

New perspectives on Italian migrants's plurilingualism: a sociolinguistic, demographic and language planning overview

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The context

50 years of migration flows to Italy: which issues?

During the last 50 years, the migration flows to Italy have significantly increased (fig. 1—2). Undoubtedly, migration is one of the most pivotal phenomena in the Italian contemporary history, representing both a politically relevant subject and a debated social and cultural issue.

Due to the massive presence of migrants permanently living in the country, we can consider the contemporary situation of Italy as a case of *superdiversity* (Vertovec 2007). Thus, the recent scenario clearly requires new theoretical and operational tools for the analytical observation and management. This would preserve the original cultural background of migrants, and would allow a complete process of bidirectional integration. In particular, the following perspectives are to be considered:

- **Juridical level:** involving laws and procedures regulating migrants' access and stay in the country;
- **Social and cultural contacts:** describing and interpreting trajectories and strategies for migrants' integration;
- **Linguistic perspective:** internal variation due to the linguistic contact.

In past decades, the learning of Italian as L2—as widely observed in the Pavia Project since 1980—and the analysis of the results of the the linguistic contact have been the focus of a large amount of investigations.

3 Critical Points

How new plurilingualism can be considered in the Italian policies

1. The inclusion of migrant linguistic varieties in the group of historical minorities is not consistent with the high number of migrants in Italy and their impact within labour market, education and society.
2. The comparison between the new plurilingualism and historical minority languages is not completely useful to determine the role and the significance of migrant varieties in the contemporary Italian linguistic repertoire.
3. A different perspective including the evidence from juridical and statistical inquiries could better describe this new sociolinguistic scenario.

Our research

Possible innovations for the migrants' plurilingualism in Italy

Two objectives

- Revealing the **linguistic ideology** underpinning the Italian policies related to the management of migrants' plurilingualism.
- Suggesting **new forms of protection** based on language-specific sociolinguistic features in migration contexts.

Three series of factors observed

- **Demographic data:** size of communities, migrants' age and countries of origin;
- **Historical trajectories** and migration routes to Italy;
- **Linguistic and sociolinguistic data:**
 - ◇ Quantity and position of different varieties in the individual and collective repertoire;
 - ◇ Prestige accorded to them by each migrants' speech community;
 - ◇ Possible international spread of these languages (Spanish and its varieties, English etc.);
 - ◇ Presence/absence of a shared standard and its influence on language maintenance or loss;
 - ◇ Presence of *truncated repertoires* (Blommaert 2010), in which only-partially-learned languages contribute to communication.

Our interpretative perspective: (possible) language planning analysis

- Analysis of language ideologies related to the laws preserving Italian historical minority languages, in order to identify correspondences and differences with new plurilingualism.
- Study of the correlation between the absence of laws promoting plurilingualism and the loss of varieties in migrants' repertoires.

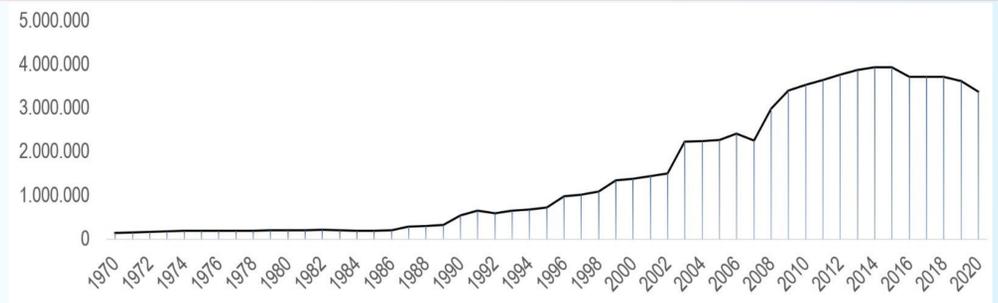


Fig. 1 - Non-EU citizens granted residence permits in Italy. Personal elaboration. Data source: For years 1970-1979: Einaudi 2007, 407; Immigrazione Dossier Statistico 2005: 76. For years 1980-1990: Einaudi 2007: 407. For years 1991-2007: 1° Rapporto sugli immigrati in Italia: 2007: 59; Einaudi 2007: 407; remaining data: Demostat.

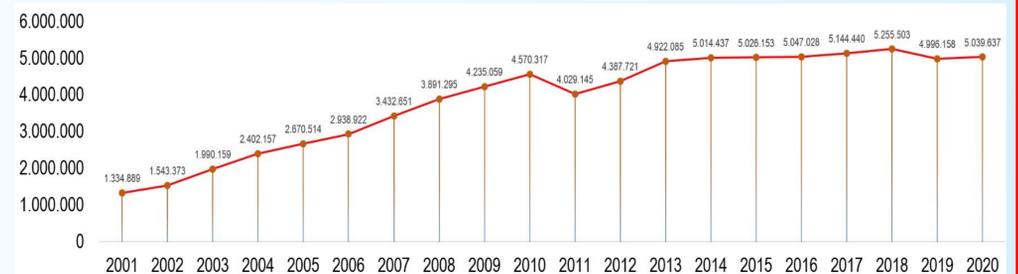


Fig. 2 — Total amount of foreign people living in Italy. Data source: Personal elaboration on various ISTAT data.

Recent migration (fig. 3-4) led to an enrichment of the varieties embedded in Italian linguistic repertoire. In past decades, historical linguistic minorities and Italian dialects were the only exception to the ideal monolingualism promoted by institutional policies. The numerous languages spoken by migrants in Italy have been defined *new Italian plurilingualism* (Bagna et alii 2003, 2007) or *new linguistic minorities* (De Mauro 1977). These terms, however, raise a few definitional issues, concerning both national and international law. The term *new linguistic minorities* does not automatically ensure rights and guarantees for migrants' linguistic communities. As a matter of fact, not only does the law n. 482/1999 provide a designation for historical linguistic minorities, but it also contains protection rules in favour of them. Furthermore, considering the numerosity of historical groups and the numerosity of new minorities, we unveil that the presence of migration is significant even in region characterized by well-established historical minorities (fig. 5).

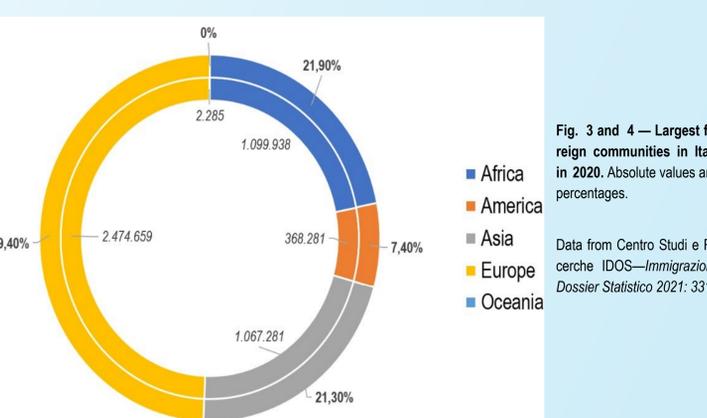
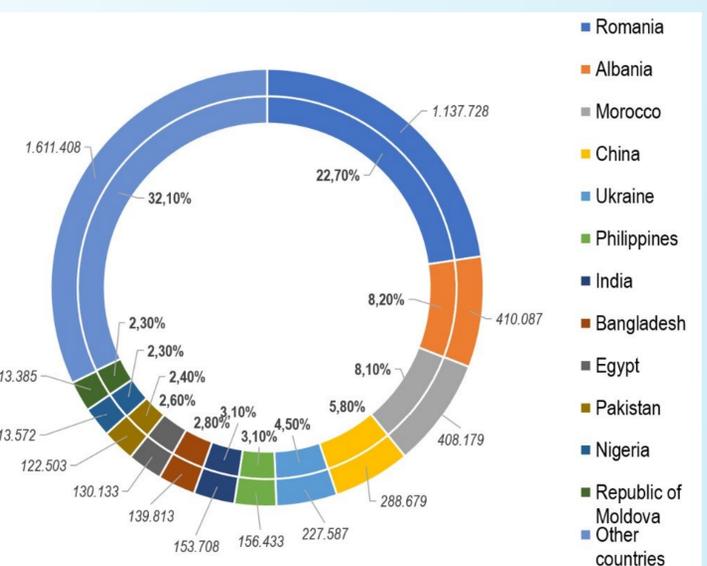


Fig. 3 and 4 — Largest foreign communities in Italy in 2020. Absolute values and percentages.

Data from Centro Studi e Ricerche IDOS—Immigrazione Dossier Statistico 2021: 331.

Fig. 5—Comparison between historical and new minority communities in the Autonomous Province of Trento in 2011. Data Source: for people belonging to historical communities: 15° Censimento della popolazione e delle abitazioni. Rilevazione sulla consistenza e la dislocazione territoriale degli appartenenti alle popolazioni di lingua ladina, mòchena e cimbra. For foreign people: ISTAT and Immigrazione Dossier Statistico for considered years.

