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SILENZIO IN SALA: PARLA IL CINEMA ITALIANO!

**NEW LINGUISTIC TENDENCIES AND THE LANGUAGE OF
CONTEMPORARY ITALIAN COMEDY**

Committee:

CINZIA RUSSI Supervisor

DANIELA BINI CARTER

PAOLA BONIFAZIO

HERVÉ PICHERIT

FABIO ROSSI

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CONTEMPORARY ITALIAN COMEDY**

by

Ettore Marchetti, B.A.; M.A.

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Dedication

A Chiara,

la mia Musa ispiratrice e la mia fonte inesauribile di energia...perchè nel suo sorriso ritrovo sempre il senso di leggerezza che ogni tanto mi capita di perdere.

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SILENZIO IN SALA: PARLA IL CINEMA ITALIANO!
NEW LINGUISTIC TENDENCIES AND THE LANGUAGE OF
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Ettore Marchetti, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2015

Supervisor: Cinzia Russi

This dissertation investigates the language used in contemporary Italian cinema, with particular focus on popular comedy through the analysis of ten films released in a 30-year span period, from 1980 to 2010. My work argues that comedy dialogues may serve linguistic descriptive purposes since they use the complete spectrum of contemporary trends. The project analyzes how cinema uses common language and how film dialogues record linguistic changes in Italian, proving to be a useful and powerful medium for describing contemporary language. A subsequent question that my work addresses is how comedy's film dialogues represent a changing society. A detailed analysis of the four linguistic levels: phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon is conducted in the dialogues of the films selected. Through the observation of the occurrences of the new linguistic tendencies I establish which variables trigger their use, what are the differences among the characters' speeches, and whether and how the language used differs from standard language. Also, the comparison with contemporary Italian reveals the degree of sociolinguistic reliability of the dialogue of popular comedy. A further type of comparison is the one between the written screenplays and the final

version of the films, which reveals some of the linguistic dynamics behind the trajectory from a written to a spoken version of the text.

The data I collected show an overall reliable reproduction by most films of the new linguistic trends, and a reliable representation of the sociolinguistic complexity of contemporary Italian. This attempt to imitate reality shows, in my opinion, the scarce inclination to linguistic experimentalism of Italian comedy. On the other hand, what film dialogues fail to reflect in a realistic way are the traits intrinsically related to oral discourse such as interruptions, reformulations, and drawbacks. What my work ultimately highlights is the value of the close analysis of film dialogues as an interdisciplinary method that can contribute to linguistic accounts as well as to explain specific choices in language related to the cinematic genre.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	xiv
1. Introduction	1
1.1. OBJECT AND AIMS OF THE STUDY	1
1.2. CONTRIBUTION	5
1.3. METHODOLOGY	6
1.4. ORGANIZATION OF THE DISSERTATION	9
2. Previous research	11
2.1. INTRODUCTION.....	11
2.2. THE LANGUAGE OF ITALIAN CINEMA	11
2.3. THE DEBATE ON CONTEMPORARY ITALIAN.....	18
3. Phonological and phono-morphological features	27
3.1. INTRODUCTION.....	27
3.2. PHONOLOGICAL FEATURES.....	28
3.2.1. Consonants system.....	28
3.2.1.1. <i>Consonant assimilation</i>	28
3.2.1.2. <i>Deaffrication</i>	28
3.2.1.3. <i>Gemination of vibrant, and voiced dental stop</i>	29
3.2.1.4. <i>Gorgia. Aspiration of /k/</i>	29
3.2.1.5. <i>Voicing of intervocalic /s/</i>	29
3.2.1.6. <i>Lenition</i>	29
3.2.1.7. <i>Palatalization of sibilant before /k/, /f/, /g/, /m/, /n/, /p/, /qw/, /v/</i>	29
3.2.1.8. <i>Phono-syntactic gemination</i>	29
3.2.1.9. <i>Porena law</i>	30
3.2.1.10. <i>Rhotacism of preconsonantal /l/</i>	30
3.2.1.11. <i>Sonorization of occlusive in post-nasal and post-labial position</i>	30
3.2.1.12. <i>Weakening of the palatal lateral</i>	30

3.2.2. Vocalism	30
3.2.2.1. <i>Monophthongization of the diphthong –uo–</i>	30
3.2.2.2. <i>Schwa</i>	31
3.3. PHONO-MORPHOLOGY	31
3.3.1 Consonant system	31
3.3.1.1. <i>Aphaeresis of demonstrative adjectives and indefinite articles</i>	31
3.3.1.2. <i>Apocope</i>	31
3.3.2. Vocalism	32
3.3.2.1. <i>Vowel lowering</i>	32
3.4. ANALYSIS OF FILMS	32
3.4.1. <i>Bianco, rosso e Verdone</i> (Directed by Carlo Verdone, 1981. Screenplay by: Leonardo Benvenuti, Piero De Bernardi, Carlo Verdone)	32
3.4.2. <i>Viaggi di nozze</i> (Directed by Carlo Verdone, 1995. Screenplay by: Leonardo Benvenuti, Piero De Bernardi, Carlo Verdone)	35
3.4.3. <i>Grande, grosso e Verdone</i> (Directed by Carlo Verdone, 2008. Screenplay by: Piero De Bernardi, Pasquale Plastino, Carlo Verdone)	38
3.4.4. <i>Il piccolo diavolo</i> (Directed Roberto Benigni, 1988. Screenplay by: Roberto Benigni, Vincenzo Cerami, Andrea Pazienza)	41
3.4.5. <i>Il mostro</i> (Directed by Roberto Benigni, 1994. Screenplay by: Roberto Benigni, Michel Blanc, Vincenzo Cerami)	43
3.4.6. <i>Vacanze di Natale '95</i> (Directed by Neri Parenti, 1995. Screenplay by Neri Parenti)	44
3.4.7. <i>Christmas in love</i> (Directed by Neri Parenti, 2004. Screenplay by: Fausto Brizzi, Marco Martani, Neri Parenti)	47
3.4.8. <i>Tre uomini e una gamba</i> (Directed by Aldo, Giovanni & Giacomo, 1997. Screenplay by: Aldo, Giovanni & Giacomo, Giorgio Gherarducci, Lucio Martignoni, Massimo Venier)	49
3.4.9. <i>Chiedimi se sono felice</i> (Directed by Aldo, Giovanni & Giacomo, Massimo Venier, 2000. Screenplay by: Aldo, Giovanni & Giacomo, Paolo Cananzi, Graziano Ferrari, Walter Fontana, Massimo Venier)	51

3.4.10. <i>Benvenuti al sud</i> (Directed by Luca Miniero, 2010. Screenplay by: Dany Boon, Alexandre Charlot, Massimo Gaudioso, Franck Magnier).....	52
3.5. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	54
3.6. CONCLUSIONS.....	58
4. Morphology and morphosyntax	61
4.1. INTRODUCTION.....	61
4.2 MORPHOLOGICAL FEATURES	62
4.2.1. <i>Voi</i> ‘you (pl.)’ instead of <i>lei</i> ‘you (formal)’ to address someone formally.....	62
4.2.2. Personal pronoun <i>te</i> ‘you’ as subject instead of <i>tu</i> ‘you (subject)’	62
4.3 MORPHO-SYNTACTIC FEATURES	63
4.3.1. <i>Cosa/che/che cosa</i> ‘what’	63
4.3.2. Impersonal <i>si</i> replacing expression of 1st person plural subject pronoun	63
4.3.3. Indicative mood replacing the conditional mood.....	64
4.3.4. Imperfect indicative replacing subjunctive in if-clauses in past tense	64
4.3.5. Modal use of future tense.....	65
4.3.6. Pronominal verbs	65
4.3.6.1. <i>Reflexive forms with endearment function</i>	66
4.3.6.2. <i>Dativo etico</i>	66
4.3.7. Redundancy of clitics.....	67
4.3.8. <i>Stare a</i> + infinitive periphrasis to replace present progressive ..	68
4.3.9. Use of <i>che polivalente</i>	69
4.4. THE MORPHOSYNTACTIC FEATURES OBJECT OF FURTHER ANALYSIS	70
4.4.1. <i>Gli</i> ‘to him’ referring to feminine antecedents	70
4.4.2. Indicative pro subjunctive in dependent clauses when the main verb is a verb of opinion, wish, hope, doubt.	71
4.4.3. Verb <i>averci</i> ‘to have’	72

4.5. ANALYSIS OF FILMS	73
4.5.1. <i>Bianco, rosso e Verdone</i>	74
4.5.2. <i>Viaggi di nozze</i>	76
4.5.3. <i>Grande, grosso e Verdone</i>	79
4.5.4. <i>Il piccolo diavolo</i>	82
4.5.5. <i>Il mostro</i>	84
4.5.6. <i>Vacanze di Natale '95</i>	86
4.5.7. <i>Christmas in love</i>	89
4.5.8. <i>Tre uomini e una gamba</i>	92
4.5.9. <i>Chiedimi se sono felice</i>	94
4.5.10. <i>Benvenuti al sud</i>	96
4.6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	98
4.7. CONCLUSIONS	102
5. Syntax	105
5.1. INTRODUCTION	105
5.2. FEATURES	106
5.2.1. <i>C'è presentativo 'presentative esserci'</i>	106
5.2.2. Cleft sentences.	106
5.2.3. Dislocation	107
5.2.3.1. <i>Left dislocation</i>	108
5.2.3.2. <i>Right dislocation</i>	109
5.2.4. Hanging topic	110
5.3. ANALYSIS OF FILMS	111
5.3.1. <i>Bianco, rosso e Verdone</i>	112
5.3.2. <i>Viaggi di nozze</i>	114
5.3.3. <i>Grande grosso e Verdone</i>	116
5.3.4. <i>Il piccolo diavolo</i>	117
5.3.5. <i>Il mostro</i>	119
5.3.6. <i>Vacanze di Natale '95</i>	120
5.3.8. <i>Tre uomini e una gamba</i>	123

5.3.9. <i>Chiedimi se sono felice</i>	125
5.3.10. <i>Benvenuti al sud</i>	127
5.4. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	128
5.5. CONCLUSIONS	130
6. Lexicon	132
6.1. INTRODUCTION	132
6.2. FEATURES	133
6.2.1 Borrowings	133
6.2.2. Obscene language and curse words	134
6.2.3. Regional terms	135
6.3. ANALYSIS OF FILMS	136
6.3.1. <i>Bianco rosso e Verdone</i>	136
6.3.2. <i>Viaggi di nozze</i>	138
6.3.3. <i>Grande grosso e Verdone</i>	141
6.3.4. <i>Il piccolo diavolo</i>	144
6.3.5. <i>Il mostro</i>	145
6.3.6. <i>Vacanze di Natale '95</i>	147
6.3.7. <i>Christmas in love</i>	149
6.3.8. <i>Tre uomini e una gamba</i>	152
6.3.9. <i>Chiedimi se sono felice</i>	153
6.3.10. <i>Benvenuti al sud</i>	155
6.4. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	156
6.5. CONCLUSIONS	160
7. The dialogues in the screenplays and the dialogues in the film	164
7.1. INTRODUCTION	164
7.2. COMPARISON SCREENPLAYS/DIALOGUES IN THE SINGLE FILMS	167
7.2.1. <i>Bianco, rosso e Verdone</i>	167
7.2.2. <i>Viaggi di nozze</i>	169
7.2.3. <i>Il piccolo diavolo</i>	171
7.2.4. <i>Il mostro</i>	172

7.2.5. <i>Vacanze di Natale '95</i>	174
7.2.6 <i>Christmas in love</i>	175
7.2.7. <i>Tre uomini e una gamba</i>	177
7.2.8. <i>Chiedimi se sono felice</i>	178
7.3. CONCLUSIONS	180
8. General discussion	182
8.1. INTRODUCTION	182
8.2. LANGUAGE OF CINEMA, LANGUAGE OF PEOPLE	182
8.3. DIRECTORS AND LANGUAGE	201
8.4. CONCLUSIONS	209
9. Conclusions	211
References	216

List of Tables

Table 1: <i>Phonology</i> -Distribution of the features as used by the main character	33
Table 2: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters	36
Table 3: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters	38
Table 4: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters.	41
Table 5: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters.	43
Table 6: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters.	45
Table 7: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters.	48
Table 8: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters	50
Table 9: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters	51
Table 10: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters	53
Table 11: <i>Morphology</i> -Distribution of the features as used by the main characters	74
Table 12: Distribution of the standard and the <i>neo-standard</i> usage of the three main traits by the main characters	75
Table 13: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters	76
Table 14: Distribution of the standard and the <i>neo-standard</i> usage of the three main traits by the main characters	78
Table 15: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters	79
Table 16: Distribution of the standard and the <i>neo-standard</i> usage of the three main traits by the main characters	81
Table 17: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters	82
Table 18: Distribution of the standard and the <i>neo-standard</i> usage of the three main traits by the main characters	83
Table 19: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters	84
Table 20: Distribution of the standard and the <i>neo-standard</i> usage of the three main traits by the main characters	85
Table 21: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters	86
Table 22: Distribution of the standard and the <i>neo-standard</i> usage of the three main traits by the main characters	88
Table 23: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters	89
Table 24: Distribution of the standard and the <i>neo-standard</i> usage of the three main traits by the main characters	91
Table 25: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters	92
Table 26: Distribution of the standard and the <i>neo-standard</i> usage of the three main traits by the main characters	93
Table 27: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters	94
Table 28: Distribution of the standard and the <i>neo-standard</i> usage of the three main traits by the main characters	95
Table 29: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters	96
Table 30: Distribution of the standard and the <i>neo-standard</i> usage of the three main traits by the main characters	98
Table 31: <i>Syntax</i> -Distribution of the features as used by the main characters	112

Table 32: Percentage distribution of dislocated sentences and sentences with unmarked order	113
Table 33: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters	114
Table 34: Percentage distribution of dislocated sentences and sentences with unmarked order	115
Table 35: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters	116
Table 36: Percentage distribution of dislocated sentences and sentences with unmarked order	117
Table 37: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters	117
Table 38: Percentage distribution of dislocated sentences and sentences with unmarked order	118
Table 39: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters	119
Table 40: Percentage distribution of dislocated sentences and sentences with unmarked order	120
Table 41: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters	120
Table 42: Percentage distribution of dislocated sentences and sentences with unmarked order	121
Table 43: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters	122
Table 44: Percentage distribution of dislocated sentences and sentences with unmarked order	123
Table 45: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters	123
Table 46: Percentage distribution of dislocated sentences and sentences with unmarked order	125
Table 47: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters	125
Table 48: Percentage distribution of dislocated sentences and sentences with unmarked order	126
Table 49: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters	127
Table 50: Percentage distribution of dislocated sentences and sentences with unmarked order	128
Table 51: Distribution of the lexicon	136
Table 52: Distribution of the lexicon	138
Table 53: Distribution of the lexicon	141
Table 54: Distribution of the lexicon	144
Table 55: Distribution of the lexicon	145
Table 56: Distribution of the lexicon	147
Table 57: Distribution of the lexicon	149
Table 58: Distribution of the lexicon	152
Table 59: Distribution of the lexicon	153
Table 60: Distribution of the lexicon	155

1. Introduction

1.1. OBJECT AND AIMS OF THE STUDY

Since the first motion picture was released in Italy, a close-knit relationship between spoken language and cinema has existed. Ironically, even before the advent of sound film language played an important role in mute films, since captions were used to summarize the most salient parts. During the fascist regime and up until its end, there was a huge gap between the language people actually spoke and the language used in the dialogues in cinema since the linguistic policies of the regime would allow only the use of the standard variety (and most Italians during the period were not literate) and a few regional dialects (i.e. *romanesco* and *napoletano*) (Raffaelli 1994: 276). After World War II, the cinematic industry underwent a period of intense growth, and the genre of comedy, in particular, was the one that achieved the greatest success. By then, the linguistic situation had begun to change. Many factors contributed to increase literacy and to the diffusion of standard Italian as the national language. Cinema was one of these contributing factors, through its reproduction of the linguistic behaviors of the middle class, which shown that Italian, although still strongly characterized by regional varieties, yet was replacing native dialects in daily conversations. Language of cinema can therefore be seen as a tool that has contributed to the shaping of a national identity. One constant over the years has been the interest of cinema for the internal differentiation of the Italian language and for its crucial role in the characterization of the society and its metamorphosis. Conversely, scholars in the field of linguistics have only recently begun to look at the use of the language in cinema with any kind of systematic attention.¹

¹. On the delay of interest for film language see Raffaelli (1994), F. Rossi (1999b), and Perego and Taylor (2009).

The language of contemporary cinema, and particularly in the genre of comedy, is the topic of the present work. I investigate linguistic variation in contemporary Italian, as it is used in the dialogues of ten films released from 1980 to 2010. My work is meant to be a descriptive study to shed light both on the type of language spoken in Italian cinema as well as on how it relates to everyday language. My goal is not to determine whether one system influences the other or vice-versa: rather, I look at the linguistic features of film dialogues and screenplays and find differences and similarities with respect to common language. The main object of the study is therefore the way Italian cinema reflects contemporary spoken Italian, which linguistic traits it uses and whether it offers a reliable representation of the current linguistic trends. The use of film dialogues as a source for a linguistic account allows us to monitor contemporary language and to offer significant insights for descriptive purposes. In so doing, my work defines the cinematic dialogues as a term of measurement of people's contemporary linguistic habits, in the same way other kinds of samples of spoken language do (e.g. samples of spontaneous conversations; samples of public speeches). It could be argued that speech in cinema is not natural, and therefore is not reliable to be analyzed as real-life speech; yet, it is also true that linguists rarely have the possibility of analyzing samples of completely spontaneous spoken language (Nencioni 1983: 132-133; Alvarez-Pereyre 2011: 59).²

A secondary goal of my study is to reverse the perspective, and to look at how the directors use the language, how they represent the internal socio-linguistic differentiation and whether the characters, through their speech, put on stage social and political issues. For example, we will observe the way in which films use regional pronunciation, how Italians deal with foreign languages, or how much television influences characters'

². For the issue of the similarity between film language and real life speech see Piazza (2011: 13-14).

speech, especially in this historical moment in which the political debate takes place mostly in television.

Through the comparison between the language of cinema and the language of today's Italy, I argue that contemporary cinema provides evidence of the changes that Italian is undergoing, and offers a source of information regarding the internal linguistic differentiation of Italian unlike other media such as newspapers, or television. With the word 'differentiation' I refer to the linguistic variation due to differences of education, age, gender, geographical origins and social status that exist among the characters. I aim to show that films dialogues use a complete spectrum of features of contemporary Italian, and therefore they are a valuable descriptive tool of contemporary grammar and of the sociolinguistic structure of Italian. My study will also touch upon features such as the low use of repetitions, the absence of interruptions, and the high fluency of the conversation that mark one great difference in film language with respect to real-life speech.

My approach, which is mainly linguistic, follows the general arguments of scholars who in recent years have been rehabilitating the verbal component of cinema (e.g. Kozloff 2000; F. Rossi 2007; Piazza 2011), which previously had been largely neglected. A further belief that supports my work is the fact that cinema, or at least popular comedy, tries to reproduce the way people speak every day, in order to be accessible to them and in order to obtain the approval of the public for commercial purposes. Therefore, the attempt to analyze the dialogues as though they were samples of conversational language, trying to single out the linguistic traits typical of contemporary informal language, does not seem so unrealistic. In the past this principle has already been applied in the American context by Koch (1997), among French scholars by Abecassis (2005), in Italy by Nencioni (1983), M. Trifone (1993), and in a more problematic way by F. Rossi (1999), who eventually recognizes the difficulty in

reproducing the traits that are strictly unique of spoken language. In my study, the level of linguistic realism of a film will not be a measurement of the quality of the film itself; a movie, in fact, does not have to be necessary realistic to be a good movie, or vice-versa. The linguistic closeness to reality is, rather, a criteria to evaluate the ability of the director and the screenwriter to linguistically represent and reproduce contemporary language.

Other scholars who have argued that film dialogues do not reliably reproduce everyday language are Cresti (1987), Kozloff (2000), and in general this is a common opinion in English-speaking contexts, as Piazza (2011: 13) points out. My dissertation intends to challenge this skeptical attitude toward the realism of film dialogues by considering a historical perspective, that is, by applying the analysis to a specific language. I do not focus primarily on the paralinguistic peculiarities of oral interaction, such as for example speech volume or voice overlapping. Nor do I have a semiotic approach, which characterizes works such as Piazza's *Discourse on Italian Cinema* (2011), where the connection among verbal component, images and contexts is the main object of the research. My study looks instead at film dialogues exclusively as an outcome of the screenwriters' observation of the most common linguistic habits and uses, and therefore as a synchronic representation of the linguistic tendencies. Alvarez-Pereyre, summarizes this possibility as follows:

...there is at least one way in which film dialogues can be studied quite straightforwardly from a linguistic point of view. That is if one is investigating what can be called 'filmspeak', i.e. *the way people (are made to) speak in films*. Filmspeak as a specific genre is perhaps best studied in comparison with what it looks like, i.e. 'naturally-occurring' interactions (insofar as we are able to record them) in settings comparable to those found in the films. (2011: 51)

Keeping that in mind, I do not intend to disregard the non-spontaneous component of film dialogues, but at the same time I am inclined to believe that this component does not

prevent us from studying this type of text (film dialogue) as a good example of everyday speech. My work outlines to what extent films represent contemporary Italian language in its synchronic development. The measurement of the ability of cinema to imitate real-life language is based on cinema's imitation of spoken Italian, considering therefore the spoken variety of a specific language rather than the spoken language as a cross-linguistic category, with its intrinsic features such as repetitions, drawbacks, or lack of cohesion. That is to say, I am more interested in identifying traits that are fairly unique to spoken Italian (e.g. the replacement of subjunctive with indicative), rather than traits that can be oral component of any language (e.g. repetitions).

1.2. CONTRIBUTION

My study contributes to the analysis of the interdisciplinary interaction of cinematic dialogues and contemporary language. The most relevant shortcoming of previous research on the role of the Italian language in film is the fact that in general, previous studies do not systematically analyze the linguistic features of an entire film. Also, they usually do not look at genre as a valuable criterion of classification. As far as Italian scholarship is concerned, the first author who proposed an analysis of the four linguistic levels (i.e. phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon) of a corpus of films is F. Rossi (1999b). The latest works on the language of cinema touched upon the influence of the language of television (Setti 2003), on the new challenges that scholars should take on (Raffaelli 2006), and on the mix of innovation and tradition in the language of films (Setti 2010). The only monograph in the last fifteen years is *Il linguaggio cinematografico* (F. Rossi 2006), which has a diachronic approach and gives an account of the ways in which Italian cinema used language since the post war until the end of the 90's. I think that an emphasis on contemporary cinema along with a close look at the

films' dialogues is needed in order to obtain more data and to approach films with a linguistic perspective. A detailed analysis of the dialogues of contemporary films and the focus on one genre is what distinguishes mine from most of the previous works on the topic. Also, by using groups of films from the same directors, I propose a method that sheds lights on whether and how the language changes among the movies of the same authors and from one author to another. Moreover, I want to point out that it is possible to monitor the status of the language using a context (cinema) that traditionally is not relied upon enough for descriptive purposes. The main contribution of my study is, then, a quantitative and qualitative description of the use of language in cinema and the identification of precise phonological, morpho-syntactic and lexical features found in films of the same genre and of different periods. A further way in which the present work intends to contribute to the literature is by dedicating a chapter to a discussion on the contemporary tendencies of the language, in order to stress the interdisciplinary approach.

Ultimately, this is a significant project because it explores the ongoing development of contemporary linguistic trends, and gives an account of sociolinguistic variation as it is reflected in film. In so doing, my work invites us to rethink and emphasize the value of the verbal component of film, as a tool for linguistic observation but also as a functional aspect of the cinematic narrative.

1.3. METHODOLOGY

Since the aim of my work is to explore what type of Italian is used in film dialogues, I carry out a detailed linguistic analysis of the dialogues of ten films released in the last thirty years. By 'dialogues' I refer to the final version of the actors' performance in the released version of the film. I believe that cinema is more reliable

than other media, such as TV for instance, in representing people's linguistic habits because of its attitude to imitate the complexity of reality, rather than influencing and conditioning the way people speak. Moreover, cinema is able to reproduce the internal diversity of contemporary Italian within the same film. My analysis follows a corpus linguistic methodology, which considers the individual traits in a given text and draws conclusions on the total number of occurrences, rather than considering blocks of conversations. I therefore analyze the four linguistic levels: phonology, morphology, syntax and lexicon in every film and I report the features of *italiano neo-standard* for each level found in the single dialogues.³

I chose comedy because, since its origins, and unlike other genres, comedy has always given a particular function to language in order to mock Italians' habits. Such stylistic orientation implies a higher linguistic variety and the attempt to be closer to the way in which people communicate every day. Two practical reasons for choosing comedy are its high popularity at the box office, and the fact that, along with drama, it is the most prolific genre. Brunetta (2001: 500-501) points out how, since the beginning of the 1980s, comedy accounts for the 44% of all Italian production, and how the box office reinforces such positive trend. Another interesting piece of data is the comparison between the number of films produced and the number of films actually distributed in theaters. In the last thirteen years drama has been the most prolific genre, with 959 films produced, followed by comedy: 650 films. However, the percentage of films that are not distributed is 43% for drama and 28% for comedy,⁴ which shows that comedy is a genre that is better received by the public. The success of comedy in the last decade is

³. For a definition of *italiano neo-standard* see Chapter 2, Section 2.3., which is dedicated to the discussion on contemporary Italian.

⁴. Data are taken from: www.cinemaitaliano.info.

confirmed also in the home-video market by a survey of Casetti and Salvemini (2007: 80-84).

The present work focuses directly upon film dialogues and the comparison with screenplays. The power of contemporary cinema of showing to the viewer his own linguistic behaviors being represented is probably what marks the difference with respect to the cinema of the past, especially before television, when films were instead supposed to shape and condition those behaviors. Now the viewer is inclined to think ‘In films, actors speak like us’, instead of thinking: ‘The film will teach me something new to say’. This also justifies my choice to work on dialogues, and on their attempt to reproduce informality.

On a linguistic level, I rely on Nencioni’s works (1983, 1989), which focus on the analysis of a written and performed text as a colloquial/informal text. Other theoretical studies referring to similarity between film dialogues and everyday use of language that I consider are Raffaelli (1992), and Alvarez-Pereyre (2011).

The films that are object of the analysis are listed in the chart below. Films were chosen to span a range of thirty years and cover different geographical areas, as well as considering success at the box office, where all the films selected ranked in the top positions in the respective years (popularity has been considered the most objective criterion in selecting the movies). By looking at films from different decades, I am able to trace the diachronic evolution of linguistic patterns. I focus on four major directors, and I also included a young author, Luca Miniero, whose recent works reached significant popular success.

Year	Directors				
	Carlo Verdone	Aldo, Giovanni e Giacomo	Neri Parenti	Roberto Benigni	Luca Miniero
1980	<i>Bianco, rosso e Verdone</i> (1981)			<i>Il piccolo diavolo</i> (1988)	
1990	<i>Viaggi di nozze</i> (1995)	<i>Tre uomini e una gamba</i> (1997)	<i>Vacanze di Natale '95</i> (1995)	<i>Il mostro</i> (1994)	
2000	<i>Grande, grosso e Verdone</i> (2008)	<i>Chiedimi se sono felice</i> (2000)	<i>Christmas in love</i> (2004)		<i>Benvenuti al sud</i> (2010)

1.4. ORGANIZATION OF THE DISSERTATION

The first part of Chapter 2 is dedicated to a review of the literature on the language of Italian cinema, from the postwar period to the present. The main questions that the chapter addresses are the following: 1) Do these studies present detailed linguistic analysis of dialogues? 2) What are the studies' aims? 3) To what extent do previous studies compare the language used in films with the language that people speak every day?

The second part of the chapter describes the tendencies of contemporary Italian, gives a picture of the structural characteristics of the language and sets the frame to which the analysis of the films refers. More space is given to informal use, because it is the register that cinema most often tries to imitate and reproduce. This second part aims to summarize the debate on the recent developments of the language and on the current proposals for its sociolinguistic structure.

Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 are dedicated to the linguistic analysis of the films. The chapters analyze the linguistic levels of phonology and phono-morphology, morphology and morpho-syntax, syntax, and the lexicon respectively. I detail the features of interest at

every level that are present in the individual films. Starting from the single features allows me to draw conclusions on the linguistic varieties used in the film, whether all *neo-standard* traits are represented and which characters use them. In the conclusion of each chapter I summarize the findings, commenting on patterns that emerge, and on the degree of reliability of dialogues in representing everyday language.

Chapter 7 looks at the differences and similarities between the screenplays and the final version of the dialogues. The purpose is to show to what extent a written text such as the screenplay is identical to a spoken one, such as the actual film dialogue, in order to contribute to define a hybrid texts such as the screenplay in a typological perspective.

In chapter 8 I compare the results found in Chapters 3-6 with the discussion on contemporary Italian by showing how film language and contemporary spoken Italian relate and by commenting on the linguistic choices in the dialogues. The chapter serves as an elaboration of the data and as an interpretation of the way they translate and convey socio-linguistic dynamics in contemporary Italy. Chapter 9 is dedicated to the conclusions and to possible directions of future research.

2. Previous research

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter consists of two sections. Section 2.2. explores contributions on the use of language in Italian cinema since the postwar period to the present. Section 2.3. is an overview of the debate on the tendencies of contemporary Italian. The chapter aims to present the way language has been used in Italian cinema and to identify the possible shortcomings of previous research. Section 2.3. serves as the linguistic background according to which the data collected in Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, is analyzed. The objective is to establish a framework of reference for the comparison to the results that emerge from the films' analysis.

2.2. THE LANGUAGE OF ITALIAN CINEMA

The cinematic movement known as *neorealismo* proposed the idea of cinema being close to the people, and it explored the potentiality of non-professional actors. Such a stylistic-narrative choice implied also a reflection on the language to be used. It was probably the first time in the history of Italian cinema that dialect and regional language were the prevalent varieties used. Scholars began to realize that the ability of cinema to unify the language, and to teach people how to speak was not less important than the opposite role, that is the influence of real-life talk on linguistic choices in film dialogues. Between spoken language and cinema there has always been a complex relation, in the sense that the pedagogical role of cinema has often coexisted with its attempt to imitate reality. Sound cinema was in fact one of the factors strictly linked to increasing literacy, given its ability to reach a vast community and to reproduce a language comprehensible to the greatest variety of people. Precisely because of its pedagogical role, and especially

since the postwar period, linguists have begun to show interest for cinema as a context for language use. Such interest has sometimes been considered scant (Raffaelli 1997; F. Rossi 1999b; Perego and Taylor 2009), sometimes too much oriented toward a semiotic approach rather than a strictly linguistic one (F. Rossi 1999b: 43). Certainly, scholars have emphasized the ambivalence of the functions of cinema with respect to language, starting with Menarini (1947), who shows the bidirectional relationship between cinema and language. With ‘bidirectional’ I refer to both the ability of cinema to affect people’s linguistic behaviors and on the other hand to the reproduction of common language in film dialogues. Menarini analyzes on a lexical ground the influence that foreign films had on spoken language (e.g. the word *picchiatello* ‘dumb, little crazy’ from the dubbed version of *Mr. Deeds goes to town*, 1936 by F. Capra) and vice-versa the colloquial words that films used. Menarini’s *La lingua del cinema* (1947) can be considered the first work that describes in detail the actual language used in films, with prevailing focus on lexicon. According to Battisti (1952), Menarini’s attitude is fairly open to neologisms and to the use of colloquialisms in films, which were becoming more popular in real-life speech, also thank to cinema.

Over the years, one of the most common goals of the studies specifically dealing with the language of Italian cinema has been to give an account of the influence of cinema on spoken language. Menarini (1947) and De Mauro (1963), for instance, have emphasized the pedagogical role of cinema. However, a deeper analysis would show that this function is not unidirectional, and that, since the first productions of sound films, screenwriters, directors, and linguists have reflected on what should be the most appropriate language to use. Dialogues are not necessarily thought to be a didactic tool. In fact, they could even be an adaption of everyday language (Allodoli 1937), which would automatically exclude a pedagogical function and would, rather, suggest an

attempt of imitation and legitimization of language use. The approach of linguists, then, since the second half of the 40's, is more tolerant with the higher linguistic variability that cinema displays compared to the previous decades.

De Mauro (1963) adopts a sociolinguistic approach, arguing that cinema, in particular the postwar cinema until the 60's, accepts the interference with everyday talk and actively contributes to people's linguistic competence. At the same time it functions as a mirror that gives spectators the perception of their linguistic behaviors. He contends that the fact that cinema begins to use regional dialects and to give more and more space to colloquial registers, somehow proposes a synthesis of a variety comprehensible to the majority of people, as a valid alternative to the standard language, which almost nobody is able to speak. The spectators become aware, thank to cinema, of the 'regional character of dialects' (De Mauro 1963: 124) and of the fact that they represent some negative aspects of national identity, e.g. provincialism. Cinema therefore, by stigmatizing and mocking regional dialects would push spectators to use a language variety less geographically limited and more accessible to the majority. This language would precisely be one that employs some features of the standard language yet still maintains some regional traits. This variety will become more and more stable, to the point that scholars, first of all Sabatini (1985), begin to codify it and define it as 'italiano dell'uso medio'. Raffaelli (1983: 112, 119), however, challenges De Mauro's argument that cinema makes people aware of the regional character of Italian, basing his skepticism toward the influence of cinema on everyday language on the scarce success at the box office of films such as *Ladri di biciclette* (V. De Sica, 1948) or *Sciusià* (V. De Sica, 1946).

Raffaelli's and De Mauro's fundamental contributions highlight the interdependence between the two systems (i.e. language and cinema), since they

demonstrate that cinema also depends on spoken language. The developments and the changes of both systems (language and cinema) in previous decades have continued to confirm the difficulty to define their reciprocal influence; however the direction of such presumed influence seems to be very hard to track. Cresti (1982) and Raffaelli (1983) among others, have abandoned their efforts to establish whether such direction is constant and consistent, and have faced the issue with a chronological approach. This approach characterizes Raffaelli's analysis of the use of regional dialect in cinema and his classification of *dialettalità imitativa* 'imitative regionalism', *dialettalità stereotipata* 'stereotyped regionalism', and *dialettalità espressiva* 'expressive regionalism', traces the development of the function of regional dialects from Neorealism to the 80's. A close look at the most important films of that period, with a prevalence of comedies, is the methodology he follows.

Emanuela Cresti's study (1982) points out the importance of cinema in recording the new linguistic developments and, at the same time, in making spectators aware of these new trends, on the same line traced by De Mauro (1963). Cresti's approach is diachronic and considers the fast evolution that language of cinema has undergone starting from the postwar period until the mid-1960s. Her study values the function of cinema as an important part in the process of shaping the national language, and as a variety that does not follow the prescriptions of the standard nor the limitations of the dialect. She calls it *italiano pubblico* 'public Italian' (Cresti 1982: 289); what cinema does, according to her, is to legitimize its use by putting its features on stage. Cinema organizes and turns into artifacts the linguistic choices that people make unconsciously, also proving to be a potential tool to measure linguistic evolution. In a later article Cresti (1987) reinforces her conviction by arguing for a major adherence to reality achieved by cinematic language in the late postwar period and at the beginning of the 1960s.

It is interesting to notice that from the reflections of De Mauro (1963) until the works of Cresti (1982) and Raffaelli (1983) there has not been a quantitatively significant contribution to film language (the only studies I am aware of are Dorigo 1966, and Brunetta 1977).

In 1992 Sergio Raffaelli, who once again confirms to be the most prolific scholar on the topic, focuses on the different functions of language in cinema: to represent reality, to entertain, and to contribute to the shaping of the national identity. F. Rossi (2006: 405) argues for the impossibility of such an influence of film on language use by mentioning the crisis of the Italian film industry: ‘Data l’assenza dei nostri prodotti anche sul piccolo schermo, appare praticamente nulla la possibilità di penetrazione della lingua filmica italiana degli anni in corso nella lingua comune’.⁵ F. Rossi (2007: 122) re-confirms such impression: ‘Al massimo il cinema, a differenza della televisione, sembra poter rispecchiare il parlato, non più condizionarlo’.⁶

F. Rossi remains the only scholar (along with Coveri, Menarini, and Raffaelli) who dedicated monographs, besides articles and short studies, to the use of language in Italian cinema. His *Le parole dello schermo* (1999b) is the first detailed linguistic analysis of film dialogues that actually considers the four linguistic levels (phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon). His work establishes the importance of film language as a way to monitor and describe contemporary spoken Italian and also intends to identify the traits that are peculiar of film language. Rossi does not neglect the restrictions that film as a medium imposes on the use of language and takes into account the consequences of

⁵. ‘Given to the scarcity of our national products even on television, the influence of language of films on everyday language is very low’ (My translation).

⁶. ‘Cinema, unlike television, seems to reflect spoken language, rather than influencing it’ (My translation).

such interaction, which are mostly at the pragmatic level. An example is the scarce presence of interruptions and repetitions, which are usually avoided because the film dialogue has to be as synthetic and dense as possible. Rossi's conclusions promote a classification of the cinematic dialogue as a communicative code that is halfway between a written and a spoken text.

Recently a valuable contribution to the dialogue was made by Setti (2003). The scholar looks at the interaction of Italian cinema with the language of television by arguing that cinema employs some linguistic techniques of television, namely the use of stereotyped expressions, exasperated language, the comparison between standard Italian and regional varieties with emphasis on the higher prestige of the former compared to the latter. At the same time cinema modifies them in order to show its power to reproduce a more realistic language when compared to that of television. The author also indicates a generally increase in the realism of cinema language in the recent decades. Setti's methodology is a close discourse analysis concentrated on two contemporary films: *Sud* (Gabriele Salvatores, 1993) and *Ferie d'agosto* (Paolo Virzì, 1998).

The most recent studies (e.g. A. Rossi 2003; F. Rossi 2006 and 2007), integrate the previous works with an increased emphasis on data directly taken from dialogues and screenplays. A. Rossi (2003) argues for the ability of films to reproduce some features of contemporary Italian, basing her work, which is not quantitative, on a comparison of the traits of the spoken variety. The major strength is the abundance of examples that the author gives from films of different periods, covering a fifty-year span. The two F. Rossi' works are the most recent and at the same time the most organic contributions to the literature. The former (*Il linguaggio cinematografico*, 2006), which thus far remains the most complete monograph that I am aware of, elaborates a diachronic description of the several phases through which film language went, from the fascist period cinema until the

end of the 1990s. The latter (*Lingua italiana e cinema*, 2007) is a dense synthesis of the main steps that the evolution of Italian cinema language underwent since the postwar period up to the present. F. Rossi, Setti, and A. Rossi definitely begin to fulfill the lack of monographic studies on the language of cinema observed by Raffaelli (1997: 14). Such a scarcity of studies on the topic is also noticed in the French tradition by Alvarez-Pereyre, who remarks, in particular, on the lack of quantitative analysis (2011: 60).

Lastly, I would like to mention a few contributions that, along with a close analysis of the dialogues, propose to approach the study of film language by focusing on the works of one single author or even on one single film: F. Rossi 1999a (on Roberto Benigni's films), Setti 2001 (on the Taviani brothers), Picchiorri 2007 (on Nanni Moretti), F. Rossi 2010 (on Federico Fellini's *La dolce vita*).

The following conclusions can be drawn from the literature review on the language of Italian cinema. A shared characteristic in the Italian bibliography is the diachronic approach; the use of language in cinema is explored in its historical development. The semiotic approach is less predominant, whereas the historical-linguistic one is given constant attention. There seems to be a widespread agreement (Battisti 1952; Raffaelli 1994; F. Rossi 1999b and 2003; Pavesi 2005; Picchiorri 2007; Piazza 2011) on considering film language as peculiar, with its own specific characteristics. Such specificity consists of the fact that film language imitates everyday talk, but avoids or reduces all the traits that are exclusively typical of unplanned discourse such as interruptions, overlapping, drawbacks, hesitations, and repetitions. It is then the result of a text that is written and then performed as if it were not written (Nencioni 1983; Taylor 1999).

In recent decades there has been an increased interest for a synchronic perspective (Setti 2003; A. Rossi 2003; Picchiorri 2007). Although the close analysis of dialogues has

been recently paid more attention starting with F. Rossi (1999b), studies that give account of the four linguistic levels of films are still lacking.

The aims of the studies are to show the strict relationship between the use of language in cinema and the dynamics of Italian society as they are conveyed by real-life language. The scholars' attentiveness to the way in which film language looks at people's language is consistently evident in the studies throughout the years. Such an approach reveals, I think, one of the predominant functions that is often assigned to cinema in the Italian tradition, that is to reproduce and to represent reality, which often implies the risk of considering the level of realism of the film as a criterion to judge the value of the film itself. An increased level of linguistic realism since the days of postwar cinema has been noticed by most scholars: Cresti (1982: 317; 1987: 62), Pavesi (2005: 32), Setti (2003: 462).

2.3. THE DEBATE ON CONTEMPORARY ITALIAN

The purpose of the present section is to give account of the most salient characteristics of Italian as they are dealt with in the contemporary debate. I refer to them when I discuss the relationship of film dialogues with real-life language. It is needless to say that the present bibliographic overview does not mean nor claim to be exhaustive, which would be an extremely arduous task, if we consider the large amount of contributions on contemporary Italian. A further goal is to look at the sociolinguistic differentiation that the studies reveal in order to see whether and how cinema is able to reflect and reproduce such diversification.

In considering the most important contributions on contemporary Italian the *terminus post quem* is Sabatini (1985), who discusses a list of features (mostly morpho-syntactic) that have been stigmatized for centuries by official grammars and are now

commonly accepted, especially in the spoken language.⁷ Some examples are: *gli* ‘to him’ to refer to feminine antecedents and dislocations: *Il gelato, l’ho già mangiato* ‘The ice cream, I have already eaten it’.

The use of these traits gave rise to the label (created by Sabatini) *italiano dell’uso medio*, a variety that seems to be able to mediate between the high formality of written texts and the high informality of the spoken language and the regional varieties. Henceforth I use the term ‘variety’ following Berruto (1980: 25) who defines it as a way to use the language which, under the influence of certain variables (e.g. geography, social status, etc.), differs from the codified standard language, and includes traits that distinguish it from other varieties. Examples are the regional Italian spoken in Sicily, or the formal Italian spoken by a professor during a talk, or the juvenile jargon.

Sabatini’s studies (1985, 1990) on the *italiano dell’uso medio* argue for a tangible evolution of this variety, in the sense that it is shared, in situation of average formality, by both educated and less educated speakers. The scholar lists thirty-five peculiar features, reduced to fourteen in the 1990 article, that characterize the *italiano dell’uso medio*. They are mostly morpho-syntactic, and are being recovered in the common use after centuries of skepticism of the prescriptive grammars. Sabatini’s main argument is in fact a strong continuity between the past and the present, since contemporary Italian recovers those traits that were excluded from the formal uses, but that were able to fulfill the needs of daily communication. They also facilitated the linguistic interaction among different social statuses and among speakers of different geographic origins. Sabatini’s classification constitutes a point of reference for the later debate on contemporary Italian, since it establishes a set of features the use of which is largely widespread, and that

⁷. The presence of these traits are monitored in the films analyzed.

demonstrates a progressive reduction of the difference between the written and the spoken language (see also Berruto 1993: 86). Dardano (1994: 370) considers the traits singled out by Sabatini not as a whole constituting a variety by itself, but rather as a group of single features that are shared by several varieties of Italian, such as the regional Italian, and some of them are also found in standard Italian (e.g. the use of the pronoun *gli* 'to him' for plural referents 'to them'; the use of the form *lui* as a subject pronoun instead of the form *egli* 'he'). Dardano applies his analysis to the language of newspapers and the features of *italiano dell'uso medio* that he finds are justified by the intention to imitate the spoken language. Therefore his contribution confirms that these features, although present in some written texts, are however peculiar of oral language. Some of the examples that he gives are: *gli* 'to him' used for 'to her' and 'to them' is in constant expansion (412); the verb *averci* 'to have' (413); the structure of dislocation which, when it is used in written texts, has an expressive function (413). As far as the verbal system is concerned, Dardano argues for a general process of simplification in the spoken language that leads to assign more functions to the present tense or to the indicative mood. Present tense is in fact often used to replace future tense, and indicative is replacing subjunctive, for example, after verbs of opinion. The exhaustive analysis of Dardano points out the sociolinguistic complexity that characterizes contemporary Italian, which reflects issues such as the stratification of society, or the proliferation of new media, just to name a few. He argues then that the prescriptive language has achieved a higher malleability in becoming more open to accept features that belong to colloquial registers.

The increased flexibility of the normative grammar and its interaction with actual use is one of the leitmotifs in the current debate (e.g.: Serianni 1986; Beccaria 1992; Molinelli 2005; Marazzini 2010). Beccaria (1992) emphasizes the crucial role that daily use plays in linguistic evolution, and values the importance of its influence in

determining changes at the normative level. His work focuses on the variables that trigger or indicate the possibility of language changes, particularly to geography and to the factor of the different communicative domain such as a formal conversation, a public speech, or a conversation on the phone. Contemporary Italian is extremely diverse in this respect since the complexity of modernity implies a high differentiation as far as the medium, or as far as the type of speakers that are involved. The role that until a few decades ago was played by the dialects or by regional Italian, which is the only variety that most Italians were able to manage, nowadays is taken by the *italiano dell'uso medio*, which everybody can use and understand and which suits a wide range of informal situations. Beccaria (1992: 138) signals that one of the traits of *italiano dell'uso medio*, the indicative replacing the subjunctive with verbs of opinion, is often heard in the spoken language, but at the same time he stigmatizes this habit in the written language. Also, *gli* 'to him' regularly replaces *a loro* 'to them' (132), and the *che polivalente* ('that' used with multiple functions beside the unmarked function of relative pronoun and coordinative conjunction) is common among educated people in informal registers (133). Beccaria also points out the high frequency of cleft structures, hanging topics and dislocations as direct consequences of the difficulties of planning that spoken discourse implies (134). Another stable tendency, according to the scholar, is the constant increase of foreign borrowings, which are fairly common in the spoken language and are also used more often (if compared to past usage) by speakers of a low social level (236). Cortelazzo (2000a), Renzi (2000) and D'Achille (2010) support this observation.

A general attitude that scholars share is the relevance given to spoken Italian as a crucial factor in language change (Beccaria 1992; Mengaldo 1994) and the high value that they give, on a methodological viewpoint, to examples from daily-life speech to describe contemporary Italian (Renzi 2000). Consequently, the primary role of literature

as the main example both for prescriptive and descriptive accounts has lost its traditional importance. The spoken language, after centuries of prevalence of written Italian as the prescriptive reference, is more influential on the changes in the normative framework. Processes such as the replacement of subjunctive with indicative in some subordinate clauses is even presented as a viable possibility by some modern grammars (e.g. Salvini-Vanelli 1992).

A further issue that often scholars pose is whether Italian has actually reached a status where it can be considered ‘new’ with respect to the past, with renovated morpho-syntactic structures and new lexical items. Renzi (2000: 293) among others, excludes more or less categorically a complete renovation; however, they emphasize the extreme dynamism of contemporary language, particularly influenced by the new media and by the interaction among the sociolinguistic variables such as the communicative situation, the social status, and the geographic origins of the speakers. The consequences of such internal movement are, according to Sobrero (2005: 209), the progressive distance that formal registers have traveled from literary language, the influence of some technical jargon (e.g. the language of economics, of politics, of computer science) on common language (Berruto 2012: 184, 193), and the fact that educated people use structures and features typical of colloquial registers more than they did in the past. Such a different attitude acquired by refined speakers is exemplified in Renzi (2000). He reports that the subjunctive is replaced with the indicative in some cases (e.g. such as in subordinate depending on verbs of emotion: *mi dispiace che* ‘I am sorry that’) not only in colloquial speeches, but also in official speeches and in formal registers (302). Also, the presence of dislocated and cleft structures is found even in a high-level written language (such as for example in U. Eco’s texts; 299).

The constant adjustments and adaptations that Italian undergoes justify and explain the prevalence in the studies of a diachronic and sociolinguistic approach which, as Beccaria (1992: 136) and Dardano (1994: 385) each argue, emphasizes the centrality of the speaker over the system and is often preferred to a structural approach. That is to say, changes in the language structure are strongly determined by the speakers' social environment, by the communicative situation, and by the historical events. A further valid example of such preference is in Antonelli (2007). His monograph explores the ways in which the language changes based on the communicative function that different mass media embody. The picture that emerges is a renovation in the language that mostly involves the lexicon, with the pressure of English borrowings and with the action of technical jargon (e.g. the language of medicine, bureaucracy, economy, etc.) that are more and more often accessible to and used by common people, particularly due to the influence of television and newspapers.⁸ The conclusions reached by Antonelli, that is of a higher access for a major number of people to different repertoires, also poses the issue of whether such a frequent exposition to several registers and jargons actually corresponds also to an active competence of the speakers (25-26), that is to say, whether they are proficiently able to use the words that they hear (see also Cortelazzo 2002: 97).

Probably the most exhaustive picture of the sociolinguistic structure of contemporary Italian is given by Berruto's *Sociolinguistica dell'italiano contemporaneo*. The first edition was published in 1987, but I refer to the most recent edition from 2012. Berruto strongly emphasizes the interaction and the intersection among the variables that determine differences among the several varieties. These variables are: the geographic

⁸. The accessibility of technical jargons to common people is obviously partial, and usually does not concern the most technical vocabulary. Ex: in the language of medicine, the word *neoplasia* 'neoplasia, cancer' would not be comprehensible to many people, unlike the term *distrofia muscolare* 'muscular dystrophy' which is still technical but more common.

origin, the medium (i.e. written and oral), the social status and/or condition, and the communicative situations and contexts. An example of variety is *italiano standard* ‘standard Italian’, which is supposed to be a neutral register, theoretically at the center of Berruto’s schema; a further example of variety is *dialetto* ‘regional dialect’, which is geographically characterized, is more common in oral language, and is presumably used by people of a low social status. The interaction between varieties and variables constitutes the main object of Berruto’s analysis. He proposes the concept of *continuum* to give account of the reorganization of the structure of contemporary Italian. The notion of *continuum* expresses the impossibility to establish clear-cut boundaries between the varieties of a language. Such impossibility seems definitely plausible in the case of Italian, where two varieties such as, for example, regional and dialect, may have several features in common. The *continuum* does not function exclusively across varieties, but also applies to the idiolect, that is, the grammar available to a single speaker. The most recent researches show that speakers with a high level of education regularly tend to include features of very informal registers in their speeches or conversations (Berruto, 2012: 112). This is the case of traits such as *averci* ‘to have’, or the use of the indicative mood instead the subjunctive (115). Further important contributions of Berruto are the emphasis on the variety that Sabatini (1985, 1990) calls *italiano dell’uso medio*, and that he defines *neo-standard*. The *neo-standard*, according to Berruto, includes several features that are typical of other varieties (e.g. regional Italian, colloquial Italian, literary Italian) such as the extended use of the relative pronoun *che* ‘that’ (Berruto, 2012: 78) or left and right dislocation, and therefore it represents a valid example of the notion of *continuum*. This notion implies the impossibility of categorically assigning some features to either one or another variety, and consequently the fact that speakers of different social status or different geographic origins can share the use of some traits. The *neo-standard*

challenges the normative framework, and prevails over the use of dialect and standard Italian in daily-life conversation. Along with regional varieties it is the one that characterizes the use of the majority of the speakers. On one hand then, the *neo-standard* is the variety that inspires the interest of most scholars; on the other hand, the variable that seems to be the most influential on language change and the most diverse, is the variable due to the different communicative situation. Berruto dedicates a whole chapter to such a variable (*dimensione diafasica*) since it potentially determines the most complex diversification in the way people speak due to an intense proliferation of communicative situations. The juvenile jargon, the language used in text messages, the language of the new media such as blogs, chats or forums are a few examples. Berruto speculates that the growth of the use of the most recent communicative tools may accentuate the difference between young and old people, and between educated and less-educated speakers (197).

The situation of contemporary Italian appears then as a system in which even unrefined or uneducated speakers have access to expressive linguistic tools (e.g. inputs from television, from technology, from the new media), and at the same time people of high social classes and statuses indulge in using more often colloquial traits, challenging the inflexibility of formal language.

The following conclusions summarize the main issues that the debate on contemporary Italian elaborates. All the contributions have a historic-diachronic or sociolinguistic approach, which is preferred rather than a functional-structural approach. Language is studied as a mechanism that changes depending on external factors, and not as a self-referential system that exclusively follows internal rules (see also Berruto 2012: 107). Quantitative studies are scarce (Cortelazzo 2000b; Renzi 2000). Most contributions

are based on impressions, perceptions or on the observation of newspapers, television, and/or news.

A list of features that in the past have been stigmatized by traditional grammars are now becoming common, even in the speech of refined speakers. The list of these traits elaborated by Sabatini (1990) and labeled as *italiano dell'uso medio* is still unanimously considered an exhaustive description of the new tendencies. The *neo-standard*, which is the definition of *italiano dell'uso medio* given by Berruto (2012), replaces the standard as a national linguistic variety. Standard Italian is generally perceived as unusual and somehow unfamiliar, and is by now limited to specific communicative situations, such as formal situations (by educated speakers), or is used by some categories of speakers, such as the news anchorman.

The use of technical registers and jargon (i.e. language of bureaucracy, language of medicine, and language of politics) is widespread mainly due to mass media. Everyday language is sometimes influenced by them and, to some extent, is enriched by the technical terminology of specific activities (Sobrero 2005: 209).

The difference between the formal and the informal levels is reduced, as is the difference between the written and the spoken language. Literature is no longer able to influence linguistic change as much as it did in the past. Such an influence is nowadays primarily exercised by mass media, which also determine a decline in people's writing skills (Beccaria 1992: 279).

3. Phonological and phono-morphological features

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at the phonological characteristics of the films that I selected and gives an account of the degree of influence that regional varieties have on standard Italian pronunciation. Further goals are to see whether there is a variety that acquires more prestige than another and to identify which varieties fit the best the genre of comedy.

Before proceeding with the data from the individual films, I provide a list in alphabetical order of the phonological and phono-morphological traits identified in the films, with a brief description of each. I have only considered traits which deviate from the prescriptive standard, and which characterize the regional varieties highlighted herein. A regional variety is characterized by linguistic features that are shared by people of the same geographic area (e.g. Tuscany) or the same city, and that usually do not compromise inter-comprehension for speakers of a different regional variety. The level most affected by regional influence is phonology. I do not consider dialects, since they have a greater internal differentiation with respect to regional Italian, and because their use in cinema is minimal. Rather than translate the names of the regional varieties, I refer to them by the names they are called in Italian. For example, I refer to the Italian spoken in Abruzzo as *abruzzese*, or as *romanesco* to the variety spoken in Rome. In the case of Rome, the difference between the dialect and the regional variety is not always clearly defined, and some traits are at the same time regional and vernacular.⁹

⁹. D'Agostino (2007: 119) gives the specific example of the vowel lowering in pretonic position: *di Roma* > *de Roma* 'of Rome'. See D'Achille (2002) for general references on the dialect of Rome.

The chapter is structured as follows: in Sections 3.2, and 3.3 I list the trait found in the dialogues with a brief description. Section 3.4 is dedicated to the analysis of the films. For each film, a synopsis is given, followed by a chart illustrating the distribution of the salient phono-morphological features identified in the film and by a commentary. Section 3.5 summarizes the findings, grouping together the films of each director and considering the use of the language in a diachronic perspective.¹⁰ In Section 3.6 I draw the general conclusions.

3.2. PHONOLOGICAL FEATURES

Phonology involves vowels and consonants, therefore a distinction between the two is needed. For the definitions of the features of both phonology and phono-morphology I follow Telmon (1993).

3.2.1. Consonants system

3.2.1.1. *Consonant assimilation*

A consonant assimilates to the following consonant (regressive assimilation): *con lui*, /kon lui/ > /Kollui/ ‘with him’; or to the preceding (progressive assimilation): /kwando/ > /kwanno/ *quando* ‘when’ (*romanesco, napoletano*).

3.2.1.2. *Deaffrication*

Deletion of the stop component of an affricate.

a. Voiceless alveo-palatal affricate: *dieci* /dietʃi/ > /dieʃi/ ‘ten’ (*romanesco, toscano, napoletano*).

¹⁰. In the section ‘Summary of findings’ of every chapter is therefore absent *Benvenuti al sud*, since is the only film of Luca Miniero that I considered.

b. Voiced alveo-palatal affricate: *gente* /dʒente/ > /ʒente/ ‘people’ (exclusive of *toscano, umbro*).

3.2.1.3. *Gemination of vibrant, and voiced dental stop*

Doubling of the sounds /r/ and /d/ at the beginning of a word: *ragione* /radʒone/ > /rradʒone/ ‘the reason’; *decisioni* /detʃizjoni/ > /ʔddetʃizjoni/ ‘decisions’ (*siciliano, sardo*).

3.2.1.4. *Gorgia. Aspiration of /k/*

la casa /la kasa/ > /la hasa/ ‘the house’ (exclusive of *toscano*).

3.2.1.5. *Voicing of intervocalic /s/*

Peculiar of Northern varieties, it is now considered a feature of standard Italian: *cosa* /kosa/ > /koza/ ‘thing’ (Northern varieties). In Tuscan varieties the process is not generalized.

3.2.1.6. *Lenition*

Reduction of a double consonant cluster.

a. All consonants: *allora* /allora/ > /alora/ ‘then’ (Northern varieties).

b. Vibrant: *burro* /burro/ > /buro/ ‘butter’ (*romanesco*).

3.2.1.7. *Palatalization of sibilant before /k/, /f/, /g/, /m/, /n/, /p/, /qw/, /v/*

The palatalization is triggered by the preceding consonant: *sperare* /sperare/ > /ʃperare/ ‘to hope’; *scala* /scala/ > /ʃcala/ ‘ladder’ (*campano*). This feature denotes a high degree of regionalism.

3.2.1.8. *Phono-syntactic gemination*

Doubling of a consonant at the beginning of a word that is preceded by a stressed vowel, by a monosyllable, or by some bisyllables such as *come* ‘like as’, *dove* ‘where’,

qualche ‘some’: *città bella* /tʃittà bella/ > /tʃittà bbella/ ‘beautiful city’; *va bene* /va bene/ > /va bbene/ ‘all right’; *come me* /kome me/ > /kome mme/ ‘like me’ (Central and Southern varieties).

3.2.1.9. Porena law

This phenomenon causes the dropping of laterals in definite articles, prepositions, and clitic pronouns: *la coscienza* > ‘*a coscienza* ‘the conscience’; *delle calze* > *de* ‘*e calze* ‘some socks’; ‘*o vedi* > *lo vedi* ‘you see him/it’ (*romanesco*).

3.2.1.10. Rhotacism of preconsonantal /l/

qualcuno /kwalkuno/ > /kwarkuno/ ‘someone’ (*romanesco*).

3.2.1.11. Sonorization of occlusive in post-nasal and post-labial position

anche /anke/ > /anghe/ ‘as well, too’; *esempio* /esempjo/ > /esembjo/ ‘example’ (*siciliano, abruzzese*).

3.2.1.12. Weakening of the palatal lateral

figlio /fiλλo/ > /fijjo/ ‘son’ (*romanesco* and *napoletano*).

3.2.2. Vocalism

3.2.2.1. Monophthongization of the diphthong –uo–

Loss of the semi-consonant sound in the diphthong: *buono* /bwono/ > /bono/ ‘good’ (modern *fiorentino, romanesco*).

3.2.2.2. *Schwa*

This phenomenon involves the replacement of the vowels /e/ and /o/ in final position with an indistinct vowel (*abruzzese, molisano, campano, pugliese*): *casa* /kasa/ > /kasə/ ‘house’; *regalo* /regalo/ > /regalə/ ‘gift’.

3.3. PHONO-MORPHOLOGY

The level of phono-morphology concerns phonetic changes that affect not only a single sound, like phonology does, but also the structure of a word.

3.3.1. Consonant system

3.3.1.1. *Aphaeresis of demonstrative adjectives and indefinite articles*

Loss of initial syllable (demonstrative adjectives) or segment (definite and indefinite articles): *questa tomba* > *’sta tomba* ‘this tomb’ (*romanesco, milanese*); *una bottiglia* > *’na bottiglia* ‘a bottle’ (*romanesco*); *la festa* > *’a festa* ‘the party’ (*napoletano*).

3.3.1.2. *Apocope*

Loss of the final syllable or vowel, which applies to:

- a. Possessive adjectives, names and titles in the vocative form:** *mia nonna* > *mi nonna* ‘my grandmother’; *Ivano!* > *Iva’!*; *Direttore!* > *Diretto’!* ‘Director!’ (*romanesco, Southern*).
- b. Infinitives:** *scordare* > *scorda’* ‘to forget’ (*romanesco*); *entrare* > *entrar* ‘to enter’ (*milanese*)
- c. 1st singular and 3rd plural of *essere* ‘to be’:** *sono partito* > *so’ partito* ‘I left’ (lit. ‘I am left’, *romanesco*); *siamo partiti* > *siam partiti* ‘we left’ (lit. ‘we are left’, *Northern*).

d. 1st singular and 3rd plural present indicative: portiamo > portiam ‘we bring’ (milanese, Northern).

3.3.2. Vocalism

3.3.2.1. Vowel lowering¹¹

This process involves the change of /i/ into /e/ in pretonic position: *mi lavo* > *me lavo* ‘I wash myself’ (*romanesco*).

3.4. ANALYSIS OF FILMS

The analysis of the dialogues assesses the distribution of the considered phonological traits among the main characters. A synopsis of the film precedes a chart and then a commentary elaborates on the data.

3.4.1. *Bianco, rosso e Verdone* (Directed by Carlo Verdone, 1981. Screenplay by: Leonardo Benvenuti, Piero De Bernardi, Carlo Verdone)

The film is comprised of three episodes, each of which portrays a character who, in an election day in the early 1980s, goes to vote in his own city. *Bianco, rosso e Verdone* and the other two Verdone’s films that I also analyze, constitute a trilogy which features characters sharing common traits and one of the characters, Furio, the logorrheic, is also present in the other Verdone’s films.

Furio is a logorrheic white-collar obsessed with order and organization, who causes his wife Magda to have a nervous breakdown. Pasquale is an emigrant from the Southern region of Basilicata. He does not speak standard Italian, and currently lives in Switzerland. Throughout his journey to his hometown in the South, he is the victim of

¹¹. For the consideration of lowering of *-i-* in pretonic position as a phonological feature of *romanesco*, see Telmon (1993: 115); D’Achille (2001: 20).

petty theft and several other misfortunes, which cause him to regret his new life in Switzerland. Mimmo is a naïve young man who takes care of his ill grandmother. They keep quarreling during the entire journey also because of a very nice truck driver into whom they run and who eventually gets arrested. Before Mimmo and the old woman have the time to make peace, she dies of a heart attack while she is in the voting booth.






Characters→ Features↓	Mimmo 	Grandmother 	Furio 	Magda 	Truck-driver 	Others
Aphaeresis	25	8			9	
Apocope (a)	2	2			2	
Apocope (b)	34	15	1		3	
Apocope (c)	3	1			4	
Cons. assim.	4	3			2	
Deaffrication (a)	13	7	37		5	
Intervocalic -s- voicing				17		5
Lenition (b)	8	3			2	
Phono-syntactic	29	21	12		10	3
<i>Porena</i> law	30	11			3	
Rhotacism	3	6			6	
Vowel lowering	41	19	1		5	
Weakening	10	15			4	1

Table 1: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters

The prevalent traits in this film are characteristic of *romanesco* and are used by the characters of Mimmo, his grandmother, and the truck driver. These characters constantly speak a very colloquial language, which sometimes, in the case of the old woman, can be vulgar: *li mortacci!* ‘Go to hell!’. The use of the *romanesco* is linked to the origins of the actors, especially Lella Fabrizi (the grandmother) and Mario Brega (the

truck driver), who are two of the best exponents of the *romanità*. The fact that the grandmother and the truck driver, both presumably not well-educated, speak a very poor Italian is socio-linguistically logical. It is also logical that the woman does not change her register in more formal situations. Nor does the grandson, whose naivety is reflected in his way to speak, which is very childish and also characterized by a very strong Roman accent.

Vowel lowering (*me piace* instead of *mi piace* ‘I like’) is confirmed to be one of the most peculiar traits of *romanesco*. Even Furio, who shows minimal deviation from the standard phonology, uses it once: *Che te devo di’?* ‘What should I tell you?’ (vs. standard *Che ti devo dire?*), when he scolds his wife at the gas station. In addition to this trait, there are only two regional traits that Furio uses regularly: phono-syntactic gemination and the deaffrication of alveo-palatal affricates. These two features are characteristic of *romanesco*, and not even a speaker such as Furio, whose language is very close to the standard, is able to avoid them. The impossibility to avoid these two traits even by Roman standard speakers is confirmed by an analysis on Nanni Moretti’s films (Picchiorri 2007: 111), which are generally devoted to a fairly reliable reproduction of standard Italian, with a very low level of colloquialism.

Phonological features from Northern varieties are scarcely used. Magda, Furio’s wife, is from Turin. She speaks with a strong accent that easily identifies her as a speaker from Piedmont. However, she uses fewer regional traits than the characters in the other episodes. Furio and his wife Magda are both from the middle class, and their speech is reflective of that social status. The Northern accent, in Magda’s case, is selected to represent a middle-high social status, as such accent is less marked than *romanesco*. The equating of Northern varieties with higher status is fairly consistent in the other films as well. Interestingly, the features that distinguish Magda’s Northern origins all belong to

the vowel system. Her pronunciation of stressed *-e-* and *-o-* is always closed, in general opposition to the openness of Southern and Central pronunciation (I do not discuss this trait in the main list). The other Northern variety that is phonologically represented is *veneto*, in the speech of a secondary character who delivers only a few lines.

Overall, the way in which the director plays with the linguistic diversity is in line with the tradition of comedy. That is, there is a primary regional variety, typically the one spoken by the main actor, and then there are minor characters who represent different regions. In this case we have *veneto*, *torinese*, and a few lines of *umbro* as secondary varieties.

Romanesco prevails and is associated with characters that are somehow grotesque and picturesque. It is therefore a variety that identifies a type, that singles out a peculiarity, and that does not fulfill the function of standard language, which is mainly to make homogeneous and regular the way people speak, precisely because its traits convey expressionism rather than normality.

3.4.2. *Viaggi di nozze* (Directed by Carlo Verdone, 1995. Screenplay by: Leonardo Benvenuti, Piero De Bernardi, Carlo Verdone)

Verdone favors the structure of three parallel stories to describe habits and defects of contemporary Italian society. In this case, each story is about a couple. The object of the mockery is life right after marriage, and the common situation is the honeymoon. Giovanni and Valeriana are a typical middle-class couple who, due to several unforeseen complications have to suspend and then give up their honeymoon. The protagonists of another episode are Ivano and Jessica, two extremely ordinary people, whose only goals are to keep up with every kind of trend and to live a comfortable and wealthy lifestyle. Eventually, boredom overcomes them. Their questionable tastes are the object of fierce

mockery by the director. The third couple mirrors, *mutatis mutandis*, Furio and Magda in the previous film. Raniero is a pedant, unbearable doctor, who keeps comparing his ex with his current wife, Fosca, who eventually commits suicide.







Characters→ Features↓	Raniero 	Fosca 	Ivano 	Jessica 	Valeriana 	Giovanni 	Others
Aphaeresis			8	8	1	15	5
Apocope (a)			3	3			
Apocope (b)			20	19		16	5
Apocope (c)			1	1		1	
Consonant assim.			6	5		1	
Deaffrication (a)	27		18	17		16	2
Intervocalic - s-voicing		3			7		5
Lenition (b)				1		1	2
Phono- syntactic germination	6		14	9	10	14	5
Porena law			20	11		19	1
Rhotacism			6	3		2	3
Vowel lowering			23	12		30	5
Weakening			4	3		3	

Table 2: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters

Table 2 shows that the three couples occupy three different levels on a hypothetical scale of regional representation. Ivano and Jessica are at the highest level, and Fosca and Raniero at the lowest. In the middle are Valeriana and Giovannino, with Giovannino more inclined to speak *romanesco* than Valeriana. The accent of Ivano and Jessica is very strong, and the phonological features characteristic of their variety are so

exaggerated that their characters become a caricature. They embody a type, the *coatto*, born and raised in the Roman suburbs, usually young, not well-educated, with unrefined taste. Ivano maintains his marked pronunciation throughout the film, even in situations in which one would expect more formality, such as during the wedding ceremony at the church, or at the wedding party, where he is asked to give a speech. Jessica, at least at the church, changes both her register and her accent to be closer to the standard. Both try to abandon their *romanesco* pronunciation in one occasion: in order to spice up their daily routine they decide to go to a restaurant and pretend that they have just met. Therefore, they have to use a more formal register compared to the one they are used to.

Phonologically, the characters of Fosca and Raniero are very similar to Furio and Magda in *Bianco, rosso e Verdone*. Raniero's speech confirms that deaffrication of alveo-palatal affricates and phono-syntactic gemination are features of *romanesco* that are almost impossible to hide, even for speakers of the standard language. Fosca has a slight Northern accent, but besides that, she otherwise demonstrates no unusual phonological traits, which makes her a very sober and neutral speaker. It could be argued that, precisely because her character is, at least until the suicide, very remissive and colorless, a neutral pronunciation has been chosen.

Valeriana and Giovanni represent the typical middle-class couple who speaks a variety halfway between standard and dialect. Valeriana's pronunciation is closer to the standard than Giovanni's. Although we know from the plot that she is also from Rome, she uses intervocalic *s*-voicing (Northern feature), which is somehow unusual for a Roman speaker. Furthermore, she does not produce any example of deaffrication, which we saw is a trait impossible to avoid for any speaker of *romanesco*. The data show the tendency of women to use fewer regional features, and to be more able to adjust their pronunciation depending on the formality of the situation.

3.4.3. *Grande, grosso e Verdone* (Directed by Carlo Verdone, 2008. Screenplay by: Piero De Bernardi, Pasquale Plastino, Carlo Verdone)

The film consists of three episodes featuring the same type of characters already performed by Verdone in the past, but this time there is not a real leitmotif that links the three parts. In the first episode, Leo's happy family is upset by the sudden death of his mother and by the troubles they encounter in trying to give her a respectable burial. In the second episode, Callisto plays the role of a hypocritical and tyrannical professor who tries to subjugate his teen-aged son by organizing every aspect of his son's life. In the last episode Verdone reintroduces the ordinary couple that made their first appearance in *Viaggi di nozze*. In this film their vulgarity is even more emphasized, and it is somewhat reflected in the personality of their son, Steven.

T=Tecla; S.=Leo's sons ; Funeral home employee=F.H.; C.=Callisto; Sev. Severiano; Mor.=Moreno; Luc.=Lucilla; Steven=St.; O=others











Charact.→	Leo	T.	S.	F. h.	C.	Sev.	Luc.	Mor.	Enza	St.	O
Features↓											
Aphaeres.	9		3	8				26	14	9	5
Apocope (a)	2							1	1		2
Apocope (b)	19		3	7				28	17	12	4
Apocope (c)	1			1				8	4	3	
Deaffr. (a)	8			8	30	2		19	12	4	2
Intervoc. s-voicing		5				3					7
Lenition (b)								2	2	1	
Phono-syntactic gemin.	9		3	4	4	5	3	30	12	8	4
Porena law	12		2	6				34	15	8	4
Rhotacism	4		1	5				9	6	5	2
Vowel lowering	15		2	5	1			52	47	24	9
Weak.	5			3				7	11	8	

Table 3: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters

The film shows a fairly complete selection of the phonological traits that characterize contemporary *romanesco*. The representation of a low-class, a middle-class and a high-class register is consistent with the previous film *Viaggi di nozze*, compared to which the most notable difference in *Grande, grosso e Verdone* is the reproduction of a wide spectrum of regional varieties and foreign languages. Russian is spoken by the nurse of Giovanni's mother, and both English and French are spoken by the prostitute who tries to seduce Moreno. Additionally, Sardinian is spoken by Tecla, who is Leo's wife, and Sicilian is spoken by the fishermen who rescue Enza, Moreno's wife, at the end of the

film. The confrontation of Italian with foreign languages is reflected in the film, emphasizing the communication problems resulting from mispronunciation, especially by Italians (see Moreno with Blanche, the prostitute).

In the first episode, the actress who plays Tecla is from Sardinia, and so is her character. This choice allows the director to give a little screen time to Sardinian pronunciation, which has never been particularly present in film dialogues (Rossi 2007: 77). The film confirms that the most salient phonological features of *romanesco* that are consistently used by people of all social levels and of different degrees of education are phono-syntactic gemination and the deaffrication of alveo-palatal affricates. This fact shows that, at least at the phonological level, it is impossible to completely hide one's geographical origins. The abovementioned phonological traits do not seem to be indicative of any particular sociolinguistic variable within the larger community of *romanesco* speakers.

In the second episode Severiano and Lucilla, professor Callisto's son and his girlfriend, are portrayed in their attempt to live their love story. It is therefore sociolinguistically reasonable that their pronunciation and phonological traits are close to the standard, as the data show. As for Callisto, his only deviations from the standard are the same that characterize Raniero in *Viaggi di nozze* and Furio in *Bianco rosso e Verdone*: that is, phono-syntactic gemination and lenition of alveo-palatal affricates. These two features can be taken as examples of common items in the *continuum* that links the pronunciation of regional to more standard varieties. Another feature that is shared by all speakers in the three episodes is the use of borrowings. The pallbearer says that they are in 'pole-position' talking about their efficiency; Callisto asks his son if he is 'gay'; and Moreno once greets the prostitute saying '*À bientôt*' (French 'see you soon'). The

pronunciation is adapted to *romanesco*: /por posiʝon/, which shows the phonological integration of the foreign word.

The characters of Moreno and Enza are a reproduction of the couple Ivano and Jessica in the previous Verdone film *Viaggi di nozze*, but the caricature in this case is more intense. Moreno and Enza are poorly educated, and they use the entire spectrum of traits of *romanesco*. They even use the same register even in talking with their son, Steven.

3.4.4. *Il piccolo diavolo* (Directed Roberto Benigni, 1988. Screenplay by: Roberto Benigni, Vincenzo Cerami, Andrea Pazienza)

Roberto Benigni plays a mischievous devil, Giuditta, who is successfully exorcized by father Maurizio. However, once the exorcism is over, Giuditta starts following him everywhere he goes. The priest, exhausted by the devil's misbehavior and oppressive attentions, takes some time off his duties. During this period, Giuditta emancipates from his own subordinate condition and finds a woman, Nina, with whom the little demon will fall madly in love. Nina is actually a devil herself, who manages to possess Giuditta and to permanently take him away from Maurizio.




Characters→ Features↓	Giuditta 	Maurizio 	Nina 	Others
Deaffrication (a)	24			
Deaffrication (b)	6			
Intervocalic -s-voicing	11	24	6	13
Monophthongization of the diphthong -uo-	4			
Phono-syntactic germination	9	3	1	1

Table 4: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters.

Roberto Benigni mitigates the Tuscan pronunciation by reproducing only some of the most peculiar regional traits. The two that he uses most frequently are the deaffrication of voiceless affricates and the intervocalic *-s-* voicing. The feature that is widely perceived as the most representative of Tuscan dialect, the aspiration of intervocalic *-c-* (e.g. /la hasa/ instead of /la kasa/ *la casa* ‘the house’), is never used in the film. Such a trait would have given a strong regional identity to the character.

At the same time, the speech of Benigni, who plays the devil Giuditta, is not immune from some local characteristics, as shown in Table 2, where we see that there are several cases of intervocalic *-s-* voicing. On the other hand, Giuditta pronounces words such as *cosa* ‘thing’, *casa* ‘house’, and *così* ‘thus’, with the voiceless *-s-*. The alternation between the voiced and voiceless realization confirms the variation in production of intervocalic *-s-* in contemporary Tuscan.¹²

The regularity of the intervocalic *s*-voicing in the practice of dubbing shows that Northern varieties are considered and perceived as more suitable than others to represent the standard language, which is, therefore, the variety selected for foreign actors. The accent chosen for Father Maurizio, played by the American actor Walter Matthau, is, in fact, standard Italian, as is usually the case for dubbed actors. Consequently, he constantly uses the intervocalic *s*-voicing. His voice is dubbed by the Florentine Renato Turi, and the only exception to a standard pronunciation in his speech is the phonosyntactic gemination (three occurrences).

¹². See Grassi, Sobrero, & Telmon (1997: 113); D’Achille (2001: 56-57).

3.4.5. *Il mostro* (Directed by Roberto Benigni, 1994. Screenplay by: Roberto Benigni, Michel Blanc, Vincenzo Cerami)

Loris (Roberto Benigni) is a bizarre and naïve clerk who works part-time in a department store. During his free time he takes Chinese classes. Due to his quirky behavior he is mistaken by the police for a serial killer who has already raped and murdered several women. In order to incriminate Loris, an attractive undercover agent, Jessica (N. Braschi), is sent to his house to seduce him. A violent reaction would be the proof that he is the monster. Jessica provokes him in every possible way, but Loris resists the temptation, maintaining his odd and inoffensive conduct. The detective Frustalupi (Laurent Spielvogel) and a famous psychiatrist, Paride Taccone (Michel Blanc), interpreted by two French actors, eventually realize that they have the wrong man, and a *coup de théâtre* will reveal the real identity of the serial killer, who turns out to be the professor of Chinese (Franco Mescolini).





Characters→ Features↓	Loris 	Jessica 	Detective 	Psychiatrist 	Professor 	Others
Apocope (a)	4					
Deaffrication (a)	36					
Deaffrication (b)	12					
Intervocalic -s-voicing	31	19	12	31	5	15
Phono-syntactic gemination	13		2	1		

Table 5: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters.

Table 5 shows that, as in *Il piccolo diavolo*, Roberto Benigni is the only character who uses any regional features in his speech. In fact, the detective, the psychiatrist and Jessica, do not have a peculiar accent at all. Roberto Benigni's histrionic personality is

emphasized by the choice of maintaining a language close to the standard for the other characters, in order to create greater contrast to his Florentine pronunciation. Although Tuscan varieties have gained a greater presence in cinema in recent decades (Setti 2010: 118), in part due to Benigni (Coveri 1994: 83), in this particular film, language, or at least regional pronunciation, does not perform a prominent function, nor does geographical association. The characterization of Loris is, in fact, exemplified in his physicality rather than in his speech, and during the film it is never explicitly said where the action takes place.

The dubbing of the rest of the characters reproduces the standard language. The intervocalic *s*-voicing is the only feature shared by everyone, and seems to be a trait that never marks low social status, a low level of literacy or a low-prestige job.

Jessica, the only female character, does not demonstrate any linguistic peculiarity, besides the regularity of intervocalic *s*-voicing.

3.4.6. *Vacanze di Natale '95* (Directed by Neri Parenti, 1995. Screenplay by Neri Parenti)

The film carries on the tradition of movies that lately have been named by critics *cinepanettoni*¹³, which indicates a specific type of movie released during Christmas Holidays, that is characterized by a highly disengaged humor and by the same setting: always a very touristic place during Christmas time. Another typical trait of these films is the large use of situations of misunderstanding of sexual references.

Vacanze di Natale '95 takes place in Aspen, Colorado. Remo (Christian De Sica) and Lorenzo (Massimo Boldi), respectively from Rome and Milan, are two middle-class

¹³. The progenitor *ante litteram* is considered to be *Vacanze di Natale*, directed by Carlo Vanzina (1983). The *panettone* is a very typical Christmas cake.

forty year-olds who do not know each other and who have decided to spend their Christmas holidays in the USA for different reasons. The former follows his American wife, Kelly (Elizabeth Nottoli), because he wants to reconcile with her after having squandered all his money in poker. He cannot resist the temptation of playing even during the vacation, and he ends up proposing that a friend of his, Paolone (Paolo Bonacelli), spend the night with Kelly in order to pay off a game debt. Lorenzo goes to Aspen to support his daughter, Marta (Cristiana Capotondi), in her wish to meet Luke Perry, who, in the film, plays himself. The vacation helps the father and daughter to recover their relationship. After several misfortunes, Remo and Lorenzo achieve their goals, but when Christmas is over and it is time to leave, both decide to fly to Brazil, instead of going back to Italy.






Characters→ Features↓	Lorenzo 	Remo 	Marta 	Kelly 	Paolone 	Others
Aphaeresis	2	9			1	
Apocope (a)		1				
Apocope (b)	1	24			1	4
Apocope (c)		3				
Apocope (d)	2					
Deaffrication (b)		5	5		1	
<i>Gorgia</i>					6	
Intervocalic -s-voicing	52	4		13	4	5
Phono-syntactic germination		10	11	3	5	1
<i>Porena</i> law		4				2
Vowel lowering		14	2			3
Weakening		5				2

Table 6: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters.

The comedy tries to reproduce the phonological diversity of Italian. The main characters are from Milan (Lorenzo) and Rome (Remo), a friend of Remo is from Florence (Paolone), and in just one scene there is a waiter speaking Italian with a Sardinian accent. The attempt to offer a multiplicity of accents is not new in the tradition of the genre, nor is it original to select a low-prestige variety, such as Sardinian, for a secondary character. In this case the result is a stereotypical match of a low-prestige accent with a low-prestige job. Moreover, the presence of the character serves no other function at all to the rest of the film.

The *romanesco* of Remo is not consistent, as it changes into a more careful pronunciation in some of his conversations with his wife. The data in Table 6 show that Remo's speech presents all the distinctive features of *romanesco*, but also cases of intervocalic -s-voicing, a very peculiar Northern trait. Such alternation may suggest, on one hand, the versatility of the actor, who adapts his accent depending in the situation, or on the other hand, an evident incompatibility and, therefore, poor linguistic reliability of the character. The only Northern speaker is Lorenzo. Besides the regular intervocalic -s-voicing (52 cases), two other traits emerge that are extended to the Northern use: the aphaeresis of demonstrative adjectives: *'sto posto qua* instead of *questo posto qua* 'this place here', and the vowel apocope in some forms of the verb *to be*: *siam partiti* instead of *siamo partiti* 'we have left'. We find both in Lorenzo's speech. *Romanesco* has similar features, but they are perceived as more regionally characterized with respect to the Northern equivalent.

The Tuscan pronunciation is represented by Paolone, who uses all the typical phonological traits, including the deletion of intervocalic -c-. This particular trait is, in people's perception, the most peculiar of *toscano*, and denotes a speaker of lower social status.

3.4.7. *Christmas in love* (Directed by Neri Parenti, 2004. Screenplay by: Fausto Brizzi, Marco Martani, Neri Parenti)

This is another extremely successful *cinepanettone*. In a beautiful hotel at Gstaad, in Switzerland, the Italian petty bourgeoisie spends its Christmas holidays. The parallel development of three different situations constitutes the plot of the film. Fabrizio (Christian De Sica) and Lisa (Sabrina Ferilli), both plastic surgeons, have been divorced for a few years. Their respective new partners, who have an affair with each other, design a plan to push them to re-marry and organize the vacation in the same hotel. Guido (Massimo Boldi) has left his wife for a 25-year-old top-model. When he arrives at the hotel, he finds, with great surprise, that his daughter Monica (Cristiana Capotondi) is going to spend the holidays with them. But the even bigger surprise is that she is with her boyfriend, a 60-year-old professional American actor, played by Danny De Vito. Concetta (Anna Maria Barbera) is a heavy-set Sicilian worker, who has won a bizarre competition. The award, is in fact, an entire weekend with the American star Ron Moss.

Fab.=*Fabrizio*; *Conc.*=*Concetta*








Characters→	Fab.	Guido	Lisa	Conc.	Angela	Sofia	Monica	Others
Features↓								
Aphaeresis	5		5			1		
Apocope (b)	4		3					
Apocope (c)	1		1					
Deaffricatio-(b)	7		4					
Gemination				3				
Intervocalic -s- voicing	18	45	8		8	4	6	14
Phono-syntactic gemination	14		13				1	
Sonorization				16				
Vow. lowering	10		3					

Table 7: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters.

Fabrizio and Lisa constantly change register. When they appear on TV (first scene) or when they hang out with their respective partners they prefer to use a more formal language. When they are by themselves, they are more natural and show phonological features of *romanesco*. Their idiolect, though, is not completely reliable, as it presents, along with the above-mentioned traits, the use of intervocalic -s- voicing, a trait of Northern varieties incompatible with features of *romanesco*. Guido, the other protagonist, reveals his *milanese* origins in particular by his pronunciation of vowels. Specifically, in words such as *bene* ‘well’, where the -e- in open syllable is pronounced as closed, or words such as *questo* ‘this’, with the open realization of -e- in closed syllable.¹⁴ The rest of his speech is characterized only by the usual intervocalic -s- voicing.

¹⁴. Telmon (1993: 106).

Concetta's variety is a completely unrealistic mix of *siciliano* and an invented language based on puns, which was already part of the actress' repertoire from her previous cabaret career. The actress is Anna Maria Barbera from Turin. The character that made her famous in cabaret is a woman who emigrated from Sicily to Northern Italy and who does not manage Italian very well. From such linguistic difficulty derives the type of humor that she reproduces in this film.

3.4.8. *Tre uomini e una gamba* (Directed by Aldo, Giovanni & Giacomo, 1997. Screenplay by: Aldo, Giovanni & Giacomo, Giorgio Gherarducci, Lucio Martignoni, Massimo Venier)

Aldo (Aldo Baglio), Giovanni (Giovanni Storti) and Giacomo (Giacomo Poretti) are employed in a hardware store. They are unhappy with their job, are subjugated by their tyrannical father-in-law (Carlo Croccolo), and are frustrated by daily routine. The three leave Milan to reach Gallipoli, in Puglia, where Giacomo is about to marry Giuliana. Along with their luggage, they are carrying a sculpture of a leg that their father-in-law has bought from a famous artist. During the journey, a beautiful girl, Chiara (Marina Massironi), joins the three after having caused a car accident. This changes everything. Together they go through several misfortunes which makes them once again appreciate the taste of life and gives them the courage to drastically change their routines.

Characters→	Aldo	Giovanni	Giacomo	Chiara	Father in law	Others
Features↓						
Aphaeresis		6	1		2	
Apocope (b)		1			6	
Apocope (c)			1			
Apocope (d)		3	1			
Gemination	4					
Intervocalic -s-voicing		27	17	12		7
Lenition (a)		5				
Phono-syntactic gemination	16		2		8	1
Vowel lowering					10	

Table 8: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters

The dialogues emphasize the most salient phonological characteristic of Northern Italian: the sonorization of intervocalic -s-. This is heavily used by Giovanni, Giacomo, Chiara and Giuliana. There are other traits that characterize Northern regional Italian, such as aphaeresis of demonstrative adjectives: *'sto posto* instead of *questo posto* ‘this place’. This feature is also characteristic of *romanesco*. However, when it is used in the films set in Rome, it is used more regularly and it is perceived as more colloquial.

The only Roman character, Giacomo’s father-in-law, has a very strong accent, and speaks a highly colloquial variety, which denotes his low degree of education and his unrefined manners. He portrays the stereotype of a wealthy, arrogant man with poor education and rude personality.

3.4.9. *Chiedimi se sono felice* (Directed by Aldo, Giovanni & Giacomo, Massimo Venier, 2000. Screenplay by: Aldo, Giovanni & Giacomo, Paolo Cananzi, Graziano Ferrari, Walter Fontana, Massimo Venier)

Aldo, Giovanni and Giacomo are best friends and share the passion for theater. They are in fact working on the *mise en scène* of *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Aldo is a Latin lover, and he often needs his friends' help to keep girls away, while Giacomo is the least successful with women. Giovanni, who has been single for a long time, finally meets Marina, and falls madly in love with her. When she breaks up with him, the friendship of the three inseparable men starts to fall apart, because Giacomo takes advantage of the break-up and kisses her. The theatrical production is therefore abruptly interrupted, and the three quit seeing each other.

Eventually, Giacomo and Aldo decide to regain Giovanni's trust. With a phony excuse, they convince him to go to Sicily, where the three put on their play, and finally recover their old friendship.





Characters→	Aldo	Giovanni	Giacomo	Marina
Features↓				
Apocope (d)		3	4	1
Deaffrication (a)	12			
Gemination	24			
Intervocalic -s- voicing	3	38	23	5
Phono-syntactic germination	22	1		

Table 9: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters

Although Aldo is the only Southern speaker, he presents a wider spectrum of non-standard traits than do the rest of the characters. The cinematic use of Sicilian pronunciation in this case is not stereotypical as it has traditionally been (see F. Rossi

2007: 47), and does not merge into actual dialect.¹⁵ The three cases of intervocalic *s*-voicing, unusual for a Sicilian, are found in Aldo's introductory speech for the theater production at the end of the film.

Giovanni, Giacomo and Marina do not present relevant phonological deviation from the standard. For them, as well as for the other Northern speakers in the other films,¹⁶ intervocalic *-s-* voicing is the most used feature, and yields a number of occurrences remarkably higher than any other.

3.4.10. *Benvenuti al sud* (Directed by Luca Miniero, 2010. Screenplay by: Dany Boon, Alexandre Charlot, Massimo Gaudioso, Franck Magnier)

The film is a remake of *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis*, a successful French comedy released in 2008. In *Benvenuti al sud*, the primary objects of mockery and critique are the stereotypes of Southerners and certain aspects of life in southern Italy. A manager of the postal service, Alberto Colombo (Claudio Bisio), born and raised in the hinterland of Milan, dreams of a job in the main office downtown. He tries to obtain the position by pretending to be disabled. The fraud is discovered and he is consequently transferred to the post office of a remote little town, Castellabate, in southern Italy. During the two years he has to stay there, his point of view on the South radically changes, and all his prejudices and derogatory opinions about Southerners are proved to be false.

¹⁵. Sicilian pronunciation is usually linked to the type of the sexual maniac, or to an extremely conservative and jealous person (Rossi 2006: 346).

¹⁶. Lorenzo in *Vacanze di Natale* '95, and Guido in *Christmas in love*.

Characters→	Alberto	Silvia	Mattia	Maria	Cost. p.	Cost. g.	Others
Features→							
Aphaeresis	1		15	2	2	3	8
Apocope (a)			8			2	
Apocope (b)			8		2	2	
Apocope (d)	1						
Deaffrication (a)			3	2	1		
Intervocalic -s-voicing	32	14					1
Palatalization			17	6	3		1
Phono-syntactic gemination			11	5	2	2	
Schwa	1		8	2	2	2	1
Sonorization			5		3	2	

Table 10: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters

The data in Table 10 show that there is a large difference between Alberto and the other characters in using regional traits. Such a gap is mainly due to Alberto's higher social status, and partially to the geographic variable. Alberto lives, in fact, in a suburb of Milan, whereas Mattia, Maria, and the employees both named Costabile, live in a small town, far from big cities. Mattia's idiolect is strongly characterized. He has a strong Neapolitan pronunciation, characterized, above all, by the palatalization of sibilants before consonants. So does Maria, but with lower frequency, since the distribution of the features corresponds with the level of importance of the characters, and in this case, also with the gender of the character. The register of Mattia, Maria and the two Costabiles is always colloquial, but it never switches into dialect, which is spoken only by Mattia's mother, and by the old man Scapece, who are obviously designed to be caricatures. Age, is therefore a variable which denotes a higher degree of regionalism.

The new colleagues of Alberto maintain their usual variety when speaking with him, and never adjust the register to his higher formality. They even try to alleviate Alberto's frustration caused by the cultural and the linguistic shock by giving him a lesson of Neapolitan, in the scene of the dinner at the restaurant. On that occasion, Mattia teaches Alberto how to pronounce the *schwa*, the indistinct vowel in word final position, typical of central and southern varieties. Alberto shows to be phonologically talented, by correctly pronounce the word *latte*: /o lattə/ 'the milk'.

The aphaeresis of demonstrative is confirmed to be a sort of cross regional continuum, although in this film there is only one occurrence for Northern speakers, and in general in the other films it is always more frequently used by Southern characters.

3.5. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The following summary groups together the films of each director. In Carlo Verdone's films the use of the expressivity of *romanesco* is always heavily emphasized, as it contributes to the creation of caricatures, rather than characters. Furthermore, it is associated with people who, for different reasons (e.g. low education, naiveté, low-prestige job, etc.), are subject to stigmatization in the eyes of society. The way in which Verdone places the linguistic variation of contemporary Italian on stage is consistent across his three films, as he tries to reproduce as many accents as possible, and, at the same time, to avoid stereotypical usage. The leitmotif that links the first film of the trilogy *Bianco rosso e Verdone* to the last *Grande, grosso e Verdone*, is the difficulty that Italians have with foreign languages. There is, in fact, a trajectory that goes from the Southern immigrant in Germany in one of the episodes of *Bianco, rosso e Verdone* to the several examples of foreign language (i.e. Russian, English, and French), in *Grande, grosso e Verdone*. In the former, the man from Basilicata speaks only dialect, and has

never learned German, nor standard Italian. In the latter, the introduction of Russian (from the nurse in the first episode), English, and French (both from Blanche in the last episode) in contemporary Italian society causes incomprehension and miscommunication.

Besides the struggle with foreign languages, in Verdone's films the inadequacy of Italians to adapt to the standard variety is made evident. Even those who would be expected to be flawless speakers of the standard reveal non-standard traits. There are three regional features that constitute a phonological continuum, in the sense that they are shared by people of different status and education: phono-syntactic gemination, vowel lowering, and deaffrication of the voiceless affricate. In other words, these are traits that by themselves do not distinguish a high-prestige from a low-prestige variety. Finally, gender/sex seems to be a salient factor in predicting phonological variation in Verdone's films, since almost all of the women display a more neutral pronunciation than do the men.

Roberto Benigni seems inclined to emphasize the Florentine pronunciation. The data from the films I analyzed show consistency in the selection of the traits in the variety that the director uses, which is always colloquial. However, he avoids the most peculiar regional characteristic: the aspiration of intervocalic *-c-*. Roberto Benigni's character is a valid example of the inability to adjust register according to the situation, as he maintains the same speech patterns with all his interlocutors. There is only one trait that the Tuscan actor shares with the other characters in both films: the intervocalic *-s-*voicing. The use of the intervocalic *-s-*voicing by a Tuscan is a regular phonological attribute of his variety. However, in society's perception, the voicing of intervocalic *-s-* is always associated with a Northern pronunciation. The cinema of the new Tuscan comedians,¹⁷ therefore,

¹⁷. In the last two decades Tuscan comedians, and particularly Leonardo Pieraccioni and Giorgio Panariello, have achieved a large success by using in their movies the most peculiar features of *toscano*.

attempts to prove such misconception to be false. Moreover, it helps to clarify that this feature is not always an indicator of a high prestige variety, but also a regular feature of Tuscan pronunciation, even though Tuscan does not belong to the macro division of Northern varieties.

Another aspect worthy of mention is the language choices made in dubbing *Il piccolo diavolo* and *Il mostro*. In the former, it is explicitly said that father Maurizio is American, and therefore, according to a regular practice, he is dubbed with standard Italian pronunciation. Moreover, it is well-known that Walter Matthau is an American actor, and any kind of regional association would have seemed unnatural. In *Il mostro*, the characters of the detective and the psychiatrist are played by two French actors. However, although they play two Italians, the dubbing is still in an almost completely standard variety of Italian, as though the characters they play were just as foreign as the actors playing them. Such absence of regional connotation could be justified by the social and professional status of the two characters. However, as we already saw in Carlo Verdone's films, even educated and refined speakers such as Furio, Raniero, and Callisto, are characterized to some degree by regional traits. That leads to the conclusion that the use of standard Italian by the two characters in *Il mostro* is not completely plausible. Two alternative explanations could justify such a choice: the first is the intention to stress the eccentricity of Loris, through distinguishing him from the other characters also on a linguistic level by making the rest of the characters speak a standard variety. The second is the assumption (less likely than the former) that the two French actors were known to the public, and therefore it would seem more natural to avoid regional nuances in their speech.

Vacanze di Natale '95 and *Christmas in love* reinforce the prestige that Northern pronunciation has. This variety does not serve the same comic function as Roman and

Southern varieties. This type of cinema contributes to the characterization of *romanesco* as being appropriate for irreverent (see De Sica in *Vacanze di Natale* '95, where he plays a character from Rome), and ordinary situations. Such treatment indirectly gives more prestige to the Northern pronunciation. The Northern speaker, featured by the same actor, Massimo Boldi, is the stereotypical businessman, whose professional success reinforces the prestigious status of his pronunciation. In this respect, he is probably the only character who is linguistically predictable, unlike the rest of the characters. For example, Remo and Fabrizio, both Roman, and both played by De Sica in the two films, keep alternating their register between high informality and using more marked features such as intervocalic *s*-voicing, which is typical of formal situations. Similarly, Lisa, in *Christmas in love* uses all the peculiar traits of *romanesco* and adjusts her speech to a Northern pronunciation when she participates at a TV show, proving that variety to be more suitable on a TV show. The American characters in both films speak a flawless standard Italian. One of them, Ron Moss, plays himself. The other, Danny De Vito, plays the American boyfriend of Massimo Boldi's daughter. The choice of standard language in these cases is due to the fact that Ron Moss and Danny De Vito are both American characters, and they are also both well-known actors. Therefore, following established practice, they could not have been dubbed differently.

The language used in the Aldo, Giovanni & Giacomo comedies is more realistic than that of the *cinepanettoni*, even though their regional pronunciation is attenuate and close to the standard. In *Tre uomini e una gamba* there is a quantitatively higher use of regional features than can be found in *Chiedimi se sono felice*, with Giovanni's pronunciation being the most salient. The data show in both films that the Northern speakers Giovanni and Giacomo use apocope of vowels and of demonstrative adjectives. These phonological traits are also present in the idiolect of the *milanese* speakers in the

cinepanettoni, and therefore confirm them to be an inescapable characteristic of the language of speakers of the Northern varieties. Overall, the linguistic characterization is not the main source of humor in the Aldo, Giovanni & Giacomo films. They, instead, rely more on other comic devices, such as mimicry or their irreverent approach to the description of daily routine. The linguistic regionalism, therefore, is not emphasized. The only two characters whose speech considerably deviates from the standard are Aldo, a Sicilian in both films, and Giacomo's father-in-law, from Rome, in *Tre uomini e una gamba*. This further confirms that Southern and *romanesco* varieties, with respect to other regional varieties, have higher comic potential.

3.6. CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, data on phonological features that deviate from the standard have been highlighted and patterns in the usage of such features have been observed. The findings can be summarized as follows. First, all characters, regardless of social status or level of education, use language featuring at least two regional traits that reveal their geographic origins. Phonological features that constitute a continuum such as, for example the deaffrication of voiceless affricates for roman speakers, or the general intervocalic -s- voicing for Northern speakers, confirm the inexistence of an actual standard pronunciation. Therefore, it is very unlikely that a character would be able to hide his pronunciation.¹⁸ The cases (the dubbing in Roberto Benigni's *Il mostro*) of almost perfect reproduction of standard Italian by actors who play Italian characters, are exceptional examples, and do not reflect a realistic possibility. On the other hand, there are cases, in the past, of foreign actors playing Italian characters who are dubbed with

¹⁸. See Berruto (2012: 70) on the observation that nobody, except for special professional categories (some television speakers, film dubbers), speaks standard.

regional varieties: Bernard Blier in *Speriamo che sia femmina* (Mario Monicelli, 1986) speaks *toscano*; Philippe Noiret in *Nuovo cinema Paradiso* (Giuseppe Tornatore, 1990) speaks *siciliano*. These contrasting cases show the diversification in the practice of dubbing foreign actors in Italian films. Conversely, as far as dubbing in foreign films is concerned, the tendency is to use standard language, according to the tradition started during Fascism, which would tend to avoid foreign and regional pronunciation. Raffaelli (1994: 284-285) summarizes such practice and gives also account of a countertendency that emerged in the '70s, where regional traits start to be used.

Second, there is a stable tendency to use Northern less frequently than Central and Southern varieties. The latter have acquired a particular reputation to fit irreverent, ordinary, and in general comic situations. As a consequence, Central and Southern varieties are seen as more distant from the normative framework, with respect to the varieties of Italian spoken in the North. Such discrepancy, which does not have a scientific-grounded explanation, is well illustrated by the concept of 'linguistic prestige'. In Italy the current debate¹⁹ recognizes that people perceive the Northern variety, and particularly the type of Italian spoken in Milan, as '...quella maggiormente vicina a un ipotetico italiano standard' (Sobrero and Miglietta 2006: 84).²⁰ The historical reasons are mainly economic, due to the fast growth of the Northern regions in the postwar period. The role of cinema is controversial in this respect. *Romanesco* was the most used variety in postwar cinema, and had a pedagogical function, which implied a certain consideration. At present Northern varieties have taken over that function, and

¹⁹. Galli de' Paratesi (1984), Sobrero and Miglietta (2006). Also, for a cogent example, see D'Achille (2010: 195), who comments on the different reception of the same feature: the apocope of vowels, typical of Northern varieties is accepted in the written standard, whereas the apocope of syllables, typical of *romanesco* and Southern varieties, is stigmatized and more regionally connoted.

²⁰. '...the closest to a hypothetical standard Italian' (My translation).

romanesco has been relegated, as the films I analyzed show, to the role of language of expressivity and unrefined humor. In fact, while my analysis reveals the quantitative prevalence of *romanesco* even on films that are not set in Rome, or that do not have Roman protagonists, yet this variety is often used by a caricature, or by a histrionic personality.

Finally, Northern varieties are always associated with middle-class characters, or with characters who have a respectable job. These variables then, more than economic success, appear to influence the selection of the high-prestige pronunciation.

4. Morphology and morphosyntax

4.1. INTRODUCTION

The objective of this chapter is to show which *neo-standard* traits are used by the main characters of each film, to look at their distribution, and to elaborate on which variables are more influential in determining such distribution. Possible patterns that will emerge from the data will be compared, in the general discussion chapter, with the current tendencies of contemporary Italian. Only traits that deviate from prescriptive Italian are considered, precisely because the standard variety does not prevail in real-life speech, and is therefore not representative of the contemporary language usage.

For each film two tables are provided considering two different types of data. The first table displays the distribution of the *neo-standard* features found in the dialogues as they are used by the main characters. It indicates which traits are the most common and by which character they are used. The second table displays the three traits listed in section 4.4.²¹ and compares their occurrence with that of their standard equivalent in the dialogues. The first table singles out which ones are the most common traits and by which character they are used, while the data in the second table demonstrate what might be considered synchronic change by highlighting how often features of the standard are being replaced by *neo-standard* features.

The entire group of the features found in the films is divided into two sub-groups: section 4.2. details morphological features, while section 4.3. considers morpho-syntactic features. The three aforementioned traits, all morpho-syntactic, which are present in both tables and have been selected for further analysis, are illustrated separately in section 4.4.

²¹. *Averci* vs *avere* ‘to have’, *gli* ‘to him’ to refer to feminine antecedents, and *indicative* pro *subjunctive*.

Morphology includes features such as pronouns, articles, nouns, and the verbal system. In the morphology section I follow D’Achille’s (2010) descriptions in order to identify certain features as belonging to particular regional or group-specific varieties. In the identification of morpho-syntactic features, which include morphological features that also determine a change in syntactic structure, I refer to the classification of Berruto (2012). Section 4.5. is dedicated to the analysis of the films. In section 4.6. I discuss the general findings and section 4.7. summarizes the conclusions.

4.2 MORPHOLOGICAL FEATURES

4.2.1. *Voi* ‘you (pl.)’ instead of *lei* ‘you (formal)’ to address someone formally

According to both descriptive (e.g. D’Achille 2010) and prescriptive works (e.g. Salvi-Vanelli 2004; Serianni 2006) the use of *voi* is still stable but strictly limited to Southern varieties.

4.2.2. Personal pronoun *te* ‘you’ as subject instead of *tu* ‘you (subject)’.

In standard Italian, *te* ‘you’ is the tonic object pronoun with indirect object function when preceded by the the prepositions *a* ‘to’, *con* ‘with’, *per* ‘for’, *di* ‘of’, *da* ‘from’:

(1) *Sono d’accordo con te*

‘I agree with you’

In Northern varieties and in *romanesco*, however, *te* is used also with the function of subject:

(2) a. *E te cosa vuoi?*
 and you what want-2SG.PI

‘What do you want?’ (Northern varieties, *romanesco*)

- b. *E tu, cosa vuoi?*
and you what want-2SG.PI

‘What about you, what do you want?’²² (Standard Italian)

4.3 MORPHO-SYNTACTIC FEATURES

In this section the morpho-syntactic *neo-standard* traits that are found in the films are listed. They involve changes occurring mostly in the pronouns and in the verbal system. A comment on how they are accounted for in literature is followed by examples.

4.3.1. *Cosa/che/che cosa* ‘what’

There are no semantic differences among the three options. The geographical variable determines the alternation of three forms of the interrogative pronoun. *Che cosa* is the standard Italian form, whereas *che* has been identified as predominant among Southern speakers and *cosa* among Northern speakers (Bonomi 1993). Sabatini (1985) points out that the use of *cosa* is slowly replacing *che cosa* as the unmarked form. The overall prestige of Northern varieties may favor the reception of *cosa* as standard interrogative pronoun.

- (3) a. *Che cosa fai?* b. *Cosa fai?* c. *Che fai?*
what thing do-2SG.PI thing do-2SG.PI what do-2SG.PI
‘What do you do?’

4.3.2. Impersonal *si* replacing expression of 1st person plural subject pronoun

It is a characteristic of regional Italian from Tuscany.

²². When the source is not indicated, the examples are mine.

- (4) a. *Andiamo a casa*
 go-1PL.II to home
- b. *Si va a casa*
Si go-3SG.II to home
 ‘We are going home’

4.3.3. Indicative mood replacing the conditional mood

This type of replacement is part of the general trend of the whole verbal system to achieve a higher level of simplification:

- (5) a. *Non avresti dovuto bere così tanto*
 not have-2SG.PC have.to-PPART drink-INF so much
- b. *Non dovevi bere così tanto*
 not have.to-2II drink-INF so much
 ‘You shouldn’t have drunk so much’.

4.3.4. Imperfect indicative replacing subjunctive in if-clauses in past tense

According to Renzi (2000: 302) it is an accepted substitution, in Latin as well, which means that this is a trait that is not completely new, but is coming back in the current usage, after a period of linguistic stigmatization. Furthermore, other linguists, even in prescriptive works, tend to be fairly tolerant of this type of substitution (Dardano-Trifone 2007: 333; Salvi-Vanelli 2004: 277):

- (6) a. *Se pioveva non venivamo*
 if rain.3SG-II not come-1PL.II
- b. *Se avesse piovuto non saremmo venuti*
 if have-3SG.IS rain-PP not be-1PL.PC come-PP

‘If it had rained, we would not have come.’

4.3.5. Modal use of future tense

Future tense is more often used to express a prediction, or an intention, rather than a statement about a future event (Sobrero and Miglietta 2006: 72; Seranni 2006: 474-475):

- (7) *Saranno le 9*
be-3PL. FUT the 9 o'clock
‘It is probably 9 o'clock.’

4.3.6. Pronominal verbs

According to the definition of Serianni (2006: 387), verbs that combine with a clitic pronoun are referred to as *verbi pronominali* ‘pronominal verbs’. The clitic pronoun may determine either a change in the perspective of the agent toward the action, as is the case of (4.3.6.1), or a semantic change, as in *verbi procomplementari* (4.3.6.3). Such semantic implication is taken into account by Patota (2006: 139), who narrows the category of pronominal verbs to those verbs that are reflexive only at the structural level, and not at the level of meaning. From these two accounts in the literature, there emerge several problems in classifying this type of verb. I considered under the label of *pronominali* three different types of verbs: a) reflexive with endearment function, b) *procomplementari*, and c) *dativi etici*. The criterion according to which I grouped them together is a merely formal one: they all combine with (or incorporate) a clitic pronoun without having a real reflexive meaning. Another shared characteristic that I intend to emphasize is the fact that the capacity of verbs to attract clitic pronouns while weakening their grammatical status is one of the new tendencies of contemporary Italian (Berretta

1994: 226; D'Achille 2010: 130). I exclude from the list 'truly' reflexive verbs (e.g. *lavarsi* 'to wash oneself'), where the clitic and the subject are co-referential, because they are not representative of *neo-standard* Italian.

4.3.6.1. *Reflexive forms with endearment function*

This is a particular kind of pronominal verb (Serianni 2006: 387), in which the action does not directly affect the agent, but, rather, is highly beneficial to him; thus the term *funzione affettivo-intensiva* 'endearment function' (Serianni 2006: 250). Serianni also argues that this use is regionally marked, being more common in Central and Southern regions. The clitic pronoun in this case does not determine any change in the meaning of the verb, but indicates a strong participation of the subject:

- (8) *Adesso mi bevo una birra*
 now to.me drink-1SG.Pl a beer
 'I am going to drink a beer.'

4.3.6.2. *Dativo etico*

Based on the definition of Renzi-Salvi (2001: 1,77), *dativo etico* is a structure in which the clitic pronoun indicates a personal responsibility or a particular involvement felt by the speaker. The clitic pronoun is optional, and its function is merely expressive. Renzi-Salvi (2001: 1,77) Serianni (2006: 100) and Cignetti (2010), unlike Berruto (2012: 85-86), agree on distinguishing the *dativo etico* from the reflexive with endearment function, since in the former there is no co-referentiality between the clitic and the subject:

- (9) *Mi prenda un'aspirina*
 to.me take.3SG.PS an aspirine
 'I prescribe you an aspirine' (lit. translation: 'Take an aspirine')

In this case, as with the verbs 4.3.6.1, the verb retains its original meaning. *Dativo etico* is often used by doctors with their patients, or in general by someone who is assumed to be more competent or experienced than the addressee.

4.3.6.3. *Verbi procomplementari*

The definition for *verbi procomplementari* was attested for the first time in De Mauro (2000). Viviani (2006: 268) following De Mauro, remarks on the complexity of the distinction between the *procomplementari* and the *pronominali*. Russi (2008: 7) emphasizes the importance that these verbs are acquiring in contemporary speech, and demonstrates the viability of a lexicalization approach to explain their formation. In this type of verb, incorporation of one or two clitic pronouns completely modifies the original meaning of the verb. The pronoun has, therefore, a distinctive function. The clitics that are used are the locative pronoun *ci* ‘here’, reflexive *si* ‘him/herself’, feminine singular direct object *la* ‘her’, or *ne* ‘of it’:²³

- (10) a. *entrare* ‘to enter, to go inside’ vs *entrarci* ‘to have to do with’
b. *fregare* ‘to steal’ vs *fregarsene* ‘to disregard, not to care about something someone’

4.3.7. Redundancy of clitics

Berretta (1985: 192) identifies this trait as ‘substandard’, that is, a feature fairly common in spoken language but still marked as very colloquial and considered ungrammatical. She refers particularly to the redundancy of indirect rather than direct object pronouns. Mengaldo (1994: 94) identifies this feature as one of many that

²³. The clitic pronoun *ne* also has the function of locative pronoun: *ne* ‘from here’.

characterize *neo-standard* Italian, but points out that its use is likely due to the influence of dialect, partially confirming Berretta's label of 'substandard':

- (11) a. *A me piace il gelato*
 to me like-3SG.Pl the ice cream
- b. *Mi piace il gelato*
 to.me like-3SG.Pl the ice cream
- c. *A me mi piace il gelato*
 to.me to.me like-3SG.Pl the ice cream
 'I like ice cream'

4.3.8. *Stare a* + infinitive periphrasis to replace present progressive

The present progressive is also a periphrasis, consisting of the present tense of the verb 'to stay' which has an auxiliary function, and the gerundive form of the main verb. What I consider here is the replacement of this periphrastic structure with the present indicative of the verb 'to stay', the preposition *a* 'to', and the infinitive of the main verb. Such a structure is geographically marked, being typical of *romanesco* (D'Achille 2010: 213) and of Central varieties, and characterizes informal registers, since the infinitive often presents syllabic apocope.

- (12) a. *Stai scherzando!*
 stay-2SG.Pl joke-GER
- b. *Stai a scherza'?*
 stay-2SG.Pl to joke-INF
 'You are joking!'

4.3.9. Use of *che polivalente*

Che ‘that, which’ has, in standard Italian, a double grammatical function: a) relative and interrogative direct object pronoun: *Il film **che** ho visto era bello* ‘The film **that** I saw was good’; b) coordinative conjunction: *So **che** domani parti* ‘I know **that** tomorrow you will leave’.

To fulfill the function of indirect object a different pronoun is used (*cui*), so different conjunctions are used to introduce subordinate clauses (e.g. *poiché* ‘since’, *quando* ‘when’). One of the most common features of *neo-standard* Italian (especially in the spoken variety) is to generalize the use of *che* (both the pronoun and the conjunction) to any grammatical function:

(13) *La città **che** vado in vacanza è piccola*

the city that go-1SG on vacation to be-3SG small

‘The city where I go on vacation is small’

The standard correspondent of (13) is *La città **in cui** vado in vacanza è piccola*

(14) *È nato **che** non ce lo aspettavamo più*

to be-3SG born-PP that not us it wait-1PL.II no longer

‘He was born when we no longer expected it’

The standard correspondent of (14) is *È nato **quando ormai** non ce lo aspettavamo più*.

This generalized use of *che* is defined *che polivalente* ‘multifunctional *che*’. All major accounts on contemporary spoken Italian (Sabatini 1990; Mengaldo 1994; Cortelazzo 2000a; D’Achille 2010) consider the *che polivalente* a widespread device that allows speakers considerable morpho-syntactic simplification. Berruto (2012) discusses the difficulty, from a sociolinguistic point of view, to establish the variables that would favor the use of this feature. In fact, the *che polivalente*, in its various functions

(temporal, causal, relative, etc.) is used by wide spectrum of speakers, from the most formal and educated, to the most unrefined (Fiorentino 2010).

4.4. THE MORPHOSYNTACTIC FEATURES OBJECT OF FURTHER ANALYSIS

For the second table given for every film, I have selected the three traits that, unlike the rest of the features, are present in all the films and are used by the majority of the characters, which shows that they are fairly stable in common usage. Moreover, they are consistently listed as current tendencies of contemporary Italian (Mengaldo 1994; Telmon 1994; Cortelazzo 2000; D'Achille 2010; Berruto 2012), and are therefore identified by scholars as the most representative of the new trends of the language. For these reasons they have been selected to be compared with their standard Italian counterparts.

4.4.1. *Gli* 'to him' referring to feminine antecedents

Used with a masculine, singular antecedent in the standard language, the use of this pronoun is extending to feminine singular antecedents and to plural antecedents.²⁴ It is one of the most characteristic tendencies of contemporary Italian (Sabatini 1985; Telmon 1993; Berruto 2012), but it is less accepted in written language:

- (15) *Vedo* *Maria e* ***gli*** *do* *il libro*
 see-1SG.PI Maria and ***gli*** give-1SG.PI the book
 'I see Maria and I give her the book'

²⁴. With plural antecedents the use of *gli* 'to him' instead of (*a*) *loro* 'to them' is by now almost completely acceptable in the spoken variety (Sobrero and Miglietta 2006: 76; Berruto 2012: 84). For this reason I did not consider it in my analysis.

4.4.2. Indicative pro subjunctive in dependent clauses when the main verb is a verb of opinion, wish, hope, doubt.

The issue of the regression of the subjunctive has been largely addressed in recent decades. Sabatini (1985, 1990), and later Mengaldo (1994), indicates the tendency to use the indicative instead of the subjunctive in five syntactic contexts²⁵ as one of the characteristics of *neo-standard*. However, as Bonomi (1993) notes, such regression is in general not sufficiently supported by quantitative analysis. More recently M. A. Cortelazzo (2000a) discusses data collected by Bonomi (1993) and Schneider (1999) on the use of subjunctive in written and spoken language and shows how the subjunctive, in clauses depending on a verb of opinion, wish, or hope is still fairly stable, even though the use of the indicative is becoming more and more frequent. Berruto (2012: 80-81) confirms the general impression that indicative pro subjunctive is expanding and approaches the debate with a sociolinguistic perspective, pointing out that the indicative pro subjunctive is regionally marked; precisely, it is more common in speakers of Central and Southern Italy. Also it is more frequent with present tense rather than with past tense subordinates:

- (16) a. *Voglio che lui arriva presto*
 Want-1SG.Pl that he arrive-3SG.Pl early
- b. *Voglio che lui arrivi presto*
 Want-1SG.Pl that he arrive-3SG.PS early
- ‘I want him to arrive early.’

²⁵. After a verb of opinion, hope, doubt; after a negative declarative clause, after a restrictive relative clause, after an indirect interrogative clause, and in past tense if-clauses.

4.4.3. Verb *averci* ‘to have’ (< *avere* ‘to have’ + the clitic pronoun *ci* ‘here’) instead of simple *avere* (to denote possession).

Berruto (2012: 85) identifies the use of *averci* as one of the most stable among the new tendencies, especially in the spoken language. There are not substantial semantic changes between *avere* and *averci*. *Averci* is already indicated by Sabatini (1985, 1990) as one of the features of *neo-standard* Italian. There seems to be agreement on the large presence of this trait in spoken language (Mengaldo 1994; D’Achille 2010; Berruto 2012), and even in the speech of educated people (Sabatini 1985: 160). The literature is less explicit about the variable that triggers the use of *averci* or *avere*, whether it is a regionally marked feature, or determined by the social condition of the speakers:

- (17) a. ***C’ho*** *duemila* *euro*
 averci-1SG.PI two.thousand euro
 b. ***Ho*** *duemila* *euro*
 have-1SG.PI two.thousand euro
 ‘I have two thousand euros.’

The use of *averci* instead of *avere* is by now completely standard, if not mandatory, when the item that is owned or possessed is anticipated or replaced by a direct object pronoun when answering a question (Sabatini 1985: 160; Moretti 2004: 145; Berruto 2012: 85):

- (18) *Hai* *la penna?* *Sì, ce l’ho?*
 have-2SG.PI pen yes here it have-1SG.PI
 ‘Do you have a pen? Yes, I have it’

In this case the answer: **Sì, l’ho*, omitting the clitic pronoun *ci* (*ce*), would not be acceptable, not even in refined speakers’ speeches or in formal situations.

All the above mentioned traits are the *neo-standard* features found in the dialogues. The next section of the chapter shows which traits are used in every film, and is intended to function as a quantitative sample of the features of *neo-standard* Italian.

4.5. ANALYSIS OF FILMS

The first and the second table of every film summarize respectively the distribution of the features of *neo-standard* Italian among the main characters, and the percentage in the use of the three most representative *neo-standard* features 4.4.1, 4.4.2., 4.4.3., and their standard counterparts. The traits are listed in alphabetical order.

4.5.1. Bianco, rosso e Verdone






Characters→ Features↓	Mimmo 	Grandmother 	Furio 	Magda 	Truck-d. 	Others
<i>Averci</i>	8	6	1			
<i>Che/cosa/che cosa</i>	12(che)	4(che)	3(che)	2(che cosa) 4(cosa)		1(che) 2(cosa)
<i>Che polivalente</i>			2			
<i>Gli</i> 'to him'	11	2	1		3	2
Indicative pro subjunctive with verbs of opinion, willing, emotion, hope			1	2	1	1
Modal use of future tense	1	1	1	1		
Pron. verbs – reflexive	7	4		1	1	
Pron. verbs – <i>dativo etico</i>		3	1			
Pron. verbs – <i>procomplementari</i>	12	4	3	3	2	2
Redundancy of clitics	1	1	2			
<i>Stare</i> +infinitive	7	1	1			
<i>Te</i> as subject	3	1				

Table 11: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters

The film tells the story of three different characters and of their journey to their home city on an election day in the early 80's. The protagonists are the young Mimmo and his ill grandmother, the logorrheic Furio and his wife, the illiterate emigrant Pasquale whose only lines are found in the very last scene.

As Table 11 shows, Mimmo and the grandmother use almost all the features of *neo-standard*, with a higher number of occurrences compared to the other characters' lines. Their speech has a minimal internal differentiation. They are not only linguistically

similar, but also, from a narrative point of view, they constitute a *unicum*, as though they were the two faces of the same character.

Two traits of the *neo-standard* that are shared by the majority of the characters are the extension of the indirect object pronoun *gli* ‘to him’ to singular feminine and plural referents, and the use of pronominal verbs.

The use of pronominal verbs has a relatively balanced distribution among all speakers, but the extension of *gli* ‘to him’ is less equally distributed. Furio uses *gli* to refer to a woman only once, which is likely due to the fact that he speaks a more formal language compared to the other characters. The reasons for his higher level of speech are his social condition of exponent of the middle class and his professional status of white-collar, though he is also able to switch to a more colloquial register by using some *neo-standard* features, such as the redundancy of clitics or the clitic pronoun *gli* ‘to him’ used in reference to women. The differentiation in his speech and his inclination to share traits with less formal and less educated speakers makes his idiolect a realistic reflection of the process that contemporary Italian is undergoing. Table 12 reports the occurrence of three *neo-standard* features and the standard equivalents.

Features	Standard	<i>Neo-standard</i>
<i>Averci</i> vs <i>Avere</i>	6(29%)	15(71%)
<i>Gli</i> ‘to him’	2(10%)	18(90%)
Subjunctive with verbs of opinion, willing, emotion, hope. standard= subjunctive; <i>neo-standard</i> = indicative	4(44%)	5(56%)

Table 12: Distribution of the standard and the *neo-standard* usage of the three main traits by the main characters

We see in Table 12 that the deviation from the standard prevails in the three cases, consistent with the sociolinguistic condition of most of the characters. In fact, except for

Furio, the rest of them have a low social status, are not well educated and do not come across formal situations. Therefore, we have a high occurrence of *gli* referring to female antecedents, the verb *averci* is regularly used, mostly by Mimmo but also once by Furio, and the balance between indicative and subjunctive confirms the impression of many authors (Cortelazzo 2000a; Lombardi Vallauri 2003; D’Achille 2010) that the use of the subjunctive is in regression.

4.5.2. *Viaggi di nozze*






Characters→ Features↓	Raniero 	Ivano 	Jessica 	Valeriana 	Giovanni 	Others
<i>Averci</i>		1	2	1	4	
<i>Che/cosa/che cosa</i>	3(che) 3(cosa)	5(che)	8(che)	6(che)	7(che)	2(che)
<i>Che polivalente</i>		2		2	1	
<i>Gli</i> ‘to him’		2	1	1	1	
Indicative pro conditional		2			4	3
Indicative pro subjunctive with verbs of opinion, willing, emotion, hope	1	1				
Modal use of future tense			2		1	1
Pron. verbs – reflexive				1	4	1
Pron. verbs – dativo etico	15					2
Pron. verbs – <i>procomplementari</i>	2	2	2	5	3	1
Redundancy of clitics			2		1	1
<i>Stare</i> + infinitive		2	1			

Table 13: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters

Three couples, in three separate episodes, are portrayed in the period immediately following their wedding, as they attempt to enjoy their honeymoon. Raniero is the pedantic husband of the poor Fosca; Ivano and Jessica are two unrefined and uneducated people; and, Giovannino and Valeriana are the classic petty bourgeois couple.

Table 13 confirms the use of the interrogative pronoun *che* by speakers from both Southern and Central Italy, without distinction of social stratification. The rest of the data shows that the main features of *neo-standard* are represented and that their distribution is fairly homogenous. The extension of the clitic *gli* ‘to him’ to feminine singular referents and the use of the verb *averci* feature in the speech of all the main characters, except Raniero. The presence of these two traits points to an informal register and indicates that the use of the latter is growing among middle-class people, as the four occurrences in Giovanni’s speech demonstrate. However, the feature of *neo-standard* that has the widest distribution is the use of pronominal verbs, and particularly the use of *verbi procomplementari*, such as *farcela* ‘to make it’. Every single character uses a *verbo procomplementare* at least once, showing preference for synthesis rather than analysis, since the former replaces an expression that is usually more complex, or another verb that is more formal (e.g. *ci vuole* ‘it takes’ rather than *occorre* ‘it is needed’). In Raniero’s speech, in addition to the two occurrences of *verbi procomplementari*, there are 15 examples of *dativo etico*, a particular use of a pronominal verb in which the pronoun conveys a high degree of involvement of the subject. The following example is taken from one of the phone conversations that Raniero (who is a doctor) has with one of his patients, to whom he prescribes the medication Trimagor:

(19) **Mi** *prendi* *il Trimagor*

to.me take-3SG.PS the Trimagor

‘I prescribe you Trimagor’ (lit. translation: ‘Take a Trimagor’)

In (19) the pronoun *mi* bears no lexical meaning, and gives to the sentence a paternalistic tone. The frequency of such structure shows Raniero's snobbery and affectation, and emphasizes the arrogance of this character. The difference in language that exists between him and Fosca, his wife, reflects the difference between their social statuses, and marks one of the most abhorred characteristics of the bourgeoisie: a superiority complex.

The following data on the difference between standard and *neo-standard* reveal a more balanced situation with respect to the previous film

Features	Standard	<i>Neo-standard</i>
<i>Averci</i> vs <i>Avere</i>	7(45%)	8(55%)
<i>Gli</i> 'to him'	6(55%)	5(45%)
Subjunctive with verbs of willing, opinion, emotion, hope. Standard=subjunctive; <i>neo-standard</i> =indicative	9(75%)	3(25%)

Table 14: Distribution of the standard and the *neo-standard* usage of the main three traits by the main characters

Table 14 shows the prevalence of the subjunctive. Such data demonstrate that the regression of the subjunctive mood in the spoken language is not a complete and regular process, and that there are cases in which speakers still try to conform to the standard. Interestingly, one of the indicative pro subjunctive tokens comes from the most careful speaker, Raniero, which means that this feature may constitute a continuum across the sociolinguistic spectrum. The pronoun *gli* referring to female antecedents has a low occurrence, maybe due to the presence of several formal situations (e.g. the meetings of Raniero with his colleagues, the scenes in churches).

4.5.3. *Grande, grosso e Verdone*

T=Tecla; S.=Leo's sons ; Funeral home employee=F.H.; C.=Callisto; Sev. Severiano; Mor.=Moreno; Luc.=Lucilla; Steven=St.; O=Others

Characters→ Features↓	Leo	T.	L. sons	Emplo.	C.	Mor.	Enza	Steven	Others
<i>Averci</i>	9		3	2		7	5	1	1
<i>Cosa/che/ che cosa</i>	2(che)	1(cosa) 1(che)	1(che)	1(che)	1(cosa)	8(che)	5(che)	1(che)	1(che) 1(cosa)
<i>Che polivalente</i>	1			1		1			
<i>Gli</i> 'to him'	2					2	2		
Indicative pro conditional	2			1		3			
Ind. pro subj. with verbs...	1			1		4			1
Pron. verbs – <i>dativo etico</i>					4	3			
Pron. verbs – reflexive		2	1	2		3	8	2	
Pron. verbs – <i>procompl.</i>	2	1				2	2	1	1
Redundancy of clitics	2				1	1		1	
<i>Stare</i> + infinitive	2			1		3	1	1	2
<i>Te</i> as subject						1	5	2	

Table 15: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters

Following the same structure of the previous film, *Grande, grosso e Verdone* portrays the tragicomic situations that three families, deeply different from one another in social and professional conditions, undergo. Moreno, and Enza play the role of the ordinary couple, on vacation with their son, Steven. Callisto, a despotic art history

professor insists on organizing his son and his girlfriend's life. Leo and Tecla face the sorrow of Leo's mother's unexpected death.

From Table 15 we see that the characters of Leo, Moreno, and Enza are the ones that use the most *neo-standard* traits overall. They are, in fact, ordinary people, portrayed as average Italians. Callisto, is scarcely represented. The tragicomic aspect of his character derives from his extremely elevated language, which obviously becomes a parody. Callisto is alienated because of his maniacal behavior. His language, so different from the other characters, reflects this marginalized condition. As he is one of the characters who utters one of the three cases of subjunctive after verbs of opinion, doubt, hope, it seems that one of the variables on which the use of subjunctive depends, thus, is social status. However, there is also a case in which the character of Moreno uses it. Addressing the beautiful Blanche he says:

(20) *'Temevo che non arrivasse'*

fear-1SG.II that not arrive-3SG.SI

'I was afraid you (formal) would not come'

This shows that this feature (the use of subjunctive) may be triggered also by the formality of the situation, and not only by social or professional condition. The exchange between Moreno and Blanche is, in fact, their first romantic encounter, and he is a little intimidated by the elegance and the grace of her manners. In Chapter 4, we saw that the most careful speaker of the episode, Raniero, is a counter example to the abovementioned presumed criteria triggering the standard use of subjunctive.

The verb *averci* and the reflexive forms of endearment are the most widespread features. The latter occurs even in the speech of Callisto (4 times), a highly educated speaker. The interrogative pronoun *cosa* seems to be a variable that depends on social

status and on geographical origins. In fact, it is used by Callisto, who is Roman, but of a high social condition, and by Tecla, who is originally from Sardinia. Women are characterized by a higher adherence to the standard, with the exception of Enza, whose speech obviously exemplifies strong regionalism. Table 16 illustrates the behavior of the three main *neo-standard* features:

Features	Standard	<i>Neo-standard</i>
<i>Averci</i> vs <i>Avere</i>	6(18%)	28(82%)
<i>Gli</i> 'to him'	1 (14%)	6 (86%)
Subjunctive with verbs of opinion, willing, emotion, hope. Standard= subjunctive; <i>neo-standard</i> = indicative	3 (30%)	7 (70%)

Table 16: Distribution of the standard and the *neo-standard* usage of the three main traits by the main characters

Table 16 shows the prevalence of *neo-standard* in the use of all the traits that I considered. Among them, the clitic *gli* for feminine singular is the feature with the most concentrated distribution, suggesting that it is more regionally characterized with respect to the other two features (i.e. indicative instead of subjunctive and the verb *averci*). Once again, as in the previous film, the occurrence of the indicative pro subjunctive is the lowest among the three percentages, which may suggest a slower adoption of this trait with respect to the other two in disrupting the overall stability of the standard counterpart.

4.5.4. *Il piccolo diavolo*




Characters→ Features↓	Giuditta 	Maurizio 	Nina 	Others
<i>Averci</i>	11			
<i>Che/cosa/che cosa</i>	8(che) 2(cosa)	2(che) 2(che cosa) 3(cosa)		3(che) 1(cosa) 2(che cosa)
Impersonal <i>si</i>	10			2
Indicative pro subjunctive with verbs of opinion, willing, emotion, hope		2		
Modal use of future tense		3		
Pron. verbs – reflexive	2	1		2
Pron. verbs – <i>procomplementari</i>	5	5	4	1
Redundancy of clitics	2			

Table 17: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters

The protagonist is a naïve little devil, Giuditta (Roberto Benigni), who emancipated by the priest who has exorcised him, discovers the world and eventually falls in love with the first woman he has met in his life.

Table 17 shows that the only character who displays any nuance of regional connotation is Giuditta, with 9 occurrences of the impersonal *si* structure. The frequent use of diminutives and pejoratives (7 tokens) contributes to shape his childish personality and his friendly relationship with father Maurizio. The character of Giuditta uses all the features of *neo-standard*, except for the modal use of the future tense and the regression of the subjunctive. The data confirm that the verb *averci* ‘to have’, which indicates ownership, is regularly used in situations both formal and informal, but is avoided by speakers of standard Italian such as Maurizio and Nina.

Maurizio is played by Walter Matthau who is dubbed in standard Italian; or rather, standard Italian with a few exceptional occurrences of the indicative replacing the subjunctive mood. The speech of the only woman in the film is also very close to the standard. The only trait that is shared by all the characters is the use of pronominal verbs, specifically *verbi procomplementari* (4.3.6.3). The feature of clitic pronouns incorporated into verbs and losing their semantic weight has already been identified as one of the expanding traits of contemporary Italian by Mengaldo (1994), and its productivity is confirmed to be widely accepted in recent publication (e.g. Berruto in Miglietta 2006).

Table 18 gives a sense of the low deviation from the standard:

Features	Standard	<i>Neo-standard</i>
<i>Averci</i> vs <i>Avere</i>	5(30%)	10(70%)
<i>Gli</i> 'to him'	6(100%)	0
Subjunctive with verbs of opinion, willing, emotion, hope. Standard= subjunctive; <i>neo-standard</i> = indicative	5(71%)	2(29%)

Table 18: Distribution of the standard and the *neo-standard* usage of the main three traits by the main characters

Table 18 shows that the only *neo-standard* feature that prevails is the verb *averci*. All the occurrences, 11, are found in Giuditta's lines. Such a scarce presence of the *neo-standard* is justified by the fact that the other protagonist is dubbed, which drastically reduces the chance to find deviations from the standard. The female protagonist is a very careful speaker, consistent with the general principle that female sex is a variable that strongly favors standard speech (Berruto in Sobrero 1993, vol. I).

4.5.5. *Il mostro*






Characters→ Features↓	Loris 	Jessica 	Detective 	Psychiatrist 	Professor 	Others
<i>Averci</i>	8					
<i>Che/cosa/che cosa</i>	6(che)	3(cosa)	4(cosa)	3(cosa) 2(che)		3(che)
<i>Che polivalente</i>		2				
<i>Gli</i> ‘to him’	4					1
Impersonal <i>si</i>	4					
Indicative pro subjunctive in if- clauses in past tense	2					
Modal use of future tense	2					2
Pron. verbs - reflexive	1					2
Pron. verbs – <i>procomplementari</i>	7					2

Table 19: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters

Loris is mistaken for a serial killer and an undercover agent, Jessica, tries to infiltrate in his life to arrest him. The police will soon find out that they have the wrong man, and eventually Jessica will be seduced by Loris’ bizarre and anticonformistic behavior.

We see in Table 19 that Loris uses *gli* ‘to him’ for feminine antecedents, whereas the standard *le* ‘to her’ is used by the psychiatrist and by the detective. Such difference reflects the current distribution of this feature of *neo-standard*, which is preferred by less-educated speakers and is avoided by speakers with a more careful speech (D’Achille 2003: 113; Berruto 2012: 84). Loris’ language is, in fact, not grammatically correct with

respect to standard Italian; however, the traits that deviate the most from the standard are not morphological, but are found in the phonology and, as it will be shown in the next chapter, in syntax and textuality.²⁶

The other trait, which is actually a regional feature that characterizes Loris' deviation from the standard, is the impersonal *si* structure (four occurrences), an indicator of the Tuscan origins of the actor. The characters of the detective and the psychiatrist, being dubbed, do not produce any example of *neo-standard* features, confirming the closeness to standard speech already discussed in the phonology chapter.

Features	Standard	<i>Neo-standard</i>
<i>Averci</i> vs <i>Avere</i>	7(47%)	8(53%)
<i>Gli</i> 'to him'	5(56%)	4(44%)
Subjunctive with verbs of opinion, willing, emotion, hope. Standard= subjunctive; <i>neo-standard</i> = indicative	5(100%)	0

Table 20: Distribution of the standard and the *neo-standard* usage of the three main traits by the main characters

The overall results in Table 20 are similar to the ones shown in Table 18, with *averci* being the only *neo-standard* trait that slightly prevails on the standard correspondent. The total absence of indicative pro subjunctive is fairly unrealistic when compared with real life speech, but in this case is probably due to the presence of two characters (the detective and the psychiatrist) played by foreign actors who are dubbed. In fact, four out of the five subjunctive tokens are produced by the psychiatrist.

²⁶. Textuality involves strategies in organizing a discourse, or structures such as hanging topics, typical of spoken language.

4.5.6. Vacanze di Natale '95






Characters→ Features↓	Remo 	Lorenzo 	Marta 	Kelly 	Paolone 	Others
<i>Averci</i>	13	3	2		2	1
<i>Che/cosa/che cosa</i>	10(che) 2(cosa)	1(cosa)	2(che)	2(che)	1(che)	2(cosa) 1(che cosa)
<i>Che polivalente</i>	2	2		1		
<i>Gli</i> 'to him'	2		1		2	
Indicative pro subjunctive with verbs of opinion, willing, emotion, hope			1			
Pron. verbs – reflexive	2	3				1
Pron. verbs – <i>procomplementari</i>	1	1			1	1
<i>Stare</i> + infinitive	7				1	

Table 21: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters

Remo, from Rome, and Lorenzo, from Milan, are two middle-class white collars, who end up spending their Christmas holidays in the same hotel in Aspen. They both have the same main goal: to recover a relationship. Remo with his wife Kelly, and Lorenzo with his daughter Marta.

As summarized in Table 21, the features of *neo-standard* are heavily concentrated in the speech of Remo, who, as has already been shown in Chapter 3, is able to constantly change his register. He alternates between formal and colloquial and *neo-standard* speech, as shown in examples (21) and (22) respectively:

(21) *Mi lasci qui con la tempesta nel cranio*

‘You are leaving me, and I am going crazy’

(22) *Lavate i denti **che te puzza er fiato***

‘Wash your teeth, that your breath stinks’

The elements of formality in the first sentence are the word *cranio* ‘cranium, skull’, which replaces the more common *testa* ‘head, mind’, and also the general metaphoric sense. In the second expression, the colloquial tone is given by the *neo-standard* use of the *che polivalente*, which replaces the standard *poiché* ‘since’, and by the selection of the not very elegant verb *puzzare* ‘to stink’. Moreover, there are regionally marked elements of *romanesco*, such as the vowel lowering in pretonic position (*lavate* < *lavati*; *te* < *ti*), and the rhoticism (*er* < *il*).

However, the gap between the two registers employed by Remo throughout the film is too large, and the parts in which he is very formal are too artificial. Therefore, I contend that his constant change of register, even within the same situation (e.g. the dialogue with his wife in the hotel room returning from the disco), has an expressive function rather than a realistic one. Aside from the *neo-standard* traits, in Remo’s speech are found seven occurrences of the periphrasis typical of *romanesco* (and of Central varieties) and typical of a very informal register:

(23) *Sta già a aspetta’*

‘He is already waiting’

The other male protagonist, Lorenzo, played by the *milanese* actor Massimo Boldi, is the extremely naïf father of the young Marta. Such naïveté is reflected in his use of diminutives and in his body language. Physical manifestations of this quality are found in his ridiculous dance when he finds out that Marta does not take the pill, or the act of sticking his tongue out when he sees a naked girl.

The only two occurrences of subordinates that would require the subjunctive (see Table 22: one standard, and one *neo-standard*) show the scarceness of complexity in the dialogues, whose banality, in fact, is consistent with the type of humor that the film embodies. The number of *verbi procomplementari* (four occurrences) is also very low, which further demonstrates a divergence from contemporary Italian, and from the language of the other films analyzed. The only female character whose speech includes some morphological traits typical of the *neo-standard* is Marta. However, her language is more interesting for the lexicon, which will be accounted for in Chapter 6. The rest of the women play American characters, therefore their speech is almost completely standard. Table 22 reports the high presence of *neo-standard* features:

Features	Standard	<i>Neo-standard</i>
<i>Averci</i> vs <i>Avere</i>	5(19%)	21(81%)
<i>Gli</i> 'to him'	1(14%)	5(86%)
Subjunctive with verbs of opinion, willing, emotion, hope. Standard= subjunctive; <i>neo-standard</i> = indicative	1(50%)	1(50%)

Table 22: Distribution of the standard and the *neo-standard* usage of the three main traits

The perfect balance in the use of indicative and subjunctive reflects the uncertainty in the selection of the two moods. On the other hand, the presence of only two contexts with a subordinate clause requiring the subjunctive demonstrates the scarce morpho-syntactic complexity of the film's dialogues. The prevalence of *neo-standard* usage of *gli* and of *averci* demonstrate a high occurrence of informal situations.

4.5.7. Christmas in love







Characters→ Features↓	Fabrizio 	Guido 	Lisa 	Concetta 	Sofia 	Monica 	Others
<i>Averci</i>	1	3	1				
<i>Che/cosa/che cosa</i>	5(che)	14(cosa) 1(che)	1(che) 1(che cosa)	1(che)	1(che)	2(che) 1(che cosa)	2(cosa) 1(che) 1(che cosa)
<i>Che polivalente</i>		2					
Indicative pro subjunctive in if-clauses in past tense	1		1				
Indicative pro subjunctive with verbs of opinion, willing, emotion, hope			1	3		1	2
Modal use of future tense				1			2
Pron. verbs – reflexive	6	4	3	1			1
Pron. verbs – <i>procomplentari</i>	2	4	5			1	
Redundancy of clitics	1			1			

Table 23: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters

Three parallel situations constitute the plot of the film, which takes place in a luxurious hotel in Switzerland during Christmas time. The protagonists are Fabrizio and Lisa, two plastic surgeons; Guido, a businessman on vacation with his daughter who hired a sixty year-old American actor to play the role of her boyfriend; and lastly, Concetta, a Sicilian worker who wins a TV competition and gets to spend a weekend with

Ron Moss. Given that all the characters, except Concetta who belongs to a lower class, are of the same social status (petty bourgeoisie), and all the situations throughout the film are characterized by informality, we would expect many deviations from the standard. However, the data in Table 23 show a reduced use of *neo-standard* traits, and the spectrum of *neo-standard* features is not as wide as in other films. Overall the language is very close to the standard, with the exception of Concetta, whose lines reproduce an invented language: a mix of dialect, made-up words and agrammatical structures. An example: at her first date with Ron Moss, she addresses him by asking: *Perchè non mi sei aspettato?*, using the wrong auxiliary *sei* ‘you are’ instead of *hai* ‘you have’.

The strategies present in Concetta’s speech parody affected language and propose a provocative way to re-think linguistic humor; the character of Concetta, in fact, suggests that traditional humor has been thoroughly explored. Her speech faces the complexity of contemporary language and, by relying on the juxtaposition of registers (formal and informal) and geographical varieties (Sicilian, regional Italian and English), she produces comedic effects. Ultimately her lines show the impossibility to find clear-cut boundaries within the language system between prescriptive grammar and actual usage. There is also attempted mockery of the abuse of foreign language, but this aspect will be emphasized in the chapter dedicated to lexicon.

The verb *averci* ‘to have’ is used three times by a Northern speaker, Guido. The use of this feature is thus extended to speakers from different regions and social conditions. In the previous films, we saw it used by characters from Rome and Tuscany, each of different social status. The only variable that inhibits the selection of the verb *averci* seems to be a higher level of formality in a given situation. This is demonstrated by the fact that Fabrizio selects *averci* only once, while choosing *avere* six times all in

very formal situations (e.g. during the talk show in the first scene of the film).

Pronominal verbs are used by all the characters, except by the Russian Sofia.

Features	Standard	<i>Neo-standard</i>
<i>Averci</i> vs <i>Avere</i>	15(75%)	5(25%)
<i>Gli</i> 'to him'	1(100%)	0
Subjunctive with verbs of opinion, willing, emotion, hope. Standard= subjunctive; <i>neo-standard</i> = indicative	4(36%)	7(64%)

Table 24: Distribution of the standard and the *neo-standard* usage of the three main traits by the main characters

In Table 24 the only *neo-standard* trait that prevails over the standard equivalent is the indicative used to replace the subjunctive. However, out of the seven occurrences, three are concentrated in the speech of one character: Concetta.

4.5.8. *Tre uomini e una gamba*






Characters→ Features↓	Aldo 	Giovanni 	Giacomo 	Chiara 	Father in law 	Others
<i>Averci</i>	2	1	2		5	
<i>Cosa/che</i>	5(che)	7(cosa) 2(che)	8(cosa)			1(cosa)
<i>Che polivalente</i>	2	3	2			
Indicative pro subjunctive in if- clauses in past tense		1			1	
Modal use of future tense	4	1				1
Pron. verbs – reflexive	3					
Pron. verbs – <i>procomplementari</i>	3	3	6	5		2
Redundancy of clitics	1	1				1

Table 25: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters

Structurally conceived as a road movie, *Tre uomini e una gamba* is the story of three friends, Aldo, Giovanni and Giacomo, who are tired of their daily routine. The journey that they take from Milan to Gallipoli, the small Southern town where Giacomo is supposed to get married, will change their lives.

Table 25 suggests that the character of Aldo, a Southern speaker, who phonologically distinguishes himself from the others because of his strong regionalisms, is very similar to Giovanni and Giacomo with regards to morphology, with the exception of the interrogative *che*, which is selected almost exclusively by Southern speakers (Bonomi 1993). All of the targeted morphological traits in the film's dialogue pattern more after the *neo-standard* grammar, but their frequency of occurrence is very low.

Table 26, below, reveals the absence of two *neo-standard* features: the pronoun *gli* ‘to him’ when referring to women, and the redundant clitics:

Features	Standard	<i>Neo-standard</i>
<i>Averci</i> vs <i>Avere</i>	6(38%)	10(62%)
<i>Gli</i> ‘to him’	3(100%)	0
Subjunctive with verbs of opinion, willing, emotion, hope. Standard= subjunctive; <i>neo-standard</i> = indicative	6 (100%)	0

Table 26: Distribution of the standard and the *neo-standard* usage of the main three traits by the main characters

The total absence of the two features indicated in Table 26 is striking, as they are considered to be among the most typical of the *neo-standard* grammar. On the contrary, the verb *averci* prevails over the standard *avere*. This feature is used by speakers of different regional origins, and with different social background (e.g. Aldo, Giovanni, Giacomo, Giacomo’s father-in-law), which indicates it is a flexible trait that constitutes a *continuum* across several variables. Also, *averci* is the only other trait, along with the pronominal verbs, that is used by all the main characters, except Chiara. She is the only female character, and her sex plays a crucial role in the selection of her idiolect, which shows very little influence from *neo-standard*, and is more oriented toward the prescriptive, standard morphology.

4.5.9. Chiedimi se sono felice





Characters→	Aldo 	Giovanni 	Giacomo 	Marina 	Others
Features↓					
<i>Averci</i>	6		3		
<i>Cosa/che/che cosa</i>	6(che cosa) 3(che) 2(cosa)	4(che cosa) 2(che) 11(cosa)	11(cosa)	2(cosa)	
<i>Gli</i> ‘to him’	3				
Indicative pro conditional	1	1	1		
Indicative pro subjunctive with verbs of opinion, willing, emotion, hope	1		2		
Modal use of future tense	2	3	1	1	
Pron. verbs – reflexive	1	1	1		4
Pron. verbs – <i>procomplementari</i>	7	2	5		

Table 27: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters

The old friendship as well as the theatrical production of Aldo, Giovanni and Giacomo are seriously compromised because of a love affair between Giovanni’s girlfriend and Giacomo. A couple of years later, Aldo decides to put on stage the old project and successfully manages to recover Giacomo and Giovanni’s friendship.

The distribution of the *neo-standard* traits is very regular, and the centrality of the three main actors is evident as we note the low number of occurrences of the targeted traits in the speech of the other characters. Among all characters, there are ten occurrences of the interrogative *che cosa* ‘what’, which is actually the original, standard

form. Aldo is the only one who uses the clitic *gli* for feminine referents. However, when he does the voice-over narration, he regularly uses the standard *le* ‘to her’.

The voice over, Aldo, is perceived as an external character. He is played by one of the actors who temporarily steps back from the story and talks directly to the viewer, as if he were on a theater stage. The use of this technique explains and justifies the use of a standard language, which is more appropriate for an external narrator. Some of the *neo-standard* traits that Aldo uses in the dialogues (e.g. *gli* ‘to him’ referring to women and *averci*) are therefore stigmatized and omitted in the voiceover speech, giving preference to their standard counterparts: *le* ‘to her’, or *avere* ‘to have’. Aside from these two traits, the morphology of Aldo’s speech is not very different from one of the other characters, and the linguistic contrast between his dialogues and his voice-over lines yields a comic effect. Table 28 summarizes the occurrence of standard and *neo-standard* usage of the three most representative features of contemporary Italian:

Features	Standard	<i>Neo-standard</i>
<i>Averci</i> vs <i>Avere</i>	12(67%)	6(33%)
<i>Gli</i> ‘to him’	13(81%)	3(19%)
Subjunctive with verbs of willing, opinion, emotion, hope. Standard= subjunctive; <i>neo-standard</i> = indicative	8(73%)	3(27%)

Table 28: Distribution of the standard and the *neo-standard* usage of the three main traits by the main characters

The data confirm the closeness to standard language of the dialogues of Aldo, Giovanni & Giacomo’s films.

4.5.10. Benvenuti al sud







Characters→	Alberto	Silvia	Mattia	Maria	Cost. p.	Cost. g.	Others
Features↓							
<i>Cosa/che/che cosa</i>	4(che) 4(cosa)	3(cosa)	3(che)	4(che)			
Indicative pro conditional	1	2	1	1			
Indicative pro subjunctive in if-clauses in past tense	2		1	1			
Indicative pro subjunctive with verbs of opinion, willing, emotion, hope	1			1			1
Modal use of future tense	2	1					
Pron. verbs. – reflexive	6	2	3	1			2
Pron. verbs – <i>procomplementari</i>	4	1	2				1
<i>Voi</i> instead of <i>lei</i>			29	13	2	8	5

Table 29: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters

The manager of the postal service Alberto Colombo is transferred from Milan to the office of a small town in Southern Italy. What he thinks will be a nightmare, will turn out to be a deeply formative life-experience, as he realizes how wrong and unfounded his prejudices about Southerners were.

When compared with the phonological data from Table 10 in Chapter 3, the data in Table 29 show that the morphological features are quantitatively not as relevant as the individual phonological traits. That is, there is a higher number of features involved in the morphology, but a lower distribution of those features among the characters' speech. The

only exception here lies in the distribution of a typical Southern characteristic, which is the use of *voi* ‘You all (You formal)’ instead of *lei* as the formal form of address, which occurs 57 times.²⁷ This variation is a source of misunderstanding when Alberto first arrives in the South, and addresses Mattia’s mother using *lei* ‘she, her’. The woman asks to whom he is speaking. At that point, Mattia intervenes and explains that in Northern Italian, the formal pronoun is *lei*. This is another example of metalinguistic reflection in the film, along with the mini phonology lesson on the sound *schwa* that I discussed in Chapter 3. We find a few exceptions to the use of the pronoun *voi*, all of which occur in Maria’s lines. The regional connotation of Southern speakers particularly stands out with the use of the *voi* instead of *lei* for formal ‘you’. However, it is a feature that is more likely to appear than others, as it is a form of address. The alternation of interrogative pronouns *cosa/che* reflects the actual dichotomy of Northern-Southern varieties, with an interesting balance in the character of Alberto, from whom we would expect only *cosa*.

The distribution here is more homogeneous than was found in phonology. Such a result leads to the general conclusion that the geographical variable is perceived as being less influential on morphology than on phonology. The traits of what Berruto (2012) defines as the *neo-standard* are manifest in the four main characters, Mattia, Maria, Alberto and Silvia with general regularity. The most interesting finding is the spread of pronominal verbs, a new tendency that has semantic implications. It is shared by all main characters and is geographically unmarked.

²⁷. I have also counted the implicit uses, such as in verbs: *volete* ‘you (formal) want’ or in clitic pronouns *vi* ‘to you (formal)’.

Features	Standard	<i>Neo-standard</i>
<i>Averci</i> vs <i>Avere</i>	5(100%)	0
<i>Gli</i> ‘to him’	2(100%)	0
Subjunctive with verbs of willing, opinion, emotion, hope. Standard= subjunctive; <i>neo-standard</i> = indicative	6(66%)	3(34%)

Table 30: Distribution of the standard and the *neo-standard* usage of the three main traits by the main characters

The absence of *averci* is, in this case, totally realistic, given the fact that most characters in the film speak the regional variety of the region Campania, where the verb to indicate ownership is not *averci* but is rather *tenere* ‘to hold, to keep’. See an example from Maria’s speech:

- (24) *La gente tiene che fare*
the people hold-3SG.PI that do-INF
‘People have things to do’

4.6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In Carlo Verdone’s films, morphology does not have the same function as phonology in expressing the comedic side of the characters. Accent and pronunciation, as shown in the previous chapter, are crucial in shaping the identity of the characters and, in many cases, to build a caricature. Morphological features do not play such a role, and their distribution is homogeneous, with a lower level of regionalism. The female characters are linguistically less relevant than the male ones, in the sense that Carlo Verdone prefers to have men deliver more lines, and have them use more *neo-standard* traits. Women (e.g. Magda, Valeriana, Tecla) speak a variety close to the standard, with an internal differentiation that is less variable than male characters. The couples in the three films are fairly homogeneous from a general linguistic point of view, and this

balance is reflected in the morphology as well. Although all social statuses are represented, the middle-class characters, such as Giovannino in *Viaggi di nozze*, or Leo in *Grande, grosso e Verdone*, share more morphological traits with lower condition characters (e.g. the truck driver in *Bianco, rosso e Verdone*, or Ivano in *Viaggi di nozze*), rather than with higher-class characters such as Furio or Raniero. Tables 12, 14, and 16 confirm that the feature of *neo-standard* that regularly prevails over the corresponding standard equivalent is the verb *averci* ‘to have’. Tables 12, 14, and 16 also show the regression of the use of subjunctive in dependent clauses when the main verb is a verb of opinion, wish or hope. The standard use prevails only in *Viaggi di nozze*, where most of the occurrences are, not surprisingly, found in Raniero’s speech. The infrequent usage of subjunctive in all films confirms the tendency to avoid morphological complexity that some subjunctive forms entail, such as the verb *essere* ‘to be’ (e.g. *Ho paura che mi è morto* ‘I’m afraid he is dead’, where the correct form of *essere* should be the present subjunctive *sia*).

To conclude, overall, all Carlo Verdone’s characters use a complete variety of morphological features of the *neo-standard*, and their distribution is more homogenous than that of the phonological traits, which contributes to reducing the distance between speakers of different social classes and conditions.

A direct consequence of the emphasis on Roberto Benigni’s body is the reduced use of strong regional traits, and the presence of fewer *neo-standard* traits with respect to Carlo Verdone’s films. Benigni’s films are morphologically relevant in using two of the *neo-standard* features: the verb *averci* ‘to have’ and the pronominal verbs. These two features are predominantly used by the protagonist, Roberto Benigni, and have a similar distribution in both films (seven and eleven occurrences respectively in *Il piccolo diavolo*, and eight and eight occurrences, respectively, in *Il mostro*). The low frequency

of such features in the secondary characters in *Il piccolo diavolo*, and the total absence of them in *Il mostro*, confirms the results of the phonological data, and reinforces the scarce linguistic relevance and realism of secondary characters in Benigni's films. Benigni has contributed to the use of the Tuscan variety of Italian in cinema, which has constantly grown since the 1970's, thanks to Mario Monicelli (F. Rossi 1999: 224). In the films I analyzed there is a regression in the usage of regionalisms, and a tendency to level the language through the diffusion of a *neo-standard* variety. From a linguistic point of view, therefore, Benigni with his main character gives a reliable picture of a middle-class Italian. However, his humor is not focused on the mockery of such a stereotypical figure; rather, it relies on a very personal use of his own body and on the shaping of a character, which embodies the tradition of popular theater and literature. Examples of such characters are Stenterello or Pinocchio (F. Rossi 1999: 223).²⁸

In *Vacanze di Natale '95* and *Christmas in love*, morphology does not emphasize regionalism as much as does phonology. A difference that emerges between the two is an increased standardization of the language in the latter film, which lacks the use of the clitic pronoun *gli* 'to him' referring to women, sees very poor use of *averci*, and displays only two instances of *che polivalente*. In *Vacanze di Natale '95* the screen-players try to represent the regional diversification of Italy, by putting on stage different pronunciations, and trying to involve as many accents as possible. We have the waiter who speaks Sardinian, Lorenzo who speaks *milanese*, and the character of Paolone, from Tuscany. Such an undertaking is inspired by the traditional *commedia all'italiana*, whose goal was to show to people that the real identity of the language was precisely the

²⁸. Stenterello is one of the masked types characteristic of the *Commedia dell'arte*, a form of theater developed in Italy since the XVI century, which is based on improvised performances. Stenterello is the typical mask of Florence, created in XVIII century. He is smart, chatty and vivacious.

regionalism, and that the regional varieties had the same dignity as the national language (De Mauro 1963). In the case of *Vacanze di Natale '95*, that sociological goal seems to be lost, and what it prevails is the intention of the screen-players to use the regional accents exclusively to elicit laughter from the viewer. In the latter film, *Christmas in love*, the director Neri Parenti reduces the use of regionalism in general, and in particular the use of *neo-standard* morphological traits. He portrays the typical petty bourgeoisie as people who spend their Christmas holidays in an exclusive place, and who are expected to speak a language close to the standard. In fact, at the morphological level they keep the same formality even in the many informal situations of the movie. This differs directly from the phonological behavior of these characters. In Chapter 3, in fact, we saw that the characters are more able to change register phonologically depending on the situation (see in particular the commentary on the phonology of the characters of Fabrizio and Lisa in *Christmas in love*). Lastly, in *Christmas in love* there are more female characters than are present in the other film, which increases the chances of hearing speech closer to the standard.

In Aldo, Giovanni & Giacomo's films, the linguistic humor derives from the contrast between the Southern speaker Aldo, and the two Northerners, Giovanni and Giacomo. However, the difference is perceivable more at a phonological level, as shown in Chapter 3, rather than at the morphological one. The distribution of the morphological features is more regular in *Chiedimi se sono felice* than in *Tre uomini e una gamba*, with a fairly homogeneous concentration of the traits in the speech of the three protagonists. Tables 26 and 28 show an increased use, from the former film to the latter, of the standard equivalent of *averci* 'to have here', the simple *avere* 'to have'. The prevalence of the standard *avere* instead of the *neo-standard averci* is a countertendency, since

averci over the last years has become more and more stable in spoken language (D'Achille 2010; Berruto 2012).

Summing up the occurrences in both films, the majority of tokens of *averci* is found in Aldo's lines, which is a deviation from the standard, and therefore it characterizes the Southerner as a less careful speaker than the others. The morphology in Aldo, Giovanni and Giacomo's films, as well as in Roberto Benigni's, confirms the choice of a humor based less on regional characterization, and more inclined to nonsense and irony. Such irony makes fun of stereotypical ways to communicate, stereotypical behaviors in daily life, or of linguistic habits of Italians. For example, in *Chiedimi se sono felice*, Giacomo scolds Aldo a couple of times because he uses *gli* 'to him' to refer to women, telling him which is the correct pronoun to use. The metalinguistic reflection in this case produces the comedic effect.

4.7. CONCLUSIONS

With respect to morphological features, one of the most evident conclusions that can be drawn is that the regionalism is conveyed more by phonology than by morphology. It may be impossible to establish the geographical origins of a character exclusively based on morphological traits. Comedic effects rely therefore more on accents and pronunciations than on morphology. Morphology shows the use of the entire spectrum of features that characterizes the variety *italiano dell'uso medio* (Sabatini 1985) or *neo-standard* (Berruto 2012). It is a variety that constitutes a *continuum* because its traits are shared by speakers from different places, with different social status and different cultural backgrounds.

Traits that deviate from the standard are more common in Southern and Roman speakers than in Northern characters. The characterization of strong regionalism is

limited to a few features that the public can easily recognize, such as the impersonal *si* to replace first person plural (*toscano*), or the absence of *averci* in *napoletano*, replaced by *tenere* ‘hold’ (see Table 30 and following explanation).

Morphological features have a more homogeneous distribution than phonological traits among main and secondary characters. Such balance suggests that morphology is less apt than phonology in emphasizing differences among characters and, in general, less accurate in identifying differences among speakers of different social classes and statuses.

Women use a morphology very close to the standard; that is they use less *neo-standard* features than do the men. This outcome confirms the sociolinguistic account according to which women, more than men, tend to prefer prescriptive features of the language (Berruto in Sobrero 1993).

The distribution of the verb *averci* confirms the accounts found in the current linguistic literature which claim that the use of *averci* has become widespread in actual spoken language (Berruto, 2012: 85), typically in informal situations. In seven of the ten films analyzed the use of *averci* prevails over *avere*, is used by any type of speaker and always in colloquial contexts. The verb *averci* when the item owned is preceded by a clitic pronoun is instead used in 100% of the cases, confirming its standardization (see Section 4.4.3.).

With respect to subjunctive, a regression in its use is reported by Renzi (2000: 302), Berruto (2012: 80) and is also remarked as a general perception by Cortelazzo (2000b). On the other hand, quantitative analysis carried out by Bonomi (1993), Schneider (1999), Lombardi Vallauri (2003), demonstrate that the substitution is neither regular nor systematic, and is therefore a feature that still maintains a balanced distribution between standard and *neo-standard*. In the films I analyzed, in only three out

of ten did I find the *neo-standard* trait of indicative pro-subjunctive in dependent clauses when the main verb is a verb of opinion. This distribution reflects therefore the actual balance shown by the data accounts found in the recent literature.

The feature of the *che polivalente* is almost absent in the film dialogues. The lack of this common structure of *neo-standard* reveals a proper mastery of subordinate structures by the majority of the characters. The scarcity of the multifunctional *che* is not realistic if compared with the tendency of contemporary Italian, especially in spoken language, where the level of simplification is higher than in written texts, and, therefore, the use of the *che* is very frequent.

The *neo-standard* feature that is used by most characters is pronominal verbs. In every film, almost all the characters use at least one pronominal verb, which confirms that this category is expanding, and that it does not depend on any variable (e.g. such as the social or professional status, sex, age, geographic origins), but is shared by a variety of speakers.

5. Syntax

5.1. INTRODUCTION

The objective of this chapter is to illustrate the distribution of the most relevant syntactic features of *neo-standard* as they are found in the dialogues of the films. Syntax is the level of the language that involves the structure of the sentence and the ways in which words are coordinated and put together within the sentence itself. According to Benincà (1993) this level is not involved in a real evolution process, and the changes that it undergoes are very slow. However, there are some features that are identified as typical of *neo-standard*, or at least, as traits that have been stigmatized by traditional grammars and are now regularly coming back in common usage (Sabatini 1985; Sabatini 1990; Renzi 2000). These traits are: left and right dislocation, cleft sentences, hanging topics and the structure of *c'è presentativo* ‘presentative *esserci*’, which is the equivalent of the structure ‘there is’ used to introduce new information.

Most scholars who have studied the new tendencies of contemporary Italian have classified these features at the level of morpho-syntax (e.g. Mengaldo 1994; Berruto 2012). I follow the terminology of D’Achille (2010), who classifies them as ‘syntactic’.

The chapter is divided into three macro-sections: Section 5.2., lists the features and a brief description of each; Section 5.3. consists of the analysis of the films, and Section 5.4. is dedicated to the general discussion that groups together the films of the same director, as it has been done in the previous chapters.

5.2. FEATURES

5.2.1. *C'è presentativo* ‘presentative esserci’

In the construction of *c'è presentativo*, the form *c'è* ‘there is’ introduces a noun phrase, which, in turn, acts in the role of topic of the subordinate that follows. The form *c'è* rewords a sentence with one verbal clause into a sentence with two verbal forms:

- (1) a. *Un gatto gioca nel giardino*
‘A cat is playing/plays in the garden’
b. *C'è un gatto che gioca nel giardino*
‘**There is** a cat playing/that plays in the garden’ (from Berruto 2012: 77).

Sentences such as example (1a) contain two pieces of new information: *un gatto* and the fact that he *gioca*; this is done using only one verb, *gioca*. The information ‘in the garden’ is part of the shared knowledge between the speaker and the listener. In (1b), unlike (1a), the new informations rely on two different verbs: *c'è* and *gioca*. The pragmatic function of the *c'è presentativo*, which is more frequent in spoken than in written language, is, according to D'Achille (2010: 181) and Berruto (2012: 77), to separate two blocks of information that are both new to the listener. This function is comparable to the analogous French structure *il ya* ‘there is’ (Berruto 2012:77).

5.2.2. Cleft sentences.

Clefting is a syntactic strategy that breaks a main clause into two parts, as exemplified in (2b):

- (2) a. *Gianni beve*
‘Gianni drinks’

b. *È Gianni che beve*

‘It’s Gianni the one who drinks/drinking’.

This strategy has the function of strongly emphasizing a constituent (e.g. *Gianni*) by isolating it from the rest of the sentence and giving it the new pragmatic status of focus; that is, the status of new information (Frison 2001; D’Achille 2010). It is generally considered ‘well integrated’ in standard Italian (Berruto 2012: 78), and it is a very typical feature particularly of spoken language (Berruto 2012: 170). In fact Cortelazzo (2000a: 423) points out that this feature is no longer a taboo even in written Italian.

5.2.3. Dislocation

This syntactic strategy changes the pragmatic status of a constituent in a sentence, that is, the value of the information that the constituent itself bears. The unmarked order of the elements in a declarative clause consists of the topic, about which a new information is being given, and the focus, which is what is being said about the topic, in post-verbal position. An example of a sentence with unmarked word order is given in (3):

(3) *Mario mangia la mela*

‘Mario eats the apple’

The topic of the conversation is that Mario is eating something, and the new information (focus) is what he is eating: an apple.

Dislocation modifies the unmarked order according to the communicative intentions of the speaker and it is a syntactic trait that was once a characteristic of older written Italian as Sabatini argues (1990: 224-225). He also notes that the emphatic structures (of which dislocation is but one example) have generally been condemned by

traditional grammars. However, these types of structures have been partially rehabilitated by prescriptive grammars and are a stable feature not only of spoken Italian but also of the variety of prose that tries to emulate spoken language (Sabatini 1985: 161; Sobrero 1993: 1, 424). Two types of dislocation will be considered in my analysis: left dislocation (Section 5.3.2.1) and right dislocation (Section 5.3.2.2).

5.2.3.1. *Left dislocation*

Left dislocation re-arranges the position of a constituent, different from the grammatical subject, by moving it to the left edge of the clause, and by giving it the pragmatic status of topic, that is, of main object of interest of the conversation. A clitic pronoun replaces the dislocated constituent:

- (4) a. *Giorgio compra i giornali alla stazione*
‘Giorgio buys the newspapers at the railway station’
- b. *I giornali, Giorgio li compra alla stazione*
‘**The newspapers**, Giorgio buys **them** at the railway station’ (from Benincà 2001: 144).

In structures such as (4b) the speaker assumes that *i giornali* is part of a general pre-existing knowledge shared with the listener, or is something that was previously mentioned in the conversation. The pronoun *li* clearly expresses the replacement of the dislocated element. According to Sobrero (1993: 1, 425), this strategy does not characterize a specific variety or register (*neo-standard*, regional, formal, informal), and it is used in different communicative situations, in different geographic areas, and by people of different social statuses. D’Achille (2010: 176) affirms the peculiarity of left dislocation as being a feature across several varieties and of its use in several types of written texts. Frascarella (2003) supports the argument of the increasing un-markedness

of left dislocation with data from a corpus of spoken Italian, which reveal that a constituent is often dislocated even in the absence of any identifiable pragmatic need.

5.2.3.2. *Right dislocation*

Right dislocation anticipates a constituent with a clitic pronoun and pragmatically isolates it at the right edge of the sentence. There is not an actual movement with respect to the natural order of the sentence. As Benincà clarifies (2001: 160), right dislocation presupposes that the constituent that is being moved is a well-known topic for the listeners as a consequence of the fact that it has already been mentioned in the conversation:

- (5) a. *Domani porto il dolce*
‘Tomorrow I will bring the dessert’
b. *Lo porto domani, il dolce*
‘Tomorrow, I will bring the dessert’ (from Benincà 2001: 144).

An urgent need of the speaker to give more space to new information about the known topic may explain the strategy of anticipating it with a pronoun, and then recalling it at the end of the sentence. Right dislocation is limited with respect to left dislocation, because it can anticipate only a topic that was mentioned in the same conversation, and that is not part of a pre-existing knowledge shared with the audience. The pragmatic similarity between the two structures is recognized by Benincà (2001: 161) and Berruto (2012: 76). However, the latter points out the higher informality that right dislocation conveys. D’Achille (2010: 176) indirectly confirms this characteristic by remarking that right dislocations are more common in spoken than in written language, precisely for this colloquial connotation. Interesting data on the reduced use of right dislocations in written texts are found in Frascarella’s analysis of newspapers articles (Frascarella 2003: 549).

5.2.4. Hanging topic

Hanging topic is a very typical construction of the spoken language and, in general, of any type of unplanned discourse or conversation. The main goal of the speaker in using this structure is to fulfill a pragmatic intention. It consists in moving the given topic at the beginning of the sentence in order to emphasize it, without eliciting the grammatical function of the topic itself. The difference with respect to the structure of the left dislocation is the fact that the hanging topic does not anticipate any grammatical function and that it can be resumptive, not only by means of a clitic pronoun, but also by a demonstrative pronoun, or by a personal pronoun (Benincà 1993: 266; 2001: 145):

- (6) *Il professor Piva, nessuno gli affiderebbe un bambino/nessuno affiderebbe un bambino a lui*

‘**Professor Piva**, nobody would give **him** the custody of a kid/nobody would give the custody of a kid **to him**’ (from Benincà 2001: 146).

In example (6) we cannot tell what is the grammatical function of *il professor Piva*, whether it is an object, a subject, or an indirect object. The clitic pronoun *gli* ‘to him’ in the second part of the sentence reveals that it is an indirect object. A left dislocation of the same sentence would have shown such function with the use of the preposition *a* ‘to’:

- (7) *Al professor Piva, nessuno gli affiderebbe un bambino*

‘**To** professor Piva, nobody would give him the custody of a kid’ (from Benincà 2001: 146).

Sabatini (1985: 163) and Berruto (2012: 76) include hanging topics in the broader category of dislocation devices, and also Lambrecht notes that there may be overlapping terminology between the two (Lambrecht 2001: 1051). The general function of the

hanging topic is in fact to strongly emphasize a topic. There seems to be general agreement on the fact that the hanging topic is typical exclusively of spoken varieties (Mengaldo 1994: 94; Benincà 2001: 145; D'Achille 2010: 179), with some scholars more willing than others to emphasize the common perception of its ungrammaticality (e.g. Benincà 1993: 263). Although both D'Achille (2010: 179) and Benincà (1993: 264) remind us that the hanging topic was used by prestigious authors of the literary tradition (e.g. Boccaccio, Dante, Manzoni), they also clarify that the structure was to be avoided if not justified by literary intention. Descriptive works on contemporary Italian do not identify the use of the hanging topic with a particular social status or of a specific geographic area. It is, rather, a trait that generally characterizes spoken language, since it is strictly linked to the impossibility to plan a discourse. Among the prescriptive works, there seems to be a fairly neutral attitude toward the hanging topic (Serianni 2006: 534-535; Benincà 2001: 145-146), with at least one exception, Dardano and Trifone (2007: 446), who are more inclined to stigmatize it.

5.3. ANALYSIS OF FILMS

For each movie two tables are given, which report two different types of data. The first table illustrates the distribution of the traits as they are used by the main characters. The data resulting from this first chart are relevant because they show which *neo-standard* features are most frequently used, and whether they are typical of any character, or specific to characters who are of the same sociolinguistic status. The second table shows the percentage of the dislocated constructions compared to the percentage of their standard counterparts. The standard correspondent of a dislocated clause is a declarative sentence with subject in initial position and a direct or indirect object in post-verbal position without the reference of a clitic pronoun (see examples (3) and (5a)).

For the comparison that is accounted for in the second table, the trait of dislocation has been chosen because it is shared by all the characters, and because it replaces a structure with canonical and pragmatically unmarked syntactic order. The data I have collected will contribute to show the frequency of such replacement in film dialogues.

The commentary of every film is also accompanied by an account on the contingent use of particles and connectives that are typical of spoken language, such as *diciamo* ‘let’s say’, *cioè* ‘that is’, *senti* ‘listen’. These elements may have several functions: maintaining the attention of the interlocutor, marking the beginning or the end of the discourse, filling the pauses that typically characterize unplanned speech, and, of course, they have different grammatical status depending on their function (Bazzanella 2001: 225).

I give a general account of these traits because they transcend the classification of a specific variety (such as the one I am considering: *neo-standard*); in fact they can be found in many languages, and are an intrinsic peculiarity of spoken language in general, and not exclusively of spoken Italian.

5.3.1. *Bianco, rosso e Verdone*

Characters→ Features↓	Mimmo 	Grandmother 	Furio 	Magda 	Truck-driver 	Others
Cleft	4			1		
Dislocation	left: 1	left: 2	left: 11		left: 1	left: 1
	right: 4	right: 4	right: 8	right: 2		right: 3
Hanging topics		1				

Table 31. Distribution of the features as used by the main characters

Table 31 shows a very linear syntax, with a regular use of dislocation by all the characters, and a slight preference for right dislocation. Right dislocation is in fact typical of spoken language (D’Achille 2010: 150; Berruto 2012: 77).

Although cleft sentences are normally accepted in common language (Berruto 2012: 1), only 5 occurrences are found in this movie, and 4 of them are in Mimmo’s lines. Magda uses it once: *Cos’è che vuole* ‘What it is that you want?’, addressing the charming Raoul, who knocks on her room’s door to invite her to have a drink while her husband is at the hospital. The woman is exasperated by Raoul’s insistence, and the cleft structure emphasizes this exceptional reaction by stressing the word *cosa* ‘what’ by means of the cleft, which separates it from the rest of the sentence and adds the verbal form *è* ‘it is’: *cos’è* ‘what it is’. The scarce presence of cleft sentences suggests an incomplete reliability on syntax in the film’s dialogues in reproducing everyday language. We will see that the low rate of occurrence of this structure is a common characteristic across all the films analyzed. Further evidence of this syntactic unreliability is the near total absence of hanging topics, a feature that is almost unavoidable in spoken language because of the scarce opportunity to plan discourse in actual usage. A certain reliability in reproducing contemporary spoken Italian is shown instead by the occurrence of dislocation in Table 32:

Dislocated sentences	Sentences with unmarked word order
37 (77%)	11 (23%)

Table 32: Percentage distribution of dislocated sentences and sentences with unmarked order

The percentage of dislocations is in fact significantly higher than the unmarked order clauses, which reflects the current situation in actual contemporary speech.

5.3.2. *Viaggi di nozze*

Characters→	Raniero	Ivano	Jessica	Valeriana	Giovanni	Fosca	Others
Features↓							
<i>C'è presentative</i>					1		
Cleft		1	1				
Dislocation	left: 4		left: 1		left: 3		left: 1
	right: 2	right: 2	right: 3	right: 1	right: 1	right: 1	right: 6
Hanging topics						1	1

Table 33: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters

The structure of the sentences is, in general, very simple. Even in the speech of Raniero, who is the most refined speaker (recall that he is a doctor), we find examples of dislocation. The distribution of dislocation is fairly balanced among the characters. This syntactic trait does not necessarily connote the social status of the characters, nor their level of education or geographic origins. Right dislocation prevails over left dislocation. Ivano and Jessica, whose speech displays many deviations from the standard at the phonological and morphological levels, do not show a substantial difference with respect to the other characters as far as syntax is concerned. Such balance proves that dislocation, which emphasizes an element in the sentence for pragmatic goals, is not a prerogative of low social classes, nor of a specific regional area, but it is shared by all kinds of speakers. Pragmatics and expressivity, in fact, transcend sociolinguistic differences and the devices that are used are not stigmatized for being too regional or too colloquial.

The realism of spoken language is only partially reproduced, with the use of some phatic connectives such as *guarda* ‘look’, *senti* ‘listen’. These lexical items serve the function of introducing discourse and drawing the attention of the listener. Another

mechanism, typical of *romanesco*, is the so called *struttura a cornice* ‘framed structure’, in which an element that is used at the beginning of the sentence is also repeated at the end, in order to give an idea of completeness and to reiterate the importance of that element:

- (8) *Io sto in viaggio di nozze, sto*
‘**I am** in honey moon, **I am**’

Aside from these, devices that are strictly pragmatic such as voice overlapping, reformulation, and repetition are completely absent. Table 34 illustrates the difference between dislocated structures and canonical order declaratives:

Dislocated sentences	Sentences with unmarked word order
25 (66%)	13 (34%)

Table 34: Percentage distribution of dislocated sentences and sentences with unmarked order

The sentences with a dislocated constituent are significantly more numerous than the unmarked ones, even though the gap is smaller than in the previous film (see Table 32). Out of the 13 sentences with unmarked word order, 7 are concentrated in one character’s lines, Raniero, which confirms his speech to be fairly close to the standard.

5.3.3. *Grande grosso e Verdone*

F.H.= Funeral home employee; C.=Callisto; M.=Moreno; En.=Enza; St.=Steven; O.=Others

Characters→	Leo	F. h.	C.	M.	En.	St.	O.
Features→							
Cleft	1				1		
Dislocation	left: 2	left: 1	left: 1	left: 1	left: 1	left: 1	left: 2
	right: 1			right: 3	right: 1		
Hanging topics	1						

Table 35. Distribution of the features as used by the main characters

All the characters have a very regular syntax. They show a particular mastery in shaping both simple and subordinate structures. The level of education of Callisto along with the way his character is conceived, that is as a caricature, justifies his perfect Italian. The difference between the more refined speakers (Callisto, Severiano and Lucilla; the last two do not show any deviation from the standard) and the less educated characters (Moreno, Enza) is not as big as expected. The traits that distinguish the two categories of speakers are some phatic connectives that also convey a regional characterization. An example from the speech of Moreno is given in (9):

(9) ***Hai fraticato tutti, hai fraticato***

‘You got everyone soaked, **you got**’.

The reiteration at the end of the first part of the sentence does not have any functional meaning, but it frames the structure putting emphasis on the responsibility of the agent.

Almost completely absent are the typical devices of spoken textuality, such as hanging topics, repetition, interruption and reformulation of the discourse. An example is the character of Moreno, who, although is a very unrefined and not well educated person,

is able to use a linear syntax in a very formal situation when he meets the beautiful Blanche: ...*è in ritardo stasera, temevo non arrivasse più* ‘you are late tonight. I was afraid you would not come’. The syntax of Moreno is unexpectedly flawless and fluent. In Table 36 the results of the usage of dislocations are summarized and compared to their standard equivalent:

Dislocated sentences	Sentences with unmarked word order
14 (44%)	18(56%)

Table 36: Percentage distribution of dislocated sentences and sentences with unmarked order

Table 36 presents data in contrast with the previous films and also with the expected prevalence of dislocations. It is the only movie out of the ten analyzed in which the percentage of unmarked order clauses is higher than the *neo-standard* counterpart.

5.3.4 *Il piccolo diavolo*

Characters→ Features↓	Giuditta	Maurizio	Nina	Others
				
<i>C'è presentativo</i>			1	
Cleft			1	3
Dislocation	left: 4	left: 2	left: 4	left: 1
	right: 3	right: 2	right: 1	
Hanging topics	2			

Table 37: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters

The centrality of the character Giuditta (Roberto Benigni) is reflected in his speech, as his language stands out with respect to that of the other characters whose

speech, in general, lacks significant deviations from the standard. Giuditta, in fact, reproduces a syntax that very closely imitates spoken language despite the role of his character, from whom, being a devil, we would expect much more solemnity, seriousness, and refined language. The difference among the remaining characters is not so evident from Table 37, which reports the distribution of features that are strictly syntactic (and not pragmatic), and shows a fairly balanced distribution. Giuditta's language is instead very interesting if we look at the reproduction of textuality. He uses, in fact, many devices typical of a unplanned discourse, such as streams of thoughts (10) and repetitions (11):

(10) *...mi viene voglia...devo fa' qualcosa...sennò*

'I feel like...I have to do something, otherwise...';

(11) *è troppo eloquente, non so cosa...non so cosa fare*

'It is too much eloquent...I don't know what...don't know what to do'.

These examples make Giuditta a speaker who reproduces fairly realistically the language that people speak daily. The more refined syntax of Maurizio is justified by the fact that he is a foreign actor dubbed in Italian, and also by the role of his character (a priest), which suggests frequent participation in formal situations and contexts. Table 38 demonstrates a frequent usage of *neo-standard* syntactic order:

Dislocated sentences	Sentences with unmarked word order
17 (61%)	11 (39%)

Table 38: Percentage distribution of dislocated sentences and sentences with unmarked order

Of the eleven cases of canonical ordered clauses, none of them is found in Benigni-Giuditta's lines, which is consistent with what emerges in Table 37, where he is judged to be the character whose speech most closely resembles the *neo-standard*.

5.3.5. *Il mostro*

Characters→ Features↓	Loris 	Jessica 	Psychiatrist 	Others
<i>C'è presentative</i>			2	
Cleft	1	1		1
Dislocation	left: 10	left: 1		left: 1
	right: 2	right: 2	right: 1	
Hanging topics	1			

Table 39: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters

As in *Il piccolo diavolo*, the whole spectrum of syntactic traits is represented, but with a less balanced distribution. In this case, Jessica and Loris share the majority of the features, while the other characters' speech shows minimal deviations from the standard. The detective and the psychiatrist are always portrayed in professional contexts, therefore their language is extremely careful and formal. The fact that they rarely use any colloquialisms seems a little artificial (the issue of the dubbing of these two characters has been discussed in Chapter 3).

Also in this film the personality and eccentricity of the character played by Roberto Benigni are linked to his language. He is very energetic, disorganized, and his speech contains the main traits of the *neo-standard* variety (i.e. dislocation, cleft sentences, and hanging topics), along with the features of the spoken language, such as reformulations, interruptions, and repetitions. He adjusts register in a couple of situations.

The first is when he gives a public speech during the meeting with his neighbors, and the second is during his nonsensical monologue on finance and economics as he tries to avoid the temptation of having sex with Jessica. In both cases is evident that register does not fit to his usual manner of speaking, and such a contrast creates a hilarious comedic effect.

Dislocated sentences	Sentences with unmarked word order
17 (59%)	12 (41%)

Table 40: Percentage distribution of dislocated sentences and sentences with unmarked order

Table 40 shows a percentage of dislocated sentences lower than the one in the previous film, but they are heavily concentrated in the lines of one character, Loris. The sentences with unmarked word order are shared by Jessica and the psychiatrist, who both prove to be very careful speakers.

5.3.6. *Vacanze di Natale '95*

Characters→	Remo	Lorenzo	Marta	Others
Features↓				
Cleft			1	1
Dislocation	left: 2	left: 2		
	right: 4	right: 2	right: 1	right: 3

Table 41: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters

We see from the data in Table 41 that there are not significant deviations from the standard and that there are not relevant differences from one character's speech to another's. The comedic effects of the language are not triggered by the way sentences are structured, but rather by use of the lexicon or pronunciation. Overall, the humor of the film primarily relies on situations more than on language.

The syntax is very standardized from speaker to speaker, and it conveys an unlikely homogeneity among the characters. The total absence of hanging topics, reformulations, and interruptions shows an unrealistic reproduction of everyday language. Since the film is set in Colorado, there are numerous American characters played by American actors and dubbed in Italian (e.g. Luke Perry dubbed by Francesco Prando). For this reason the chances of finding deviation from the standard are poor, as Table 41 reports. Table 42 reveals the low percentage of dislocated sentences, suggesting the film's poor adherence to actual spoken language.

Dislocated sentences	Sentences with unmarked word order
14 (56%)	11 (44%)

Table 42: Percentage distribution of dislocated sentences and sentences with unmarked order

5.3.7. Christmas in love

Characters→ Features↓	Fabrizio	Guido	Lisa	Concetta	Sofia	Monica	Others
<i>C'è presentativo</i>			1				
Cleft		1		2			
Dislocation	left: 1	left: 3		left: 1		left: 1	left: 1
		right: 2	right: 1	right: 1	right: 1	right: 1	right: 5
Hanging topics		1					

Table 43: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters

The syntax in the dialogues is more influenced by the situations in which the characters find themselves, rather than by their differing social classes and conditions, which are all fairly homogeneous. The situations instead, and therefore the register, change for some of the characters throughout the film. We found, in fact, cases of high formality, such as the talk-show at the beginning when Fabrizio fights with his ex-wife Lisa, and highly informal situations such as the numerous conversations between Guido and his daughter Monica, or between Guido and his wife. The syntax of Fabrizio and Lisa is very close to the standard, and is less variable with respect to the other characters. Such choice is probably due to the intention of the screenwriters to match a standard variety with characters with a high professional status. Fabrizio and Lisa are in fact both plastic surgeons, and they maintain a formal syntax throughout the film, resulting in very artificial and theatrical speech. So do their respective partners, in whose speech no deviation from the standard syntax is found. The only character who uses 3 of the 4 features screened is Guido, the classic portrait of a Northern businessman, whose speech exemplifies this association that D'Achille reports (2010: 34): 'In Italia è stato notato che

ha riflessi linguistici più il livello d'istruzione che non il reddito'.²⁹ The character, Guido, in fact, despite his good economic status, shows a high number of *neo-standard* traits when compared with the other characters. Table 44 summarizes the occurrences of dislocations versus standard order declaratives:

Dislocated sentences	Sentences with unmarked word order
18 (60%)	12 (40%)

Table 44: Percentage distribution of dislocated sentences and sentences with unmarked order

5.3.8. *Tre uomini e una gamba*

Characters→	Aldo	Giovanni	Giacomo	Chiara	Father in law	Others
Features↓						
Cleft	5	5	2			2
Dislocation	left: 1	left: 2	left: 1	left: 2	left: 1	left: 2
	right: 3	right: 1	right: 3	right: 2	right: 1	
Hanging topics		2	2			1

Table 45: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters

The humor of the film relies on the interactions of three close friends, Aldo, Giovanni, and Giacomo, and on their attitude toward life: a mix of irony and disenchantment. The syntax is colloquial and linear, it makes little use of subordination, and with a regular use of the main *neo-standard* traits. Even the only female character uses about the same amount of dislocated sentences of the main male characters.

²⁹. 'In Italy has been noticed that the level of education affects linguistic behavior more than the economic condition does' (My translation).

The abundant usage of cleft sentences is a further demonstration of the informality of Aldo, Giovanni, and Giacomo's language, but at the same time is a proof that they perfectly embody an average speaker of the *neo-standard* variety.

Another element that makes the syntax of the film a plausible reproduction is the way in which the three main characters manage the textuality of spoken language. Their conversations are full of reformulations, repetitions and interruptions, which suggests an element of spontaneity in their personality. An example, from the episode of the car accident with Chiara is given in (12), where Giovanni is furious because of the damage that the girl caused:

- (12) *...ma porca puttana...va va...ero fermo...ero fermo...vabbè, lasciamo perdere*
'Holy shit...I stopped...I stopped...ok, let's move on'.

In other cases, such as the unsuccessful attempt by Giovanni at explaining their job (they are clerks in a hardware store) in a sophisticated way, the uncertain and broken syntax of his discourse makes for a comedic effect and shows Giovanni's lack of malice and his inadequacy at pretending:

- (13) *...cioè, creiamo dei supporti che poi serviranno per progettare delle grosse situazioni...non so, strumenti di precisione per una svolta magari futura, anche della meccanica...eh?...non so se mi spiego...*
'...that is, we create supports to build, in the future, important situations...I don't know...tools for a future change, also of the mechanics...did I make myself clear?

In Table 46 we see the difference in the use of dislocation and standard declaratives:

Dislocated sentences	Sentences with unmarked word order
19 (58%)	14 (42%)

Table 46: Percentage distribution of dislocated sentences and sentences with unmarked order

Given the general informality and the abundance of *neo-standard* traits in the film, we would have expected a more significant gap due to a lower frequency of clauses with unmarked order.

5.3.9. *Chiedimi se sono felice*

Characters→ Features↓	Aldo	Giovanni	Giacomo	Marina	Others
					
Cleft	2	1	5		2
Dislocation	left: 4	left: 3	left: 1		
	right: 5	right: 1	right: 5		right: 1
Hanging topics				2	

Table 47: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters

The three main characters use fairly regularly a *neo-standard* syntax, with cleft sentences, and both types of dislocation. Aldo is the speaker who uses most dislocations. It is unlikely due to the fact that, among the three, he is the least educated, and therefore a speaker who would likely employ abundant colloquial forms. The secondary characters are not linguistically relevant, as they do not show *neo-standard* traits.

The high percentage of sentences (50%) with unmarked order is due to the several situations in which a more formal language is appropriate. These are, for examples, the interviews with the candidate actresses for the role of Rossana or the several lines of voiceover delivered by Aldo. The variable that triggers the use of a more formal syntax is

therefore one related to different communicative situations, and not a variable that depends on the social class or social condition of a given speaker.

The frequent unplanned syntax is due to the many colloquial situations involving Aldo, Giovanni, and Giacomo, who have a very strong friendship among themselves.

Example (14) shows this syntactic informality and uncertainty in one of Giovanni's lines. When he finds out that Marina came to talk to him and he was not there, he expresses his disappointment by saying:

(14) ...*cioè io come un deficiente a Francoforte, lei al grande magazzino*

'...that is, I (was) in Frankfurt, and she (was) at the mall...'

The traits typical of colloquial syntax are: the clause begins with *cioè* 'that is', a verbal form (to be) is missing, and the term *deficiente* belongs to a very informal register.

Dislocated sentences	Sentences with unmarked word order
19 (50%)	19 (50%)

Table 48: Percentage distribution of dislocated sentences and sentences with unmarked order

The results that we see in Table 48 are somewhat exceptional with regards to both the other films and also to the accounts in the literature that propose dislocated sentences as having achieved the almost acquired status of unmarked structure (Frascarella 2003; D'Achille 2010; Berruto 2012).

5.3.10. *Benvenuti al sud*

Characters→	Alberto	Silvia	Mattia	Maria	Cost. p.	Cost. g.	Others
Features↓							
<i>C'è presentativo</i>							1
Cleft	7	1		2			
Dislocation	left: 3 right: 3	left: 1 right: 1	left: 4 right: 3		left: 1 right: 1	left: 1 right: 1	right: 2
Hanging topics	1	1					

Table 49: Distribution of the features as used by the main characters

From the very beginning, the film establishes a clear contraposition among the sociolinguistic roles of the characters. Alberto is a post office director who belongs to the *milanese* middle-class and when he is sent to the South he will deal with people of lower professional condition and probably with a lower level of education. Also, there is the conflict due to the geographic difference, which we saw being emphasized especially at the phonological level.

The expected gap between the syntax of Alberto's speech and the other characters' is contradicted by the data. The number of dislocated sentences in Alberto's lines is the same as in Mattia's lines (the other main character, who has about the same amount of total spoken lines as Alberto). Dislocation is confirmed to be a feature that depends primarily on the situation, and less on other variables. The character of Alberto, in fact, who is seemingly a more careful speaker, adapts his syntax to the informal situations he has to face. The issue of adapting to a different lifestyle and interacting with new people is precisely a leitmotif of the film, and Alberto's speech follows this process.

Clefting, a very common structure in informal language, is used 7 times by Alberto, whereas it is scarce in the rest of the characters' lines. This is a further example of how a syntactic *neo-standard* trait does not distinguish one speaker from another on the basis of the same criteria as other linguistic features and levels. Syntactic variation relies more on contexts and situations, and less on social class, professional condition, gender, and level of education. Table 50 confirms the characters' preference for a marked structure of sentences, even though the canonical order clauses still have a fairly high rate of occurrence:

Dislocated sentences	Sentences with unmarked word order
21 (54%)	18 (46%)

Table 50: Percentage distribution of dislocated sentences and sentences with unmarked order

5.4. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In Carlo Verdone films we notice a progressive use of the standard syntactic structures, which, in the latest film, follow the unmarked order in 56% of the cases. Conversely, the presence of regionalisms is very strong, especially at the phonological and morphological levels. This is true for the couple Ivano and Jessica in *Viaggi di nozze* and Moreno and Enza in *Grande, grosso e Verdone*. The four are a perfect example of the attempt to obtain the consensus of the public by elaborating an exasperated version of regional traits. There is an evident contrast between linguistic levels. Whereas phonology and morphology show deviations from the standard, syntax is very linear and does not reflect, especially in the latest film, the typical structures of common, spoken language.

In the *cinepanettoni* *Vacanze di Natale '95* and *Christmas in love*, the representation of the Italian petty bourgeoisie relies, in part, on an almost flawless syntax,

the artificiality of which reflects the hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie's behaviors. That is, the bourgeoisie is characterized, as a social class, as placing great importance on money, as having strong prejudices against diversity (e.g. homosexuality), and, at the same time, as trying to appear respectable to the community. By having the characters use a proper and careful syntax in most situations, screenwriters apply an artificial use of the language to a social subject who has an artificial behavior. Popular cinema may, in some cases, favor the formality of dialogues, as F. Rossi (2002: 170) argues. The level of education is the crucial variable that raises the linguistic level in the latter film, where there are four characters: Fabrizio, Lisa, and their respective partners, who each have a university degree. In fact, the standard language is concentrated in their lines. This aspect of higher standardization with respect to the former film, *Vacanze di Natale '95*, confirms the data from the morphology session (Chapter 4, Table 24).

The two films of Roberto Benigni display overall the same syntactic characteristics. This is in part a consequence of a similar conception of the main character, who is very eccentric and is completely different with respect to the other characters. In both films Roberto Benigni creates a narrative mechanism according to which he is a centripetal point of reference for the rest of the characters, and therefore his language has to be somewhat peculiar. This peculiarity consists, in part, of a very realistic and colloquial syntax, which ironically portrays him as the classic common man who is trapped by his mediocrity. However, upon closer analysis, it seems that, by emphasizing the linguistic gap with the others, Roberto Benigni makes fun of the formality of linguistic behaviors imposed by society and that, in a provocative way, he challenges linguistic order and rationality.

When we compare the latter film of Aldo, Giovanni & Giacomo to the former, we notice not only the same occurrences of dislocations, but also more standard-order

sentences. This difference is due to an increased number of formal situations rather than to an intent of the authors to reproduce a higher standardization of the language.

There is a wider distribution of *neo-standard* features in the main and secondary characters' speech in *Tre uomini e una gamba* than in *Chiedimi se sono felice*. The former film shows in fact a higher diversification, with different linguistic contexts (e.g. the hospital, the police headquarter, informal situations), with several regional varieties involved (i.e. Giacomo and Giovanni=Northern, Aldo=Southern, Eros= *romanesco*), and even an example of Italian spoken by a foreigner (i.e. the architect from Morocco). *Chiedimi se sono felice* is instead more uniform, and mainly devoted to emphasizing the differences between the three protagonists' speech. A last remark is that syntax conveys the very particular humor of Aldo, Giovanni and Giacomo, which is a humor based on nonsensical dialogues and on the mockery of the typical conventions used in daily communication.

5.5. CONCLUSIONS

From the discussion on syntactic features, I conclude that syntactic deviations from the standard are quantitatively less relevant than the deviations existing at the levels analyzed in the previous chapters. Such results reflect the fact that the level of syntax is subject to a lower degree of variation, both diachronic and synchronic. The variation is also scarcely influenced by the variables of social class, geographic origins, social condition, age, and sex of the characters. The level of education, instead, is a variable that determines a more careful syntax. Overall, the characters who reproduce a flawless syntax appear to be fairly artificial. If compared to the other linguistic levels, regionalism is not conveyed by syntax as it is by phonology or morphology. *Neo-standard* syntactic traits are, in fact, used indiscriminately by all types of speaker.

The feature of the dislocation (both left and right) is used on a regular basis, as it prevails in almost all the films. It is a trait that is shared by different types of characters, and therefore goes beyond differences due to social class, level of education, and geographic origins. Its widespread and indiscriminate distribution reflects the advanced stage of its acceptance in everyday speech.

The peculiarities of spoken language (i.e. reformulations, repetitions, and interruptions) are present in some films (i.e. Roberto Benigni's, Aldo, Giovanni & Giacomo's), and totally absent in others (i.e. the two *cinepanettoni*, *Benvenuti al sud*, *Grande, grosso e Verdone*). Such irregular distribution attests to the difficulty of reproducing, in a pre-organized text, the most typical traits of spontaneous language.

6. Lexicon

6.1. INTRODUCTION

According to Dardano (1993: 291) ‘Le vicende politiche, economiche, sociali e culturali sono riflesse in modo più o meno diretto nel lessico’.³⁰ Cinema inevitably takes inspiration from the words that people use every day in order to be accessible and comprehensible, and in order to simplify the complexity of reality. To do so, cinema seeks to talk the same way people do. This is one of the approaches that Raffaelli (1983: 48) proposes in studying the language of cinema; that is considering it as an extension of common language. Inspired by these considerations, this chapter explores not only the different types of lexicon used by the main characters of the ten films, but also the circumstances and variables (e.g. age, gender, social condition, etc.) that trigger its usage. A further and more specific objective is to verify whether the lexical items found in the dialogues reflect some of the dynamics of contemporary society, such as, for example, the influence of mass-media on the way people speak, or the political changes that Italy is undergoing.

The observations in this chapter are integrated into the general discussion in Chapter 8, where the current accounts on contemporary Italian are compared with the data I summarized and commented upon Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

I comment on the presence of obscene language and cursing, borrowings, and regional terms in the individual films. Section 6.2. is dedicated to the description of the lexical features found in the movies. Section 6.3 follows with the analysis of the

³⁰. ‘Political, economic, social, and cultural events are reflected, more or less directly, in the lexicon’ (My translation).

individual films. In Section 6.4. I summarize the findings by grouping together the films of the same director as has been done in the previous chapters.

6.2. FEATURES

6.2.1 Borrowings

A borrowing is a word that is taken from a foreign language and becomes stable part of the lexicon. Some examples of borrowings in Italian are: *mouse* ‘tool to move the cursor on a pc screen’, *perestrojka* ‘a series of reforms carried out by the Russian premier Mikhail Gorbaciov at the end of the 80’s’ (from Russian), *kebab* ‘skewed lamb, or chicken meat’ (from Turkish). The literature on borrowings is vast, therefore I only list a few works. For a general and exhaustive introduction to the process of borrowing, the reader is referred to Dardano (1993), who offers a detailed analysis also corroborated by observations on the potential responsibility of governments in favoring the diffusion of foreign words. Such political interpretation of the issue is reiterated in a recent work by the same author (Dardano and Frenguelli 2008). Beccaria’s monograph on contemporary Italian (1992) suggests a structural change in the process of borrowing with respect to the past, by pointing out that borrowings, especially English ones, are spread among different kinds of speakers, including poorly-educated speakers. Berruto (2012) contributes to the discussion by arguing that although borrowings, English ones in particular, reach a significant frequency in common usage, they are far from being a threat to the structure of the receiving language. The idea that the influence of borrowings on contemporary Italian is not threatening for the structure of the language is shared by a majority of scholars. Mention also ought be made of the only scholar, Arrigo Castellani, who has thus far expressed any sort of concern for the large number of English borrowings in

contemporary Italian. Castellani (1987) firmly sustains the adaption of foreign terms, by arguing that the identity of the language has to be maintained particularly from a phonetic viewpoint. Lastly, for a specific account on the translation of English words, see Gualdo and Giovanardi (2003).

In my analysis I look at how foreign words are used and by which characters, the possible prevalence of a particular semantic field whence the borrowings come, and the function that the foreign word has.

6.2.2. Obscene language and curse words

Following the definition of F. Rossi (2011), I include in this category words referring to sex, such as *scopare* ‘to have sex’; curse words *strictu sensu*, such as *porca puttana!* ‘shit!’ and, highly colloquial expressions, such as *vaffanculo* ‘fuck you!’.

The usage of obscene language and cursing has increased in the recent decades, spreading among younger generations, but also among speakers with high social and professional status. This phenomenon is addressed by Simone (1980) in an interesting essay that explores how people, at the end of the 1970s, are re-considering their sense of privacy and how this feeling affects their language. Serianni (1986b), and Berruto (2012) elaborate further, with an exclusively linguistic approach, on this increased freedom manifest by using obscene language. They agree on the fact that there has also been a slight diminution of the markedness of some curse words, precisely due to their increased usage. A further consequence is the loss of obscene and vulgar meaning of these terms in some pragmatic uses such as exclamations (e.g. *merda!* ‘shit!’) or interrogative sentences (e.g. *che cazzo vuoi?* ‘What the fuck do you want?’). Galli de’ Paratesi (1969) explores the subconscious reasons that are behind this mental mechanism. She suggests that the reaction to the social stigmatization of sex and scatological language causes a recycling

of that very language after depriving it of its original semantic value. Along this line is Radtke (1993), who also touches on the influence that juvenile language has in the spread of curse words.

The major concern of my analysis is to look at which variables trigger the use of *turpiloquio* ‘profanity’ and whether it is possible to comment on its function.

6.2.3. Regional terms

Examples of the interference of regional varieties in standard and *neo-standard* Italian speakers have been given and discussed in the chapter dedicated to phonology. Such interference is also extremely productive at the level of lexicon where, as Telmon points out (1993: 101), there is a bidirectional exchange of words, from standard vocabulary to regional and vice versa. What I focus on, is just one direction of this exchange, that is the use of regional terms by speakers of *neo-standard*. Examples such as *pomiciare* (*romanesco*) ‘to make out’, *pirla* (*milanese*) ‘dumb, stupid’, *schiettare* (*napoletano*) ‘to die’, are regional words with a strong expressive connotation that are employed for comedic effects and whose meaning, at the same time, is known even by speakers from different regions.

There are, on the other hand, regional terms that have entered the vocabulary of common language and that have almost completely integrated themselves into the standard variety, as they are widespread in most geographical areas. Lorenzetti (2002: 41) and Dardano and Frenguelli (2008: 22) give valid examples of this acquisition, showing also the different degree of integration involving different words. In fact there are terms that are perceived as completely standard like *intrallazzo* ‘intrigue’ (Sicilian), *amarcord* ‘nostalgic memory’ (*romagnolo*) (Dardano and Frenguelli 2008: 22), and others such as *inciucio* ‘agreement set behind the scene by two political groups’ (*napoletano*), which are

well integrated in the standard language. I do not consider regionalisms that are a part of the shared, standard vocabulary.

6.3. ANALYSIS OF FILMS

6.3.1. *Bianco rosso e Verdone*

Characters→	Mimmo	grandmother	Furio	Truck-driver
Features↓				
Borrowings	1		3	
Obscene language		4		2
Regionalisms	2	2		4

Table 51: Distribution of the lexicon

The film's feeling of creativity and diversification is primarily generated by the gap between Furio's lexicon and the words used by the other characters. Furio uses a very formal register, regardless of the situation in which he is involved. His vocabulary is then very precise and he never chooses the words randomly. In one of the first scenes of the film, before leaving for Rome with his family, he calls the Italian equivalent of AAA³¹ to find out about the weather, and the lexicon he uses has a very strong bureaucratic feel. Some examples are *recare* instead of *andare* 'to go', *delucidazione* instead of *chiarimento* 'clarification', *aria depressionaria* instead of *calo di pressione atmosferica* 'atmospheric pressure drop'. In so doing, he adapts his language to the interlocutor who, as a white collar worker, is supposed to speak the language of bureaucracy. However, even in informal contexts, Furio never abandons his linguistic aplomb. His creativity in this

³¹. American Automobile Association.

dedication to a more formal register is manifest as he replaces bad words with more sober expressions. One example is when he uses the expression *porco giudaccio infame* 'Damned you, Judas infamous!', which is more controlled than other potential equivalents. This is the expression that he uses when he finds out on the highway that the car has a flat tire. The exasperated use of formal lexicon helps isolate the character of Furio, who is already in a condition of alienation because of his pedantic and paranoiac behaviors.

The rest of the characters use a colloquial vocabulary. Only the grandmother and the truck-driver employ, from time to time, obscene language and coarse language that strongly characterize their *romanità*. Some of their expressions, in fact, embody the peculiar expressivity of *romanesco* and have often been used by cinema to convey a humor characteristic of Roman speakers. Some examples from the truck-driver's and the grandmother's lines are *li mortacchi tua* 'go to hell! (invective addressed to somebody's dear ones), *chiappa* 'butt', *cornuto* 'cuckold', and *rompicojoni* 'extremely annoying person'. Verdone does not overindulge with the use of obscene language; rather, he employs it in selected moments, where vulgarity succeeds better than formality in yielding comedic effects. The term *sorca*, a very vulgar word for 'vagina', used by the grandmother to make fun of Mimmo in front of the soldier in one of the last scenes is a case in point. The use of colloquial and obscene language marks a clean sociolinguistic distinction between the exponents of petty bourgeoisie and the rest of the characters. In fact, Furio and Magda, do not use it, whereas several examples are found in the other characters' speech. The variable triggering obscene language seems to be the speaker's social status.

The character of Mimmo shows a pronounced naiveté both in his personality as well as in his lexicon, which is full of regional words and colloquial exclamations: *non*

so' bono 'I am not able', *mannaggia* 'damn'. However, he remains one of the most significant and remembered characters, because an expression that he keeps repeating throughout the film, *in che senso?* 'in what sense?', will become part of the collective imagination and will always be associated to his character.

A last remark concerns the scarce presence of borrowings. Three of them are in Furio's lines, and all are English words of very common use, *puzzle*, *termos*, *sandwich*, which do not have an Italian equivalent. Another one is the Latin word *curriculum*, completely integrated in the daily vocabulary, but, nonetheless mispronounced by Mimmo: *curricùlum* instead of *curriculum*.

6.3.2. *Viaggi di nozze*

Characters→ Features↓	Raniero	Ivano	Jessica	Giovannino	Valeriana	Fosca	Others
Borrowings	2	1		1			
Obscene language		3	1	6	1	1	1
Regionalisms		4	2	2			1

Table 52: Distribution of the lexicon

Three different types of social condition are portrayed in this movie and the linguistic differences among them are, in general, fairly clear. At the level of lexicon, as Table 52 illustrates, bad words represent a feature that is shared by the middle class (Giovannino and Valeriana, the couple on the cruise) and by the couple Ivano and Jessica, who belong to a lower social condition. However, for the former, vulgar vocabulary is a sort of reaction to stressful situations when there is a problem to be solved; in other words, it is not a consistent linguistic habit but is instigated by

exceptional events. For Ivano and Jessica, instead, bad words are a component of their regular speech. Sometimes they are even employed as a term of endearment, as in the case of the word *stronzi* ‘assholes’, that the couple intends to write on a postcard addressed to some friends.

The characteristic of the lexicon that is generally emphasized in the film, and in particular in Ivano and Jessica’s speech, is the lack of specificity and the overgeneralization. Every time they have to describe a new feeling, or an attitude toward a new situation, the only adjective they can come up with is *strano* ‘strange’. The following example shows the use of this adjective:

(1) *‘O famo strano?*

‘Shall we make it strange? Why don’t we make love in an unusual way?’

The above expression, that the couple uses to propose new sexual fantasies to each other, has become a sort of trademark for the characters of Ivano and Jessica, and has also been successful in common language (P. Trifone 2007: 131; Setti 2010: 120).

The vocabulary of Raniero gives variety and diversification to the lexicon of the film. In fact, besides his accurate selection of words in daily life conversations, being a doctor he displays a large use of technical terms, as he speaks with his patients on the phone and, in a couple of situations, with his colleagues. The scenes of the conversations with the other doctors make explicit the contrast that exists between their lexicon and that of the rest of the characters. At the same time, the director makes an ironic critique of the technical language, in this case the language of medicine, and particularly of its obscurity. The jargon that Raniero uses with his patients, along with the extremely formal terms and expressions that he employs when he talks to his wife push the grotesque representation of his character so far that it is impossible to take him seriously. Therefore,

he becomes a caricature and confirms what was already evident in the previous film: that highly formal vocabulary is an easy target for mockery and a valid source for humor.

Only three borrowings are found in this movie: *charter*, *performance*, and *flûte*, used by Giovannino, Raniero, and Ivano, respectively. Raniero uses the word *performance* to refer to the sexual intercourse he is about to have with his wife Fosca, showing his detachment and lack of romanticism by exclusively considering the physical aspect of making love. Ivano, not well educated and definitely not at ease with foreign languages, is brave enough to order *due flûtes de champagne* ‘two glasses of champagne’ at the restaurant, using the right term for that particular type of glass (i.e. a tall and narrow glass specifically used for champagne). However, as expected, his pronunciation is completely wrong.

The characters who employ regionalisms are Ivano, Jessica, and Giovannino. Some of them, as we saw for the expression ‘*o famo strano?*’, have become part of common language, especially in the speech of young people. The term *rosicare* ‘to resent’, used by Ivano, is a case in point. This regionalism is in fact reported by D’Achille and Giovanardi (2001: 86) to have regularly entered Italian vocabulary. The inclusion of Roman regionalisms in everyday language is, in my opinion, a clue of the power of cinema to influence linguistic habits. Particularly, it shows how the privileged position of the city of Rome in postwar cinema has accelerated the increasing importance of *romanesco* (Napolitano 1997: 166).

6.3.3. *Grande grosso e Verdone*

Characters→	Leo	Employ.	Call.	Moreno	Enza	Steven	Sev.	Others
Features↓								
Borrowings		1		4	2			
Obscene language			2	1		5	2	1
Regional.	2	2		5	1	2		1

Table 53: Distribution of the lexicon

Similar to what we saw in *Viaggi di nozze*, the lexicon in this film reflects the repartition of the characters in three distinct types of speakers with different social status and education. Leo and Tecla are the middle-class couple that uses a very regular vocabulary, with no obscene language nor regionalisms. Then there is the art history professor, Callisto, who employs an elevated and accurate lexicon. Finally, the family in the last episode, Moreno, Enza, and Steven are characterized as being very unrefined speakers.

It is likely that the social status and the religious orientation of the characters in the first episode (Leo and Tecla) determine their sober choice of words and total refusal of vulgar or obscene language. Leo, for example, uses the euphemism *porca miseria* ‘damn’, when he finds out about his mother’s death, showing an ability to control his verbal reaction. As already mentioned above in Section 6.2., several scholars (e.g. Serianni 1986; Berruto 2012) argue that the use of cursing has increased in the past decades and has spread to both high and low social classes, as well as to both formal and informal registers. This finding contrasts with Leo’s linguistic behavior; he and his wife, in fact, seem to be immune to the use of obscene language.

The same innocent expression that Leo uses, *porca miseria*, is pronounced in the second episode also by Callisto when he realizes that he got lost in the catacomb. Callisto is the target of a fierce mockery by the director, who portrays him as a despotic and hypocritical person. His vocabulary is very formal, careful, and obsessively polished, even in licentious situations, such as the encounter with a prostitute where he does not use a single vulgar expression nor any hint of sexual connotation in his language.

With regards to the use of curse words in the film, age seems to be a crucial variable. Callisto's son, Severiano, regularly curses against his father when he is not present. In the last episode Steven, Moreno and Enza's son, expresses his exuberance with vulgarities and imprecations.

Most borrowings are concentrated in the last episode. Moreno and Enza show off their good economic condition and demonstrate a keen devotion to appearances. One of their obsessions are cell phones and, as a result, they demonstrate this obsession by their regular and confident use of foreign words and expressions related to the semantic field of technology: *t-9*, *bluetooth*, *software*, *water resistant*. However, with different topics, the couple's difficulty in managing foreign languages becomes evident. Such is the case of Moreno, while at the restaurant, does not know the meaning of the word *sommelier*, and Enza thinks it is an English borrowing, not a French one:

(2) *Cameriere: 'Vi mando subito il **sommelier**'.*

Moreno: 'Chi?'

Enza: '..è per i vini... Due parole di inglese te le potresti pure imparare'!

*Waiter: 'I'll send you the **sommelier**'.*

Moreno: 'Who?'

Enza: 'It's for the wines... Why don't you learn a few words in English?!?!'.

While this sarcasm on the borrowings yields a rather effective comedic outcome, it also causes the viewer to reflect on the poor familiarity of Italians with foreign languages, an issue at which Verdone hints in his previous films.

The use of regionalisms has, in my opinion, a different function in the first episode compared to the last (in the second episode no regional words are found). In the first episode, the funeral home employee speaks a very colloquial language and uses idioms and dialectal words such as *sta pe' stira' i zoccoli* 'he is about to kick the bucket', and the contrast of such informality with the context of his job obviously aims at creating humorous and funny reactions. The use of regionalism, therefore, has an expressive function rather than an anthropological one; that is, a function that aims to provoke laughter instead of presenting an accurate portrayal of a person's speech stereotypes associated with geographic origin. In the episode of Moreno and Enza, on the other hand, the dialectal lexicon serves to define the daily habits of the characters, to contextualize their social condition and, eventually, to profile them as a particular type of person: the person who has achieved economic success but whose speech is very poor. The use of regionalism in this case functions precisely as a realistic account of Moreno and Enza's limited vocabulary and not as directly as a tool of humor. What causes the comedic effect, in fact, is not their regional lexicon but their attempt to break that normality, which happens in a few circumstances. In one of them, for example, Moreno uses the euphemistic term *fondoschiene* 'bottom', and its elegance is obviously in direct contrast with his linguistic clumsiness.

6.3.4. *Il piccolo diavolo*


Characters→	Giuditta	Others
Features↓		
Borrowings		3
Obscene language	4	
Regionalisms		1

Table 54: Distribution of the lexicon

A peculiarity of the language of *Il piccolo diavolo* is the general lack of vulgarity, particularly in the lexicon, which, despite the many conversations and situations that involve sex, is often allusive, but never explicit.

The little devil Giuditta (Roberto Benigni) maintains throughout the story a childish behavior, including the selection of a vocabulary that avoids obscene language and cursing. The 4 cases of vulgarity found in his lines are very innocent terms: *palle* ‘balls’ (3 times), *culetto* ‘little bum’. Since Giuditta is a devil who has just arrived on earth straight from Hell, his attitude toward life is one of continuous discovery. This aspect affects his language and, in particular, his vocabulary. In fact, he is ignorant of many of the common terms one would use to designate much of what he sees. For example, when he falls in love with Nina, he asks a guy in the hall of a hotel about her using the expression:

(3) *Che **marca** di donna è?*

‘What **brand** of woman is that?’

The use of the word *marca* ‘brand’ shows a complete inability to distinguish semantic fields and reveals a total sexual unawareness. In addition, Giuditta confirms the

adherence to a strictly spoken style of language that was evident at the level of syntax (see Chapter 5). He demonstrates semantic overgeneralization by using, for example, the word *cosa* ‘thing’ even to refer to female genitalia.³²

The only borrowings are found in the scene at the casino, and are all French formulas and expressions related to gambling: *rien va plus* ‘no more bets’, *les jeux sont faits* ‘the dice is cast’, and *cent douze millions* ‘one hundred and twelve millions’. One regionalism is also used in the film: *balla* ‘(a) lie’.

6.3.5. *Il mostro*

Characters→	Loris	psychiatrist	detective	Others
Features↓				
Borrowings	1	1		
Obscene language	2		3	1
Regionalisms	1			

Table 55: Distribution of the lexicon

The lexicon of this film is heterogeneous because it includes some characters who employ technical language, others who use a basic vocabulary, and the protagonist, Loris (Roberto Benigni), who is able to change register in some situations. The occurrences of curse words are not numerous; they are concentrated in Loris’ speech and are all instigated by unexpected events, such as the expression *porca puttana* ‘holy shit!; shit!’, during the struggle with a chainsaw that he cannot get to turn off in front of a terrified woman. Obscene language is also very rare and this seems to be paradoxical, given that this is a film about a sex maniac. However, the general lack of obscene language is

³². See D’Achille (2010: 204) for the semantic overgeneralization as a peculiarity of spoken language.

compensated by the psychiatrist who talks about the killer's behavior using metaphors and elegant adjectives like *ape vogliosa* 'lustful bee' and *lascivo* 'licentious'.

The character of the psychiatrist uses a highly technical jargon, which prevents everybody from understanding him and creates distance between him and the other characters. He keeps making hypothesis on Loris's behaviors, totally convinced that he is the real serial killer. Some of the words found in the psychiatrist's analysis are *apatia catartica* 'cathartic apathy', *scintigrafia* 'total body scan', *checkup neuro-somatico* 'neuro-somatic checkup'; the fact that he uses them no matter who the interlocutor is, is suggestive of his professional delirium. Furthermore, the fact that the object of his attention is the wrong man incites skeptical feelings toward the efficacy of psychoanalysis, through a sort of parody of the jargon. The monologues on economic issues that Loris holds in order to reject the temptation of having an affair with Jessica have to be looked at with the same ironical interpretation. Jessica, the undercover cop who shares the apartment with Loris, keeps provoking him to verify whether he is the real maniac and he reacts by talking about interest rates, foreign currency, and the Bundersbank using an accurate lexicon but in a totally incoherent and nonsensical way. Again, as in the case of the psychiatrist, the obscurity of technical language is emphasized and mocked. There is another occasion in which Loris shows his ability to switch from a basic to a more formal and varied vocabulary: the meeting with his neighbors where he proposes himself to occupy the position of new administrator of the building. In this case he displays some of the typical techniques of political speech,³³ such as euphemisms (*appropriarsi* 'take possession of' instead of *rubare* 'steal'), exaggeration (*stimati, amatissimi colleghi* 'esteemed, beloved colleagues'), and use of

³³. For the features of political speech I refer to Sobrero (1993).

formal synonyms (*denominato* ‘denominated’ instead of *chiamato* ‘called’). Such drastic change in his language makes his personality to appear stronger and more complex compared to the naïveté of his usual behaviors. The entire episode of the speech at the meeting is a parody of the rhetoric of politicians and of their fake modesty.

There are few cases of borrowings in this movie, all of them of very common usage (i.e. *check-up*, *chewing-gum*, *import-export*). Regionalisms are also sporadic, due to the fact that all the characters, except Loris, speak a language very close to the standard.

6.3.6. *Vacanze di Natale '95*



Characters→ Features↓	Remo 	Lorenzo 	Marta 	Kelly 	Paolone 	others
Borrowings	1	2			1	
Obscene language	9	5		1		1
Regionalisms		2	4		3	2

Table 56: Distribution of the lexicon

Numerous instances of obscene language and cursing characterize the many licentious and grotesque situations of this film. Frequently, the line that contains vulgarity is delivered at the end of the scene in order to create a sort of comedic climax, which gives a key role to the choice of the lexical item. An example is the scene on the plane where the African young man of Neapolitan origins replies to Lorenzo (Massimo Boldi) *strunz!* ‘asshole’, thus terminating the conversation abruptly.

In *Vacanze di Natale '95* the obscene language generally applies to two types of circumstance: when characters talk about sex and when the topic of conversation is

homosexuality. The film deals with sex in a traditional perspective, that is, emphasizing the aspect of male domination over women and stressing the most basic components of it. Such an approach is reflected in the use of a very vulgar vocabulary in describing sexual intercourse or female anatomy. Two examples, both taken from Remo's speech are *scopare* 'to make love' and *trombata* 'sexual intercourse'. The same degree of traditionalism and conservatism is shown in the attitude toward homosexuality, which is also repeatedly presented through exaggerated caricatures (see, for example, the gay-club where Lorenzo enters when escaping from the policeman). The word that the heterosexual characters use to address gay people is always *frocio*, the offensive version of *gay*. Lorenzo even grammatically declines the term once he enters in a gay-club, using the pejorative suffixes *-accio* and *-one* (Dardano and Trifone 2007: 540; Serianni 2006: 655): *frociaccio*, *frocionaccio*. The fact that the word *frocio* is used in the film (probably to provoke laughter) brings up the issue of the very questionable taste of the public with regards to popular comedy.

The borrowings found in this film are: *raus*, *airbag*, *jeep*, *ginseng*, *convention*. The word *ginseng* is mispronounced by Paolone who says *ginsenghe* [*dʒin'tʒɛŋge*], following the same pattern of the mispronunciation of *ictus* 'stroke' in *Tre uomini e una gamba* (i.e., adding *-e-* at the end of the word). The word *convention*, which replaces *riunione* in this case exclusively for reasons of prestige, is used by Lorenzo to refer to the encounter with a group of gay people at the night club. The use of this borrowing probably echoes its acquisition by the language of politics in recent decades, when it has begun to indicate precisely a meeting or an assembly of the components of a political party. The German term *raus* 'get out!' is used once by Lorenzo with his daughter Marta and reflects a despotic attitude. It was, in fact, a very common word in the vocabulary of

German Nazis (*Juden raus!*) when they would force Jews to leave their houses in Polish or Czech ghettos to take them to concentration camps.

Regionalisms are few and those used are characterized by weak expressive function; they are mainly Roman and Florentine words, from Remo, Paolone and Marta's lines: *saccoccia* 'pocket', *magara* 'I wish', *bono* 'handsome' (*romanesco*); *poppe* 'boobs', *bischero* 'idiot' (Florentine).

The character of Marta, Lorenzo's daughter, linguistically reproduces the stereotype of a rebellious teenager who challenges the authority and who creates distance from her parents by using a language bordering incomprehensible jargon. Some examples, taken from the conversation that Marta has with her father during the flight to Aspen, are *m'arimbarza* 'it does not interest me', *scrausa* 'mediocre' (both have also a regional origin, *romanesco*).

6.3.7. Christmas in love

Characters↓ Features↓	Fabrizio	Guido	Lisa	Concetta	Monica	Others
						
Borrowings	3		1	5		2
Obscene language	4	2	2		1	1
Regionalisms	4	1				

Table 57: Distribution of the lexicon

The film presents sentimental stories, whose protagonists happen to spend Christmas vacation in the same hotel in Switzerland. The dialogues present many examples of cursing, particularly in the lines of the characters of Fabrizio (Christian De Sica) and Guido (Massimo Boldi). Fabrizio spends most of the time fighting with his ex-

wife, whom he frequently addresses with the word *stronza* ‘bitch’. Guido is worried about his daughter having a relationship with a 50-year-old man and refers to him as a *rompiballe* ‘very annoying person’. The exaggerate reiteration of such vulgar lexicon causes them to blend with the regular language in such a way that the cursing loses some of its expressivity, which expressivity constitutes its primary reason to be used in the first place. Berruto (2012: 93) synthesizes this trend of contemporary Italian lexicon as follows:

È indubbio anzitutto che vi sia stata negli ultimi decenni la larga accettazione nel neo-standard di termini in origine molto marcati socialmente, geograficamente, gergalmente, espressivamente, che hanno perso gran parte della loro marcatezza e vengono comunemente usati anche nel parlato non enfatico né espressivamente motivato.³⁴

An example of the obscene language of Guido is the pun given in (4), which is a famous commercial of the coffee brand *Lavazza*:

(4) *più lo mandi giù e più ti tira sù*

‘the more you push it down, the more it picks you up’ (literal translation)

‘the more (coffee) you drink, the more energy you will have’

Guido uses the expression in a pharmacy to refer to the regenerating effects of Viagra. The humor is triggered by the ambiguous meaning of the verb *tirare sù* ‘to pick up’. This is also a case that shows how the language of television can influence film dialogues, and

³⁴. ‘It is undeniable that in recent decades there has been an increasing acceptance in the *neo-standard* variety of terms that originally were characterized as being slang or that were marked socially or geographically, and that have by now partially lost such characterization. The same terms are often used with no particular emphatic nor expressive purpose’ (My translation).

how it can contribute to a very obvious humor, by using slogans and/or expressions that are widely known.

The vocabulary of the character of Concetta deserves a separate analysis. She is a simple, poorly educated woman who tries to mask her simple speech with standard Italian and with foreign language borrowings. The result is an expressionistic speech consisting of mispronounced foreign words, nonsense structures and dialectal terms. A few examples of her speech are: *acarò* ‘acarus/mite’ instead of *hacker*; *wiskas* (a famous brand of cat-food) instead of *whisky*; *non mi interrompere quando ti ascolto* ‘don’t interrupt me when I listen to you’.

All the regionalisms of the film belong to the semantic field of sex. The majority of them are found in Fabrizio’s lines. Although Fabrizio has a high professional status and demonstrates well his mastery of the standard language, he does not hesitate to employ dialectal terms in formal situations. From such a refined a speaker, in fact, we would expect a lexicon tailored on the listener and, in particular, a formal lexicon with people that he does not know. However, Fabrizio makes use of regional terms in several occasions. A perfect example is his request to the piano-player in the hall of the hotel to dedicate a song to his wife and his ex-wife’s new husband (the regional lexicon is in bold):

(5) *Aho, ce l’hai ‘na cosa che come la senti te **scappa da pomicia**’?*

‘Hey, do you have a song that, as soon as people hear it, makes them want to make out?’

The borrowings are all well integrated into common vocabulary, all completely accessible, and all pronounced in the appropriate way (except, as we said, in the case of Concetta). The language of television and in particular the language of soccer

commentaries, inspires Fabrizio's use of the expression *standing ovation* to describe the physical skills of his wife.

6.3.8. *Tre uomini e una gamba*

Characters→	Aldo	Giovanni	Giacomo	Father in law	Others
Features↓					
Borrowings		1		1	
Obscene language	2	3	3	3	1
Regionalisms		5	1		

Table 58: Distribution of the lexicon

The confidential language that Aldo, Giovanni and Giacomo use to talk to each other is justified by the strong friendship that exists among them. The way they address one another frequently with swear words or colloquial expressions is therefore the communicative code that defines their relationship, rather than a device consciously used by the authors with expressive goals. Conversely, the use of curse words that their father-in-law makes is totally different. He is a successful businessman, who allows his sons-in-law to work in his hardware store, but does not have any respect for them. His level of education is low and his manners very unrefined. Vulgarity is therefore a regular and natural component of his speech. The humor is created by the contrast between such vulgarity and the formal situations in which it is sometimes displayed, such as the dinner in the elegant restaurant where he starts yelling, on the phone, with his son-in-law: *m'avete fatto fa' 'na figura de merda!* 'I made a very bad impression because of you!'.

There are two occurrences of foreign words: *hardware* and the Latinism *ictus* 'stroke'. The former is used by Giovanni to describe his job to Marina. Giovanni works

in a hardware store and, to make a good impression on the girl, he employs the English borrowing, mispronouncing it: *hardware* ['aruærə]. The latter is found in one of Eros' phone conversations and, in this case, is also mispronounced as *ictuse* ['iktuse].

The regionalisms are all from *milanese*, where Giovanni, Giacomo, and Marina are from. The term *ciullare* 'to steal' is used twice and it is one of the *milanese* words that even people who are not from Milan would recognize, along with *pirlla* 'idiot', which has one occurrence in the film. The regionalisms are all found in the male characters' lines, which confirms the sociolinguistic principle according to which women tend to use a variety closer to the standard than that which men use (Berruto 1993: 68).

6.3.9. *Chiedimi se sono felice*

Characters→	Aldo	Giovanni	Giacomo	Others
Features				
Borrowings	2			
Obscene language	1	2	2	2
Regionalisms	2	2	1	

Table 59: Distribution of the lexicon

The three main actors play the same types of character as in *Tre uomini e una gamba*, they have the same close relationship, and their speech displays overall the same linguistic features. In *Chiedimi se sono felice* the level of cursing and obscene language is very low and does not have any expressionistic connotation. At least in a couple of occurrences the bad words used by the characters have almost completely lost the

derogatory lexical value and have acquired a pragmatic and emphatic function.³⁵ Both the examples are in Giovanni's lines, and both refer to the fight between him and Giacomo after Giovanni found out that Marina has cheated on him:

- (5) a. *cosa **cazzo** me ne frega cosa avete bevuto*
'I don't give a fuck of what you guys had'
- b. *spegnila quella **merda** di musica*
'Turn off that fuckin' music'

The familiarity with the interlocutor and the situation of tension and hanger are the variables that determine Giovanni's cursing.

The two borrowings found are French in origin, and are both used by Aldo in the same sentence: *noblesse* 'high society' and *savoir faire*.

Most regionalisms are Southern words in Aldo's speech. He employs them to refer to his girlfriend, whom he cannot stand anymore. The term *cozza* 'mussel', is used to describe her oppressive personality and the verb *scaricare* 'to break out with somebody; to abandon somebody' is a sort of leitmotif, since Aldo repeatedly tries to leave her. An example of a Northern term is *sfiga* 'bad luck', found in Giovanni's speech, which is a word of very common usage, especially among teenagers.

³⁵. For this tendency in the contemporary use of obscene language see D'Achille (2010: 205), which is corroborated by Berruto (2012: 102).

6.3.10. *Benvenuti al sud*

Characters→	Alberto	Monica	Mattia	Maria	C. p.	C. g.	Others
Features↓							
Borrowings				1			
Obscene language							2
Regionalisms	1	1	2		1		3

Table 60: Distribution of the lexicon

There are no references to sex in this movie, and obscene language and cursing are almost completely absent. The entire lexicon plays on representing differences among characters that mainly depend on social and geographical variables. The drastic change Alberto has to face, moving from Milan to a small town near Naples, creates conflict as he encounters new habits, new people, and new words. Regionalism is the most peculiar trait of the lexicon of the film, with the predominance of Southern terms, which prove to have elevated, expressive possibilities. An example is given by the speech of one of the main characters, Mattia, during his first encounter with the new director of the post office. In explaining that the former director died, Mattia gives a series of definition of the verb ‘to die’, using difference nuances of formality and expressivity; the first definition is a periphrasis *s’è fatto la cartella* ‘He kicked the bucket’,³⁶ the second is the dialectal term *è schiattato*, and the last is the neutral *è morto*. A gradual level of comprehensibility progresses from the more opaque to the most explicit terminology.

In other circumstances, the usage of regionalism isn’t intended to carry any particular connotation, but rather exclusively realistic purposes. Such is the case with the

³⁶. The translation is not literal, but what I intend to convey is the expressivity and the colloquial aspect of the periphrasis.

verb *tenere* ‘to keep’, which regularly replaces the standard *avere* ‘to have’ when indicating ownership, and it is employed by all the Neapolitan characters. They are not able to adjust the level of their lexicon when speaking with the new director, maintaining a sort of polite informality that defines the social and professional differences between them and Alberto.

The film creates an ironic tension not only between Northern and Southern expressivity, but also between bureaucratic and everyday terms. There are several cases, in fact, in which a complex synonym is preferred to the less sophisticated counterpart. This mechanism definitely provokes a reaction in the viewer who, as a speaker, stigmatizes incomprehensible and bureaucratic language. It is impossible not to notice the lofty expressions such as *flusso discensionale* ‘traffic proceeding from North to South’, used by a traffic officer who pulls over Alberto on his way to Naples; or, in the inaugural discourse of Alberto to his new employees, the terms *criticità* ‘critical points’, or *apporre* ‘to place, to put’, both easily replaceable with the more accessible terms *problemi* ‘problems’ and *mettere* ‘to put’.

Benvenuti al sud explores the influence of several variables (i.e. geographic, social class, and communicative situation) on the lexicon and confirms the higher comedic potentiality of Southern varieties with respect to Northern varieties. Furthermore, it elaborates a humor that mostly relies on vocabulary of common usage, avoiding obscene language and borrowings.

6.4. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Carlo Verdone’s films portray obscene language and curse words in part as a source of humor, but mostly as a regular characteristic of less educated people and teenagers. He also gives the impression, in the evolution from the first to the third film, to

constantly reduce the comedic power of regional lexicon, in order to strengthen its realistic function. Overall, the lexicon of the three films is fairly diverse, including examples of basic as well as more elevated vocabulary. Elaborate vocabulary is the target of a fierce satire, because it is used by completely negative characters (Furio, Raniero, Callisto), who embody the worst features of the petty bourgeoisie such as hypocrisy and close-mindedness. The word *cazzo* ‘penis (vulgar)’ is never used with its original meaning; on the contrary, it is used always as an exclamation, an emphatic filler, or an interrogative pronoun reinforcing the standard interrogative pronouns (*come* ‘how’, *che* ‘what’, *cosa* ‘what’): *Come cazzo se fa* ‘How the fuck do I do it?’ (Ivano in *Viaggi di nozze* while trying to cut a pineapple with a knife). The latest movie *Grande, grosso e Verdone* hints at the issue of the difficulties of communication between young people and their parents. Moreno and Enza’s son, Steven, in the first part of the episode, communicates with them only through gestures. When he eventually starts talking, we see that his idiolect is characterized by course language. Both these attitudes, the silence and the vulgar lexicon, are signs that reflect the feeling of idiosyncrasy and rebellion of teenagers toward the older generation.

In the films analyzed, Roberto Benigni chooses a type of lexicon that does not rely too much on dialect nor on vulgarity, which marks a change with respect to his recent past, as F. Rossi (1999a: 227) has already reported: ‘...la dialettalità dei primi film di Benigni è senz’altro superiore rispetto agli ultimi. Come se il crescente successo di pubblico [...] e di critica avesse prodotto una volontaria sprovincializzazione della lingua’.³⁷

³⁷. ‘...the use of regional dialects in Benigni’s earliest films is higher compared to the latest ones. As if the increasing success of public [...] and criticism had led to a standardization of the language’ (My translation).

The selection of the vocabulary is functional to the character; it serves to define his naïveté in the former film and his extravagance and versatility in the latter. Roberto Benigni does not intend to reproduce the stereotypical lexicon of the average Italian speaker, nor does he intend to base his humor on lexical devices that are canonical in comedy; in fact, in his films cursing and obscene language are relegated to a very minimal role. Benigni, rather, aims at creating a friction, a displacement between the words he uses and the way normal people speak. Such efforts are reflected also in the satire against technical jargon, which, in *Il mostro*, is portrayed as obscure and ineffective.

The two *cinepanettoni* *Vacanze di Natale '95* and *Christmas in love* maintain overall the same attention to a licentious lexicon, but the vulgarity decreases in the latter film. Obscene language and cursing are mainly used for comedic effect, as if breaking the social conventions of clean language would be by itself a valid cause for public laughter. This fact demonstrates the poorly sophisticated humor of both films. As De Mauro (in Napolitano 1997: 174) remarks, the fact that the use of obscene language provokes laughter exclusively for its supposed self-referential comedic power, is due to a deterioration of cultural models. This intuition of De Mauro has not lost its value, as would still apply to current Italy. Homosexuality is also referenced through very vulgar language, which ends up devolving such an important issue into an object of humor. The latter film is less trivial than the former, with vulgar language that seems to have partially lost the expressive tension that it was supposed to have. *Vacanze di Natale '95* also presents an example of generational conflict; the dialogues between Lorenzo and his daughter Marta are characterized by a lexicon to which Lorenzo is not accustomed. Marta, in fact, by using regional words such as *scrausa* 'mediocre', *m'arimbarza* 'it does not interest me' (both Roman), emphasizes the geographical distance with her father (he

is from Milan and she lives in Rome) and also the distance caused by the generational gap.³⁸ The intentional use and/or the recovery of regional lexicon as a reaction to prescriptive language imposed by contexts, such as school or family, is one of the most salient feature of juvenile language according to Radtke (1993: 212). In *Christmas in love* the language is closer to the standard, but at the same time it shows higher diversification, since it includes, besides the several examples of formal speech, technical jargon (from the couple Fabrizio and Lisa, both plastic surgeons) and the absolutely unique idiolect of Concetta. The humor of the *cinepanettoni* partially relies on regional terms, and in *Christmas in love* their usage seems to be more effective and more expressionistic mainly because they are found in unexpected situations (e.g. the use of the word *pomiciare* ‘to make out’ discussed in example 5). A last remark: the latter film, *Christmas in love*, uses terms, formulas, and expressions that are inspired by television. Besides the one I have already illustrated above (i.e. the commercial of the coffee brand *Lavazza*), we find the expression *ce l’abbiamo duro* ‘we are tough people’, which became one of the mottos of the political party *Lega Nord*, and it has become a well known phrase via television since the beginning of the 90’s.³⁹ The expression is used by Guido (Massimo Boldi) referring to his sexual skills. The process of taking inspiration from television, has been recognized as one of the new tendencies of the language of contemporary Italian cinema (Setti 2003).

The lexicon in Aldo, Giovanni, & Giacomo’s films is fairly realistic, in that it reflects rather consistently the actual usage of the social classes represented. Obscene

³⁸. Lorenzetti (1996) gives a convincing example of how regional words can be retrieved by the standard language after having been used by juvenile jargon.

³⁹. The word *celodurista* ‘a person who shares the ideology of *Lega Nord*’, that derives from the expression *ce l’abbiamo duro*, is attested for the first time in a written text in 1993 (Adamo and Della Valle 2003: 240). The literal translation is ‘We have a permanent erection’. I do not have the reference for the first written attestation of the expression *ce l’abbiamo duro*.

language is reduced in the latter film, *Chiedimi se sono felice*. Swearing and obscene language seem to have an expressive function when they are used by the tyrannical father-in-law in *Tre uomini e una gamba*, and by the character of Aldo, who in both films plays the role of the poorly educated and bad-mannered Southerner. This suggests that vulgarity is more effective as an expressive device in the speech of Southerners and Romans, while it seems to be more integrated in the normal lexicon in the usage of Northerners and to have a less comedic potential. The same trend is shown by regionalisms, which are also more relevant than borrowings in conveying comedic and expressive effects. A certain degree of generic terms characterizes both films, which demonstrates one of the main features of spoken language: the fact that the speaker does not plan the discourse and, therefore, uses words that are promptly accessible, at the expenses of semantic and lexical accuracy. Terms such as *roba* ‘stuff’, *casino* ‘complicated situation’ are cases in point.

6.5. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the lexicon reveals that only characters that have a high professional status and a high level of education use a precise and wide range of words (e.g.: the detective and the psychiatrist in *Il mostro*, the art history professor in *Grande, grosso e Verdone*). The elevated economic conditions are not variables that determine accuracy in the lexical choices; Eros in *Tre uomini e una gamba* is one such a speaker: he has a high social and economic condition, but a very scarce mastery of the lexicon.

There is a significant uncertainty in the usage of borrowings. The ineptitude of Italians with foreign languages is a recurrent target of irony. Most borrowings are terms of very common use (e.g. *ictus*, *hardware*, *curriculum*), and are employed by all types of speaker, of different social classes and professional conditions; it seems that there is not a

specific variable that prevents the use of borrowings nor, vice versa, particular sociolinguistic conditions that favor it over others. This observation corroborates the expansion of foreign words, and especially the fact that their diffusion is a general process that bypasses sociolinguistic levels. The main reasons for using foreign words are the non-existence of the Italian equivalent (e.g. *airbag*, *bluetooth*), and the supposed high prestige of the term (e.g. *flûte*).

From the films analyzed, in a few cases the lexicon of young people emerges as one of the new issues that film dialogues take into account. Terms and expressions used by teenagers highlight the conflict caused by the generation gap, with the parents sometimes absolutely incapable of understanding what their kids say (as in *Grande grosso e Verdone* and more emphasized in *Vacanze di Natale '95*). Comedy draws out such an issue and turns it into a source of humor.

Affected language and technical jargon are targets of irony. The obscurity of technical terms and of formal language, and the distance that their users create with common speakers emerge in most of the films analyzed. This distance can contribute to creating a negative attitude toward the affected use of technical language, as in *Il mostro*, or to highlighting the potentially exasperating nature of formal speech, as is the case with the pedantic characters of Carlo Verdone's films. In this sense, we may say that comedy plays a political role, because it denounces a conflict between different social layers by mocking formal and technical language and by making the people who use them appear ridiculous.

Obscene and coarse language is often used with a semantic value different from the original one. Exceptions are the *cinepanettoni*, where terms such as *scopare* 'to fuck' and *frocio* 'faggot' still carry their sexual and derogatory meaning, and they are supposed to provoke laughter. Overall two general observations can be made with respect to

obscene language and cursing. First, the usage of vulgarity is often almost a natural part of every day speech, as if bad words were acquiring the function of filler words, losing part of their original meaning in the process; we see this in *Chiedimi se sono felice (cosa cazzo me ne frega cosa avete bevuto....)*. Second, the lexicon of film dialogues presses the issue of the function of obscene language: “why do people use it?”, which in turn raises a further question: “why do dialogues’ authors have characters use it?”. The explanation of a search for expressivity seems to be the most obvious answer. However, since obscene language is losing its transgressive function, the expressivity itself is consequently weakened. Finally, obscene language seems to be a cross-variable feature, meaning that it is used by speakers of both sexes, of any geographical place, and of different social conditions. The high cultural level seems to be a variable that determines a lower use of obscene language (see the characters of the history professor in *Grande grosso e Verdone*, the psychiatrist in *Il mostro*, or the priest in *Il piccolo diavolo*).

Regionalisms conserve an expressive function⁴⁰ probably higher than obscene language and cursing, particularly because of the situation and contexts in which they are employed. For example, the character of the truck-driver in *Bianco, rosso e Verdone*, uses the term *chiappa* ‘buttock’ while helping Mimmo’s grandmother with an injection. Regionalisms also are a regular feature in the speech of characters with a restricted vocabulary (see the unrefined speakers in Carlo Verdone’s films). The variables that trigger the use of regional terms are therefore the communicative situation and the social status. Geography is not a relevant variable; that is, being from a Northern rather than from a Southern city does not necessarily determine a higher or lower use of regionalisms.

⁴⁰. The expressivity deriving from the use of regional words is widely agreed upon by scholars. Among others: Beccaria (1992: 128); Lepschy (2002: 60).

The lexicon of cinema records, at a superficial level, the social issues that people perceive as being important. Therefore, the use of English words, the increased interference of the language of television, the indulgence to use obscene language to talk about homosexuality and immigration, and the recycling of words from different technical jargons are typical examples of a society interpreting current changes. At a deeper level, the words that film dialogues display are also a valuable indicator of the way in which people perceive new aspects of reality, and eventually of their ineptitude to select the appropriate words to name and describe the complexity that surrounds them. The way in which some characters simplify the political discourse or the abuse of obscene language are both symptomatic examples of a weak ability to navigate the lexicon, as well as of a close-minded perspective on a changing reality.

7. The dialogues in the screenplays and the dialogues in the film

7.1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I compare the dialogues in the screenplays with the dialogues in the films that I have analyzed in Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6. My main goal is to see how much they differ from one another. A further objective is to elaborate on the consequence that such differences have on the narrative structure of the film, on the portrayal of the characters' personality, and on their interaction with the other characters. The analysis of the screenplays will also reveal whether a written text conceived to be performed is still able to reflect the repertoire of spoken contemporary Italian in the same way that an oral text such, as the actual dialogue, does.

Traces of the written source (the screenplay) are likely to be found in the oral outcome (the dialogue), in terms of the structure of the sentences, and of the scarcity of hesitations, just to name a few. In other words, what I expect to find are some of the features typical of written texts transferred into the correspondent dialogue. However, the distance between the two versions can be enormous, since there are many variables involved in the passage from the script to the dialogues that we hear on screen, such as the power of the director to change the screenplay while filming. The core objective here is to observe the way the script and the dialogue interact from both a linguistic and a narrative viewpoint. When I say 'narrative' I refer to the way in which the characters are portrayed, which can differ significantly between the original script and the corresponding dialogue in final cut of the film.

In the American tradition, film studies scholars and in general scholars who have focused their research on film language do not tend to address the comparison between the dialogues in the screenplay and the dialogues in the film, nor are they inclined to

analyze the screenplay with a strictly linguistic approach. American scholars look more at the functions of the screenplays' dialogues,⁴¹ rather than at their linguistic features, as they try to address questions such as: 'What is the role of this line?', or: 'How is this dialogue useful to the development of the plot?' The works of Mehring (1990), or Vale (1998) (just to name a few) reflect this analytical orientation. Studies on film language show even minor interest in analyzing the dialogues as samples of everyday language. Mehring (1990), and Kozloff (2000) account for such skepticism from two opposite perspectives: the former contends that everyday conversation is not adaptable to screenplay language, while the latter excludes that film language reliably reflects real-life speech:

You must, however, be aware of the important fact that much of what people say in everyday life does not qualify as screenplay dialogue. Dialogue is selected information, while everyday conversation includes much random and extraneous information (Mehring 1990: 174).

In narrative films, dialogue may strive mightily to imitate natural conversation, but it is always an imitation [...] ...although I have found the work of linguists very helpful, I conclude that the cross-disciplinary poaching cannot proceed in the opposite direction; linguists who use film dialogue as accurate case studies of everyday conversation are operating on mistaken assumptions (Kozloff 2000: 18-19).

The American approach to the language used in cinema is therefore more semiotic and literary than linguistic. The starting point for the analysis is in fact, in many cases, the screenplay itself, and not the dialogues in the final version of the film. A large number of publications (among others, Field 1994; Packard 1997; Duncan 2008) also have a

⁴¹. 'In addition to portraying your characters, dialogue has other functions. It compresses and extends action, presents facts...' (Mehring 1990: 172).

pedagogical orientation, as they elaborate a discourse over the textual structure of the screenplay and on the ways in which such structure is crafted.

Italian scholarship offers a diversified approach to the study of film language and screenwriting, going from the semiotic, as Bettetini (1968), to works more focused on the writing process, as Age (1990), Cerami (1996), Robbiano (2004), to the linguistic approach, as Raffaelli (1992) F. Rossi (1999b, 2006). Yet, the linguistic based analysis, according to Perego-Taylor (2009: 57), has only recently received consistent attention. Due to the lack of specific works exclusively focused on the language of screenplays, one might infer that scholars agree that the object of film's linguistic analysis has to be the dialogues of the final version of the film, and not the dialogues in the script. A possible explanation to this methodological choice could be, in Remael's words (2008: 58), that 'In the world of cinema, it goes without saying that the screenplay is not the film, that it can be rewritten at any time during production, and that it almost invariably is'.

Since my dissertation focuses on the comparison between film's language and the way people speak every day, in this chapter I analyze exclusively the parts of the screenplay that contain the dialogues, without considering the parts that contain the description of the actions of the characters. Such parts are in fact extra-diegetic; that is to say, they express the voice of an external narrator (i.e. the screenwriter) and their function is to describe what the characters do while they speak. There is therefore a narrative dichotomy between the level of the descriptions, and the level of the dialogues (which are expressions of different characters). Such dichotomy is graphically represented in the page design of the screenplay, which shows a clear division between the dialogues and the narrative elements.⁴² Given to the fact that the passage from the

⁴². In the Italian screenplay, for example, the description of the actions is on the left and the dialogues are on the right side.

written script to the released version of the dialogue on film is a ‘missing piece’ (unless we have the chance to directly ask actors and directors), I would like to emphasize that most of the conclusions that I will be drawing in this chapter are the result of hypothesis and speculations, as well as of empirical observation.

7.2. COMPARISON SCREENPLAYS/DIALOGUES IN THE SINGLE FILMS

In this section I discuss the differences between screenplay and dialogue in the individual films. Since the scripts, unlike the dialogues, are not the main focus of my study, I do not analyze them in detail; that is to say, I do not consider the single linguistic levels such as phonology, syntax, etc. Rather, I give account of the comparison on a general level. All the screenplays have been analyzed except *Grande, grosso e Verdone* and *Benvenuti al sud* because they are not available.

7.2.1. *Bianco, rosso e Verdone*

In this film, the main sources of humor are the dialogues between Mimmo and his grandmother, which are full of regional features of *romanesco*, and the logorrheic speech of Furio, Magda’s husband. These two linguistic peculiarities of the film also characterize the screenplay, which tries to imitate and graphically reproduce the phonology of *romanesco*. We therefore find typical phonological features such as apocope of infinitives: *mette*’ < *mettere* ‘to put’ and apheresis of indefinite articles: ‘*na* < *una* ‘a, an’, which indicate a very colloquial register and which are regularly used in the screenplay by the characters of Mimmo and the grandmother. The graphic imitation of *romanesco* is evident in the word *nun* < *non* ‘not’ as well. This is particularly noticeable if we compare *Bianco rosso e Verdone* with the later film by Carlo Verdone, *Viaggi di nozze*, in which the dialogues maintain the regional pronunciation *nun*, while in the screenplay appears in

the standard spelling *non*. The screenplay of *Bianco rosso e Verdone* shows consistent closeness to *neo-standard* morphology as well, with the use of *gli* ‘to him’ for female referents (*piegagli* ‘bend (her legs) to him’, *stendigli* ‘lay (her legs) to him’), both used by Mimmo referring to his grandmother. The systematic use in the script of *neo-standard* traits such as *gli* instead of *le* ‘to her’, or the verb *averci* instead of *avere* ‘to have’ suggests, I believe, a double interpretation. On one hand, it reflects the effort of the screenwriters to craft as believably as possible the speech of a character like Mimmo: clumsy, childish, and not well educated. On the other hand, it may simply be a natural reflection of the way the authors, as speakers of contemporary Italian, would speak. The language of the screenplay would become in this case a projection of the writer’s language, which is, according to Cerami (1996: 113), a process that likely involves the author.

In countertendency with the fairly realistic reproduction of spoken Italian is the graphic representation of the verb *averci* which, instead, does not correspond to the pronunciation in the film dialogues. We find in fact the following spelling in one of the grandmother’s lines:

(1) ***ci ho l'enfisema***

‘I’ve got the emphysema’

This graphic representation: *ci ho*, with two separate morphemes, does not successfully convey the oral outcome of one morpheme /tʃo/, which is by now regular in spoken Italian. The same written representation is found in *Viaggi di nozze*’s screenplay (screenplay p. 8).

7.2.2. *Viaggi di nozze*

Overall the dialogues mirror the screenplay, both in the chronological sequence of the events and in the way they develop. They are also similar in the depiction of the characters. In fact, there are no significant differences between the ways the screenplay and the film dialogues portray their personality and the way they speak. In the screenplay, Ivano and Jessica are portrayed as a couple who seeks for new experiences in order to spice up their routine, Giovannino and Valeriana as a couple who have to deal with family issues during their honeymoon, and Fosca as a subjugated wife who is led to suicide by the tyrannical Raniero. In the portrayal of the characters, there are two cases in which the script differs from the film dialogues due to linguistic choices, specifically in terms of lexical choices. The first, is the character of Valeriana, Giovannino's wife. She is the typical petty-bourgeoisie housewife whose speech is a regular balance of regional and standard language. In the dialogues, she puts up with all the difficulties they have and never uses vulgar expressions. In the screenplay, instead, she employs more than once curse words, such as *cazzo* 'shit', referring to Giovannino's family. The choice to eliminate these expressions from her lines in the final dialogues may suggest the intention to characterize her personality as calmer and more indulgent toward circumstances. The other example of relevant linguistic difference is in the speech of Fosca, Raniero's wife. It is still a difference that involves obscene language, and it functions in the opposite way compared to Valeriana's example. In the dialogues, in fact, there is a scene in which Fosca, in a hotel in Bologna, with her husband wearing earplugs, addresses him by saying: *vaffanculo stronzo* 'fuck you asshole'. In the screenplay the scene is absent. I suggest that the introduction of those lines in the film serves to give the impression that

Fosca's character is potentially able to rise up against her miserable condition, whereas in the script, the absence of any sort of rebellion leaves no space to hope.

There are two more facts to notice. One is the written reproduction of most of the phono-morphological features of *romanesco*, such as aphaeresis: '*sta* < *questa* 'this', or apocope: *di*' < *dire* 'to say'. The re-creation of phonological features in a written text more than the re-creation of other linguistic levels (e.g. syntax or lexicon) shows the intention to maintain the language as close as possible to the spoken variety, mainly because of the difficulties that graphic reproduction of sounds sometimes implies. The sound of the schwa,⁴³ for instance, is impossible to represent through traditional graphic means unless the international phonetic alphabet symbols are used. A second fact to notice is at the level of morphology: the written representation of the verb *averci* 'to have'. In the screenplay the form used is:

(2) *che ci hai in mente?*

 'What do you have in mind?'

whereas in the dialogues the pronunciation would exclude the –i- in the pronoun *ci*. When used in written literary texts, the verb *averci* has always been graphically represented as in example (2) (Sabatini 1985: 161). Recently, according to D'Achille (2010: 133) the forms *c'ho*, *c'hai* 'I have, you have' are preferred by contemporary writers.⁴⁴ However, while they recognize the justified uncertainty in reproducing the

⁴³. The *schwa* is a phoneme present in Central and Southern varieties. It corresponds to an indistinct mix of the vowels *a* and *e*.

⁴⁴. An example of this graphic representation is in the screenplay of *Vacanze di Natale '95* (Remo; screenplay p. 72): *non c'ho manco i soldi per maganmme un panino* 'I don't even have the money to get a sandwich'.

structure, both D'Achille and Renzi (2000: 304), argue that the best solution would be *ci ho, ci ha*.

7.2.3. *Il piccolo diavolo*

A relevant difference between script and actual dialogue in this film is the emphasis that is given to the possessed woman with respect to the screenplay, in which the woman, who is from Rome (we know it because one of the witnesses says it), does not deliver a single line. In the film, she delivers a few lines after the devil Giuditta leaves her body, and unlike the script, she is from Naples.

The broken syntax of Giuditta's speech, of which I gave account in Chapter 5, is established first in the screenplay, where the little devil uses many features characteristic of unplanned discourse such as repetitions and interruptions:

- (3) *Oh, Maurice, prima ha suonato quello...drin drin drin...Non c'è una zuppa inglese qua? Ha suonato...drin...Allora Maurice, che si fa? Che si fa Maurice? Andiamo? Aspetta, aspetta...C'è le sigarette...niente da bere...*

Oh, Maurice, earlier I rang that...drin drin drin...Is there any cake here? I rang...drin...So, Maurice, what are we gonna do now? Should we go? Wait, wait...Are there any cigarettes here?...nothing to drink...

This syntactic style, which imitates colloquialism, seems to be tailored to the actor (Roberto Benigni), whose language, since his first films (*Berlinguer ti voglio bene*, 1977; *Tu mi turbi*, 1983), has always been characterized by particular skills in reproducing the unpredictability of oral discourse. The other characters' speech is consistently close to the screenplay and to standard Italian, particularly the character of Nina (Nicoletta Braschi), the bizarre woman who tries to seduce Roberto Benigni in the second part of the story.

As far as the character of Maurizio (Walter Matthau) is concerned, in the script there is one case of obscene language *pisciata* ‘pee’, and a few more cases of very colloquial traits such as *gli* ‘to him’ referred to women, and they are absent in the film. The fact that obscene language and significant deviations from the standard are absent in Maurizio’s lines is socio-linguistically plausible with his character, a priest, and with the actor’s identity as a non-native speaker. Therefore, an adjustment to Maurizio’s colloquialism from the script to the dialogues has been made.

Overall, the film reflects the general content of the screenplay, and the differences that I discussed are details. However, there is one omission in the film which, while being apparently a detail, is in my opinion an intentional choice that marks a change in the way the final events of the film develop. We learn that Nina is a devil only in the last scene, where she finally possesses Giuditta, and he speaks through her body, so that we see Giuditta speaking with Nina’s voice. In the screenplay, the fact that Nina is a demon is alluded to during a conversation in a hotel room with her friend Cusatelli (he is also a devil; scene 52 in the script), where he addresses the woman by calling her Demogorgon, a mythological creature often associated with Satan. In the film, the delay in the revelation of Nina’s real nature suggests the intention to delay the effect of surprise at the very end of the story.

7.2.4. *Il mostro*

The screenplay gives a little more time to Loris learning Chinese than the film does. It is not a difference that affects the story structurally, but it emphasizes a socio-economical issue: Chinese immigration and the way in which Italians face it. Loris intends to apply for a job in a Chinese company and therefore tries to learn the basics of the language. His professor, who eventually will reveal himself as the serial killer,

encourages him to persist since Chinese, he argues, is going to be one of the languages of the future. The teacher is confident about the fast economic growth of Asian countries:

(4) *Il futuro è dell'oriente...Hong Kong, Singapore...si guadagna miliardi*

‘Future belongs to Eastern countries...Honk Kong, Singapore...you can make a lot of money’.

This example, taken from the script, is absent in the film, and so is the episode in which Loris runs into a Chinese man and addresses him in his broken Chinese; to which the man replies: *Io cinese, io no capisco italiano!* ‘Me...Chinese, don’t understand Italian!’.

In the film, Loris’ interest for Chinese primarily serves the function of enhancing the expressivity of his body language while struggling with the pronunciation, besides being a reference to a current social issue as is highlighted in the screenplay.

The main linguistic peculiarities of the script also characterize the film. These are the extreme variability and expressivity of Loris’ language, who is able to switch from colloquialisms to a very formal register (e.g. the monologue at the meeting with the neighbors), and the parody of technical and formal language, shown in the psychiatrist’s speech.

Most of Loris’ lines in the screenplay are very reliable in establishing the informality of spoken language that we hear in the film. We find, in fact, dislocated structures: *ma poi chi se lo compra l’appartamento?* ‘...but then who is going to buy **it**, the **apartment?**’ (screenplay p. 23), the verb *averci*: *c’ha le cose* ‘she’s got her things’ (screenplay p. 91), regionalisms (*toscano*): *ignuda* < *nuda* ‘naked’ (screenplay p. 93). All these features are kept in the dialogues.

7.2.5. *Vacanze di Natale* '95

The screenplay reproduces the phonology of *romanesco*, confirming the comedic power of such variety, even in written texts. We find cases of apocope of infinitives: *allarga* < *allargare* 'to exaggerate' (Remo; screenplay p. 2), and regressive assimilation *ve sfonnamo* < *vi sfondiamo* 'we will smash you' (Cesare; screenplay p. 4). The reproduction of the local dialect from Rome is also in the other films set in Rome or with roman characters: *Bianco rosso e Verdone* and *Viaggi di nozze*. In *Vacanze di Natale* '95 there are also characters from Florence, such as Marione, but his lines in the script never reveal his Florentine origins.

The screenplay contains a higher level of vulgarity, and more obscene language than the film dialogues do. Moreover, the obscene language is mostly used with its original meaning, and not with pragmatic employ, which is instead a tendency of the recent decades, as I mention in Chapter 6. A possible explanation of the decreased vulgarity of the dialogues is given by F. Rossi (2007: 12): 'Generalmente nel passaggio dallo scritto al recitato vengono (o per meglio dire venivano) eliminati termini troppo gergali o volgari per questioni di comprensibilità o di censura'.⁴⁵ The discriminatory term *negro* 'nigger' found in the screenplay and not in the dialogues could be a case in point. The word *negro* is nowadays strongly stigmatized and politically incorrect. Although until the end of the 1980s there was a small part of the public opinion that would still accept such a term (Tosi 2001: 84), yet it was precisely in those years (the beginning of the 1990s) that the term begun to be considered offensive (Faloppa 2011: 10), in particular due to the influence of the debate that was developing in the United States about politically correctness in language. The reiterated use of the word *negro/negra* in

⁴⁵. Generally from the script to the performed text, vulgar or too colloquial terms are (or were) eliminated due to problems of comprehension or censorship' (My translation).

the screenplay of *Vacanze di Natale '95* could be explained by the fact that the transition between the acceptability of the term to its stigmatization was not completely realized and its use was still somehow tolerated. A second hypothesis, which I believe is more realistic, is that the film intentionally and explicitly proposes a type of humor based on discriminatory language with the conviction that the public would not disapprove. The fact that the word is used in the screenplay demonstrates that the authors contemplated the possibility to use it in the film as well. Generally, since screenplays are rarely published, the authors are more free and, more importantly, less tied censorship boundaries when the issue at stake is vulgarity, sex language or ethnic discrimination.

The script of *Vacanze di Natale '95* also establishes the jargon used by the teenager Marta, whose vocabulary is hardly comprehensible to her father Renato (Massimo Boldi). In the film dialogues we find the same emphasis on juvenile language.

The syntax is very linear and very fluid, with total absence of interruptions, reformulations, repetitions, which are features that are more likely to appear in oral texts. The way syntax is structured in the screenplay is therefore typical of planned texts, where there is time to organize the sentences with cohesion and to choose the appropriate vocabulary.

7.2.6 *Christmas in love*

The screenplay gives space to the language of television, since it uses a famous TV anchorman, Valerio Staffelli, as a character. The TV show involved is *Striscia la notizia*, a satirical news program, which interferes with the regular stream of the script, and which has contributed to the diffusion in common language of expressions such as

consegna del tapiro ‘delivery of the tapir’ used in the screenplay.⁴⁶ Valerio Staffelli plays himself, and interviews the actor Ron Moss, who also plays as himself and who has to spend a Christmas weekend with Concetta, a Sicilian heavyset worker, winner of a TV competition. The film dialogues, which leave out these lines, attenuate such role of the television.

Another narrative choice in the screenplay that implies a linguistic consequence refers to the character of Eros, Monica’s elderly boyfriend. In the script he is in fact from Naples, and uses several traits of its regional variety: *tengo* ‘I have’ (screenplay p. 53), *voi* ‘you all’ as a third-person singular, formal pronoun, etc. Along with the *romanesco* of Carlo Verdone’s films, we see in this case another example of how the graphic reproduction of phonology of Central and Southern varieties is preferred to the Northern ones. No phonological representation of Northern features is found in the screenplay. This absence is meaningful because it shows their poor comedic success when compared to Southern varieties.

In the film, Monica’s boyfriend is an unemployed, sixty year-old American, who speaks an almost flawless standard Italian. We will find out that he is actually an actor hired by Monica to play the role of her boyfriend because, in so doing, she hopes to convince her father to leave his young girlfriend. The situation, the same in the screenplay as in the film, is therefore a grotesque set-up, and the use of a regional coloring in Eros’ lines in the script may be justified by the need to convey a particular comedic aspect. The choice to employ an American actor in the film eliminates the linguistic regionalism. In the film, the grotesque is conveyed by the physical difference

⁴⁶. In every episode of *Striscia la notizia* a very popular person who stands out for a negative behavior is given a symbolic golden tapir.

between Monica, who is very good looking, and her boyfriend, performed by Danny De Vito, who is arguably less appealing.

7.2.7. *Tre uomini e una gamba*

Through the use of a very colloquial language the screenplay projects a picture of the genuine friendship that ties together the three main characters, Aldo, Giovanni and Giacomo. Overall there are not significant differences between the script and the dialogues, both at a linguistic and at a narrative level; only a few discrepancies can be found. One of them is a greater presence of vulgar expressions and words in the screenplay when compared to the film, particularly in Giovanni's lines: *cazzo* 'shit' (screenplay p. 14); *e fa pure un caldo della Madonna* 'it's hot in here; it's fuckin' hot in here' (screenplay p. 28).

A further difference refers to the character of the father in law. In transferring from the screenplay to the film, his speech undergoes a slight change that results in emphasizing his vulgarity over his low level of education. The script clearly hints at his lack of culture and his arrogance in a scene in which he plays scrabble with his wife and makes up words that are a mix of dialect and non-existing terms: *brubbero*, *ignubbile*. Both words show gemination (-bb-), which is typical of Southern regional pronunciation and more characteristic of an uneducated speaker, but the terms are by no means vulgar. The character shows his linguistic arrogance in a different way in the film, where he displays his unrefined manners primarily through his use of obscene language, rather than with ungrammaticality. This is then a case diametrically opposite to the one discussed in Section 7.2.5, where a politically incorrect word such as *negra* was employed in the screenplay and censored in the film dialogues.

Sometimes the sophistication of some of the comedic lines that we hear in the dialogues requires elaboration. The same level of sophistication is reflected in the screenplay. Example (5) shows the bizarre humor of the script. While the three friends are taking a break at a gas station, Giacomo is flirting with a girl at the bookstore. Aldo and Giovanni, in order to make the girl walk away, tell her:

(5) *La pasta per la dentiera te l'ho comprata. L'ultima volta gli è rimasta attaccata a una mela*

‘We have already got him his denture paste. Last time he lost it while eating an apple’

In other words, the unusual humor of Aldo, Giovanni, & Giacomo necessary reveals some sort of planning, which eventually relates to the typology of written texts such as screenplays.

7.2.8. Chiedimi se sono felice

The written text is able to reproduce all the linguistic features of *neo-standard* that will be employed by the characters in the dialogues. In the screenplay we find in dislocations (Claudia; screenplay p. 53), cleft sentences (Giovanni; screenplay p. 52), and *gli* ‘to him’ to refer to female antecedents (Aldo; screenplay p. 51). The presence of these traits demonstrates a particular ability of the authors of the script to imitate spoken Italian and the dialogues are linguistically very similar to the scripts. In particular, the colloquial register of the conversations among the three friends is evident in syntax more than in morphology. This is the case in both the screenplay and the dialogues, which closely resemble one another. The fact that the directors and protagonists Aldo Baglio, Giovanni Storti, and Giacomo Poretti are also the screenwriters, could explain the close

correspondence between written and performed dialogues. The five voice-over parts, all performed by Aldo, demonstrate a prevalence of standard language, which is justified by the fact that the voiceover implies an external narrator who represents a neutral presence with respect to the story and therefore is likely characterized by a neutral and standard language.

Lastly, a major emphasis in the screenplay, when compared to the film, is given to the Sicilian dialect, which in the script, serves as an object of parody in a couple of situations. The first is when Giovanni refers to Sicilian stereotypes and expressions as he suggests which dialect to use for their play. His parody provokes a reaction from Aldo since he is Sicilian himself. The second situation occurs in one of the last scenes. Giovanni and Giacomo go to visit Aldo in his hometown in Sicily. They go to a bakery to buy Aldo's favorite pastry and they meet a group of old men who start speaking the dialect as they dispute their priority in the line to buy the same pastry. Both situations highlighting Sicilian have been omitted in the film's dialogues, which in fact do not rely too much on regionalism to produce comedic effect.

The most relevant differences overall are not linguistic but involve the narrative development of the film, and particularly, the love story between Giovanni and Marina. The film dialogues show the two lovers break up, and they barely talk to each other when they get together to go visit Aldo, after almost two years. The screenplay, in a couple of scenes, shows that Marina still thinks about her relationship with Giovanni and that she does feel a certain measure of regret. The following example is taken from scene 44, where Claudia opens her heart to Giacomo:

(6) *Avevo sbagliato, ero confusa, in quel momento non sapevo cosa stavo buttando via*

'I was wrong, I was confused, I did not realize what I was giving up'

The omission of these lines in the film clearly does not leave any hope to the love story of Claudia and Giovanni.

7.3. CONCLUSIONS

From the discussion on the differences between the screenplays dialogues and the film dialogues, the main conclusion is that there is a lack of significant differences between the two texts at a linguistic level. The scripts reproduce all the features of *neo-standard* Italian that characterize the film dialogues and, in the case of *romanesco* in Carlo Verdone's films, there is also a fairly reliable graphic reproduction of the pronunciation and phonology. Syntactic traits such as dislocations or cleft structures, which are considered peculiar of informal speech, are regularly employed in the screenplays. This consistent presence of oral traits illustrates the growing interference between the spoken language and literary texts that characterize many recent literary works (Antonelli 2007). The only relevant difference is at the level of the lexicon. There seems to be a tendency to use a higher vulgarity in the screenplay and attempt to adjust this vulgarity in a more civil language in the dialogues. This sort of switch may have consequences on the construction of the characters, as we see in the examples of *Viaggi di nozze*, where the character of Valeriana appears to be more humble in the film than in the screenplay, or in *Vacanze di Natale '95*, where the screenplay displays the use of the word *negretta*, which since the mid-1990s has come to have a very strong racial connotation. At the level of textuality, which includes peculiarities of oral speech, such as interruptions, repetitions, and unplanned discourse, the only screenplays that are close to the spoken language are those of Roberto Benigni. The rest of the movies analyzed do not show the same level of depiction in the script nor in the final dialogues, using a textuality too fluent to be realistic. The absence of redundancies, fillers, and devices that would

slow the pace of the conversation make films such as *Grande grosso e Verdone*, *Benvenuti al sud*, *Christmas in love* sound artificial in reproducing everyday conversation. It is precisely the particular structure of film dialogues that discourages certain textual peculiarities of the spoken language (Karetnikova 1990; Robbiano 2004; McKee 2010).

With the exception of *Benvenuti al sud*, in all the films the director participates to the writing of the screenplay. This may explain why so few differences are found in the transition from script to screen. If the director himself is the author of the dialogues (or one of the authors), is reasonable to think that he would not make significant changes in the final version.

The only regional varieties graphically represented are *romanesco* and *napoletano*, which are consequently confirmed to be the varieties that produce comedic effect even in a written text. This fact mirrors what emerged in the phonology chapter, where it has been shown that the use of these two varieties and of Central and Southern varieties generally prevails over others because of their higher level of comedic power and because of the solid cinematic tradition that already exists.

8. General discussion

8.1. INTRODUCTION

The objective of the present chapter is to discuss the comparison between the analysis of the dialogues of the films and the debate on contemporary Italian that I presented in Chapter 2, Section 2.3. This discussion aims to shed light on the reliability of cinema as a mirror of everyday language. The division of the chapter in two sections is intended to offer a dual-perspective to the interpretation of the data. The first section looks at the way in which the language of dialogues reflects real-life language and examines the linguistic changes that cinema records. The second section elaborates on how the individual directors have used the language in their films and shows the differences (if any) that exist among them.

8.2. LANGUAGE OF CINEMA, LANGUAGE OF PEOPLE

At first glance, the main linguistic feature that cinema imitates from contemporary Italian is the internal diversification and the emphasis on regional pronunciation. The scarce presence of characters with a standard accent reflects the absence of a shared pronunciation in contemporary Italian, which has been determined by the influence of the many regional dialects. Until the recent past, regional dialects have been the predominant spoken varieties in Italian, whereas the standard language has been confined to written texts or to formal uses. The regional varieties mainly used in dialogues of popular, contemporary comedy are Tuscan, *romanesco*, Neapolitan, and *milanese*. The four macro-regional pronunciations are represented, with an evident difference in their function and distribution among the characters. In fact, the Northern variety (primarily *milanese*) is usually linked to characters of a high social status, or to characters with a

high-profile job, and generally does not have an expressive function as much as the other varieties do (see the characters of the two *cinepanettoni*, or the post office manager in *Benvenuti al sud*). Southern varieties are usually used by poorly educated people or people with a modest employment (see Verdone's and Aldo, Giovanni & Giacomo's films). The widespread perception of a higher prestige of Northern compared to Southern pronunciations, for which most scholars argue (Sobrero and Miglietta 2006; D'Achille 2010; Berruto 2012), is therefore reflected in the films. By such linguistic choice, films contribute to the shaping of a public prejudice (i.e. the supposed superiority of one variety over another) that is deep-rooted in the people's mind and is reinforced by non-linguistic factors such as the success of television shows (where Northern accents are not stigmatized and are proposed as a model of standard pronunciation), the critical condition of Southern economy, and the image that mass media often portray of the South as a place with a high crime rate; the last two in particular may deceitfully lead the common opinion to negatively judge Southern varieties.

The difference of prestige between Northern and Southern speakers is partially neutralized when foreign language usage is considered. One of the targets of humor of contemporary comedy is the poor ability of Italians to pronounce foreign words as well their weak inclinations toward foreign languages. Such ineptitude is shared equally by both Northern and Southern characters and by most of the characters generally in the films that I analyzed;⁴⁷ the higher prestige of Northern varieties therefore does not necessarily correspond to a better use of foreign words by their speakers. Directors poignantly ridicule this characteristic, in so doing they make use of a peculiar feature of

⁴⁷. See *curricùlum* instead of *curriculum* in *Bianco, rosso e Verdone*, by the roman Mimmo and the uncertain pronunciation of *hardware* of Giovanni, who is from Milan, in *Tre uomini e una gamba*. Other examples are found in the following films: *Notte prima degli esami-Oggi* (Fausto Brizzi, 2006), *Nero bifamiliare* (Federico Zampaglione, 2007), *Bianco e nero* (Cristina Comencini, 2008).

Italian style of comedy, which is a very harsh and bitter humor and a very caustic irony rooted in the defects of the Italian people. The low level of proficiency in foreign languages is an ongoing issue in contemporary Italian society, and I contend that it is partially rooted in the inadequacy of the Italian educational system, which has begun only recently to promote the teaching of foreign languages from the first years of elementary school.⁴⁸ The way in which cinema tackles this issue is by making objects of ridicule out of the characters who try to use (foreign) borrowings and end up mispronouncing them.

There are a few cases where characters are able to adjust their pronunciation according to the situation, and to change their register to a more formal one. When this happens (see Remo in *Vacanze di Natale '95*, or Fabrizio in *Christmas in love*, or Loris in *Il mostro*; the first two films, the *cinepanettoni*, probably display too wide a difference in the shift, and are, therefore, artificial), the change involves only speakers of a fairly high social or professional status. Also, as shown in Chapter 3, Sections 3.4.6. and 3.4.7., the change in register consists of combining two features that are usually not compatible, where the more formal among the two is always a feature typical of a Northern variety. This ability of some speakers to change register magnifies the ineptitude of other unrefined speakers to do likewise. In fact, there are speakers who are able to use multiple registers, while others have a very limited style choice. This observation is definitely reflective of the actual situation in modern Italy, and is probably a consequence of the poor familiarity that many Italians have with formal uses of the language. This unfamiliarity is an indirect reaction to the deep-rooted nature of regional varieties. Cortelazzo (2000a: 429) sees this inadequacy as a structural problem of the Italian language itself: ‘...agli inizi del Novecento l’italiano risultava una lingua fortemente

⁴⁸. The *Moratti* law (2003) introduces English language in elementary school as a required subject instead of elective.

deficitaria per gli usi informali; all'inizio del nuovo millennio l'italiano risulta tendenzialmente deficitario per gli usi formali'.⁴⁹

Contemporary comedy emphasizes this kind of idiosyncrasy toward non-colloquial registers by making fun of highly formal speakers and of scientific language, especially their level of technical rigidity. Characters such as Furio in *Bianco, rosso e Verdone*, the psychiatrist in *Il mostro*, or Raniero, the doctor, in *Viaggi di nozze*, are portrayed as pedantic and snobbish through their language, which distinguishes them from the other characters and marks a gap between the language of a selected minority and the language of the common majority. The same mechanism is present in many films of the traditional *commedia all'italiana*, in which the language of bureaucracy and institutional language generally are fierce objects of mockery.⁵⁰ The irony toward such language aims at criticizing its high level of technical precision, which prevents most people from understanding it. The fact that the use of standard Italian is used as an object of irony and provokes in the viewer a comedic effect, implies that spectators consider it an unusual habit, and a behavior that, although in line with the prescriptive norm, is paradoxically perceived as extraneous and affected. The perception of the spectators is crucial precisely because the main purpose of popular comedy is to get them involved and to give them the impression that actors talk in the same way they do. The comedies I analyzed (which I think to be a representative sample of popular comedy) aim at being comprehensible, and pursue the demagogic attempt to make cinema appear as a popular art than can be accessible to anybody. In the case of Italian, one of the ways to get the

49. '...at the beginning of the 20th century the Italian language was inadequate for informal uses; at the beginning of the new millennium Italian proves to be inadequated for formal uses' (My translation).

50. Some cogent examples are given by Comand (2010: 44): the language of lawyers in *Divorzio all'italiana* (Pietro Germi, 1962), and in *Sedotta e abbandonata* (Pietro Germi, 1964), the language of bureaucracy in *Made in Italy* (Nanny Loy, 1965).

spectator involved is to give him a realistic picture of the linguistic situation; that is, a picture of an extremely wide range of diversity which proposes alternatives to the standard language. One of these alternatives is the *neo-standard* with the features that I looked at in the ten films.

From my study emerges the reproduction of all the main traits identified by studies on contemporary spoken Italian, such as, for example, *averci* ‘to have’, *gli* ‘to him’ to refer to female indirect objects, the substitution of subjunctive with indicative, and left and right dislocation. Some of these tendencies are used in film dialogues with the same frequency and in the same conditions in which they are reported to appear in everyday speech. If we consider the status of *gli*, my analysis shows it not to be prevalent (it prevails over its standard counterpart in only two films out of ten); in fact, scholars agree that it is increasing in usage and acceptability, but it is still far away from completely replacing the standard counterpart, especially in fairly refined speakers (Dardano 1994: 412; Berruto 2012: 84).

Another feature that I monitored is the substitution of the subjunctive with the indicative mood in clauses dependent on a verb of willing, hope, opinion, or emotion. In only three of the ten films the indicative prevails over the standard choice, which confirms the conclusions of several scholars (Cortelazzo 2000a: 426; Renzi 2000: 302; Berruto 2012: 115), according to whom the regression of subjunctive is not as drastic nor overgeneralized as much as is commonly perceived.

Also the use of *averci*, prevalent in seven out of the ten films,⁵¹ reflects its gradual expansion into contemporary informal Italian of both refined and less-careful speakers, generally in informal situations. The film dialogues confirm the distribution of this

⁵¹. The form *averci* prevails over the standard *avere* in the dialogues of the following films: *Bianco, rosso e Verdone*, *Viaggi di nozze*, *Grande, grosso e Verdone*, *Il piccolo idavolo*, *Il mostro*, *Vacanze di Natale '95*, and *Tre uomini e una gamba*.

feature across the language of different types of speakers. The dialogues also reproduce the completed standardization of the use of *averci* when the accusative object is anticipated or replaced by a direct object pronoun (see description of the trait in Chapter 4, Section 4.4.3). The trait is, by now, standard since it is used by all types of character, from any social and/or educational status, and in any situation.

Pronominal verbs in general are a feature used by the majority of the characters in every film analyzed. In particular, *verbi procomplementari*, those verbs that change meaning after the incorporation of one or two clitic pronouns, seem to be a highly productive category and are used by speakers for various levels of formality in all types of situation. Among the most used *verbi procomplementari* I recorded *avercela* ‘to be angry with someone’, *farcela* ‘to succeed’, *non farcela più* ‘to have a nervous breakdown, to be very tired’.

The last example of comparison between the data and the accounts in the literature that I will mention is the structure of left and right dislocation. Dislocation is found in the speech of the majority of the characters and it prevails over the standard counterpart in eight films out of ten. It seems to be the feature that most explicitly and accurately mirrors the situation of the same trait in current spoken Italian. Left and right dislocations are in fact extremely frequent in a number of varieties and their use has almost reached the level of the standard (Lorenzetti 2002: 84; Berruto 2012: 75-76).

The linguistic level that most openly denotes the original written nature of film dialogues and their impossibility to achieve a total adherence to real everyday language is the level of pragmatic devices; that is, all the features exclusively peculiar of the spoken language such as fillers, interruptions, repetitions, changes of planning in the discourse, reformulations, and phatic expressions. Even poorly educated speakers (e.g. some of the characters in Verdone’s films) show an unusual mastery in the organization of the

discourse, avoiding the abovementioned traits, the lack of which is primarily due an intrinsic characteristic of film language: the need to be cohesive and concise and the impossibility of spending too much time on communicating information. The spectator is in fact a passive consumer who does not have the possibility to ask the actors to repeat what they say; the communication exchange is unidirectional and does not have pauses that fulfill an explanatory function. With respect to pragmatic devices then, the film dialogues analyzed are extremely artificial.

While pragmatically most films behave as written texts, there are a few exceptions in my corpus. The characters played by Roberto Benigni in both films (*Il piccolo diavolo* and *Il mostro*) display a syntax that is not always linear, with elements that evoke the uncertainty of oral speech. Also Aldo, Giovanni & Giacomo's films show in a few circumstances a reliable imitation of the fuzziness of the spoken language. Generally, comedy dialogues struggle to reproduce the textuality of authentic oral speech, as do the screenplays from which they come, as I shown in Chapter 7 (where I also remark that only in Roberto Benigni's films are the screenplays close to spoken language).

By recording the changes that represent the process of re-standardization which Italian is undergoing, and by reporting the different levels of expansion and frequency with which the changes occur, cinema shows particular attention to language and to the contrast between its use and the normative framework, which is a very present issue in the current linguistic debate. One of the strategies that contemporary cinema is developing is a meta-reflection on people's linguistic doubts and errors, that makes the spectator aware of his own relationship with the norm and with (the) language in general. An example: in *Chiedimi se sono felice* Giacomo corrects his friend Aldo who used *gli* 'to him' to refer to a woman telling him what the right pronoun is (*le* 'to her'). This kind

of reflection takes on a pedagogical function, strictly linked to the political function, which cinema fulfills by interpreting the inconsistencies of reality and by trying to modify them.⁵² Comedy emphasizes the importance of language issues and somehow plays the role of defender of the standard norm. In so doing, it embodies an intellectual function that sees in the correct linguistic usage a resource for the growth of civic awareness.

Dialogues reproduce the extreme complexity and variability of contemporary Italian along with its high level internal diversification. Therefore, not only the single phonological and morpho-syntactic features are recorded, but also the sociolinguistic dynamics. First of all, all the social classes are represented in film, with the exception of the very lowest; in fact, linked to that absence is the absence of dialects, which have never had too much fortune in Italian cinema.⁵³ Instead, regional varieties have always been preferred. However, in portraying social classes, contemporary comedy partially deconstructs the stereotypical correspondence ‘refined speaker equals consistent standard language’, having many characters of high status sometimes shift to colloquial registers. This is the case, for example, of the two *cinepanettoni*. The shift usually involves the levels of lexicon and morphology. Syntax is the level that shows minimal variability and that remains very close to the standard, counterbalancing the effect of realism somehow given by the other levels. The influence of both the communicative situation and the domain on register change is another variable that film dialogues accurately take into

⁵². Further examples can be found in other films that are not part of my work: *Palombella rossa* (Nanni Moretti, 1989); *Ovosodo* (Paolo Virzi, 1997); *Non pensarci* (Gianni Zanasi, 2007); *Manuale d'amore 3* (Giovanni Veronesi, 2011).

⁵³. *La terra trema* (Luchino Visconti, 1948) is a classic example. In the original version the actors spoke in their native dialect (Sicilian), which was incomprehensible, resulting in a total failure of the film at the box office.

account; that is to say, contemporary comedy puts on stage the proliferation of the contexts in which, nowadays, the communicative exchanges take place. Such proliferation involves the new media, the lack of familiarity that common people have with technical jargons and special languages, and the several levels of formality that people have to manage in their daily relationships. Film dialogues represent this complexity and in so doing emphasize the potential of the expressivity of contemporary Italian language. The attempt to explore new possibility within the system itself collides, though, with an opposite force. In fact, while comedy dialogues approach new ways to elicit from contemporary language its comedic potential (examples of such ways are exploring the contrast between description and prescription, or displaying how Italians manage foreign languages), on the other hand, they stick to the representation of social and linguistic stereotypes: use of language to show the difference/competition between the North and the South (*Benvenuti al sud*), higher prestige of Northern varieties, varieties that have always been rarely used in cinema (e.g. *veneto*, *sardo*, *calabrese*) being associated to minor characters with a low prestige job (*Vacanze di Natale '95*, *Benvenuti al sud*), the predominant use of *romanesco* and Florentine (Carlo Verdone's films, Roberto Benigni's films). Therefore, in the genre of comedy, language is in part still used in a very traditional way. To convey the difference between Southerners and Northerners, and the supposed superiority of the latter over the former, is a case in point; deviations from the standard are actually more frequent in Southern and Roman characters' lines than in the other characters. This sort of linguistic dualism replicates a contrast that has historically involved economic development, which marks a significant difference between the industrialized North and the underdeveloped South. Wood convincingly depicts the role of the South as 'other': 'The south of Italy is where social problems are depicted as more visible, where the soil is poorer, domestic comfort less

[...]. The South is constructed as ‘Other’, the site of problems in society that are displaced from the urban...’ (2005: 144).

The otherness, the aura of inferiority under which the South is perceived by common opinion in the films analyzed, is extended also to Central Italy and particularly to Rome, as *romanesco* is often associated with deviations from the standard, or with coarse words (see in particular characters of Carlo Verdone’s films). This fact reinforces the prejudice of the higher prestige of Northern varieties. Therefore, part of the comic effects in popular comedy still relies on this stereotype.

Overall, the great importance that dialogues have in the success of comedy becomes very clear. In most cases it is precisely the language in any of its aspects and nuances that triggers the humorous effects, yielding a fundamental component of the genre. Dialogues often go beyond the importance of mimicry. All the linguistic patterns that emerge from my analysis (e.g. contraposition Northern/Southern pronunciations, the use of obscene language, regional varieties, irony on very formal language) have a feature in common: they all challenge a predetermined order, an order that is socially accepted or is established by a prescriptive grammatical norm. For example, the use of curse words by the grandmother in *Bianco, rosso e Verdone* is incongruous with her age and with her character; the numerous situations in which high social class speakers use dialectal words in *Vacanze di Natale '95* and *Christmas in love*; and the expressionistic spectacularization of the language of Southerners in *Benvenuti al sud*.

The abovementioned traits break canonical rules, and the resulting subversion of a *status quo* provokes comedic effect. Another device strictly linked to the genre of comedy is linguistic surrealism, which has been argued by Spinazzola (1985: 87) to explain the success of the comedian Totò, protagonist in numerous comic films from the end of the 1930s. The importance of words reveals a detachment from the theatrical form

commedia dell'arte, which developed in the sixteenth century and which is one of the fundamental artistic expressions of contemporary comedy. In *commedia dell'arte*, in fact, the use of the body to produce comedic effect prevails over the comic potential of words:

In the *commedia*, the literary script of the classical theatre is no more than a quick *canovaccio* (sketchy plot), because the bodies of the actors, their movements and behaviors, tell most of the story, along with verbal jokes note-worthy more for their color and rhythm than for their subtleties. The victory of *soma* over *logos* travels from painting, opera, and the *commedia* to literature. The subordination of word to music in opera, and to gesture in the *commedia*, is a phenomenon literary historians explain by referring to the *questione della lingua* (chronic absence of a national literary language) (Dalle Vacche 1992: 4-5).

The characters of the *commedia dell'arte*, in fact, spoke different dialects which were not understood by people from a different geographic area, and therefore the comedic aspects needed to be conveyed by other means, such as physicality or the use of masks. However, Caniato (2002: 2) gives more importance than does Dalle Vacche to the humoristic power of language in the *commedia dell'arte*, by proposing that the perception of a different way to speak and of the stereotypes that we associate to a different language triggers comic reactions.

The current humor of comedy mostly focuses on linguistic elements. The function that masks had in the *commedia dell'arte* is now filled by dialogues, and even by particular expressions or single words that become identifiable with a certain actor or character. A couple of examples are Ivano (Carlo Verdone) and his wife Jessica (Claudia Gerini) in *Viaggi di nozze*. The couple keeps repeating the expression: '*O famo strano*' 'Shall we make it in a weird way?' referring to trying new sexual experiences to spice up their routine. Or the character of Fantozzi (Paolo Villaggio), who in several films plays the role of the mediocre white-collar who is not able to use the subjunctive mood. In both cases, a peculiar linguistic habit becomes the distinctive feature of a type, a mask

(Verdone showcases a similar couple in *Grande, grosso e Verdone*, and Fantozzi reiterates the same traits in numerous films), and is strictly linked to the performer. The importance of the actor, then, is crucial in determining the success of a film, since the genre is often identified with the strength of the actor. The linguistic elements used by an actor become peculiar of his comic style, and therefore comedy itself appears as a multifaceted and not homogeneous genre, able to adapt to the single performance. Such centrality of the single actor also justifies the choice of some regional varieties over others; the selection of Florentine, for example, is explained by the success of actors such as Benigni. That accounts for a very limited sphere of influence of the comic art in Italian cinema, which operates within the national confines and adjusts its linguistic features and its content to audience's expectations (Viganò 1995: 17).

Another strategy inspired by the *commedia dell'arte* is the arbitrary pairing of a regional variety with a particular type. And so, Sicilian is usually spoken by a very jealous man, *romanesco* by an arrogant and self-confident person, etc. (on this stereotypical pairing of language with personality see, among others, F. Rossi 2007). Contemporary comedy re-elaborates the strategies of *commedia dell'arte* giving to words the function of compensating the lack of physicality. Overall, though, comedies still ground their humor on the foundational principles of the comic art, which are the contrast with 'normality', the ridiculization of the differences and of physical defects, the diversion from the codified language, etc. (Spinazzola 1985: 209; Banfi 1995: 24; Sainati 2003). The irony in the defects of Italians is constantly present in the ten films analyzed, and, in some cases, the defects are exclusively linguistic ones, such as their scant ability with foreign languages. This example demonstrates us how a peculiarity of the genre (i.e. parody) can necessarily be linked to language. Parody also reveals ambiguity in its objectives; what Italian comedy does not completely clarify is whether the staging of

defects and weaknesses aims to criticize people in order to stimulate a change, or simply to acknowledge the *status quo*.

Italian comic language displays a strong sense of conservatism, since it is still radically attached to the tradition, and since it creates a temporal and physical space within which the audience experiences a brief feeling of subversion of predetermined order. With Sorlin's words (1996: 121): "...a comedy is a temporary disruption of order which ends when routine is restored." Outside of that space, then, when the performance is over, that order is re-established. A question, I think, arises: is this conservatism limited to Italian comedy, or it is intrinsic to the genre itself? Banfi (1995: 23) would answer as follows:

Il comico è una categoria 'contingente': ciò che provoca il riso – nelle sue diverse modulazioni – dipende *sempre* da forze, pragmatiche e culturali, che regolano, in un particolare *hic et nunc*, l'atto di comunicazione. Legato alle regole socioculturali proprie della comunità che lo esprime, il comico è anche strettamente connesso con la lingua in cui esso si realizza...⁵⁴

This huge role of linguistic humor poses a further question, limited to Italian comedy: is Italian cinema exportable? To what extent can translation into another language succeed in conveying such a peculiar component of a different foreign culture? A few authors in contemporary Italian comedy (Nanni Moretti, the late Carlo Verdone with his romantic comedies, Paolo Virzì) have achieved to build the comedic effects on other aspects of the film, partially relieving language from its responsibility of being the main source of humor. Nanni Moretti and Paolo Virzì have ironized the way Italians react to social issues or current political events, giving to language a secondary role (the former with

⁵⁴. "Comedy is a contingent category: what it provokes is laughter, in its different modulations, it always depends on cultural and pragmatic aspects which, in a particular moment, regulate the communicative act. Comedy, which has is strongly tied to the socio-cultural rules of the community, is also strictly linked to the language in which is expressed." (My translation).

Aprile 1998, and *Il caimano* 2006; the latter in particular with *Tutta la vita davanti* 2008, and *Tutti i santi giorni* 2012); Carlo Verdone, in most of his late works, bases the humor on the observation of the crisis that families and couples face, mainly using a language close to the standard (*L'amore è eterno finchè dura*, 2004; *Il mio miglior nemico*, 2006; *Sotto una buona stella*, 2014).

Besides humor, another function of linguistic choices in comedy has been to ironize, to parody or simply to refer to the social and political reality. In order to give a complete picture of the role of contemporary Italian in film dialogues, it is therefore important to look at what level of engagement the genre of comedy demonstrates through language and what social and political issues it tackles (if any). Through empirical observations of how language behaves in the films analyzed, and also referring to the data collected in the previous chapters, I will comment on how language can translate and perform social and political meanings. Since the interpretations I give are limited to my corpus, they are not meant to have a generalizing value, but they are intended to contribute, with practical examples, to point out the multifunctional power of linguistic choices, and to emphasize their role as a complementary criterion in the critical interpretation of films.

It has previously emerged how the division North-South and the 'otherness' are reflected in language. A similar type of 'otherness' is the one that involves the protagonists of immigration. Language used in films consciously or subconsciously reiterates a prejudicial attitude toward the South as a geographical and social space that remains alienated from the rest of the country. The stigmatization of the South reveals an unsolved conflict, in the same way, that is, in terms of conflict, that the issue of immigration is faced. Russo Bullaro (2010: xvi) emphasizes the increased interest of

cinema in immigration by considering ‘migration cinema’ a contemporary sub-genre, which sees its first examples at the beginning of the 1990s (Cicognetti and Servetti 2003: 17), at which time, in fact, immigration started to intensify. Zambenedetti (2010: 2) accepts this attempt of classification, although he proposes a few internal distinctions, which would include films such as *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (Luchino Visconti, 1960), or *Il cammino della speranza* (Pietro Germi, 1950) as anticipatory of an ideal ‘multicultural cinema’.

Immigrants appear as ‘others’ with no hope of integration. Their condition is always a disadvantaged one and a distinction between their social and economic status and the Italian middle class is always clearly marked. Such a ‘barrier’ is often conveyed through language. In some cases immigrants share the stigmatization with Southerners to such an extent that they are assimilated⁵⁵, as in *Vacanze di Natale '95*, when Guido meets an African young man who turns out to be a perfect Neapolitan speaker; or in *Benvenuti al sud*, where Alberto’s wife refuses to go to live in an apartment complex because all the last names on the doors are of people from North Africa and from Campania; the woman says that she does not like the building because, speaking of people who live there, ‘...it’s all stuff under the Equator’ (*È tutta roba sotto l’equatore*), using an irreverent expression that is not only perceived by the public as totally acceptable, but it also triggers comedic effects. That spectators approve of such humor reveals latent racist feeling, which emerges from the fact that racist language provokes a humoristic reaction instead of a negative one. Tosi comments on the attitude of Italians toward racism as follows:

They feel it (racism) is the result of ignorance (66,2%) and is becoming dangerous (78,7%). Although these data seem to confirm the conventional image of a

⁵⁵. See also Rossi Bullaro (2010: xx), and Small (2005: 246).

traditionally tolerant country (Richards 1994), alternative views suggest that many individuals are unaware of their racism, and that such a person should be called *un razzista democratico* ('a democratic racist'; Nirenstein 1990) (Tosi 2001: 84).

Among the films I considered, the ones that reevaluate immigrants to some extent are *Tre uomini e una gamba* and *Il mostro*. In the latter, such reevaluation is evidently carried out through language. The protagonist, Loris, takes Chinese classes because he is planning on applying for a job in a company run by Chinese people. It is, in this case, the Italian citizen who has to struggle to be accepted by the immigrants in order to benefit from the economic opportunity they offer, and the language of the foreign culture becomes more valuable than the one of the hosting culture. The different approaches to linguistically represent the issue of immigration reflect both its internal diversification and the fragmentation of civic awareness of Italians. This complexity is translated by different attitudes toward immigration and immigrants: ridiculization, sometimes rehabilitation, linguistic simplification, and superiority complex. What is important to notice is the fact that immigration is rarely addressed in a neutral way, and the language used to describe it is always strongly characterized, since it is a relatively new phenomenon, and because the 'stranger, the person we do not know' draws our attention and provokes our curiosity. Comedy translates these feelings into the humor that addresses immigrants.

The issue of immigration is therefore dealt with a mix of stereotyped attitudes, skepticism, in a few cases with positive intents (Benigni, Aldo, Giovanni & Giacomo), and with obvious humor. The same obvious humor is used in the very few cases in which politics is brought up. In fact, I argue that contemporary popular comedy lacks of political satire and political references, as represented through the use of language, if we compare it with the traditional Italian style of comedy. In the few cases in which references are made, the humor and the language are acritical. In the past, the choice of

the genre 'comedy' has been closely related to political intents, identifying political reference as one of the peculiarities of the genre (D'Amico 1985: 99), or by arguing that the insertion of political satire in a codified narrative framework (comedy) would grant easier access for the audience (Fantoni Minnella 2004: 165). In films such as (Luigi Zampa, 1960), *I compagni* (Mario Monicelli, 1963), and *Vogliamo i colonnelli* (Mario Monicelli, 1973) (just to name a few), there are explicit references to political content and a clear intention of assigning a major role to engaged satire. A scarce use of political language and a weak emphasis on political irony in contemporary comedy is influenced, in my opinion, by the aura of loss of credibility that generally involves politics (Bichon 2006: 45). Disenchantment of people sometimes turns into indifference, which may also lead to the absence of criticism. The widespread pessimism of public opinion for the current social and economical conditions of the country and the disappointment for the inefficiency of politics are each reflected in some of the new challenges of contemporary cinema. The current proliferation of films on the 1970s, according to the argument of D'Onofrio (2013), is justified by the intention to find in the example of the political engagement of the past, the strength to think how to (re)build the civic and political awareness of the present. The language of the films that I analyzed shows that successful comedies at the box office seem to communicate the same feeling of rejection that people have for politics by diverting the satirical function of language toward other aspects of reality. In *Christmas in love* Lorenzo, the middle-class business man who spends his vacations with his young lover, uses the slogan *Ce l'abbiamo duro* 'We have a permanent erection', when he finds himself trapped in a cable car and he happens to involuntarily push a young lady. The expression is the most known slogan of the leader of the political party *Lega Nord*, the federalist political party founded in 1991 by Umberto Bossi, and it refers to the tenacity of its members and of their capacity of not giving up. The use of this

slogan by Lorenzo leads to two conclusions. First, the character extrapolates from the expression exclusively its sexual connotation, depriving it from its political meaning (if any at all) and avoiding, in so doing, to take any kind of political position and problematize the political issue. Second, the choice of this slogan is consistent with the idea of humor that the film expresses, which is anti-intellectual, and easily accessible to the public. It actually uses the rejection of politics as an object of humor. A further example of a statement that has become very popular (but, to my knowledge, not yet quoted in films), is the one used by Silvio Berlusconi in his first public political speech in 1994: *scendere in campo* ‘to get in the (soccer) field’, borrowed by the language of soccer commentaries and employed as a metaphor to indicate the decision to begin a political career. The apparent scarce level of elaboration of criticism in contemporary comedy needs to be contextualized in the broader frame of the current simplification of political language, which is filtered mainly by television. People accept the reduction of politics to slogans because they promptly and easily convey political content and also because they successfully translate a widespread disaffection for the entire system (Gualdo 2006: 259). The constant presence of politicians in talk shows contribute to the dramatization of politics, which in turn is reflected in the way people themselves talk about politics. Cinema, following the example of television, records this tendency and puts it on stage by using slogans known by spectators through television or by snubbing political engagement. One of the consequences of the abuse of slogans is the slow obscuration of their original meaning, which results in a weakening of the power of the language. The following argument of Barotsi and Antonello (2009: 198) summarizes the role of linguistic slogans and *clichés* in Nanni Moretti’s cinema:

Moretti’s preoccupation with the use of language is pervasive in all his work, but particularly pronounced in *Palombella rossa*. Roberto De Gaetano traces the

locus of this Morettian theme in the concept of the *cliché* [...]. According to De Gaetano, it is towards the cliché and the (im)possibility of producing an original discourse that Moretti's indignation is directed. Essentially, what the critic intends as *cliché* is the detachment between meaning and linguistic enunciation, as, for example, in the case of new (imported) linguistic forms whose meaning is elusive, thus superficial and ultimately irrelevant.

A more engaged attitude compared to the *cinepanettoni* is shown by Roberto Benigni in *Il mostro*, specifically by the character of Loris, when he gives the speech to his neighbors to propose his candidacy as new manager of the building. Loris' words are sharp and ironical at the same time, and along with mocking political demagoguery they unveil the worst aspects of the average politician, which are falsity and arrogance. Moreover, I suggest that Loris' speech has a precise target; the reference that Loris makes to the theft of one of Snow White's dwarfs in the common garden of the building and a certain tendency for making hyperbolic promises hint (more or less vaguely) at Silvio Berlusconi, who, precisely ten months before the film was released, was about to begin his political career.⁵⁶ The inclination to this type of satire by Roberto Benigni is not new to his cinema, nor to his artistic performances on television. This is evident from the beginning of his cinematic career in films such as *Berlinguer ti voglio bene*, by Giuseppe Bertolucci (1977) or *Chiedo asilo* by Marco Ferreri (1980). In both of these films the Tuscan comic is the protagonist, not the director. While demonstrating his talent for humor, he has never neglected the political situation, sometimes with more obvious reference (e.g. in *Berlinguer ti voglio bene*), and sometimes with a less direct take (e.g. in *Il mostro*). Furthermore, he has never hidden his support for the Communist party, although he was never an active member.

⁵⁶. Because of his height Berlusconi has been compared to a dwarf by producers of political satire. The most popular is the satiric journalist Vauro (Vauro Senesi), who in the television show *Anno zero* defines Berlusconi 'nano di merda' 'fuckin' dwarf'.

In the films of the other directors I analyzed, and particularly in Neri Parenti's films, the political discussion is reduced to a stigmatization of those issues (e.g. immigration, homosexuality, diversity in general) that 'are historically defended by leftist ideology' (Uva and Picchi 2006: 170). Even Carlo Verdone, who in some of his first works (i.e. *Un sacco bello*, 1980; *Bianco rosso e Verdone*, 1981) shows a particular inclination to discussing and ironizing socio-political themes, seems to abandon that satirical intention in his later films (I particularly refer to *Viaggi di nozze*, and *Grande grosso e Verdone*). In the best case his target is not politics but rather the private life of politicians, as it is displayed in the scene of *Grande grosso e Verdone* where the senator meets the art history professor while looking for a prostitute in a peripheral street of Rome.

The fact that there are a few exceptions such as Benigni, confirms that the relation of comedy's language with politics generally has to be seen in terms of absence and willing escapism, which is intended as a sort of planned rejection of political engagement. It is an aspect that marks a gap with the traditional Italian style of comedy, which has, instead, constantly used politics as one of its main targets of irony (see F. Rossi 2006: 255-256; and Argentieri 2000: 80). The fact that political satire is not the major concern of box office hits also demonstrates that entertainment is not fully compatible with political engagement.

8.3. DIRECTORS AND LANGUAGE

This section draws conclusions as to how the directors and screenwriters have used language. It intends to offer a reverse perspective with respect to Section 8.2., where the presence of new linguistic tendencies is explored in the films.

8.3.1. Carlo Verdone

Although there has been a steady standardization in some of his recent films (among others, *Sono pazzo di Iris Blond* 1996; *L'amore è eterno finché dura* 2004; *Posti in piedi in paradiso* 2012), in which the regional component is drastically reduced, Carlo Verdone's language has not significantly changed throughout the years in the films I analyzed. The expressivity of *romanesco* is highly emphasized, but it also fulfills the function of characterizing a type, that is, the poorly educated couple with unrefined manners and tastes who still maintains a good economic condition. Carlo Verdone succeeds in mapping the distinctions among social classes through the use of language, ironizing the affectation that sometimes characterizes upper classes' speech. Lexicon confirms a gradual reduction of the full semantic meaning of obscene language, which is reflective of a current linguistic tendency. The Roman director's use of language is along in line with normal traditions, since he uses one of the regional varieties that has determined the success of the genre (*romanesco*), and because, through linguistic features (e.g. apocope of infinitives in the case of *romanesco*: *mette* 'instead of *mettere* 'to put') or highly recognizable expressions (e.g. *li mortacci tua* 'go to hell'; lit. translation 'your lousy dead ancestors'), he portrays typical characters that can be automatically associated with a geographic place. This intention to reproduce the comedic aspects of *romanesco* (particularly at the phonological level) is also evident in the screenplay, as shown in Chapter 7, Sections 7.2.1., 7.2.2.

8.3.2. Roberto Benigni

One conclusion regarding Roberto Benigni's films is that the main source of humor is not any particular use of the language nor an emphasized regional connotation. The setting of *Il piccolo diavolo* is Rome, but the geographical place does not play any

meaningful role in the film; in *Il mostro* the city is not even specified. This may suggest that a linguistic characterization is not the primary objective of the director, and that the comedic effects are driven by other aspects, such as, for example, the physicality of Roberto Benigni's comedy. In fact, the way he interacts with people, his hair permanently uncombed, and the hilarious dances that he improvises in both films convey the theatricality of his character and his exuberant physicality which, sometimes, overshadows the expressivity of his speech.

Two aspects mark a significant difference between Benigni's use of language and that of the other directors. The first is the infrequent use of obscene language as a source of comedic effect, which is compensated by a deeper exploration of the humorous power of situations. When we see Benigni, we laugh mostly because of the situations in which he finds himself, and for the abovementioned use of his body. I argue that, precisely for this reason, he has been just as successful when his films are translated into a foreign language. The second is the centrality of the characters played by Roberto Benigni, who stand out as the only ones in the film who vary manner of speech, and as the only ones who are regionally characterized, while the secondary characters are much more linear, consistent, and anonymous from a linguistic viewpoint.

Roberto Benigni brings on stage the same linguistic attributes that characterize his own public image off the screen; that is to say, a sort of exuberant and expressive stream of consciousness. This style of language represents everyday speech in that it suggests the absence of planning. Even the screenplays convincingly simulate the interruptions and repetitions of the spoken language.

8.3.3. Neri Parenti

In the *cinepanettoni* that I analyzed Neri Parenti makes use of language that openly seeks easy accessibility and a large success, trying to interpret what the public expects and how it conceives humor. Such *captatio benevolentiae* is achieved through either the use of a style that often recalls the fluency of standard language, especially in syntax (which somehow resembles the artificial language of soap-operas), a vague attempt to reproduce stereotypes of different regional pronunciations (mostly in *Vacanze di Natale '95*), or through the use of the vocabulary that reflects common prejudices. The homophobia conveyed through the obscene language in *Vacanze di Natale '95* is a case in point.

Spectators identify themselves with the characters; viewers feel justified in perpetuating their worst social and linguistic behaviors if they are publically legitimized by the power of cinema (see Canova 2000). However, the intentional proliferation of vulgarity and of obscene language is a component of the grotesque that the *cinepanettoni* embody. According to O'Leary (2013), the exceptionality of a situation such as Carnival can be a key concept to approach the study of the *cinepanettoni*. The scholar remarks that these types of films may have the function of '...simboli discorsivi da utilizzare nella disputa per l'auto-definizione dell'Italia e degli italiani' (92);⁵⁷ he also sees them as valuable products that can contribute to the discourse of 'negotiation of national identity' (92). In fact, linguistic vulgarity permeates Italian culture since the origins of the Latin comedy (see O'Leary 2013: 137). With respect to this consideration, a doubt emerges: by using such level of vulgarity, do the authors of *cinepanettoni* intend to portray a type with which the average Italian, regrettably, can identify (e.g. the homophobe, the *macho*) or do

⁵⁷. 'Discourse symbols to be used in the process of self-definition of Italy and Italians' (My translation).

directors exaggerate such social behaviors in order to stigmatize them? I suggest that the former interpretation, although strongly derogatory, is more plausible than the latter. In this respect, the argument of Uva and Picchi (2006: 132) is convincing: the worst characteristics of the average Italian are not only represented in the *cinepanettoni*, but are also turned into virtues and admirable values. It is important to notice that the types that *cinepanettoni* portray and that supposedly embody the national individual are all male characters, and therefore a male-centered discourse on representations of negative traits is evident. In one specific case, that is the issue of homophobia, the discriminatory attitude necessarily involves a man and is necessarily conveyed through vulgar language, which plays a performative role. On the power of language to express gender identity, see Litosseliti (2006: 62):

A way of describing the active and intentional production of gender identity is – to use a post-modernist concept – as *performing* identity. The conceptualization of gender as performative, which has been influential since the 1990's, was theorized by Butler (1999) as the repeated performance of specific ritualized acts (both bodily and discursive) which constitute gender identity.

In the eye of the audience, by using curse words to talk about homosexuality the male characters enact and re-affirm their own sexual identity (see also Rigoletto 2010: 36). According to Coates, it is impossible to avoid gender assignment in our everyday actions based on social conventions: 'Even when we attempt to subvert the dominant patterns, our performance will usually be read in either/or way, that is, as doing either masculinity or femininity' (1997: 126-127). That would explain the difficulty of not assigning a gender to the audience, and the impossibility for the spectators to look at the situations that involve homophobia without a gendered glance. For a supportive and a challenging

take on the gendered orientation of the audience, see, respectively, O’Rawe (2014: 48), and Günsberg (2005: 66).

It is a personal choice of the authors of the films to propose homophobia as a representative characteristic of Italians. In the same way, the abovementioned argument by O’Leary, according to which the *cinepanettoni* reflect and/or criticize the average Italian, probably assumes a gendered (male) audience who identifies with certain types of characters. It would be an interesting object of further research to look at the audience of the *cinepanettoni* and at its social composition. Homophobia, in the films, is represented as a male prerogative, and in general, as Rigoletto argues, it is a peculiarity of Italian comedy to exclude ‘female points of view and women’s concerns altogether’ (2010: 35). Morrish and Sauntson (2007: 144-145) comment on the ability of cinema to translate social construction:

Clearly, films are works of fiction and cannot therefore be read as ‘true’ representations of ‘real’ people. However, they can be read as important products of people within a particular culture that are worthy of scientific attention as texts. [...] Furthermore, as with any other texts presented for analysis, language does not only function to represent actions, identities and so on, it simultaneously functions to construct them.

A further aspect of Italian national identity that is shaped through language in Neri Parenti’s films is the relation of people with television. Being the most popular media, television has the ability to influence people’s speech, spreading linguistic expressions or refrains, which become common in use (I discuss some examples in Chapter 6). The technique to utilize the language of television is completely successful only if the spectator is also a consumer, and has therefore access to the same comic references. In replicating the language of television, the *cinepanettoni* delegate the creation of humor to

television, and show little attention to the comedic elaboration of everyday language. The result of the linguistic choices in Neri Parenti's films shows a general attempt of standardization of the levels of syntax and textuality, a humor defined by vulgar language (which is even more vulgar in the screenplays), and an a-political attitude; these all are elements that polemically provoke the elitism of more engaged cinema.

8.3.4. Aldo, Giovanni & Giacomo

The films of the three comics portray average, middle-class Italians with an anonymous daily routine and the language employed reflects this condition. In fact, the regionalism is not highly emphasized, at least in the main characters' lines. Additionally, the presence of *neo-standard* traits is quantitatively lower than in the other films, but at the same time they are far from the standard use of Italian. The speech of Aldo, Giovanni & Giacomo is therefore free from exaggerated attempts at expressionistic connotation. It conveys a humor more inclined to unveil the nuances of the nonsense sometimes hidden in everyday conversations, rather than to play with language itself or with dialects. The originality of Aldo, Giovanni & Giacomo's comedic style relies on the mockery of certain communicative interactions, rather than on the interaction as a linguistic object. For example, in *Tre uomini e una gamba*, the scene in which Giovanni makes fun of the dog's legs is a case in point. Or in *Chiedimi se sono felice*, the scene of Giovanni and Giacomo riding their bicycles, with Giovanni constantly interrupting Giacomo by asking him to listen to the ducks in the fields while he tries to talk. It is not a stereotypical use of language that triggers the comic effects, but an ironic look at the dynamics of daily communication. As a result, the language of their films is plain and linear, with morphology that is not very far from the standard, a more colloquial syntax, a textuality

that successfully simulates the spoken language, and a non-stereotyped emphasis on regionalism.

8.3.5. Luca Miniero

Benvenuti al sud uses Neapolitan, which is one regional variety that started being explored with more frequency, although much less than *romanesco*, by the genre of comedy after the end of the Fascist era. The choice of one of the typical dialects for comedy is justified by the social issue that the film intends to portray, which is the opposition between North and South. Such conflict is linguistically represented through a stereotypical display of higher prestige of the *milanese* variety over Neapolitan. The supposed superiority of the former over the latter is made clear particularly at the phonological level. Luca Miniero insists on the representation of this unbalanced comparison in his most recent film *Un boss in salotto* (2014), where the arrival of a *camorra* boss, Ciro, whose speech is strongly marked regionally, subverts the daily routine of his sister's middle-class Northern family.

A further inclination to stereotypes in the linguistic choices of the film is also evident in the expressive function that regional dialect serves in some characters' lines. This is particularly true for the old man Scapece, whose speech is barely comprehensible even to his fellow citizens, and Mattia's mother. Their speech is obviously exaggerated and the dialect has the exclusive function of producing comedic effects, leaving behind any possible intention of realistic anthropological characterization.

The film dialogues also portray the internal diversification of Italian by putting on stage the different levels of linguistic variation: dialect, regional variety, and *neo-standard*. This sort of repartition reflects in a schematic way a current sociolinguistic distribution: the dialect spoken by elderly people, regional Italian used by lower-middle

class (i.e. the citizens of Castellabate), and *neo-standard* employed by the middle class (i.e. Alberto and his wife). The result is an excessively strict correspondence between social class and language variety, which, while it does show the diversification of contemporary Italian, at the same time does not give a full account of the complexity of the current linguistic situation nor of the contamination among the different types of Italian. In so doing, the film reinforces the linguistic stereotypes that involve Southern varieties.

8.4. CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions can be drawn from the comparison between the data and the accounts on linguistic debate, and from the individual directors' use of language. Cinema uses the features of *neo-standard* with reliable frequency, with respect to everyday speech, paying attention to the contemporary tendencies and trying to present a language in which the viewers can identify themselves. The language used in comedy can therefore be considered a fairly reliable descriptive tool to account for main linguistic tendencies. The levels most realistically reproduced are morphology and phonology. In particular, the data emerging mostly from the phonological level confirm the higher prestige that Northern pronunciations have in people's perception when compared with Southern accents, and the predominance of *romanesco*, Tuscan, and Neapolitan as regional varieties that have the most appeal on screen. At the level of pragmatic and textuality, a high degree of artificiality can be observed in most films. Popular comedy also tries to address, through language, some of the most urgent social issues with different approaches. In some cases with a very obvious and stereotyped attitude, and in others with more refined humor. The linguistic patterns emerging from my analysis reveal a certain degree of conservatism that reiterates the peculiarities of Italian comedy

and that is rigidly linked to this genre. Such a practically inevitable relation contributes to fix the definition of the genre and to reinforce its schematic identity, which is reassuring for the spectators, whereas humor and comedy would not need to be confined in such narrow categorizations.

All directors emphasize the absence of standard Italian, and, in the few cases in which it is used, they show the distance that exists between the variety and people's speech. Some (e.g. Roberto Benigni, Carlo Verdone) have used regional dialects in a less stereotypical way. However, the predominance of Florentine, *romanesco*, and Neapolitan over other varieties is still stable. The ways in which directors use language as a tool for humor are heterogeneous and tailored to the kind of public that the film expects to entice. Carlo Verdone, for example, employs *romanesco* with an anthropological look, in order to portray a type; Neri Parenti uses regional varieties mostly with an expressive function, exaggerating the comedic side of them; Roberto Benigni and Aldo Giovanni & Giacomo aim at a more complex humor. Overall, a certain reticence toward experimentalism is evident, and a general attitude of avoiding a politically engaged use of language characterizes most dialogues. This weakening of the satirical function marks a substantial difference with the traditional Italian comedy, which is more caustic, and which constitutes an inescapable term of comparison for contemporary popular comedy.

9. Conclusions

The main goal of my work was to explore the language of contemporary popular comedy and to look at how the new linguistic tendencies are reflected in the dialogues, in order to assess the ability of cinema to measure language change and to comment on the role of language in characterizing the individual films. My work intended to offer a quantitative account of the use of linguistic features, but also tried to explain how specific linguistic choices are strictly related to the genre. In order to do that, I firmly believed, at the beginning of my study, that an analysis of the four linguistic levels (i.e. phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon) in the dialogues was an inescapable method in order to meticulously start answering the question: ‘What language does Italian cinema speak’? Now, at the end of my work, I believe it even more firmly. Also, a lack of systematic analysis of this kind is a shortcoming of most previous researches on cinema language, as I intended to demonstrate in Chapter 2. I am aware that ten films is not a quantitatively reliable sample, but I am confident that it is, at least, a starting point that answers some questions with the support of data, which compensate for the arbitrariness that intuitions and impressions sometimes imply. Moreover, I have attempted to show how directors use contemporary language and what function they assign to this component. A general conclusion is that it is impossible to consider the language of contemporary popular comedy as though it were a homogeneous system with identifiable traits that are shared by different films. Differences are found among the authors and the linguistic levels (e.g. syntax is more artificial than phonology or morphology).

That said, it emerges from the data I collected and discussed in Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 that contemporary comedy’s dialogues generally reflect the situation of contemporary Italian. The individual linguistic tendencies are reliably recorded; therefore

cinema can be considered a monitor of contemporary language change, and a descriptive tool that accounts for the traits that constitute the structure of everyday language in its ongoing development. Some examples of features of *neo standard* are the regression of the subjunctive (also present in more careful speakers' lines), the abundance of pronominal verbs, a different way to emphasize pragmatic roles of the constituents within the sentence through left and right dislocation. Along with the individual traits, cinema reproduces the structural complexity of contemporary language: the increased use of technical jargon, the reduction of the distance between formality and informality with a consistent interference of the former on the latter (many refined speakers often use features of colloquial language), and the influence of foreign languages. A consequence of this ongoing process of re-standardization is also the increased proximity of written to oral language, which is in fact displayed by most screenplays as I have shown in Chapter 7, where I also argued for a substantial similarity of screenplays and dialogues, and for the importance of the role of linguistic choices. In fact, the language differences that are found in the dialogues with respect to the scripts determine a diverse representation of characters. The ability of the screenplays to imitate and graphically reproduce even some phonological features reveals the status of this type of written text and of its primary function: to be performed. Scripts are also treated as experimental spaces where authors and directors can freely test multiple narrative and linguistic options, before they turn into the final dialogues that will be used in the film. In analyzing the language of cinema I looked at it as a 'mode of representation and as an art form.' (Elsaesser and Poppe 1994: 1225). One of the ways in which the status of art form emerges is precisely when we consider the work of screenwriters and their attempt to make the language as close as possible to real-life speech.

Chapter 8 carefully represents the dynamic internal differentiation of contemporary Italian, and the sociolinguistic structure as an object of constant analysis of directors and dialogues authors, who perceive and put on screen the increasing importance of the variable depending on the communicative situation; that is to say, what influences register change is more often the communicative situation or the communicative domain (*diafasia*), than the social or economic status of the speaker (*diastratia*). By presenting *neo-standard* and regional varieties as the most commonly spoken, cinema confirms that standard Italian indeed does not exist, and that in the few cases in which it is used, it is perceived as affected and extraneous.

The ability of film dialogues to reproduce phonological, morphological, and lexical features is counterbalanced by the scarce level of realism in imitating the semiotic aspects of language, such as pragmatics and textuality. That is, cinema is perhaps able to simulate traits of individual languages, but is less apt at reflecting and using the intrinsic and universal characteristics of language. Therefore, the almost total absence of devices such as interruptions, repetitions, reformulations, voice overlapping, and phatic connectives accounts for the partial linguistic unreliability of film dialogues. The language used in contemporary popular comedy proves then to be a hybrid mix of realism and artificiality in reproducing everyday speech. I argue that such blurred classification makes film language an expressive use of real-life speech and not a peculiar code with its own characteristics. Everyday language is therefore the starting point on which comedy grounds its humor. This persistent and tenacious sort of devotion to realism has always characterized the genre and still proves to be an obstacle to possible experimental uses of the language. In fact, although comedy has extensively explored the expressive potential of common, spoken Italian, yet it has limited its choices within the sphere of realism, and it has remained somewhat stuck on stereotypical uses of language (e.g. use of the same

regional varieties, use of the language to emphasize the South-North division, etc.). The reticence to experimentalism in the past has been overcome by films such as *L'armata Brancaleone* (Mario Monicelli, 1966), *Brancaleone alle crociate* (Mario Monicelli, 1970) *Quando le donne avevano la coda* (Pasquale Festa Campanile, 1970), and most recently by directors such as Antonio Albanese (*Il nostro matrimonio è in crisi*, 2002; *Qualunque*, 2011) or Checco Zalone (*Cado dalle nubi*, 2009; *Che bella giornata*, 2011; *Sole a catinelle*, 2013) who attempted to use the language in a different way: balancing between grammaticality and ungrammaticality, thus challenging the prescriptive norm. However, the cases of such extreme experimentalism are still scant and are not indicative of any strong tendency.

The absence of experimentalism is probably due to the fact that popular comedy offers the public exactly what the public expects, which is the use of the traditional local varieties (mainly *romanesco* and Neapolitan), a stereotyped use of coarse words, and the expressive function assigned to dialects. When popular comedy represents stereotypes, it satisfies people's expectations by reflecting their own vision of society, and, in so doing, exerts a form of control over the public since it supports and legitimizes people's opinion; conversely, the demand of the public for such stereotyped humor forces authors and directors to favor certain linguistic choices and certain ways of representing Italians' social behaviors, which in turn results in a form of control and influence that the people hold over authors' choices. The main function of comedy has always been to mock people's habits, and, in order to do so, the object to be mocked is, necessarily, reality, from which comedy rarely escapes.⁵⁸ Humor is inextricably linked to realism, being a

⁵⁸. Examples of surrealistic or non-conventional approaches to comedy are some of Nanni Moretti's films: *Palombella rossa* (1989), *Caro diario* (1993); or Maurizio Nichetti's: *Ladri di saponette* (1989), *Volere volare* (1991).

sort of distortion of it. Apparently, there is no humor without reality, as the latter is indeed an inescapable component of the former.

Overall the language of Italian cinema is a language that imitates and reports the process of development of current Italian, but it remains within the limits of a code that people recognize, since comedy is a dimension where the public seeks for confirmation of its linguistic identity. Such linguistic identity has to be shared; laughter being a mass practice. Along with the struggle of popular comedy in finding nontraditional ways to elicit humor, Chapter 8 showed a certain degree of reticence in engaging political criticism through language. One of the challenges of popular comedy should be to overcome such reticence and expand the focus of language functions from social to political satire.

The main goal of this work was to contribute to shedding light on how new linguistic tendencies are reflected in popular comedy's dialogues. A further goal, in a future project, is to extend this type of analysis to other cinematic genres, in order to establish patterns in the way language is used, and in order to emphasize the importance of the linguistic component as one of the criteria that contributes to a critical interpretation and understanding of the film itself. On the other hand, the study of language would benefit from monitoring film dialogues, because the presence of a new linguistic trend in a film legitimizes the innovation and gives the public the perception that the medium of cinema witnesses and participates, not only in the social dynamics, but also in the linguistic processes of their society.

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