Language loss of Italian immigrants in The Netherlands

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1 Introduction

This paper mainly deals with the results of a pilot study in language loss of Italian immigrants in The Netherlands (1). This pilot study was carried out as part of a large scale sociolinguistic research project in language shift and language loss in Turkish and Italian immigrants in The Netherlands and Flanders. As an introduction to this research report an overview is given of ethnic and linguistic diversity in The Netherlands (section 2). In this section special reference is made to Italian immigrants in The Netherlands and to research that has been carried out in this field. Section 3 contains a discussion of some basic theoretical issues in the field of first language loss, that we encountered in setting up the research project. In section 4 we give a short outline of the project. In section 5, the pilot study is reported on. The operationalization of language loss and the choice of a point of reference are dealt with, and the design and the results of the study are discussed. In a concluding section 6 we discuss the results of the pilot study in terms of their relevance for reconsidering the very nature of the process of language loss.

2 Linguistic Diversity in The Netherlands

In his survey of the linguistic situation in Italy, Balboni (1984) points out that this country, seen from abroad, offers a rather monolithic impression. On closer

examination, however, as Balboni shows, the situation appears to be quite different. As a matter of fact, a great number of languages and dialects coexist within Italian society. Quite the same seems to be true as far as The Netherlands is concerned. Seen from abroad this small country on the North-Sea border might also appear to be a homogeneous language area. Contrary to expectations, being a small, highly industrialized and urbanized country with hardly any natural boundaries, a very dense population and highly developed transportation and communication networks, The Netherlands is at the moment, and in fact always has been, a multilingual country. This means that in The Netherlands, a lot of indigenous and non-indigenous languages and dialects are spoken besides standard Dutch. These languages and language varieties can be divided in two main groups. The first group consists of regional varieties, with or without language status. The second group consists of languages or language varieties used by ethnic minorities that, for various, but mainly economic reasons have chosen The Netherlands, and especially its big cities and industrial areas, as their temporary or permanent place of residence.

In this context we will not comment any further upon indigenous language variation in The Netherlands (cf. Donaldson 1983; Van Hout 1984; Kroon & Sturm 1988) but confine ourselves to an overview of linguistic diversity as a result of immigration of different ethnic minority groups. In a paper on 'Language and Ethnic Minorities in The Netherlands', to appear in an issue of the

International Journal of the Sociology of Language on sociolinguistic research in The Netherlands and Flanders, Extra & Vallen (1988) indicate that it is often erroneously suggested that immigration and multilingualism are recent phenomena in Dutch society. In the extensive overview they give it is shown that, as in other European countries, the number of immigrants in The Netherlands at any given time seems to correspond with its relative economic and cultural prosperity. Between 1600 and 1640 about 10% of the population of The Netherlands was of foreign origin. By the end of the 17th century this percentage had decreased to 6% and it remained at this level until the end of the 18th century. The number of immigrants declined very rapidly during the 19th century, a period of economic and political crises. With the economic revival of the sixties and seventies of the present century, however, the percentages grew again: from 2% in 1971 to 3% in 1978 and 4% in 1986. Note that these figures only apply to residents without Dutch citizenship and, therefore, do not include immigrants from the former Dutch colonies who most often are Dutch Nationals and who, therefore, are not included in official statistics on the numbers of foreigners in The Netherlands. The size of these groups can only be estimated.

When we add the estimates for the groups of immigrants from the former Dutch colonies to the official figures, about 1 million of the more than 14 million inhabitants of The Netherlands belong, according to Extra & Vallen (1987, 2) to non-indigenous groups, i.e. about 7% of the

present Dutch population. Four main groups of immigrants can be distinguished. An overview of these groups is given in table 1 (figures are from 1985/1986). The first group consists of some 560.000 immigrants from the former Dutch colonies (Surinam, the Dutch Antilles and the former Dutch Indies). Within this group the Moluccans take in a special position, not only from an ethnic, cultural and religious perspective, but also because of their involuntary 'repatriation' to The Netherlands in 1951. The second largest group of immigrants is constituted by about 340.000 so-called foreign workers from Mediterranean countries such as Turkey, Morocco, Spain, Italy, Yugoslavia, Portugal, Greece and Tunesia. The third group consists of some 30.000 political refugees from various countries. The fourth group is rather heterogeneous: it includes for example Chinese immigrants, immigrants form Western Europe, the Americas, Africa and Asia, and gypsies and caravan dwellers up to a total amount of about 226.500 inhabitants.

As to the Italian immigrants in The Netherlands, our main point of interest here, the following remarks can be made (cf. Pasteels 1985; Bovenkerk, Eijken & Bovenkerk-Teerink 1983; Brussa, Plebani & Van de Putten 1987). The first Italian immigrants in The Netherlands were the 'granito' and 'terrazo' workers who moved in during the first half of the 19th century. Immediately after World War I a second group of Italians immigrated: the workers in the cole mines in the province of Limburg

Table 1: Ethnic minority groups in The Netherlands (from Extra & Vallen 1987, 3)

Immigrants from the former Dutch colonies	560.000
- Surinam	200.000
- Dutch Antilles	50.000
- former Dutch Indies (excl. Moluccas)	275.000
- Moluccas	40.000
Immigrants from Mediterranean countries	340.000
- Turkey	160.000
- Morocco	112.000
- Spain	20.000
- Italy	18.000
- Yugoslavia	12.000
- Portugal (incl. Cap Verdian Islands)	9.000
- Greek	4.000
- Tunesia	2.500
Political Refugees	30.000
- Hungary	4.000
- Czechoslovakia	2.000
- Poland	2.000
- Vietnam	7.000
- Turkey (Turkish and Armenian Christians)	4.000
- Sri Lanka	3.500
- Chile	2.000
- other countries	5.000
Others	226.500
- Chinese immigrants from various countries	30.000
- immigrants from Western European countries	116.000
- immigrants from the United States	4.000
- immigrants from other North and South America	8.000
- immigrants from Asia and Africa	35.000
- caravan dwellers and gypsies	33.500

in the south of the country. A third group were the 'ice-cream' Italians who came before World War II.

Throughout the years the number of Italians in The Netherlands steadily increased. A firm growth of Italian miners and industrial workers (especially in the textile factories in the East of The Netherlands) can be noticed in the 1950th and especially after 1960, when The Netherlands entered into a recruiting agreement with Italy. The highest number of Italian immigrants in the Netherlands, more than 21.000, was reached in 1981. After that year the figures show a steady decrease to about 18.000 inhabitants nowadays. This tendency can be illustrated by some figures from the cities of Amsterdam and Enschede, which show a decrease from 2.789 Italians in 1982 to 2.598 in 1985 in Amsterdam and from 1.056 to 884 in Enschede in the same period (cf. table 2).

Table 2: Decrease of Italian inhabitants in Amsterdam and Enschede (from Brussa, Plebani & Van de Putten 1987, 12).

date	Amsterdam	Enschede
1.1.1982	2.789	1.056
1.1.1983	2.689	1.029
1.1.1984	2.644	976
1.1.1985	2.598	884

As a result of the specific recruitment policy of the Dutch government, about two thirds of the Italians in The Netherlands are male.
The regions of origin of the Italians immigrants appear to be closely related to the kind of work they came to do in The Netherlands. The miners came mostly from the North-East of Italy, the 'terrazo' and 'granito' workers from Friuli and the 'ice-cream' Italians from Belluno and Toscane. After World War II Italian immigrants mostly came from South Italy or Sardinia or from urbanized regions in the rest of the country.
Most of the Italians in The Netherlands live in the provinces of North and South Holland and in the province of Overijssel in the East. Nowadays many of them are working in the metal industry.

As to research into Italian immigrants conducted in The Netherlands we want to confine ourselves here to an enumeration of some of the studies available. As early as 1962 Simons published an article about adaptation problems and social guidance of Italian immigrant workers in the Limburg mining district and the Twente region (Simons 1962). The integration of Italian workers in The Netherlands was studied by Brouwers-Kleywegt, Marinelli & Nuyten-Edelbroek (1976). In 1980 this work was followed by a study conducted by Brassé & Van Schelven about the assimilation of three generations of pre-war immigrants in The Netherlands: Poles, Slovens and Italians (Brassé & Van Schelven 1980). An in-depth ethnographic study is Bovenkerk, Eijken & Bovenkerk-Teerink (1983) who under the title 'Italiaans IJs'

(Italian ice-cream) describe the life history of some families of 'stucchiarini', 'figuristi', 'terrazieri', 'granitieri' and 'gelatieri' in The Netherlands. An overview of some results of an educational project concerning Italian immigrant children in primary education in Enschede is given by Projectraad (1983, 1984 and 1985) and the language situation of Italians in The Netherlands is described by Pasteels (1985). The results of a study about the so-called 'ethnic identity' of second generation Italians in Amsterdam and Enschede, finally, are reported on by Brussa, Plebani & Van de Putten (1986).

As far as linguistic research is concerned, little attention has been paid up till now to the Italian group. In the following, we will draw some general lines of linguistic research on ethnic minorities in The Netherlands, and discuss some basic theoretical issues in the field of language loss research, being one of the most recent and growing fields in this respect.

3 Language Loss Research: Its Position and Problems

Within the total amount of research that is conducted into ethnic minorities in The Netherlands, linguistic projects take up a rather modest position. In their overview of linguistic research activities into ethnic minorities Extra & Vallen (1988) distinguish nine areas of linguistic or language-related research that are dealt with in The Netherlands and for which they provide

extensive bibliographical documentation. These nine areas are:

1 Structural and temporal characteristics of language acquisition and loss;
2 Second language acquisition by children;
3 Second language acquisition by adults;
4 First language acquisition and loss;
5 Socio-cultural orientation and language proficiency;
6 Educational achievement and language proficiency;
7 Ethnic stereotypes and racism;
8 Acces of ethnic minority groups to Dutch mass media;
9 Language use of ethnic minorities in Flanders.

In a concluding section Extra & Vallen (1988, 25) remark that, "although an impressive amount of work has been done, many questions remain. Most sociolinguistic or psycholinguistic studies have onesidedly concentrated on the initial acquisition of oral second language proficiency by recently-arrived Turkish or Moroccan children". Little has been done, in their perception, on adult language use, language use of other ethnic minority groups than Turks or Moroccans, second language use of long term residents, written language use and first language use.

The research project that is outlined in section 4 deals with language shift and language loss of Turkish and Italian immigrants in the Netherlands and Flanders. As such it fits perfectly well into the list of desiderata drawn up in Extra & Vallen (1987). It is about adult, first language use and one of the groups under

investigation (the Italian group) is characterised by long term residence (first, second and third generation).

The field of language loss or language attrition research has only a limited history. In his overview of European research in language loss Van Els (1986) indicates that the first major conference devoted to research on language skill loss was held at the University of Pennsylvania in 1980. The proceedings of this conference were published in the well-known reader by Richard Lambert and Barbara Freed entitled 'The Loss of Language Skills' (Lambert & Freed 1982). It presents data on language acquisition, dying and immigrant languages and aphasia. A second important gathering was held in The Netherlands in 1986. It was organised by members of the Institute of Applied Linguistics at the University of Nijmegen and its results were published in a reader entitled 'Language Attrition in Progress', edited by Weltens, De Bot & Van Els (1986). This book contains contributions on first-language loss, dialect loss, and loss of second or foreign language.

Dealing with research in the field of natural, i.e. non-pathological language loss, De Bot & Weltens (1985) define four different types of language loss, using the question of what is lost and the question of the environment in which it is lost as parameters. They distinguish:

1 Loss of L1 in an L1-environment (e.g. dialect loss within a dialect community);

2 Loss of L1 in an L2-environment (e.g. loss of native languages by ethnic minorities in immigrant countries);
3 Loss of L2 in an L1-environment (e.g. foreign language loss);
4 Loss of L2 in an L2-environment (e.g. second language loss by aging migrants).

Andersen (1982, 84) defines language loss as a form of individual language evolution by which an individual loses (part of) his competence or proficiency in a particular language. Such a definition, focusing on loss in the individual can cope excellently with instances in which people lose part of their proficiency in a second or foreign language (type 3 and 4). It is also in this specific research area that the terminology and methodology of the study of language loss have been developed and applied. The already mentioned reader by Lambert & Freed (1982) illustrates this L2 pre-occupation of language loss research very well. In studies on primary language loss, i.e. the loss of one's first language or the first language of those responsible for one's socialization, however, it is often not the individual that is the basic unit of analysis. In studies on dialect loss or language death (type 1) as well as in studies on language loss of ethnic minorities in immigrant countries (type 2), the evolution of proficiency in specific groups forms the main focus of analysis. The main cause of the process of loss in these instances seems not to be located in in the individual forgetting or losing some elements or

rules of a language, but merely in incomplete transfer of a language from one generation to the next. The study of primary language loss, therefore, is marked by specific methodological problems, many of which are hardly dealt with explicitly in the literature on language loss. An exception in this respect is formed by the work of Seliger (1985), in which "language attrition" is defined as "the phenomenon, commonly found among bilinguals or polyglots, of erosion in the linguistic performance of a first or primary language which had been fully acquired and used before the onset of bilingualism" (Seliger 1985, 4). In the following we will discuss some of the theoretical and methodological problems that we encountered in setting up our research on language shift and language loss.

If we define language loss as a form of language change that causes potential communication problems between individuals and the community of which they consider themselves a member, the first question is what kind of data should be collected in order to be able to draw conclusions on the extent to which an individual has been 'suffering' language loss. One could, of course, work with spontaneous language data. The analysis of this type of data, however, is very time consuming and it is often very doubtful whether the time invested will yield useful language loss results, especially when a quantification of language loss is the research aim. Researchers using spontaneous data in general have to content themselves with giving some salient examples of language loss. A related problem is that language loss

need not be obviously present in spontaneous data. Loss that is compensated for in one way or another does not surface in the form of 'mistakes' and is therefore not easy to be detected. An alternative for working with spontaneous data is using language loss tests. In this way specific phenomena can be investigated and the use of concealing compensatory strategies can be avoided (cf. Jaspaert & Kroon 1987).

The use of tests in language loss research immediately leads to a second problem. Language loss tests are in essence language proficiency tests: they relate to the command of morphological categories, syntactic structures, lexicon, et cetera. Making decisions on the basis of the results on these tests about the existence or non-existence of language loss is a matter of interpretation. The same type of test, administered to Dutchmen in The Netherlands would certainly lead to conclusions about the degree of language proficiency of these informants, and not to conclusions about language loss. In the case of Italians, living in The Netherlands, however, the results of such tests are interpreted in terms of language loss. Such a language loss interpretation of the observed variation is only possible if it coincides with a non-linguistic social fact. In the case of Italians in The Netherlands this social fact is the immigration process, which caused a rupture between the immigrating group and the Italian speech community to which they adhere. The linguistic evolution of the immigrant group is no longer concurrent with the evolution in the 'home' community, as a

consequence of which there will occur differences in language behaviour, potentially leading to communication problems between the immigrants and the home group.

A third problem is that language proficiency tests, even if there are good reasons to interpret their results in terms of language loss, can never be used directly as measures of language loss. Language loss is the difference between language proficiency observed at a certain point in time, and a certain degree of language proficiency that serves as a base line measure, as a point of reference. The choice of such a point of reference is decisive for the scope of the language loss interpretation that is given to language loss data. Different points of reference are possible.

One can work with a pre-test post-test design using as a point of reference an earlier degree of language proficiency of the group under investigation. Apart from practical problems that have to do with time and money, there are also methodological weaknessess in this approach. First of all measuring language proficiency in L1 may have a strong impact on the loss process. The confrontation with a certain amount of language loss may be all the stimulus the informant needs to remember aspects of the tested variables in an analogous test situation some months later. Then the design itself has disturbed the natural course of the process it hoped to track down. A second problem is that, especially when time intervals between measurements are as long as in primary language loss research, it becomes very

difficult to distinguish between language loss and natural processes of language change.

Another possibility is working with a one shot design and ignoring the problem of the point of reference by implicitly taking 100% proficiency as a point of comparison. This solution is by far the most popular one in language loss research, although it gives rise to a number of serious problems concerning the interpretation of the data in terms of language loss. The fully competent language user, just like his home base, the homogeneous speech community, is a hypothetical entity that does not reflect everyday linguistic reality.

In establishing the level of proficiency of the fully competent speaker to be introduced in the research design as point of reference, researchers very often use dictionaries and grammars. This common practice is not unproblematic: dictionaries and grammars almost always reflect a highly idealized form of language use of a fully competent language user. Using them for the determination of the point of reference results in including forms of language use that can hardly be considered common knowledge to all language users.

A third possibility is working with a control group in the country of origin. The language loss results of the group under investigation can then be compared to the results of the control group in order to arrive at a measure of language loss. Of course this solution also creates problems. The fact, for instance, that emigrants did not take part in the natural linguistic evolution in their country of origin may create differences between the experimental and the control

group which are not due to what is commonly regarded as language loss.

As a consequence of this discussion it seems wise not to limit oneself to the use of only one point of reference in the establishment of a measure for language loss. By combining the results of different measures of proficiency with different points of reference, a much more reliable measure for language loss will emerge (cf. Jaspaert, Kroon & Van Hout 1986).

A fourth problem that obstructs the measurement of language loss is the influence on language loss data of so-called interfering factors. As a consequence of this influence, language profiency tests may show a good deal of variation that is in no way relatable to language loss, even when the social conditions for the loss interpretation are fulfilled. Some of these sources of variation, such as metalinguistic knowledge and test skill, are typical for research in which language tests are used. These factors may cause an individual to be attributed a greater language proficiency than he could show in unguided language production. As far as measuring language proficiency is concerned, a certain influence of metalinguistic knowledge may not be unacceptable or even undesirable. After all, the existence of a (positive) influence of metalinguistic knowledge on language proficiency is generally accepted. The relationship between metalinguistic knowledge and language proficiency is bothersome, however, when a language loss interpretation of the data is envisaged. When working with an estimate of the former language

proficiency of the informants as a point of reference, metalingustic knowledge (and test skills) will not influence the point of reference and the proficiency measure in the same way. This unequal influence will result in a lower language loss rate for those informants having extensive metalinguistic knowledge and/or test skills. Imagine, for example, that in using 100% proficiency as a point of reference, these factors have a strong effect on the test results. This would have as a consequence that informants with a high level of schooling, the typical group in which metalinguistic knowledge and test skills may be assumed, automatically would be attributed a higher level of proficiency, and thus also a lower degree of language loss than less educated people, although the real language loss situation may be the inverse. In our opinion, this problem can only be dealt with by choosing a point of reference relative to the degree of metalinguistic knowledge and/or test skill each informant has; for example by measuring these factors independently and using these measures as a weight coefficient for the point of reference measure, or by introducing in the design a control group in which a similar effect of these factors can be expected.

A last point we want to discuss here is the lack of information on language-structural aspects of the language loss process. In order to be able te measure the degree of language loss adequately, it is important that the language proficiency tests that are used contain the linguistic elements that are most

susceptible to loss. It is, however, far from evident which elements are likely loss candidates: research on primary language loss has hardly proceeded beyond formulating hypotheses on, and giving salient examples of structural aspects of language loss (cf. e.g. Andersen 1982; Sharwood Smith 1983; Gonzo & Saltarelli 1983; Campbell 1980; Tosi 1984). There is an almost total lack of reliable empirical data in this respect. Language loss research, therefore, runs the risk of working with tests that can hardly show variation due to language loss. As long as structural language loss research does not provide more insight in the way the language loss process proceeds, the construction of a fairly extensive test battery, including very diverse tasks and items, seems to be the safest way to measure language loss.

4 'Language Shift and Language Loss in Turkish and Italian Immigrants in The Netherlands and Flanders': A Project Outline

On the basis of the theoretical considerations outlined in section 3, we organised our research efforts along two lines. We started to analyse written data from Dutch informants who migrated to the United States a long time ago, thus trying to acquire some insight in structural aspects of the language loss process (cf. Jaspaert & Kroon 1988), and we designed a large scale sociolinguistic research project that includes research on the social conditions that influence the pace of the

language loss process. This project deals with Turkish and Italian immigrants in The Netherlands and Flanders, the Dutch speaking part of Belgium (cf. Jaspaert & Kroon 1986). In this section we will discuss the design of the latter project in more detail.

The main aim of the project, as formulated in the research proposal (2), is to investigate which factors are influencing the linguistic mechanisms of language shift and language loss, and to what extent the mechanisms through which these factors exert their influence, apply to Turkish and Italian immigrants in the Dutch language area. Language shift, in this respect, refers to a change in the functionality of languages or language varieties, whereas language loss refers to a change in the linguistic competence of speakers of a language or language variety (cf. Gal 1979 and Freed 1982). Language shift and language loss are considered to be interrelated phenomena: loss of L1-competence, occurring in members of immigrant groups, can be seen as a result of the shift that these groups experienced from a monolingual to a bilingual, diglossic situation (cf. Ferguson 1959). To the extent in which this situation of bilingualism can be typified as 'subtractive bilingualism' (cf. Lambert 1974), language shift is likely to eventually lead to language loss. At the same time, the loss of part of the proficiency in a given language may also cause a reduction in the functionality of that language, so that language loss in this respect may lead to further language shift.

Language loss is generally believed to be a regressive process. This means that from the bulk of linguistic elements that were acquired in an earlier stage, some disappear from the performance and/or competence of speakers. Such a process invokes two main questions concerning its non-structural characteristics:

1 How fast does language get lost?
2 Which (non-linguistic) factors influence the loss rate?

In dealing with the second question, it has often been observed that any given factor is ambivalent with respect to its influence on the language loss process: in some cases the factor seems to promote language loss, whereas in other situations the same factor turns out to retard that process. The only way in which this ambivalence can be resolved is by not focusing on the direct influence of social factors on language loss, but by examining the way in which these factors interact in constituting mechanisms of influence. In other words a theory will have to be developed in which the observed direct effects from social factors on language loss will be accounted for, thus predicting the direction of the effect in each given situation.

As a starting point for the elaboration of this theory we used Pierre Bourdieu's theory on the Economy of Symbolic Exchanges (cf. e.g. Bourdieu 1982). A central notion in this theory is the concept of the Linguistic Market. This linguistic market can be described as a social situation in which verbal interaction takes

place, and, at the same time, as a complex of variable rules on the basis of which it is, in that situation, decided upon which value can be given to which linguistic products. In our research we assume, that (apart from the official linguistic market on which communication between indigenous speakers of Dutch takes place) the immigration of groups with a native language other than Dutch creates a linguistic market on which the verbal interaction between members of the immigrant group and members of the community in which they have settled is organized (LM1) and a linguistic market on which communication within the immigrant group is organized (LM2). The symbolic power relationships between the different groups which are at work on LM1 will be reproduced in price-determining laws on the basis of which it can be decided which linguistic products are legitimate and which are not. The individuals who are subjected to these price-determining laws develop strategies in order to maximize the price of their linguistic products.

There can hardly be any doubt about the fact that immigrant groups hold a dominated position on LM1 and that the legitimacy of their products will largely be determined by the indigenous population. This does not mean, however, that LM1 is governed by the same laws as the official linguistic market which functions within the indigenous linguistic community. The dominant group can try to reinforce its position by meeting the dominated groups halfway on certain points. Such concessions can even be necessary in order to maintain

the vital minimum of communication between the various groups - a necessary condition for the existence of LM1. Their nature and scope are determining factors for both the structure of LM1 and the linguistic behaviour of the dominated groups on that market. The facilities offered by the dominant group partly depend on the dominated group, which means that there exist as many LM1's as there are combinations of dominant and dominated groups.

A member of a dominated group cannot manipulate the price-determining laws that rule LM1. He does have expectations with respect to the value of his linguistic products on that market. This anticipation, which, by the way, does not have to be a conscious one, will influence his behaviour on LM1: depending on the degree of confidence he has in his own abilities to produce acceptable linguistic products in an interaction situation, he will make his choice from various behavioural alternatives, such as not or not directly enter interaction, use L1 or L2, code-switch, et cetera. The choice made by a particular individual will, among other things, be expressed by the extent to which his linguistic behaviour shows language shift and language loss.

In as far as assimilation to the dominant group on LM1 (and hence a shift towards the normative language on that market) involves language loss for members of immigrant groups, these members lose the ability to produce legitimate linguistic products on LM2, the linguistic market on which interaction within the own

immigrant group is regulated. It should, therefore, be evident that for members of immigrant groups, behaviour on LM1 is also determined by the relative importance of LM2.

Using Bourdieu's theory we drew up a theoretical framework which offered hypothetical answers to the questions mentioned above. Central to this theoretical framework is the idea that social factors such as age, education, level of contact, do not have a direct influence on language shift and language loss. In our opinion, these factors determine a number of intermediate concepts, which have in turn a direct influence on the shift and loss process. On the basis of the above application of Bourdieu's theory, we selected three such concepts, all dealing with the social value of the languages concerned. These concepts are:

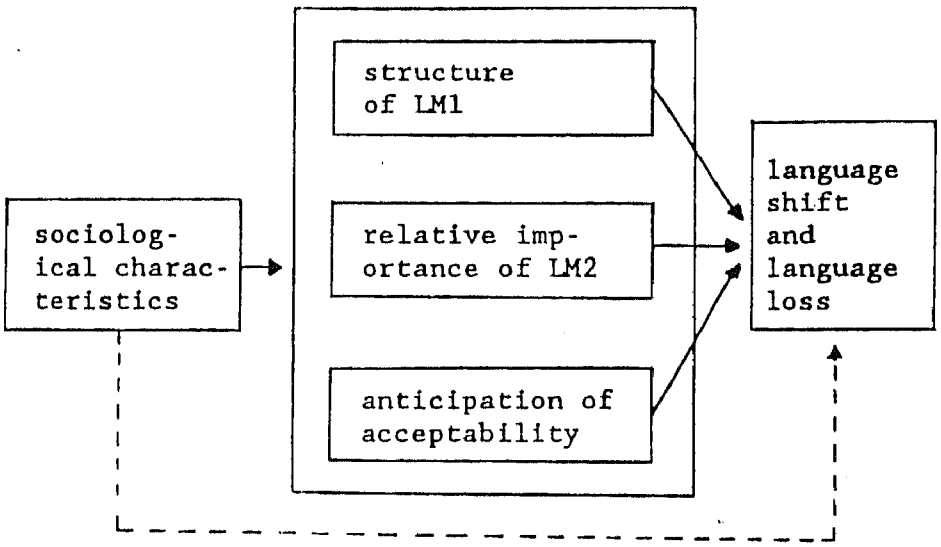
1 The 'structure of LM1', i.e. the official facilities members of a dominated group get to use their native language on the linguistic market that regulates the interaction between the dominant and the dominated group.
2 The 'relative importance of LM2', i.e. the importance of the native language of the dominated group in the immigrant context on the linguistic market that regulates the interaction among members of the dominated group.
3 The 'anticipation of acceptability', i.e. the anticipation by members of the dominated group of the success with which they can use the dominant language

(the acceptability of their linguistic products) on LM1.

In view of the above, we try to test the hypothesis that language shift and language loss are especially influenced by the structure of LM1, the relative importance of LM2, and the anticipation of acceptability of linguistic products on LM1 by members of immigrant groups. In doing so, language loss (measured by tests) and language shift (measured by a questionnaire) are used as dependent variables, whereas sociological data of the informants (N = 800; 200 Turks and 200 Italians in The Netherlands and the same in Flanders) and data with respect to their sociolinguistic situation (i.e. structure of LM1; relative importance of LM2; anticipation on acceptability), both collected by interviews and ethnographic description, are used as independent variables.

In exploring possible relationships between dependent and independent variables path-analysis is used. The main question to be answered in this respect is, wheter sociological characteristics of the informants are responsible for language loss in a direct way, or via the three concepts we developed to describe the sociolinguistic situation of the informants. The design of our research is schematically presented in figure 1.

Figure 1: Design of the Research



5 Report on a Pilot Study in Italian Language Loss

Introduction

Before carrying out our main research we decided to do a pilot study. The aim of this pilot study was twofold. First of all we wanted to test and improve our test battery (especially the language loss tests) and secondly we wanted to test the usefulness of the idea of working with a point of reference in analysing and interpreting language loss data. The pilot study was carried out in Nijmegen, The Netherlands, and Perugia, Italy.

Language Loss Tests and Points of Reference

In order to test our hypotheses, we had to quantify language loss. In doing so, we encountered the problems mentioned in section 3. Due to the scope of the study (interviewing 800 informants from two ethnic groups in two countries) working with spontaneous data was practically impossible. So we decided to draw up language loss tests. The construction of such tests and especially the selection of items in them, was seriously hindered by the fact that there is hardly any information available on the structural-linguistic way in which the language loss process proceeds. We decided to try and overcome this problem by working with a lot of different tests, in which a large diversity of linguistic elements and skills could be tested. We constructed five tests: a correction test, an editing test, a lexical test and two comprehension test. A short description of each is given below. The tests themselves are included as an appendix.

The 'correction test' (COR) consisted of seven sentences incorporating 21 errors. Both interference errors and errors relatable to the complexity of Italian as such were included (cf. the different hypotheses formulated in Andersen 1982). An example sentence gave an indication of what had to be done.

The 'editing test' (EDIT) consisted of a 189 word text taken from an Italian popular magazine. In random places in the text 36 words from another text in the same magazine were inserted. The informants were asked to strike out the superfluous words.

The 'lexicon test' (LEX) was a vocabulary test of 25 items. The words were chosen from the IBM word frequency list of Italian (Bartolini, Tagliavini & Zampolli 1971). The items were randomly selected from all words with a frequency of 3 (the lowest frequency class that is incorporated in the list), that were not inflected or declined forms of more frequent words. The informants were asked to either translate or describe the words under investigation.

'Comprehension 1' (COMP1) consisted of 16 sentences, each referring to one photograph. The informants were asked to decide for every sentence whether it was, in view of the photograph, 'true' or 'false'.

In 'comprehension 2' (COMP2) the informants were asked to decide to which of 15 photographs a certain sentence applied. The test contained 12 items.

In both comprehension tests we tried to keep interference stemming from visual details down to a minimum. In other words, the test concentrated on a good understanding of lexical, morphological and syntactic aspects of the sentences. The correction and editing tests were administered as written tests, the others as oral ones. The order in which the tests are presented here reflects a declining appeal to metalinguistic knowledge and test skills. Moreover, the specific test skills that were needed differ from test to test. The correction and editing tests, for example, appealed to the ability to find and correct linguistic errors in a written text, whereas in the comprehension tests the informants needed to be able to combine oral stimuli with visual information.

Since the pilot study was mainly directed at improving the adequacy of the tests, one of its aims in this respect was giving insight in the expected variability of items. It is clear that items which do not show variability, can not be said to be affected by language loss. Through the pilot study, we were able to eliminate these items and replace them by items of a type that had shown to be possibly affected by language loss.

The pilot study was also a necessary step in the solution of the earlier mentioned problem of selecting a point of reference. Since we do not have any knowledge of former proficiency of our informants, and introducing a second measuring moment being impossible for practical reasons, we could not use a longitudinal design. In view of the tests constructed, we could either establish a norm to which the response pattern of every informant could then be compared, or we could try and establish approximately for every single informant what would have been his competence if he had stayed in his country of origin.

The first solution has as its most important drawback that no attention is paid to differences in proficiency related to social and geographic factors which occur in any speech community independent of processes of language loss. The second solution creates problems of a more methodological nature: the establishment of these hypothetical individual levels of proficiency would entail a massive matching procedure in which the procifiency of each informant is compared to an informant similar in every respect but migration

history. Such a matching procedure is, in view of the large sample with which we work, practically unrealisable.
We decided to combine the two approaches mentioned above in the construction of one point of reference. First of all we tried to avoid as much as possible the inclusion in the test of items that showed regional variation. Secondly, by way of the pilot study we tried to discover which social factors explained variation in testing results. Subsequently we established a point of reference, not for every individual informant, but for every subgroup of informants that was formed by combining the values of the relevant factors.

In the pilot study, that was carried out in the Dutch city of Nijmegen, thirty informants, of various age groups and social and educational backgrounds, were interviewed. Most of them had little or no contact with the rest of the Italian community in The Netherlands. They were all first generation immigrants, so as to avoid having to make a distinction between actual language loss and processes of incomplete learning.

From the analysis of the results, one of the comprehension tests turned out to be unreliable. We will not comment on that test here any further.

As was pointed out earlier, one of the aims of the pilot study was to find out on the basis of which factors the control group had to be sampled. On the other hand, in order to check the adequacy of the tests as language

loss measures, it was important to have an idea of the way the control group scored on the test. To overcome this paradox - we could not carry out the control group sampling without the data of the pilot study, and we needed control group data in order to evaluate the Nijmegen pilot study data - we decided to introduce in the pilot study some preliminary control group measurements. To this end some 15 interviews were done in the area of Perugia, Italy. Since we expected the factor 'level of education' to be a very important factor in the establishment of the control group sample, we had people interviewed with both high and low educational background.

General Results

The results of the pilot study (both the Nijmegen and the Perugia data) are presented in table 3.
It appears from the data in table 3 that the amount of language loss that occurs in Nijmegen, is minimal. Especially if one takes into account that the educational background of the control group is in average higher than the educational background of the experimental group, and that level of education is considered one of the main factors influencing language proficiency, the difference between the control group and the experimental group is very small. It is very unlikely that this minimal difference between the two groups should be regarded as an indication of the fact that the tests themselves are not fit to measure language loss.

Table 3: Mean scores and standard deviations on four language loss tests in Nijmegen (experimental group) and Perugia (control group)

		maximum	experimental group	control group
COR	X	20	9.03	12.81
	s		4.06	3.52
EDIT	X	36	19.43	28.27
	s		10.65	5.82
LEX	X	25	19.73	23.00
	s		4.81	1.73
COMP	X	12	10.87	11.64
	s		1.38	0.50

As was pointed out earlier, we took great care to incorporate a lot of variation in testing procedures as well as in linguistic elements tested in our research design. It is highly improbable that the Nijmegen informants could have suffered a great deal of language loss that does not show up in our results. Therefore, we are inclined to believe that language loss is not as important a process as is generally accepted, not in the least place by people in an immigration context themselves.

Of course, this conclusion does not mean that immigration does not have any other effect on language proficiency than what we see here. One should keep in

mind that what is tested here is mainly loss of competence. It may very well be the case that a number of performance problems occur in spontaneous language use. These forms of language loss, however, do not form a part of this study.

A second striking fact in the data in table 3 is that, with the exception of the correction test, the average scores of the control group are very high and the standard deviations are low. This observation leads us to conclude that the linguistic elements we selected for testing are not particulary sensitive to sociolinguistic variation. This is a desirable condition in that working with such linguistic elements diminishes the importance of the matching procedures used to sample the control group.

A third remark we want to make here is that the comprehension test was probably too easy: not only the control group but also the experimental group have a very high average score and a low standard deviation. The conclusion here seems to be that, if this test is an adequate language loss test at all, it measures a stage in the language loss process which the Nijmegen informants have not reached yet. As a result of this outcome we decided to make the comprehension tets more difficult in the final version of the questionnaire.

Correlations with independent factors

In table 4 the correlations are presented of the four tests with a number of social factors which were expected to have a possible influence on language loss.

Table 4: Correlation coefficients between dependent and independent variables (above line Pearson's R; below line eta's) with 100% proficiency as a point of reference

	COR	EDIT	LEX	COMP
social background	.17	.12	.14	-.21
age	-.29	-.28	.09	-.17
stay Netherlands	-.49 *	-.29	-.35 *	-.45 *
education	.72 *	.74 *	.52 *	.17
proficiency Dutch	.08	.14	-.24	-.18
contact Italians	-.01	.12	-.20	-.21
nationality partner	.37	.33	.13	.26
proficiency other languages	.38 *	.26	.32	.35

In these figures the control group has not been taken into account. They are really correlations between social factors and the language proficiency of Italian immigrants in Nijmegen. Only when one adopts a 100% point of reference these results can be interpreted in terms of language loss.

In table 5, the correlations of the same social factors with two test are given after the test scores have been corrected on the basis of the scores of the control group. Since on the comprehension and the lexicon test, the average control group scores neared the maximum, it was useless to incorporate them in table 5: a perfect control group score functions in exact the same way as a 100% point of reference, so that the correlations after correction would more or less equal the correlations already presented in table 4.

Table 5: Correlation coefficients between dependent and independent variables (above line Pearson's R; below line eta's) with control group as a point of reference

	COR	EDIT
social background	.04	.07
age	.09	.21
stay Netherlands	.33	.25
education	-.40	-.66 *
proficiency Dutch	.00	-.11
contact Italians	-.03	-.15
nationality partner	.32	.31
proficiency other languages	.44 *	.44 *

As can be inferred from the tables above, no multivariate analyses were used at this point. We felt that the number of informants was too small to use

techniques such as multiple regression or multivariate analysis of variance.

The social factors used in the analysis are in most cases self-explanatory. Social background stands for the profession of the informant's father. We used a three value categorisation (1 = uneducated laborer; 2 = crafstman, shop owner, farm owner, etc.; 3 = clerical profession, teacher, etc.). Education was measured in years of school attendance. Proficiency in Dutch and contact with Italians are based on five point self rating scales. Nationality of partner distinguished between those with an Italian partner and those with a partner of another ethnic background. Proficiency in other languages (than Italian and Dutch) is a dichotomous factor indicating whether the informant has any knowledge of such a language or not.

In table 4 education and length of stay in the Netherlands are the main factors influencing the test scores. Knowledge of other languages also correlates rather well with the tests, but this relation should probably be explained as a side effect of the influence from education.

In an earlier analysis, in which no control group was used (cf. Jaspaert & Kroon 1987), we interpreted the predominance of education and length of stay in The Netherlands as an indication of the occurrence of two sources of variation in our data. We related the influence of education to sociolinguistic variation and

the effect of the length of stay in The Netherlands to variation due to language loss. Hence the idea of sampling a control group on the basis of education. We expected the introduction of control subgroups for different levels of education to do away with most of the correlation between the tests and education. We already pointed out, however, that the overall results of the control groups seemed to indicate that there was only very little sociolinguistic variation included in the test results. The correlations between education and the tests in table 5 seem to corroborate this result: even after the introduction of control subgroups differentiating in levels of education, education (as well as proficiency in other languages) remains the most important explanatory factor for the variability in the results. This would mean that people with a higher education can maintain their language proficiency in an immigration context longer than people with a low level of education. We find this to be an intriguing result, which needs further investigation. On the basis of our present data, we cannot offer more than some speculations why this is so. It may be that people with a higher education have more tools at hand to maintain their language than people with low education. They have in most cases higher salaries, which enable them to travel back and forth between the Netherlands and Italy more often, or to keep into contact with their families in other ways. They are also more accustomed to the written code of the language, which in an immigration context offers a lot of chances for contact with the language. Or maybe their education provides them with a

better insight in the structure of language and this insight makes retention easier. The influence of the factor proficiency in other languages can also be interpreted in this way.

In order to get a better understanding of this phenomenon we will have to carry out more detailed analyses. For one thing our control group sample will have to be more carefully constructed, and we certainly will have to take into account the correlations between the different independent variables we are using. We will pay special attention to all this in the analysis of the final results of our research project.

On the whole there seems to be little difference between the correlations in table 5 and the corresponding figures in table 4. It is quite normal that the introduction of a control group results in slightly lower correlations. By controlling for education in this way, we sloped out some of the systematic variation that was present in the original proficiency measures. The surpising conclusion here seems to be that the introduction of a control group does not change the correlations a great deal. Of course, here too, the results from the actual inquiry will have to be awaited before more definite statements can be made, but it looks as if a 100% point of reference may not be such a bad solution after all, especially when one takes care to exclude sociolinguistic variation from the data. The little difference between the two types of measures is of course to a great extent due to the remaining

influence of education. If the above conclusions on the effect of education on language loss are true, then the introduction of a control group replaces one type of linguistic variation influenced by education by another one dominated by the same factor, leaving the correlation structure between dependent variable and social factors more or less intact.

Another remarkable outcome is that the contact factors seem to have little effect on language loss. As it was operationalised in this study, the factor contact with Italian can be interpreted as a measure for the opportunities an informant has to use Italian. From another part of our research (that is not reported on here) we know that the scope of these opportunities correlates highly with the scope of use of Italian. As a rule members of the Italian group use Italian when everyone participating in the interaction masters Italian. This would actually mean that in this case the adagium 'Practice makes perfect' does not hold. Extensive use of Italian does not seem to lead to a more elaborate proficiency in that language. It is true that the factor nationality of the partner, which also could be considered as a contact factor, does correlate with language loss, but the effect is opposite to what one would expect: those having a partner not belonging to the Italian ethnic group actually do better than those having an Italian partner. Of course, a lot of reserve is waranted here, too. In our limited sample there is a certain interaction between education and nationality of the patner, so that this strange correlation between

language loss and nationality of the partner may very well be spurious. Nevertheless, even after correction for level of education the expected correlation would probably not emerge. The fact that the pilot study was carried out in the city of Nijmegen, a city with a very small Italian population may also be responsible for the lack of correlation between contact factors and language loss. It is clear that in such a situation contact factors do not get their full scope of variability. So, again, these results should be interpreted as indications which need corroboration in the main inquiry.

6 Conclusion

Be it that the results of the pilot study cannot be considered as hard research outcomes, they are quite remarkable. We found that:

1 there occurred much less language loss then we had expected;
2 the loss we did register does not seem due to the opportunities for using the language, or not even to the frequency of language use;
3 level of education seems to be an important factor in explaining language loss.

We find these strange outcomes for a study that concentrated on a form of linguistic change that is commonly believed to be a regressive process. If language loss really is a process of gradual erosion of language skills due to limitations in use, we would

expect to find much more loss with people who, as the Nijmegen informants, have little ethnic contacts and thus also little opportunities for use. In explaining variation in language loss we would rather expect these contact possibilities to play a crucial role than a factor such as education.

In this light we are awaiting with impatience the results of the main body of our research project. If the same tendencies are noticeable, it may very well mean that the very nature of the process of language loss has to be reconsidered.

Notes

1 This text is an extended version of a paper that was first presented at the Conferenzia nel quadro dei lunedi linguistici, Università di Roma, Dipartimento di Scienze del Linguaggio, Rome, June 8, 1987. We want to use this opportunity to express our thanks to Gabriella Pavan, who arranged our stay in Italy, and to Patrick Boylan and Patrizia Michienzi who guided us through the Dipartimento di Scienze del Linguaggio and Rome respectively, and who both were very helpful in organizing the collection of language proficiency data in Rome.

2 The latter project is carried out at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Brabant (P.O. Box 90153, 5000 LE Tilburg, The Netherlands). It is supported by

the Foundation for Linguistic Research, which is funded by the Netherlands organization for the advancement of pure research (NWO), the University of Brabant and the Belgian Fund for Fundamental Collective Research (FKFO). The project runs from 1.1.1986-1.1.1989.

3 The interviewing in Nijmegen and Perugia was done by Catia Cucchiarini, who in 1986-1987 worked as a research assistent in the project.

4 In order to create a more reliable point of reference we have also been collecting language proficiency data in Rome and Cagliari.

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Appendices

C O R R E C T I O N T E S T

Le frasi che seguono contengono errori d'italiano. Le chiediamo di sbarrare le parole che, secondo lei, sono sbagliate e di correggere gli errori. Tenga conto del tempo impiegato perchè ha a disposizione 10 minuti per completare il test.

a. La Statua della Libertá che diffonde il suo luce in mondo, non e mai apparsa in una argenta americana.

1. Gli operai chi lavorano alla mina devono biciclettare ogni giorno per circa mezz'ora.
2. Ci hanno mai obbligati per imparare olandese. Molti italiani, ma anche molti maroccani, turchi e grechi parlano generalmente la propria lingua. Ci sono perfino alcuni belgi che hanno imparato l'italiano per farsi capire verso noi.
3. Gli hanno trattenuto tanto molto dal salario brutto che non riusciva più a pagare la macchina che si aveva comprato.
4. L'insegnante erava tanto arrabbiato su me per mio ritardo, che non mi permettè più di entrare in classe.
5. I negozi nel centro della città sono molto cari. Se potevo spostarmi con piu facilità, farei miei acquisti sempre al supermercato.
6. In Olanda non mi sono potuto ampassare ed ho deciso che più tardi mi vado costruire una casa nel paese che provengono i miei genitori.

L E X I C A L T E S T

Fornisca una traduzione o una descrizione del significato delle seguenti parole (impiegare al massimo 10 minuti)

appiglio
barella
calunnia
consunto
inaspettato
incriminare
latta
monello
ribollimento
vendicare
scalata
tatto
vespero

balordaggine
batticuore
ciliegia
fulmineo
incitare
inferocire
marea
morso
rimbecillire
rivivere
sillaba
trebbiatura

E D I T I N G T E S T

Il brano che segue è tratto dalla rivista italiana OGGI. In alcuni punti sono state introdotte delle parole che non appartengono al testo. Le chiediamo di cancellare dal brano le parole fuori posto (impiegare al massimo 10 minuti)

Lo zucchero è naturale

L'organismo umano ad per crescere, svilupparsi, mantenersi polline sano ha bisogno di nutrirsi fiori in modo equilibrato. Non per farlo può essere estremamente dannoso. La natura ci ricerche fornisce questo gli i alimenti capaci di creare il necessario equilibrio appartiene. Questi alimenti contengono i principi nutritivi portato primari: le proteine, i grassi, le vitamine, funzione i sali minerali, i ha glucidi le e cioè gli zuccheri.
Fra gli zuccheri: gli lo zucchero.
Consumato senza eccesso, lo zucchero è fonte l'ape di energia. Energia fisica base, ma anche energia mentale. La chimica, con o tutti i suoi meriti, non può sostituire il le proprietà della vecchia barbabietola, api prodotto di punta dell'agricoltura italiana. Quanto alla linea ... prima equilibrata di rifiutare a malincuore, alla fine di primavera un pranzo, un po' di per zucchero nel caffè, pensiamo ai piattoni abbondanti tutte che, probabilmente, abbiamo le appena gustato e per riflettiamoci su: scopriremo l'unica ricetta miracolosa, consigliata dai medici organismo di tutto il mondo: il buon miglior senso.

C O M P R E H E N S I O N 2

Quali foto riguardano le seguenti affermazioni ?

1. Anche se sei piccolo da così in alto hai senz'altro una visuale.

2. Ancora così piccolo e già ha bisogno di due seggiole.

3. Che la gente getti per terra piccoli rifiuti come pezzetti di carta o cicche si può ancora tollerare, ma questo è davvero troppo.

4. Da questo rottame non si possono ricavare tanti cavalli vapore ormai.

5. Dal momento che non sono sullo stesso piano non si può trarre alcuna conclusione circa l'altezza di questi signori.

6. Cosa questi due signori abbiano in mente di preciso non è del tutto chiaro, ma non è escluso che le loro attività abbiano a che fare con la veterinaria.

7. A giudicare dall'ambiente in cui si trovano si direbbe che il signore non sia il padre del bambino, ma il medico.

8. La signora è l'unica della foto che, evidentemente, ha ritenuto necessario coprirsi il capo all'aria aperta.

9. Questa automobile speciale è adatta a terreni difficilmente praticabili.

10. Se ci fossero state più seggiole a disposizione questa foto di gruppo avrebbe potuto essere diversa.

11. Fatta eccezione per una di loro, si può dire che le persone attorno alla tavola preferiscono gli abiti scuri.

12. La signora si trova più o meno al centro, ma un po' in secondo piano.