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Communicative strategies in the Italian of Igbo-Nigerian immigrants in Italy: a contact-linguistic approach

Abstract

This paper reports on communicative strategies employed by Igbo-Nigerian immigrants living in the city of Padova (North-Eastern Italy). It proposes a new approach to the analysis of non-guided Second Language Acquisition (henceforth SLA). This approach treats immigrant speakers qua effective communication achievers. It focuses on communicative interaction, treating individual linguistic strategies as language innovations potentially initiating language change. It also sees non-guided SLA as a contact phenomenon and adopts a unified contact approach which puts all contact phenomena under the same umbrella.

1. Introduction

In the last two decades, the vast majority of studies on immigrants' language varieties have focused on the ways adult speakers acquire the target language (henceforth TL). A wide literature on this issue has been published in European countries where the phenomenon of immigration started in the early sixties, such as Germany and France (e.g. Klein and Perdue, 1992; Perdue, 1993; Giacomi, Stoffel & Véronique, 2000).

In Italy immigration is a relatively recent phenomenon, but the study by linguists of non-guided Italian L2 has grown considerably in the last 15 years, producing many publications (among others Bernini & Giacalone Ramat, 1990; Vedovelli et al., 2001; Giacalone Ramat, 2003; Banfi, 2003). In these studies the approach is mainly acquisitional: the focus is on the way adult speakers in a non-guided situation reach a native-like competence, with particular attention to the various steps of interlingual linguistic structures towards the exact matching of those in the TL; any deviant form in the interlanguage is treated as an incorrect step towards the 'correct' target-like one.

I do not underestimate the importance of such an approach, especially for SLA studies and the production of teaching material, which has also been prolific in recent years, but I will adopt a communicative approach in this study, rather than an acquisitional one. Adult immigrant speakers do not aim to achieve native speaker ability; their first goal is that of achieving effective communication in a limited range of communicative contexts such as workplaces, administrative offices and shops; in most cases these speakers are not at all interested in any kind of integration in the host country, nor in any deeper knowledge of the target language.

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In their attempts to carry on effective communication in a situation of non-complete access to the TL, speakers must maximize the linguistic material at their disposal and may create particular linguistic forms which differ from the equivalent TL forms used by native speakers to express the same function. I assume that these newly created forms (even if idiosyncratic or infrequent) are akin to innovations in the speech of native speakers. My definition of innovation is similar to the notion of 'exploratory expression' defined by Harris and Campbell (1995): constructions that may be used by the speakers a single time, but given the right circumstances may recur and become part of the grammar. The majority of exploratory expressions are never repeated, but a few will be successful and represent the root of language change. What is usually regarded as language change in the literature is the propagation of successful innovations (Croft, 2000; Labov, 2001). The dichotomy of 'innovation' versus 'change' will be used here for descriptive purposes as respectively the starting point and the end point of a continuum (for a similar approach, see Backus, 1992, 1996; Milroy, 1993). While the former is a synchronic fact, the latter is the diachronic result of propagation. An approach of this kind has the potential to shed light on the study of language change for two main reasons: first, because it is speaker-oriented, thus allowing it to overcome the inadequacy of system-oriented approaches used in historical linguistics or creolization; second, because it provides a closer look at the actual beginning of language change, at a micro-level, which is otherwise unobservable.

In order to effectively communicate, immigrant speakers can 'take inspiration' from the input more or less at their disposal, count on the stored knowledge of their previous languages, and be even more creative in trying out linguistic forms which may prove to be more or less successful. The fact that immigrant varieties develop outside the formal context of learning (the classroom) makes adult migrant speakers even more clearly the main actors in the learning process.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 provides the general background for the study. Section 3 presents the sociolinguistic background of the informants and the data collection. Section 4 presents the data collection. Section 5 discusses communicative strategies in the Italian of the informants, in particular the multifunctional preposition *per* and the possessive/existential *c'è*. The main conclusions of the paper are then summarised on Section 6.

2. Non-guided SLA as a contact phenomenon

Non-guided SLA is not commonly studied from a contact-linguistic perspective. Only recently have Italian linguists started applying a contact linguistic approach to the study of Italian L2, looking at an immigrant variety as a language variety per se with a mixed nature (e.g. Vedovelli et al., 2001 on Italian L2 of Arabic speakers; Guerini, 2004 on Italian L2 of Ghanaians; Vietti, 2005 on Peruvian Italian).

Traditionally, scholars have labelled changes in the TL under the influence of the L1 with various names, such as 'interference' or 'transfer'. The former term

presupposes a 'disturbing action' on the acquisition of the TL by L1 features, while the latter refers to the actual carrying over of mother tongue patterns from L1 into L2. Both terms come from the SLA tradition and have been used interchangeably in the literature to analyse what in this study I call contact-induced innovations. Transfer has been traditionally labelled as positive or negative according to its facilitating effect on the acquisition process; a positive transfer takes place when the L1 pattern is similar to the one in the TL. These two terms do not really fit the approach taken in this study, which, as noted above, conceives language learning as an effective communication process involving an active and creative role for the speaker. Talking of negative transfer would presuppose an acquisitional point of view, where the goal is to match the TL. In the communication process, even instances of traditional negative transfer can be effective. Winford (2003: 214) quotes the example of *be + after + V-ing* perfect constructions in Hiberno-English, modelled on an Irish construction (e.g. *She's after painting the house* 'She's just painted the house'). In other words, focusing on the actual communication, putting aside the idea of a TL, makes redundant the concept of negative transfer. The approach taken here conceives of language learning as language building and allows an active role for previously acquired languages. In an attempt to merge the study of SLA with that of language contact, Myers-Scotton and Jake have recently approached the study of L2 varieties in a similar way (e.g. Myers-Scotton & Jake, 2000; Jake, 1998). They use the term 'composite matrix language' to define 'interlanguage'[1] as the result of language contact between three systems: 1) the learner's previously acquired languages, 2) a variety of the TL, and 3) the developing learner variety. Although I do not adopt the Matrix Language Frame Model, this approach is very illuminating and allows the application of means of analysis proceeding from other contact phenomena, such as code-switching in the case of Myers-Scotton and Jake's model.

The focus of my analysis is on the individual's idiolects as the locus of contact following Weinreich's definition:

> "…two or more languages will be said to be in contact if they are used alternatively by the same persons. The language-using individuals are thus the locus of the contact" (Weinreich, 1953: 1).

In the immigration context, the embryonic language will be constructed of L2 material, but there will not be much of it at the very early stages, so migrant speakers will have to count on their previously acquired languages and language mixing will take place. What makes the immigration setting very fruitful is the clear and dramatic nature of contact phenomena. The migrant context was the locus of the beginnings of contact linguistics as a discipline (Weinreich, 1953; Haugen, 1956); however, most of the studies in this setting have been influenced by the

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[1] More recently the term has been used by Gross (2000) for the analysis of Berbice Dutch, a creole which has developed out of the contact between Dutch and Eastern Ijo speakers.

study of second language acquisition. The range of phenomena which can be analyzed is wide: borrowing, linguistic interference at different levels, from lexical surface to deeper facts of morphosyntax, i.e. the reorganization of the semantic and syntactic structures of a language on the model of another language, and the birth of mixed varieties. Sometimes these changes are so significant that they give birth to new varieties. Among language varieties which resulted from an immigration context are: *Cocoliche*, a mix of Spanish, Italian, and Italian dialects, which developed in Buenos Aires as a result of Italian immigration between 1880 and 1950 and *Spanglish*, a result of Spanish/English language contact (Silva-Corvalan, 1994).

3. The Igbo in Italy

In the last two decades Italy has been the destination of large waves of immigration, in line with other European countries, where immigration started in the early 1960s. Immigrants are attracted to Italy and especially the Veneto region (North-Eastern Italy) by job opportunities. The majority of immigrants come from North Africa, Eastern Europe, China and Sub-Saharan Africa. Among these, Nigerians represent the twelfth largest immigrant community in the Veneto region (Fincati, 2005).

This study focuses on the Igbo-Nigerian ethnic group. The first Igbo came very early in the 1970s as students[2]. At that time the Nigerian government itself offered grants to students who wished to study in Europe. The economic crisis that followed the coup d'état in 1983 meant that students who were abroad were no longer supported by their government. Many of them had to abandon their studies, but instead of returning to Nigeria, decided to stay in Italy and look for work in the regions where opportunities were numerous. Those who had a *permesso di soggiorno* (a residence permit) were able to work in the Veneto factories, while others started working as *vu cumprà*[3] (hawkers) while awaiting their official papers.
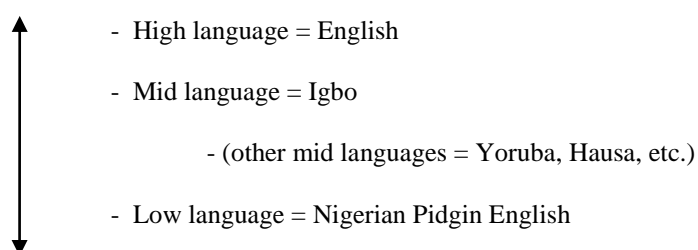
Igbo is the official language in the south east of Nigeria. In addition to Igbo, English and Nigerian Pidgin English (henceforth NPE) are also used as linguae francae. Early education in public schools is in local languages, while secondary and university education are in English[4]. All Nigerians who have received formal

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[2] Turchetta (1990) reports an estimated 750 Nigerians registered at Italian universities for the 1985/86 academic year. She also estimates that among the 150 Nigerians in Rome, 80% were Igbo.

[3] This term is used both by Italians and foreigners to refer to hawkers. V*u cumprà*, 'you want to buy' in Southern Italian, comes from the way foreign hawkers used to approach buyers.

[4] The National Policy on Education 1977 states that 'in states where there is a predominantly written language, that language should be the medium of instruction for the

education after primary school are bilingual in English and another indigenous language, or even multilingual if they speak NPE and/or other indigenous languages (depending on the level of contact with other ethnic groups and family background). This situation, however, limits Nigerians' competence in their native language. The Igbo, for example, are relatively fluent in spoken Igbo, but lack good written competence. Those without formal education tend to be monolingual in Igbo or bilingual in Igbo and NPE, which is being used more and more. In general, Igbo is the language spoken in the family and in villages. NPE is learned by the Igbo who have migrated to the big cities or the Delta area. These people are not so fluent in Igbo; thus NPE becomes a more suitable medium of communication. All Igbo speakers in this study have attended at least high school, so are bilingual in English and Igbo, but many of them also speak NPE and other indigenous languages, such as Yoruba. The linguistic repertoire of the Igbo can be represented as follows:

- High language = English

- Mid language = Igbo

    - (other mid languages = Yoruba, Hausa, etc.)

- Low language = Nigerian Pidgin English

Most Igbo have an exolanguage, in this case English, as high language, Igbo and possibly other regional linguae francae as middle functional language(s), and NPE as low language (cf. Guerini, 2002; Haust & Dittmar, 1997).

4. Data

The aim of the research reported in this article is to analyse the communicative strategies which the Igbo adopt while engaging in Italian conversation. This required the collection of as much spontaneous and natural speech as possible. For this purpose, I chose to use the recorded interview, which is a traditional way to collect data in sociolinguistics. Interviews allow the interviewer to obtain a large amount of conversational speech in a relatively short time, while other methods such as questionnaires or grammaticality judgements provide only brief responses

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first three years of primary education while English is taught as a subject; after this period English should be the language of instruction and the Nigerian language taught as a subject'.

to direct questions. Access to the community was granted through my Nigerian friends, who introduced me to other informants. The corpus of the present study consists of 18 interviews. Each interview was tape-recorded and transcribed in its entirety. The tape-recorder was always overt and anonymity was guaranteed to the speakers; interviews and speakers are referred to with capital letters. The interviews were conducted in Italian in the informant's home or in a suitable place for conversation and recording. Each interview took from 40 to 60 minutes, depending on the ease with which contact was established. The interview had two aims: to learn as much as possible about the relevant aspects of the speaker's social background and history, and to collect enough conversation in Italian to analyze communicative strategies adopted by that person when asked to speak in Italian. The first aim was also achieved by a certain degree of participant observation[5].

5. Communicative strategies

When asked to speak Italian, immigrant speakers have to maximise the already acquired Italian material at their disposal. However, the de facto version of their Italian consists of Italian material, which can be more or less creatively restructured, and more or less overt material from previously acquired languages (Igbo or English code-switching). It must be taken into account that for the Igbo, language mixing represents an unmarked communicative habit. Each individual is a language creator each time he or she speaks, since he or she can draw structures from a wide set of choices. The only difference between monolingual speakers and multilingual ones is that while monolingual speakers in their first languages choose different linguistic units or constructions for different ways of communication, adult multilingual immigrants start from scratch in building their own version of the TL and can also make use of items from their previously acquired languages. I have represented the communicative strategies adopted by Igbo immigrants as a continuum which ranges from overt use of previously acquired languages to more target-like forms:

(previously acquired languages)   *(Italian)*

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Code-switching   reanalysed forms   native-like forms
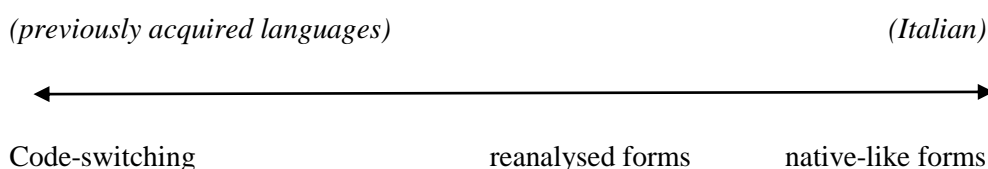
The use of each strategy varies from speaker to speaker, and is highly dependent on the linguistic interaction. The majority of immigrants have no previous

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[5] The participant observation method comes from anthropological studies. The researcher has to achieve, if only temporary, membership of the community he is studying. Obviously this is more likely to happen if the researcher is a member of that community. However, in that case, there is a danger in the researcher basing conclusions on his/her own experience.

knowledge of the Italian language on arrival and learn it with little or no formal instruction. This situation makes SLA in the immigrant context a perfect locus for the study of learners' communicative strategies and their linguistic manifestations in the immigrants' Italian speech.

In this paper I will focus on two communicative strategies which make use of reanalysed Italian forms. These forms have a clear Italian look, but their function will be innovative. The focus is on illustrating how innovative uses of TL-like forms can achieve effective communication in Italian. These innovations will most probably have to give way to more target-like forms/functions in the idiolect of each informant; nevertheless, they can also survive and become a permanent feature of an idiolect of (if widespread in many idiolects) the Igbo community. The informants' idiolects are characterized by a high variation in the use of linguistic strategies: they can use innovative linguistic structures, but also target-like ones. Some reanalysed forms resemble forms in pidgins and creoles; this supports my approach to non-guided SLA and pidginization as one and the same process in different sociolinguistic situations, or, à la Mufwene, different linguistic ecologies (2002).

Particular attention will be paid to investigating any possible role of previously acquired languages in the reanalysis of Italian forms. Previously acquired languages are thought to influence reanalysis by providing ready-made form/function patterns which can be identified through a closer examination of grammaticalization paths in previously acquired languages. Because grammaticalization theory is meant to predict potential paths of language change, it will also provide good insights to explain contact-induced linguistic developments. Reanalysis is also connected to issues of multifunctionality and iconicity already identified as organizational principles in initial stages of creolization.

5.1. Multifunctional preposition *per*

This section will deal with the non-target use of the preposition *per* as a communicative strategy in the Italian of less fluent speakers. *Per* is used in different ways by Igbo speakers: as preposition and infinitive verb introducer.

In standard Italian prepositions like *in* 'in', *a* 'to', *di* 'of' or *su* 'on' are often merged with the following definite article, forming the so-called articled prepositions. This makes the pattern very complicated and difficult for foreigners to learn. However, simple prepositions may also occur in Italian. More fluent informants, who have a wider range of target-like prepositions, use only simple prepositions[6].

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[6] Definite articles are extremely rare in the corpus, appearing only in non-analysed forms such as *i soldi* 'the money', *la televisione* 'the television', *la vita* 'the life', etc.

The prepositions *per* 'for' and *con* 'with' never form articled prepositions with the following definite article[7], making them more suitable to be reanalysed. Indeed, *per* shows extended patterns of use, especially in the Italian of less proficient speakers, as is illustrated in example (1), where informant I is explaining what his brothers do. In the excerpt, in order to answer the interviewer's question, he uses *per* twice as a locative preposition (*per scuola* 'at/in school') in lines 2 and 3, and once as topicalization marker (*per mia grandi fratello* 'as for/about my oldest brother') in line 2. Two vocabulary creations in Italian (*lettore,* a creation for 'lecturer', and *universitare < università* 'university' + *-are* the infinitive marker) and two English insertions (*lecturer* and *graduat-*), indicate that the speaker is relying on his previously acquired languages in the search for missing vocabulary.

(1)
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1    Int: Cosa fanno   i        tuoi        fratelli?
         What do3PL   theMPL   your3MPL brotherMPL
2    I:  Per scuola      lettore, uno,    per mia      grandi    fratello, lecturer,
         for schoolFSG reader?  oneMSG for myFSG bigMPL  brotherMSG
3        dottore       per scuola,      mia sorella      sono,      come dici,
         doctorMSG  for schoolFSG  myFSG sisterFSG be1SG/3PL how saySG
4        gradua- vai    universitare, altri        scuola.(I-22)
                 go2PL university?  otherMPL schoolFSL
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1    Int:     What do your brothers do?
2    I:       Teacher at school, one, as for my oldest brother, he is a *lecturer,*
3             doctor at a school, my sister is, how do you say, *gradua-*
4             she goes to the university, another school
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Excerpt (2) is also taken from informant I's interview. His Italian is very basic, many structures in his speech resembling those in pidgins and creoles. Apart from the use of *per*, note for example the reduplication, *caldo caldo* 'hot hot', to express intensity. In pidgin terms we could describe informant I's Italian as the most basilectal[8] in the corpus.

(2)
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1       Int:    Come vai    a lavorare?
                how  go2SG  to workINF
2       I:      Quasi  quasi,  per adesso caldo caldo io vai     per bicicletta,
                at least at least  for now    hot   hot    I go2SG   for bicycleFSG
3               si no    per autobus, così così prendi    sempre bicicletta,
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[7] *Con* can be merged with the following definite article, but such forms are rare in modern spoken Italian.
[8] A basilect is the variety of a pidgin or creole that is more remote from the prestige variety.

		if NEG for bus so so take2SG always bicycleFSG
4		prendi sempre autobus.
		take2SG always bus (I-60)

1	Int:	How do you go to work?
2	I:	Usually, now it is very hot I go by bicycle,
3		otherwise by bus, so so I always take the bicycle
4		I always take the bus.

The first *per* (line 2) belongs to the unit *per adesso* 'for now', although it is used in a non-target-like way by the speaker with a causative meaning like *because* in English. The other two instances of *per* are used to express the means by which he goes to work; in Italian the preposition *in* would have been the correct choice: *in bicicletta* 'by bicycle', *in autobus* 'by bus'.

In (3) *per* is used to express the topic (*per Jamaica* 'for Jamaica' = It. *sulla Giamaica* 'about Jamaica'). When asked about life in Jamaica, speaker O answers first in English, fulfilling the task of content answering, since the conversation was in Italian. He then restates the same sentence in Italian and it is in this sentence that *per* appears. Speaker O's preferred language is English, his whole interview being peppered with English insertions and alternations. It is not by chance that the occurrences appear in an excerpt of a speaker making frequent use of code-switching into English and NPE.

(3)

1	Int:	Com'è la vita in Giamaica?
		How is theFSG lifeFSG in Jamaica
2	O:	Ehh, I don't have to say much about Jamaica,
3		io non c'è tanti da dire **per** Jamaica,
		I NEG there's a lot to sayINF for Jamaica
4		solo che mi piaci come paese, ma…
		only that DAT please as countryMSG but (O-27)

1	Int:	How is life in Jamaica?
2	O:	*Ehh, I don't have a lot to say about Jamaica,*
3		I don't have a lot to say about *Jamaica*,
4		only that I like it as a country, but…

The use of one multifunctional preposition is common in creoles. Tok Pisin, for example, uses *long* (< English *belong*) as a multifunctional preposition. Most English-lexifier creoles, however, have selected *for* or a *for*-like form from their superstrate languages as a multifunctional preposition: *for* or *fo* in Hawaiian Creole

English (Byrne, 1984), and *fo* in Nigerian Pidgin English (Faraclas, 1996). Creoles with Romance languages as lexifiers show the same *for*-pattern. Creoles from the Cape Verde Islands have *pa* (< Portuguese *para* 'for') (Byrne, 1984). In French-lexifier creoles too, the multifunctional preposition is usually derived from French *pour* 'for': *pu* in Mauritius Creole (Véronique, 1994) and in Haitian Creole (Lefebvre, 2004). Comparison with Portuguese and French Creoles is of particular importance for the discussion of occurrences in the Italian of Igbo-Nigerians, since they all have a Romance language as a lexifier[9]. Kotsinas discusses the multifunctional preposition *på* in Russenorsk, derived from the Swedish preposition *på* 'on' and the Russian preposition/affix *po/po-* 'on' (Kotsinas, 1996). She also describes the use of *på* as a multifunctional preposition in her data from the Swedish spoken by immigrants. Some creolists agree on the categorical status of *for*-derived forms in creoles, which can be preposition, complementizer or modal auxiliary.

Washabaugh (1975; 1978) supports the origin of *fu* from African sources. He claims that there is a multifunctional form in many creoles of the world which usually has the above-mentioned functions. According to Byrne, creoles are particularly predisposed to adopt a *for*-like form from their respective superstrate languages to function as preposition, complementizer and modal.

I do not agree with this idea, since it is clear that there are exceptions to the select-*for* tendency: the above mentioned *long* in Tok Pisin[10] and *på* in Russenorsk and Immigrant Swedish, among others. Kriyol, a Portuguese-based Creole of Guinea Bissau, has a multifunctional preposition *na* 'in the FSG' derived from Portuguese. Bruyn (2003) reports a multifunctional preposition *na* in Sranan, which originated either from the Portuguese *na* 'in the FSG' or the Igbo multifunctional preposition.

I acknowledge that there is a general trend in creolization towards a single multifunctional preposition, and believe that Byrne's strongly Bickertonian approach may have prevented him from taking into account exceptions to the only-*for* selection tendency.

Let us examine prepositions in the previously acquired languages. Igbo has a multifunctional preposition *nà* which covers locative as well as other prepositional meanings (Welmers & Welmers, 1968; Ugochukwu, 2004). See the following example:

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[9] An interesting use of the Italian preposition *per* is in the Lingua Franca, where it marks pronouns in direct or indirect object position, as in *mi mirato per ti* 'I have seen you', *mi ablar per ti* 'I say to you', this also happens in Indo-Portuguese and Cape Dutch (Schuchardt, 1980).

[10] Byrne (1984: 117) acknowledges this exception and subsumes it to Tok Pisin late creolization, which counteracted the tendency to choose a *for*-like form.

(4)   Enyi m nwoke bi   nà[11] Manchester
        friend my boy/man live in   Manchester
        'My friend lives in Manchester'
        (Ugochukwu, C.; p.c.)

In NPE, there is also a multifunctional preposition *fo* (< English 'for') which derives its form from English, while its functions resemble those in Igbo as a substrate language. See the following examples:

(5)   A de   fo   fam
        I beAUX at/in farm
        'I am at/on/in/in front of/etc the farm
        (Faraclas, 1996)

(6)   A go   bit   yu fo ken
        1S FUT beat you with cane
        'I will beat you with a cane'
        (Faraclas, 1996)

The use of multifunctional *per* in my corpus is by speakers with low proficiency in Italian and reduced contact with Italian native speakers (speaker I) or with a preference for English (speaker O). These features make them rely more on the previously acquired languages when asked to communicate in Italian. They all show a high number of code-switches and when using Italian forms they are more likely to make use of functions from their background languages, since they have poor access to Italian. Given this particular sociolinguistic situation, communicative strategies in these speakers' idiolects strongly resemble communicative strategies in creolization.

Focusing on our case, once they have learned the preposition *per*, some speakers decide that it is a useful form to express new functions. Proceeding with the acquisition of new prepositions is made even more difficult by the fact that in Italian the majority of prepositions merge with the following definite article, creating a variety of possible combinations sometimes totally different from the preposition alone[12].

The form *per* is reanalyzed by some speakers, expanding its functions in the same way the substrate forms do. This is an example of reanalysis involving polysemy copying, in which the direction of the extension of the functions is provided by patterns in Igbo and NPE. To be precise, the contact-induced

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[11] If the noun following the preposition *nà* is followed by a noun beginning with a vowel, the final -*a* is replaced by an apostrophe, as in *n'ulo* 'in the house' and *n'uzo* 'in the street' (Ugochukwu, C.; p.c.).
[12] For example *in the* in Italian can be: *nel* 'in theMSG', *nella* 'in the FSG', *nei* 'in the MPL', etc.

reanalysis of *per* has NPE *fo* as its antecedent; polysemy copying has already taken place in the construction of NPE.

The reanalysis of *per* shows a directionality from benefactive preposition > purpose preposition[13] > infinitive marker/complementizer/topic marker, which resembles that of well attested grammaticalization paths (Heine & Kuteva, 2002: 247-248).

5.2. Possessive/existential *c'è*

Let us now move on to the reanalysed form *c'è* 'there's' used to express possession by some Igbo speakers[14]. The following examples illustrate the nature of this strategy to express possession:

(7)

1	Int:	Mi	parli	di Parigi?			
		DAT	speak2SG of Paris				
2	C:	È	bella,	anche quando viveva		là	
		be3SG	niceFSG also	when	live3SGPAST	there	
3		***io c'è***	***tanti***	***amica***,			
		I there's	manyMPL friendFSG				
4		hai	capito	no,	perché	sai	come
		have2SG understandPAST	no	because	knowsSG	like	
5		c'è	tanti	<u>African</u>	no, loro piace	parla	con…
		there's	manyMPL African	no they like3SG talk3SG with			
6		c'è	una	ragazza	di Parigi no,	perché quando	io arrivo,
		there's aFSG girlFSG	of Paris	because when	I arrive1SG		
7		l'	aereo	no, quando cammina c'è	una	ragazza	
		theMSGairplaneMSG no, when	walk3SG	there's	aFSG girlFSG		
8		così che	è	venuto	da me chiedere come stai...(C-32)		
		so that	be3SG comePASTPART to me askINF how are you				

1	Int:	Can you tell me about Paris?
2	C:	It is nice, also when I used to live there
3		I had many friends,
4		you understand no, because you know since
5		there are many *Africans* no, they like to talk with…
6		there was a girl from Paris no, because when I arrived,

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[13] Benefactive and purposive meanings are already expressed by the preposition *per* in Italian.
[14] The synthetic form *c'è* 'there's' is composed of the deictic particle *ci* 'there' and *è*, the third singular form of the verb *essere* 'to be'.

| 7 | | the airplane no, while I was walking there was a girl |
| 8 | | so who came to me and asked how I was… |

In (7), speaker C is reporting her experience at the airport in Paris, where she spent some time before arriving in Italy. As well as the reanalysed *c'è* possessive form, speaker C makes use of many non-target-like communicative strategies such as code-switching and contact-induced reanalysed forms. In example (7) note the English insertion *African* (line 5) and the use of *anche* 'also' as coordinative conjunction.

In the following example (8), I asked speaker F how often he hears from his relatives in Nigeria. He told me that his relatives often call him, because in Italy phone calls are expensive. Note in line 3 a clear *c'è*-possessive strategy. Speaker F also makes use of code-switching and other contact-induced strategies; note the use of the conjunction *anche* preceding the possessive sentence.

(8)

1	Int:	Ti	senti	spesso con loro?
		RFL	hear2SG	often with them
2	F:	Sì ogni tanto	loro <u>telephone</u> io, Qua in Italia telefono costa,
		yes sometimes	they telephone I here in Italy telephoneMSG cost3SG
3		anche ***io non*** ***c'è*** ***soldi*** ***per telefono***. (F-132)
		also I NEG there's moneyMPL for telephoneMSG

1	Int:	Do you hear from them often?
2	F:	Yes, time to time I call them. Here in Italy phoning is expensive,
3		and I do not have money to call.

Let us take a closer look at this strategy to express possession. Both speakers have acquired *c'è* and use it in a target-like way to express existence elsewhere in the data. The high frequency of use in spoken Italian makes the form *c'è* a good candidate for reanalysis. The high frequency is due to the basic meaning encoded in the form, and to a certain multifunctionality in spoken Italian (in sentences of the kind *che cosa c'è?* 'what's up?, *c'è il sole* 'it's sunny', or for clefting: *c'è un uomo che…*'there's a man who…'). As well as a suitable salient form expressing existence, the speakers have another strategy at their disposal: a general notion of topicality. This is particularly productive in the earliest stages of acquisition, when speakers must rely on the order of bare nouns: what is already known is expressed in sentence-initial position, while any new information is placed in non-initial position. In existence and possession, what exists or the possessee are indefinite and newly introduced discourse elements. Reanalysis of the *c'è* kind is not uncommon in situations of non-directed SLA or early stages of creolization; in these contexts speakers have no grammatical or metalinguistic information about

the target/lexifier language; hence they have to rely on pragmatic modes of speech and on what they hear, making choices on how to process it. Detges (2003) discusses examples of this kind of reanalysis taking place in French Creoles. For instance, the verb *simié* 'prefer' in Sainte-Lucie Creole was derived, through reanalysis, from the French construction *c'est mieux* 'it's better': *mwen simié li* 'I prefer reading'. Detges's example of *simié* and *c'è* are both examples of vocabulary expansion. Saying that 'something is better' with regard to an animate topic is equivalent to saying that the animate topic 'prefers' something. A similar semantic change takes place for *c'è*: saying that 'something exists' with regard to an animate topic normally means that the animate topic 'has' something (see below). Prototypical instances of possession involve human possessors, and, less typically, non-human animate possessors (Langacker, 1995). The schematic representation of the *c'è*-construction is as follows:

(9)   Y exists with reference to X

X stands for any place specification. However, if X becomes a human or an animal 'place' [+ ANIMATE] or [+ CONCRETE], the meaning of the sentence can still remain existential/locative (*there is a fly on John*), but it can also approach that of a possessive proposition in a metaphorical way (*there is a car on/at/with etc. John*): we therefore get a location-at-animate-locus (Agha, 1990, *cit. in* Duff, 1993: 2).
Some languages express possession in this way. Heine's (1997) representation of the so-called Topic Schema will be very appropriate in the case of the possessive *c'è*-construction used by the speakers:

(10)   As for X, Y (of X) exists > X has, owns Y (Heine, 1997: 62)

Heine (1997: 62) defines it as a schema "where the possessor is presented as a kind of clausal topic or theme: it appears as a topic or theme constituent in clause-initial position, but it also figures as a possessive modifier of the possessee in addition". The element in topic position tends to acquire the properties of a subject and to be increasingly grammaticalized as a subject. Some languages have this construction which behaves as if it had two subjects. Once the topic becomes a subject, the construction of *c'è* in the speakers' interlanguage matches that of any other VP: an obligatory subject + a bare verb form[15] + direct/indirect objects. Previous studies have shown how a poly-functional copula-like form can be used to express a number of functions in early L2 development and in pidgins and creoles: identification, topic marking, existence and possession (Giacalone Ramat, 1992, Italian L2 with Tigrinya L1; Vietti, 2005, Italian L2 with Spanish L1; Duff, 1993, English L2 with Cambodian L1; Véronique, 2003, French L2 with Moroccan

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[15] Base-forms in the literature in immigrant varieties of Italian are usually the 2nd or the 3rd singular; the same is true for the Italian of Igbo Nigerians (Giacalone Ramat, 2003).

Arabic L1). Duff (1993) describes the frequent production of possessive/existential *have* in the early interlanguage of Chinese learners. In Chinese the form *you* 'have' is also used to express existence. Duff notices that the overextension of *have* into the existential field persists in late stages of English L2, even if students can already master other target-like constructions. Véronique (2003) discusses the use of the existential *il y a* 'there is' and the phonetic variant *jãna* in French L2 of Moroccan Arabic speakers. Although the existential meaning tends to be preferred, the speakers also express the possession value. The interrelation of forms to express existence and possession is further confirmed in the development which these forms undergo in pidgins and creoles. The general preference for one form with both functions is also confirmed in a variety of Italian spoken in Ethiopia, the so called Simplified Italian of Ethiopia[16] (Marcos, 1976). The form *ce* 'there is' (alternatively *aβere* < It. *avere* 'to have') is used to express existence, possession (11) and presence:

(11)   io non   ce   (*aβere*) makkina
        I NEG there is   to have   car
        'I do not have a car'
        (Marcos, 1976: 178)

In Igbo, possession is expressed through the verb *nwé* 'receive, get' (Welmers & Welmers, 1968; Chinedu Uchechukwu, p.c.). Thus, in Igbo, the source model for have-constructions is the Action Schema, as it is for English and Italian. Example (12) shows the use of the verb *nwé*. In Igbo suffixes are the only kind of verbal inflection; in the following examples the *–ra/re* form of Indicative is used (Emenanjo, 1987). Information on person and number is provided by the use of obligatory subject pronouns:

(12)   I   nwere ezi   ulo
           you   have   good house
           'you have a nice house'

It is important to point out that the Igbo verb *nwé* is also used to express existence. In the following example, it is still conjugated with the Indicative suffix and the subject is the impersonal pronoun *e*:

(13)   E   nwere oke   n'ime   ulo   a
           Pronoun3SG   have   rat   inside   house   this
           'there is a mouse in this house'

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[16] Simplified Italian in Ethiopia and Eritrea were created in the end of the nineteenth century by the contact of Italian colonizers and local peoples in the African Horn. This variety of Italian is still spoken by a few locals (Bernini, 2005).

The impersonal pronoun *e* 'someone, it' is also used in many forms of impersonal constructions. It can be either *e* or *a*, depending on the vowel of the verb it functions as the subject of, since it must harmonize. In his diagram of subject pronouns, Emenanjo (1987) places it between the singular and the plural, although its syntactic behaviour is like that of the singular. It clearly appears that the verb *nwé* used in the third-person singular form has been grammaticalized to an existential expression. A similar directionality from a have-verb to an existential expression is found in a number of languages, cf. French *il y a* ('it there has') 'there is', or Spanish *hay* ('exists') 'there is'. In all these cases and in the Igbo construction under analysis, the third-person singular pronoun has a locative reference, although in French and Spanish it is not recognizable anymore due to the grammaticalization process (Heine, 1997).

The expression of possession in NPE seems to reflect the same pattern as Igbo. The verb *get* has been reanalysed as a possession-verb; again the source schema for possession in the Pidgin is the Action Schema. As for the expression of existence, the same verb is used with the third-person singular subject, which also functions as an impersonal. This is a common pattern in Atlantic Pidgins and Creoles. Yoruba, for instance, another substrate language, has a similar construction to Igbo. The first example shows the use of the verb *get* to express possession (14), and example (15) shows the use of the pronoun *i* as a third-person singular pronoun and as an impersonal in the existential construction:

(14)　　A get　won　buk
　　　　I have　one　book
　　　　'I have a book'
　　　　(Faraclas, 1996: 114)

(15)　　I　get　won　man　we　live here
　　　　he have　one　man　that　live here
　　　　'there is a man who lives here'
　　　　(Uchechukwu, p.c.)

The form *c'è* represents a good candidate for reanalysis. First, it is frequent in the input, in terms of contexts of use. Certainly, forms of the verb *avere* 'have' in the input represent the same problem as do all Italian verbs, in that their morphology is highly variable. Another piece of evidence comes from past tense verb forms. In early stages of acquisition the first occurrences of past tense are represented by past participles without any expressed auxiliary (in Italian *avere* 'have' or *essere* 'be'); the meaning 'past' is conveyed in the past participle, the auxiliary being perceived as redundant (Giacalone Ramat, 2003). The meaning extension is due to reanalysis by the speakers of the form *c'è*. Any grammatical functions such as gender/number in constructions of the kind *lei c'è casa* 'she has a

house', or *Roma c'è traffico* 'In Rome there is traffic' do not originate specifically from this semantic change. They are due to a general strategy in the interlanguage of immigrants which requires all verbs to be 'conjugated' by a compulsory subject. This strategy itself is an instance of canonical grammaticalization, but represents a phenomenon on its own: nouns or subject pronouns are used to convey grammatical information (in the same way as in English and French), which otherwise would not be expressed, the Italian verbal morphology being absent.

6. Conclusions

This paper has presented an analysis of the communicative strategies used in the Italian discourse of Igbo-Nigerian immigrants in Padova. This study differs from existing acquisitional proposals, by treating immigrant speakers qua effective communication achievers, who have as their TL a simplified version of the TL which could suffice for basic and effective communication, rather than a TL that native speakers master. I have chosen to look at communicative strategies as a result of speakers' creativity, potentially influenced by previously acquired languages. Studies of language contact have taken the perspective of communities or language systems being in contact with each other, rather than that of interacting individuals. In this study, language contact is conceived as taking place within the individual's idiolect rather than between idealized language systems. The focus on the speakers' idiolects as well as the communicative situation is rarely applied either to the study of immigrant varieties or to that of Language Contact. Focusing on the interaction reveals facts that would have gone unseen under other approaches. The speaker is constantly counting on the input perceived in order to build his or her own language outcomes, and the input itself is not static but constantly changing during the linguistic interaction.

In order to achieve effective communication, immigrant speakers have to maximize the resources at their disposal: their knowledge of previously acquired languages, the Italian forms already acquired, and the Italian forms in the input they are exposed to during a single linguistic interaction. I have represented the communicative strategies adopted by immigrants as a continuum which ranges from overt use of previously acquired languages to more target-like forms. The use of each strategy varies from speaker to speaker, and is highly dependent on the linguistic interaction. My analysis reveals that immigrant speakers can achieve effective communication by creating forms which deviate from the Italian norm and are potentially contact-induced. These forms are likely to be replaced by more target-like forms as the speakers become more proficient in Italian, but they may also persist in the speech of advanced speakers. In all examples, previously acquired languages may have influenced reanalysis by providing ready-made form/function patterns. This influence in any case must not be regarded as the only factor affecting reanalysis. In the case of the multifunctional preposition *per* 'for' and the reanalysis of *c'è* 'there's' as a possessive, frequency and multifunctionality

make them good candidates for reanalysis. What previously acquired languages do is to provide a possible pattern of meaning/form expansion. The communicative strategies analysed in this study strikingly resemble creole forms. This confirms the intimate relation between non-guided SLA and pidginization, which are in fact two faces of the same coin. Different linguistic outcomes, if any, are due to the different social conditions in which language contact takes place (for example, the degree of access to the target/lexifier language), not to the different linguistic behaviour of the speakers.

Abbreviations

SG	singular
PL	plural
M	masculine
F	feminine
1	1st person
2	2nd person
3	3rd person
REL	relativizer
NEG	negative
RFL	reflexive clitic personal pronouns
INF	infinitive
PAST	past
PART	participle
AUX	auxiliary verb
DIM	diminutive
PRS	present
IMP	impersonal clitic personal pronoun
DAT	dative clitic pronoun
GER	gerund
IND	Igbo Indicative verb form

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