foreign language. This process of education affected not only those who had migrated and remained in the new land, but also those who had returned to Italy, because they represented a model of progress for the non-migrant population especially before World War II. All these factors of illiteracy and poverty together with the Dialectophone nature of migrants have produced highly pidginized and mixed forms of Italian spoken abroad when confronted with the new language and local dialects. On the other hand, processes of language loss or attrition are evident in the first generation, and consolidated in the second and third generations, mainly because of the very low sociolinguistic value they gave to the language or languages of origin. How does a language of ori-

266

InterSedes, ISSN 2215-2458, Volumen 21, Número 45, Enero-Julio, 2021, pp. 263-279 (Artículo).

gin coexist with new language(s) in a different land? How does this language of origin combined with local languages contribute to the rise of local varieties? A framework aiming to answer these questions will be presented in the following section.

Diglossic position of languages

For Bettoni in Sobrero ed. (1993, pp. 415-416) the diglossic position of languages in the verbal repertoire of Italians abroad may be observed in the following chart:

CHART 1
DIGLOSSIC POSITION OF LANGUAGES IN THE REPERTOIRE OF ITALIAN MIGRANTS

| High Varieties | High Variety -- the lang. in new country |
| | Low variety -- dialect(s) of new country |

Low Varieties	High Variety -- popular Italian
	Low variety -- Italo-Romance Dialect(s)

Source: Bettoni in Sobrero ed. (1993, pp. 415-416).

InterSedes, ISSN 2215-2458,Volumen 21, Número 45, Enero-Julio, 2021, pp. 263-279 (Artículo).

267

The Italians in Costa Rica

Map 1

Geographic location of San Vito de Coto Brus in Costa Rica

San Vito de Coto Brus

Source: Taken from: http://www.cotobrus.net/el-canton/209-san-vito-de-coto-brus.html

According to Bulgarelli (1989, pp. 4-7) the Genovese presence in Costa Rica can be traced back to 1502, when Christopher Colombus landed on the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica. The first documented arrival of Italian citizens, however, took place on December 12, 1887, when seven hundred and sixty-two workers, mostly from Mantova, arrived in Puerto Limon in the Caribbean zone to work on the construction of the railroad which would connect the capital, San Jose, to the Caribbean port of Limon. Six months later, six hundred and seventy-one Italian men arrived in the same port. Bulgarelli states that many of them returned to Italy; half of them, however, remained. A second wave of Italian immigrants in Costa Rica took place after World War I. According to Bariatti (1989, p. 5) one hundred and sixty-two Italians lived in the capital city by 1927. The sample shows that with regards to the

268

InterSedes, ISSN 2215-2458,Volumen 21, Número 45, Enero-Julio, 2021, pp. 263-279 (Artículo).

use of Italian language, only 35% of this second wave spoke standard Italian, mainly because they learned "in loco." Offspring were sent to study to Italy, which constituted a great honor and pride for their parents. Another reason that they speak standard Italian is that the members of the second generation married other Italians. The rest -- 65% -- of this second generation did not speak standard Italian at all. Among the grandchildren, only 15% of them had studied in Italy and had learned the language at home.

In Sansonetti (1995) the settlement and foundation of San Vito de Coto Brus is described in detail. This constitutes the third documented arrival of Italians in Costa Rican territory.

Out of 111 families who came to colonize San Vito de Coto Brus, 38 came from different towns in the north of Italy, 30 from central Italy, 40 from southern Italy, and 3 from Dalmatia. They were mostly farmers and peasants. Sansonetti, on the other hand, was a soldier and a political science graduate. Married to Olivia Tinoco, a Costa Rican woman whom Sansonetti had met in Rome years before, Vito Sansonetti along with members of his family and other Italians founded SICA, an organization created to promote this colonization. "San Vito," the Italian name of the town, is after the patron saint of migrants. The rest of the town's name, "Coto Brus," dates back to what indigenous people called the place previous to the arrival of Europeans. The origins of these last migrants will be examined in the following chart.

InterSedes, ISSN 2215-2458, Volumen 21, Número 45, Enero-Julio, 2021, pp. 263-279 (Artículo).

269

CHART 2

PLACES OF ORIGIN OF ITALIANS IN SAN VITO. SANSONETTI
(1993, PP. 87-88)

Region	Location	Number of families	Percentage
Northern	TOTAL	38	34.23%
	Trieste	3	
	Modena	7	
	Bologna	6	
	Firenze	4	
	Taglio di Po	3	
	Montemignaio	2	
	Lendinara	2	
	Bergamo	1	
	Biella	1	
	Badia	1	
	Polesine	1	
	Polona	1	
	Nonantola	1	
	Perusa	1	
	Genova	1	
	Verdello	1	
	Castelifard	1	
	TOTAL	**38**	**34,23%**
CENTRAL	Roma	9	
	Poggio Moiano	7	
	Fiume	1	
	Bolsorano	3	
	Civitavecchia	2	
	Chieti	2	
	Cittaducale	1	
	Poggio Mirteto	1	
	Fara Sabina	1	
	Priverno	1	
	Ariccia	1	
	Valmontone	1	
	Pontinia	1	
	TOTAL	**30**	**27,03**
SOUTHERN	Mottola	18	
	Polagionello	11	
	Ruffano	5	
	Napoli	1	
	Ginosa	1	
	Castellaneta	1	
	Massafra	1	
	Sassano	1	
	Benevento	1	
	TOTAL	**40**	**36,03**
DALMAZIA	Isola d'Istria	2	
	Fiume	1	
	TOTAL	**3**	**2,71**
		111	100%

Given the fact that these families came from different locations and with different Italo- Romance Dialects, but also taking into consideration that it is possible that many of them had some instruction in the National Italian language, the tendency towards using Standard Italian more and more among themselves to un-

derstand each other at work, in the street, at church and so forth was probably the rule, as presented in the next section.

The languages of Italian immigrants in San Vito

According to Franceschi (1970, p. 89) the Italians who arrived in San Vito spoke Italo- Romance Dialect, but also regional Italian. He refers to the interviews as revealing great influence from the regional Italian, Italo-Romance Dialect, and sometimes from Spanish. At the end of his research, however, he concludes that Standard Italian constituted the most commonly used variety among members of the first generation, and that the second generation spoke Spanish as their main language. The following example was taken from an interview with a young Italian man who shows influence of middle Italian with clear interference from Sapnish as seen in *finca* It. Standard: fattoria

> "Ho comprato pure una finca, stavamo preparando pure le carte, mi son fatto pure io, pure mio fratello, e pure la paterna." (Franceschi, 1970, p. 95)

Another example corresponds to a woman with great influence from Veneto, Laziale regionale, and Italo-Romance Dialect:

> "Cene (-cenè) ancora, ci stave il dolce, non ci sta santi, non ce stava maniera, un comisariato che ci stave un po' di tutto, s'era qua." In quest'italiano laziale s'interseca quello véneto: lèto, late, deto, il meljo, e il dialetto originario: grande (femminile plurale), vedest, let, fat, pers tut. All'abitudine allo spagnolo sarà da riportare la sibilante sorda in case, piaser, mentre piuttosto dall' italiano centromeridionale verrà il sintagma la spesa nostra. La donna passa continuamente dall' italiano al dialetto," (Franceschi, 1970, p. 97).

The influence of Spanish

The influence of Spanish on the varieties of Italian may be seen in the following typology (Franceschi, 1970, pp. 226-228).

InterSedes, ISSN 2215-2458,Volumen 21, Número 45, Enero-Julio, 2021, pp. 263-279 (Artículo).

271

1. <u>Spanish words in the lexicon with no variation from Italian or borrowings</u>

Examples: Geographical names, names of people, exclamations, adverbial expressions.

2. <u>Spanish words integrated into the Italian system</u>

Examples: *traspianta* – Spanish – transplanta; *due finche* – Spanish – dos fincas; *due peoni* – Spanish – dos peones; *I peones* or *I peoni* – Spanish – los peones.

3. <u>Loanwords from Spanish</u>

Pigna – Spanish – piña – Italian– annasso

4. <u>Pragmatic calques</u>

Chiaro! – Spanish – Claro!

5. <u>Syntactic calques</u>

La ho vista facendo; ho continuato seminando

6. <u>Hybrid forms</u>

l'aggua, émo avutto, aviamo écio

7. <u>Use of local expressions in discourse</u>

…y así terminó el problema...

8. <u>Phonology</u>

Reduction of intervocalic stops to fricatives - especially/b/ - as well as reducing the voiced sibilant to voiceless in the same position, pronouncing /r/ with a marked local accent usually at the beginning (closer to a rhotic fricative alveolar, the typical Costa Rican /r/)

Conclusions found in Franceschi

At the end of the research, Franceschi concludes that in spite of the multiple Italo- Romance Dialects spoken, and the influence from Spanish, Standard Italian is the most widely used variety because of the high value given to it, and also because it made communication simpler, faster, and evidently more efficient among people with diverse origins and Italo-Romance Dialects. However, in the second generation, an evident stage of erosion is visible because of the influence of Spanish. That is, they prefer to speak Spanish as L1. The use of regional Italian Dialects is restricted to family and friends, especially those from the same region or town in Italy. He also concludes that the choice for any of the previously mentioned languages in the repertoire is conditioned by several factors such as education, age, sex, origin in Italy, relationship with the national Spanish or Costa Rican culture, marital ties with Costa Ricans, and so forth. With regards to this topic he states that:

> "Nella comunità sanvitegna l'italiano ha tronfato sui dialetti, quale strumento di comunicazione più funzionale, oltre che dotato di maggior prestigio. Nella seconda generazione la lingua a sua volta va regredendo da fronte allo spagnolo che per i giovani non solo è più funzionale, rispetto all'ambiente costarricense in cui ormai si trovano a vivere ma è assai meglio posseduto dell'Italiano (generalmente scarso, o semidialettale, già nei padri) rispetto a cui gode,grazie alla scuola,anche del prestigio della lingua di cultura.
> Gli elementi che hanno causato il vario comportamento linguistico dei coloni sono indubbiamente numerosi; ma ad alcuni si può attribuire una validitá di ordine generale. Il primo da prendere la considerazione è il posseso del linguaggio originario: che di norma è un dialetto. Un suo pieno posseso appare infatti indispensabile per una buona conversazione, in rapporto sia in all'italiano sia allo spagnolo. Il ben maggiore possesso che il parlante ha del vernacolo rispetto alla lingua spiega il minimo (talora nullo) cedimento del primo all' influsso del castigliano." (Franceschi, 1970, pp. 359-361)

InterSedes, ISSN 2215-2458,Volumen 21, Número 45, Enero-Julio, 2021, pp. 263-279 (Artículo).

273

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275

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276

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277

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279