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Italian-Spanish Contact in Early 20th Century Argentina

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Abstract

This article attempts to provide a general approach to the exceptional language contact situation that took place in Argentina from the end of the 19th century until the first decades of the 20th century, in which an enormous immigration flow drastically modified the sociolinguistic landscape. This was most evident in urban environments—and among them especially the Buenos Aires area—and led the local ruling elites to set up a complex and massive apparatus for the nationalisation of the newcomers, which included a language shift in the first stage. Given that the majority of immigrants came from Italy, the most widespread form of contact was that between the local varieties of Spanish and the Italian dialects spoken by the immigrants, which led to the creation of a contact variety called Cocoliche that arose, lived then perished. Although this contact variety did not survive the early years, at least not as a full-fledged variety, the history of its emergence and the ways in which it can be studied today nevertheless make it an object of special interest for research perspectives oriented around the question of the early years of language contact. This article gives an account of this history so as to provide an analysis of a series of documents that, in a highly mediated way, can be used as an unreliable but nonetheless interesting corpus for the study of language and culture contact.

Keywords

Italian-Spanish contact – Argentina – lexical borrowing – prosodic borrowing

* This research takes up previous contributions regarding the same topic (Ennis 2006, 2008, chap. 8), in an attempt to open new perspectives on the matter, starting from the question addressed by this issue of JLC. The author wishes to thank Stefan Pfänder for his usual generosity and critical wisdom.

1 Introduction

In a short essay first published in the prestigious literary journal *Sur* (nr. 86, November 1941), Jorge Luis Borges gave a review of the volume *La peculiaridad lingüística rioplatense y su sentido histórico* published by Américo Castro, thereby reducing it to absurdity. Castro, a salient representative of the first solid and durable philological school in the Spanish speaking world, was at that time exiled in the U.S. where he held his chair at the University of Princeton. In the 1920's he had been recommended by Ramón Menéndez Pidal to be the first director of the Instituto de Filología of the Universidad de Buenos Aires, and consequently had the chance, at a particularly sensitive moment in history, to hold discussions on the linguistic characteristics of Rioplatense Spanish, a subject that had dominated the Argentinean cultural arena in the first decades of the century but had become much less intense by that moment. In these discussions, Castro lamented the permeability of educated speech in Buenos Aires, which had enabled the integration of supposedly more vulgar forms from rural speech and from the varieties that had emerged due to contact with the languages brought to the country in the context of European immigration, particularly Italian, a huge wave of which reached Buenos Aires between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. He warned that the effects of language contact with Italian dialects were much more widespread and permanent than previously assumed:

En un libro moderno leemos: “Cuatro millones de italianos... no han dejado más remanente que sus apellidos y unos veinte italianismos en el lenguaje popular, todos muy desmonetizados: *fiaca, caldo, Lungo, laburo*”... [Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz, *El hombre que está solo y espera*, p. 38]. No estaría mal que fuera así. En realidad, la influencia italiana, en su mayoría dialectal, ha contribuido más que nada a desvencijar la lengua de Buenos Aires, y de rechazo, la de los países platenses. La fonética y la entonación, a veces la sintaxis e infinidad de vocablos revelan la huella de tales dialectos. Un cierto aire de desgarro y cinismo plebeyos ha soplado a su favor, y ha sido luego a su vez favorecido por tales influjos.

CASTRO, 1960: 123–24

[In a modern book we find statements like the following: “Four million Italians ... they have left nothing but their family names, and not more than twenty Italianisms in the vernacular, all of them very devaluated: *fiaca, caldo, Lungo, laburo*”... [Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz, *El hombre que está solo y espera*, p. 38]. If it were like this, there would be nothing wrong.

In reality, however, the mostly dialectal Italian influence, has contributed more than anything to tear apart the language of Buenos Aires and, incidentally, the languages of the area. Phonetics, intonation, sometimes syntax, and countless words reveal the traces of these dialects. A certain air of plebeian barefacedness and cynicism has blown in their favour, and has subsequently been favoured by such influences as well.]

Borges responded to this warning with profound irony, challenging what he considered to be theoretical fictions of language specialists:

Las jergas – *ce pluriel est bien singulier*. Salvo el lunfardo (...) no hay jergas en este país. No adolecemos de dialectos, aunque sí de institutos dialectológicos. Esas corporaciones viven de reprobando las sucesivas jerigonzas que inventan. Han improvisado el *gauchesco*, a base de Hernández; el *cocoliche*, a base de un payaso que trabajó con los Podestá; el *vesre*, a base de los alumnos de cuarto grado.

BORGES, 1941: 67

[Jargons – *ce pluriel est bien singulier*. Except for lunfardo (...) there is no jargon in this country. We don't suffer from dialects, but we do suffer from dialectology institutes. These corporations make a living of damning the jargons that they have invented themselves. They have improvised Gauchesco based on Hernández; Cocoliche based on a clown who worked with Podestá, and the Vesre based on fourth-graders.]

Castro's essay¹ contributed to the validation of the set of linguistic, educational and immigration policies created and successfully implemented to reduce the then heterogeneous landscape to one of homogeneity, with one national language and one national culture. This was taught in schools, and resulted in the representation of the social polyphony of the turn of the century as no more than a small and irrelevant literary anecdote by as early as the 1940s. In fact, there is broad consensus that the effects of the mass contact that characterised urban life at the turn of the century left only small traces in the lexicon and the intonation of Rioplatense Spanish. Part of this consensus, which corroborates both Scalabrini Ortiz's opinion and Borges' irony, results from a fundamental lack (see Didi-Huberman, 2006). The most reliable corpus (which we will take a look at later) for studying the early years of the Spanish-Italian contact in Río

1 For a detailed analysis of the debate in its context, see DeGiovanni and Toscano y García (2010a, 2010b).

de la Plata, consists of some pieces of popular literature, brief and forgotten texts in which Cocoliche—a clown working at José Podestá's circus—or similar character intervenes, mimicking the speech of the newcomers.

This thematic issue of *JLC* provides a good opportunity to consider this case, as it is a clear example of one of the most challenging aspects in the study of historical linguistics: How can we document a phenomenon which lacks all direct registration apart from that based on hyperbolised imitation and the construction of prestige? And to what extent is the analysis of a situation of language contact valid if we have no more than fragments of an indirect reflection? It is necessary to make it clear in advance that our aim is not to abandon the study of such an important aspect in the sociolinguistic history of Latin America, but rather to define its characteristics and limitations.

As mentioned above, the object of analysis is the period including the first and most intense decades of language contact between the variety of Spanish spoken predominantly in the Buenos Aires region in Río de la Plata and the dialectal Italian varieties spoken by the immigrants that arrived to the area in masses in the second half of the 19th and the first decades of the 20th century. The resulting contact variety, Cocoliche, is thought to have not persisted beyond the first generation of immigrants (Goluscio de Montoya, 1979: 60; Lipski, 1994: 178).

In this case, the scenario is similar to that which can be observed in other cases of contact varieties involving forced mass immigration, in which the documentation of the first years of the phenomenon is nearly always scarce and unreliable. Moreover, the process was accompanied by massive schooling policies aimed to educate “true Argentines”, that is teaching nationalism and homogeneity (see Woolard, 1998) as key ideological points of the system. These were very successful, as demonstrated by the fact that the L2 was likely almost completely abandoned by the second generation.

While there is no direct information about Cocoliche available, we do have two ways of approaching the subject that prevent research from reaching a dead-end: on the one hand, through the distorted reflection of the immigrant's language through the voice of the character that gave the variety its name (Cocoliche), as well as other characters in the melodramatic popular literature of that time; on the other hand, through the virulent rejection of the contact variety, its influence and popularity, as expressed by authors who identified with the local hegemony. Reflection and refraction can thus provide an image, albeit a rather blurry one, that is slightly more revealing with regard to the characteristic traits of the contact situation the inhabitants of Buenos Aires and Montevideo experienced between 1870 and 1920.

This article is organised in three main, interrelated sections: firstly, a sketch of the sociohistorical context; secondly, the description of the corpus materials and the questions they pose to the researcher, and finally their analysis.

2 Historical Context

In post-independence Argentine culture, the image of the European immigrant appears predominantly in the form of a desire and a program. The intellectuals of the first Argentine liberalism who would later, from their countries of exile, dream of a nation to whose formation they would contribute on their return, had projected over the so-called Pampa “desert” an image of a future modern nation, organised on the basis of a network of ports and railways that supported the prosperity of trade and the nation’s integration into the modern economic world. The labour force that was meant to fulfill these expectations were the European immigrants, who were seen not only as manual workers, but also as bearers of a particularly practical culture and spirit of progress; the imagination of intellectuals such as Sarmiento, Alberdi or Gutiérrez depicted the immigrants as the agents of Argentina’s leap to modernity. In this way, Juan Bautista Alberdi’s *Bases para la organización de la República Argentina*, which he wrote during his exile in Chile before the fall of Juan Manuel de Rosas and which would later constitute the master essay for the national Constitution in 1853, promoted the migratory politics that would later be characteristic of fin-de-siècle Argentina based on both a quantitative and qualitative need for immigrants:

Bueno es educar nuestros indígenas y nuestros hombres del pueblo, pero no son ellos los que han de sacar adelante la civilización y cultura de Chile. En doscientos años no haríamos de un *araucano* un obrero inglés, un labrador suizo. [...] En todo tropezamos con la falta de hombres. Y no sólo nos faltan hombres para la acción material; sino también para la acción inteligente, nos faltan cabezas a más de brazos.

ALBERDI, cited in Barros, 1997: 177

[While it is important to provide proper education for our indigenous and rural population, they are not the ones who will propagate and enhance the civilization and culture of Chile. Two hundred years would not be enough to mold an *araucano* into an English worker or a Swiss farmer. The lack of men hampers Chile in several aspects of its development. Not only do we lack people who can work properly, but we also

lack people who can reason and think properly: we lack clever heads rather than strong arms.]

Similarly, D. F. Sarmiento's allegation against Rosas, *Facundo o civilización y barbarie* (1999[1845]), which he also wrote during exile in Chile, is central to nineteenth-century prose and left a permanent mark in Argentine culture. While conceiving an escape towards civilisation and the progress of what was seen as the prolonged catastrophe of Rosa's tyranny, he clearly advocated the need to channel European immigration towards La Plata:

Pero el elemento principal de orden y moralización que la República Argentina cuenta hoy es la inmigración europea, que de suyo, y en despecho de la falta de seguridad que le ofrece, se agolpa de día en día al Plata, y si hubiera un gobierno capaz de dirigir su movimiento, bastaría por sí sola a sanar en diez años no más, todas las heridas que han hecho a la patria los bandidos, desde Facundo hasta Rosas, que la han dominado.

SARMIENTO, 1999[1845]: 307

[But the main element of order and improving morals that Argentina can boast of today is the steady flow of European immigration to the coast of La Plata – for its own credit and in spite of the lack of security that it is offering. And if there had been a government capable to direct the movement of this flow of immigration, just ten years would be sufficient to heal all the wounds that ruling bandits like Facundo and Rosas have inflicted on this country.]

Three decades later Sarmiento also opened a traditional defensive discourse with the hegemonic Creole elites, rejecting the influence of European culture in the formation of the citizens—a process central to the creation of a nation.

Sería lamentable que tuviésemos una conquista normanda por causa de tener escuelas para todos, y que cambiáramos de lengua, precisamente por haber enseñado a leer a los italianos, que vienen sin saber.

SARMIENTO 1951[1888]: 391

[It would be a pity if we had to suffer something like a Norman conquest because of the fact that we have schools for everyone. It would also be a pity if we had to change languages precisely for having taught to read to Italians who come without even knowing it.]

The mass of Italian, Spanish and Eastern European immigrants who began to arrive in the Río de la Plata region did not, however, much resemble the idealised image of English workers and Swiss farmers many had fantasised about during their decades of exile. Barbarism was now on the other side of the ocean, as the Italians learnt to read and write in American schools. Sarmiento promoted and formed the educational system during his presidency (1868–1874), and subsequently passed the 1420 law in 1884 establishing free, obligatory and secular public education. He strived to develop a school that would serve the formation of a state and nation as conceived by the first Argentine liberalism, not a place of action liberated by forces that were then considered foreign. The fear of a “Norman conquest”, in the form of linguistic and cultural domination by the Italian immigrants who had the diplomatic assistance of their home country, had caused a formidable reaction in the hegemonic groups in Argentina; they chose to establish a nationalising mass education. Depending on perspective, one can speak of this as either a successful integration or a violent mass acculturation of second generation Italians who were nearly all Argentine in terms of language and culture.

How can we trace the contours of this archive? How can we obtain a more or less reliable image of the early years of such a unique contact situation? The existing research on the organisation of a modern Argentine nation on the basis of mass immigration points to a state possessing all the available devices necessary for the development of a monoglossic and monocultural modern nation. The school system is one of these instruments; another is the census of the country’s population. The first official census of the Argentine population was conducted in 1869 and marks the starting point for all research on Argentine immigration, as it offers a contrastive view that enables us to appreciate the massive extent of the phenomenon at the turn of the century. There is a very significant demographic increase visible when comparing this first census to the third, carried out in 1914: while the former registered 1,800,000 inhabitants—only 12% of which were foreign—the latter registered 7,000,000. European immigration was the decisive factor in this development and the most significant group were without a doubt the Italians. Nevertheless, the information obtainable from the results of the official censuses is relatively limited, since the questionnaires did not address the languages spoken by the individuals, but only their place of birth.²

2 M.B. Fontanella de Weinberg describes this problem in her book about the history of Spanish in Buenos Aires: “La primera dificultad que se nos plantea para determinar el perfil lingüístico de la ciudad de Buenos Aires en la década de 1880 es la carencia de datos numéricos precisos, ya que ninguno de los censos proporciona cifras sobre las lenguas usadas por los habitantes,

In 1853 the Constitution established the need to define migratory politics and guarantee immigrants the same rights as Argentine-born citizens. Building on this, in 1876 the Parliament passed the so-called “Ley Avellaneda” no. 817, which aimed to promote and regulate the process of mass immigration and colonisation of the land that was still considered vital in order to lead the nation to material success via its incorporation into the international market. This law was passed just three years before the genocide of the indigenous populations from the south of the country (the so-called “Conquista del desierto” ‘conquest of the desert’) in 1879, and four years before Buenos Aires was proclaimed the federal district, two points of inflection in the history of the country’s modernisation and of the organisation of the State in Argentina. This law gave a description of the type of immigrant the State would be pleased to welcome in Argentina, namely “todo extranjero jornalero, artesano, industrial, agricultor o profesor menor de sesenta años que llegue al país para establecerse pagando pasaje de segunda o tercera clase o teniendo el viaje pagado por cuenta de la Nación, de las Provincias o de las empresas particulares protectoras de la inmigración y colonización”.³ The captains of the ships carrying immigrants were forbidden to transport people over the age of 60 (apart from the “jefes de familia [*family heads*]”), people with illnesses, beggars or prisoners (Novick, 2008).

The law was particularly open and flexible with regard to determining the forms of settlement and land acquisition, and ultimately led to the concentration of land in the hands of the great land owners, causing the frustration of many immigrants’ ambitions who had planned to stay and work in the countryside and instead ended up settling in a city that, in a short period of time, became a modern metropolis with millions of inhabitants (cf. Novick, 2008). Nevertheless, there were several groups of Italian, Spanish and German immigrants, among others, that formed colonies in the interior of the country, though most stayed in the large urban centres. In 1895, the year the second national census was conducted, there were four million inhabitants, a million of whom were foreigners, and 492,676 Italian. In Buenos Aires, the foreign citizens (ca. 345,000), slightly outnumbered the local population (ca. 318,000)

datos que – pese a los problemas que implica tomar como base las afirmaciones de los propios censados – han servido como punto de referencia para estudios de este tipo realizados en otras comunidades lingüísticas” (Fontanella de Weinberg 1987: 132).

- 3 “All foreign wageworkers, craftsmen, industrials, farmers or teachers below the age of 60 who arrive in the country to settle and pay for the journey in second or third class or have the journey paid for them by the Nation, the Provinces or the individual companies who protect immigration and colonization”.

(Panetieri, 1969: 24). By 1914, there were three foreign inhabitants above the age of 20 for every native Argentine of the same age.⁴

The city named “Atenas del Plata” by its white Criollo⁵ elite around 1870 (Prieto, 1988: 44), soon received the nickname “Sodoma” (Viñas, 1995: 175 et seq.); a place where the immigrant is considered an agent of modernity. In this case, however, it was a kind of modernity perceived as decadent and corrupting of the traditional Criollo lifestyle; the immigrant was in some cases stigmatised and occasionally criminalised (the “Ley de Residencias”, designed by Miguel Cané in 1902, deals with this issue),⁶ and was subject to a particular twist in the Argentine liberalist thought, which, after a period of xenophilia in the 1870s, turned to overt xenophobia that characterised the celebrations of the first centenary of the Republic.

4 In the first census (1869), an estimated 210,300 immigrants were thought to be in Argentina, while the number rose to 1,004,500 in the second census (1895) (Fishburn 1981: 47). See also Ramella (1992), Hipperdinger (1996/97: 629–630), Giacomazzi (2002: 580), Di Tullio (2003: 73–74) and Kailuweit (2004: 47–48).

5 The Spanish form of the word *criollo* has been preserved here in order to differentiate it from the most extended sense of the word in English and French. Nadia Altschul (2012: 4), facing the same need of making this difference clear, gives the following definition: “*criollo* generally refers to peoples of European descent who speak Castilian, have adopted a Western outlook, and who have been in positions of power at least since political independence, making them akin to white settler colonists”. For a discussion of the term’s historical implications, see Moraña (2009) and Ennis (2009, 2010).

6 The opening of immigration proposed by the constitution of 1853 (Vgr. Art. 20: “Los extranjeros gozan en el territorio de la Nación de todos los derechos civiles del ciudadano. [...] Obtienen nacionalización residiendo dos años continuos en la Nación; pero la autoridad puede acortar este término a favor del que lo solicite, alegando y probando servicios a la República”) was a result of the “Ley de residencias” in 1902 (cf. Di Tullio, 2003: 69). This law established in the first article that “El Poder Ejecutivo podrá, por decreto, ordenar la salida del territorio de la Nación a todo extranjero que haya sido condenado o sea perseguido por los tribunales nacionales o extranjeros por crímenes o delitos de derecho común” and added in the second article that if the ministers agreed, one could deport “todo extranjero cuya conducta pueda comprometer la seguridad nacional, turbar el orden público o la tranquilidad social” (Terán, 2000: 45). [“Foreigners in the Nation’s territory enjoy all civil rights of citizenship [...] They become naturalised after two years of residence in the Nation, but the authorities may shorten this term in favour of the applicant who is alleging and proving his services to the Republic”) was a result of the “Law of Residence” in 1902 (cf. Di Tullio 2003: 69). This law established in the first article that, by decree, the Executive may order the expulsion from national territory of an alien who has been convicted or who is pursued for crimes or offenses of common law by national or foreign courts” and added in the second article that if the ministers agreed, one could deport “an alien whose conduct may compromise national security, disturb the public order or the social peace”]

For the elite, this kind of immigration was doubly unwelcome: on the one hand, the immigrants had not brought Northern European civilisation with them and were seen as an enormous mass of Italians and Spaniards with no economic or symbolic capital; on the other, these new masses not only enlarged the urban population, but changed it politically in a radical way, bringing with them the current European political conflicts, the risk of a true democracy, or of the propagation of revolutionary ideas. Therefore, by establishing the popular gaucho poem *Martín Fierro* by José Hernández (1872) as the national epic in his speeches in the Odeón Theatre in Buenos Aires in 1913, Leopoldo Lugones also rejected the democratic impulses of the time, which in his view were represented by immigrants and intellectuals:

[...] la plebe ultramarina, que a semejanza de los mendigos ingratos, nos armaba escándalo en el zaguán, desató contra mí al instante sus cómplices mulatos y sus sectarios mestizos [...] los pulcros universitarios, que, por la misma época no supieron apreciar la diferencia entre el gaucho viril, sin amo en su pampa, y la triste chusma de la ciudad cuya libertad consiste en elegir sus propios amos; de igual modo que tampoco entendieron la poesía épica de Martín Fierro.

LUGONES 1979: 15–16

[The overseas masses, which, like ungrateful beggars, made a fuss in the entrance hall, immediately unleashed against me their brown-skinned accomplices and sectarian mestizos [...] around that same time, there are clean-cut university students who couldn't appreciate the difference between the manly gaucho, who lives without a master in his pampa, and the sad city mob, whose freedom is to choose their own masters; just as they didn't understand Martín Fierro's epic poetry.]

It is this same elite that applied all of the means available to the modern State to organise the country in such a way that preserved their hegemony and at the same time nationalised the urban masses by means of public education; the school system that had triumphed in transforming the immigrants' children, "amorphous and protoplasmic" (as Ramos Mejía described them in 1934), into monolingual Argentine citizens. In this way, success could be observed as early as in the second generation; "ya se ven las correcciones que empieza a imprimir la vida civilizada y más culta que la que traía el labriego inmigrante"⁷ (Ramos Mejía, in Montaldo, 2010: 53).

7 "one can already see the corrections that civilized and more educated life than that brought by the peasant immigrant is starting to carry out."

The foundations of this nationalistic education had been established by Ricardo Rojas in *La restauración nacionalista* (1909), a book written at the request of the government who had sent Rojas to Europe to study the different educational systems. According to Fernando Degiovanni (2007), Rojas made his entrance in the Argentinean cultural scenery at the beginning of the 20th century, performing the interplay of reinforcing the existing prejudices regarding immigrants and the resulting loss of tradition and advocating a nationalist civil educational program in schools, in which the humanities subjects were the most important.⁸

This elementary school system was intended to “model” the immigrants’ children into “amorphous” citizens formed by a nation forced to separate its own cultural and linguistic tradition from the new people from the American *polis*. This imposed a pedagogical policy for various subjects, above all for those related to language, tradition and history;⁹ one needed a national language, literature and tradition that existed prior to the arrival of the immigrants, which was then propagated. Di Tullio (2003) explains that this educational policy used two text types as its basic concepts: school books addressing “the head and heart” of the children who were supposed to turn into “convinced and enthusiastic” Argentine citizens, and prescriptive grammars that aimed to install normative peninsular Spanish, i.e. “pure” Spanish, as the socially prestigious norm, erasing all traces of contact with foreign languages or less prestigious variants of Spanish in Río de la Plata. Elementary school books thus communicated two fundamental if seemingly contradictory notions; the representation of

8 From the late 1880s onwards, foreigners became a worrying issue for a number of influential members of the local elite. They perceived the foreigners’s positions as a threat to the constitution of Argentinean nationality and to their own political and social legitimacy. The immigrants were alternatively accused of being “anti-nationalist”, “social agitators” or “materialistic”, and became subject of a policy of social control aimed at symbolically reigning them in in order to ensure their full assimilation into the country’s culture in the form it was being advocated by the leading sectors.

9 The historian Fernando Devoto, when describing the general lack of research on Italian immigration in Argentina until the 1960s, emphasizes this absence in one of the « classics » of the Argentine historiography of the first half of the 20th century, *Historia de la nación argentina* by Ricardo Levene (Buenos Aires, 1936–1941, 10 vols.):

“It is not surprising, therefore, that these historians had Argentine history end in 1862 when they collaborated on the *Historia de la Nación Argentina*. Their aim was to emphasize the point that the Argentine nation and Argentine nationality had already been built and were firmly in place before the great wave of migration brought the population up from 1,500,000 in 1869 to 7,000,000 in 1914”

DEVOTO, 1994: 11–12.

Argentina as a melting pot that housed and mixed immigrants and natives, and the sum of ideologemes characteristic of the vernacular nationalism, which favoured an exclusively Criollo tradition. In contrast, the educated norm was that taught and explained in the secondary school grammar books:

Mientras que el público de los libros de lectura era muy vasto (los escolares y sus familias), la mayoría de las gramáticas iban dirigidas a un sector más restringido, el grupo minoritario que tenía acceso a la escuela secundaria. Al inculcar una norma divergente de la del español rioplatense fortalecían la distinción entre una élite letrada, capaz de dominarla, y el resto de la población.

DI TULLIO, 2003: 195

[While the audience for school books was very large (schoolchildren and their families), most grammars were intended for a more restricted social group, namely the minority group that had access to high school. Instilling a different standard than the River Plate Spanish in this minority, they strengthened the distinction between a literate elite, educated to master the standard, and the rest of the population.]

Which means that not every variety of the target language—and this is also the case for the mother tongues of immigrants and their children—is given the same value. In this context, it is interesting to examine the hypotheses developed in Cocoliche scholarship. The different “values” attributed to the diverse varieties would play an important role in the attempt to comprise this phenomenon scientifically. M. B. Fontanella de Weinberg was an Argentine pioneer in sociolinguistic studies who “imported” Labov’s, Weinreich’s and Herzog’s methodology and theories and other novelties in the 1970s and 80s. In her work, Cocoliche is depicted as a *continuum*, however not a lineal one, rather as one that ranges from a single pole, the local Spanish standard (L2) to the multiple starting L1s (the various Italian dialects) (Fontanella de Weinberg, 1996: 449, cf. 1987: 141; 1992: 253); according to Fontanella de Weinberg, a “fluid repertoire” develops between the two (1996: 447). This depiction thus confirms what used to constitute a political horizon to control potentially anti-hegemonic tendencies between the new groups; the solidity of a pre-existing homogeneous language and tradition that function as a melting pot in which the differences can not only be mixed, but *dissolved*. The Argentine sociologist Gino Germani’s theory that the “cultural synchresis” produced a “new cultural type” (Germani, 1962: 210) is the scientific elaboration of a reconciliation that took place after the early conflicts.

This theory helps back up the story of Argentina as a country of immigration, consistent with the image the first liberals such as Alberdi or Sarmiento desired. According to Germani, given the unprecedented scale of immigration, the new settlers' loss of their original identity was not a result of assimilation to a pre-existing identity, but rather of the fusion of different elements in a new culture.¹⁰

The key element to achieving this integration was the mass public schooling, open to all children who lived on Argentine soil. Schooling equipped the new generations with a patriotic sentiment and a national language, regardless of their origin, thus constituting the national community by means of (among other things) the joint celebration of national holidays (Fontanella de Weinberg, 1979a: 35–37). This triumph of the education policy for the country's new inhabitants was already announced in the last books of Sarmiento, such as *Condición del extranjero en América* (1888), in which the former promoter of European immigration warns against the danger of allowing Italians to run their own schools. According to this representation, Argentina was a country experiencing a rapid process of industrialisation and modernisation, whose ruling classes displayed “an explicit intention to incorporate the immigrants” (Fontanella de Weinberg, 1979b: 33–34), as demonstrated by the legal and institutional framework. Fontanella de Weinberg uses this as the main argument against the classification of the contact language as a pidgin, claiming that the social conditions of emergence were profoundly different.¹¹

10 As the historian Fernando Devoto comments: “[...] tutta l'impalcatura interpretativa riposava su due ipotesi forti. La prima—nel quadro di un modo di pensare il cambiamento sociale come risultato degli atteggiamenti culturali e normativi degli attori social—era il ruolo di agente modernizzatore che avrebbero svolto li immigrati europei nella società tradizionale argentina. La seconda era il successo e la velocità dell'assimilazione o, come preferiva dire Germani, della fusione degli migrati europei nella o con la società argentina” (Devoto, 1994: 23). [The interpretative frame is based on two main assumptions about the function of European migrants in the Argentine society. Firstly, the assumption that European migrants would have played a modernizing role in the traditional Argentine society, casting social changes as the result of cultural and normative conducts by social actors. Secondly, the assumption that European migrants would have been assimilated successfully and at a certain rate, or, as Germani put it, had been fused with or into Argentine society]

11 Whinnom (1971) described the case of Cocoliche as a form of “failed” or “rudimentary pidginisation”. Fontanella de Weinberg (1979b) and Lavandera (1984: 59–75) agree concordant with Whinnom in rejecting the classification of Cocoliche as a pidgin. Fontanella de Weinberg (1979b) underlines the characteristics of the social space where contact occurred, that made such a classification impossible. Lavandera claims that the similarity between Italian and Spanish, as well as “the subtle character of the social variables in

[C]onsidero que no se trata de un pidgin ni de un proceso de pidginización, ya que no se dan ni las condiciones sociales ni lingüísticas que los caracterizan. En el aspecto social, no se trata de una lengua surgida en una situación de alta marginación – la más frecuente, el esclavismo – sino de un proceso de cambio de lengua en una sociedad fluida con múltiples posibilidades de ascenso social.

FONTANELLA DE WEINBERG, 1996: 450

[Due to the absence of characteristic social and linguistic conditions, I think that it is neither a pidgin nor a pidginization process. Regarding the social aspect, we don't have a language that emerged in a situation of high exclusion or discrimination – like in slavery – but a process of language change in a constantly changing society with multiple opportunities for social advancement]

The historical *melting pot* narrative was questioned as early as the late 1970s, especially by North American historians such as Sam Baily and Mark Szuchman (Devoto, 1994: 25s.). In recent years, it has also begun to be relativised in linguistics (see Di Tullio, 2003; Ennis, 2006, 2008). The phenomenon under investigation has been difficult to grasp due to insufficient data, and thus daunting and sometimes outright dubious to reconstruct. In order to obtain a clearer picture it is thus worthwhile to also reflect on the theoretical framework behind the reconstruction process and on its possible functions in the construction of a common sense within a specific society. In this case, the depiction of the languages of the colonial “others” and their place in the development pattern provided by Western history allows us to acknowledge how nineteenth century linguistics was situated among other forms of colonial knowledge and power at the time (Errington, 2008); the harmonious and happy-ending melting pot story, with its linguistic counterpart in the Cocoliche continuum, enables us to reach conclusions concerning the relationship between language sciences and nation building in Latin America.

the receiving society” or “the absence of a truly multilingual situation” are strong enough evidence to deny the Italian-Spanish contact variety in Río de la Plata this situation (Lavandera, 1984: 62). She defines *cocoliche* in the following manner: “una variedad del español, [...] una variedad subdesarrollada, más simple que el español, al cual no es funcionalmente equivalente” (Lavandera 1984: 62). [a variety of Spanish [...] an undeveloped variety, less complex than the Peninsular variety, to which it is not functionally equivalent]

3 Reflection and Refraction in the *Cocoliche* Corpus

As discussed above, the refraction provoked by the reaction of different sectors of the Creole society and especially of those that were able to control the State mechanisms can provide us with an image of the importance of this intense and extended contact situation. In the same way, the success of the linguistic policies applied in the schools enable us to observe the result of this situation in the configuration of a relatively homogenous linguistic community. The forms and consequences of contact in the early years of mass immigration are almost impossible to perceive from behind this historical barrier.

A moment of synthesis with regard to the issues of contact and national language can be found in the book by the Argentine-German philologist Rudolf Großmann, co-author of the famous “Slabby-Großmann” Spanish-German bilingual dictionary and director of the *Iberoamerikanisches Institut* in Hamburg in the 1930s. In 1926, Großmann published a monograph under the title *Das ausländische Sprachgut im Spanischen des Río de la Plata* in Hamburg.¹²

In this book, Großmann reproduces the most extreme arguments of the creole hegemony in debates on the national language, the danger of contact and the “bad mixture” of Argentinean with Italian immigrants; he claims that the Italian immigrant was the labourer that contributed to generating wealth in a country that immediately became “the world’s barn”, but that in order to reach this objective, it was necessary to compromise on a cultural level (Großmann, 2008[1926]: 266). According to the author, who is in line with an extended prejudice that can be observed in the literature of the time, Italian immigration was interested in fast economic benefit and devoid of all cultural interest. His determinism is brutal:

Las lenguas mixtas argentino-europeas son, como veíamos, lenguas auxiliares. Lenguas auxiliares, esto es, lenguas que desde el comienzo, exactamente como el rancho del trabajador rural italiano, están hechas para ser derribadas, no se ponen en primer lugar por escrito. Una literatura como fin por sí misma no puede construirse en estas lenguas mixtas. Textos en estas lenguas mixtas se obtendrán por lo común sólo por la vía del registro fonético de las mismas. Puesto que las lenguas mixtas son sin embargo las más individuales de todas las lenguas, se accedería casi con cada individuo a formas fónicas y léxicas diversas.

GROSSMANN, 2008[1926]: 268

12 In the following, we will quote the Argentine version published in 2008 by the Biblioteca Nacional de República Argentina.

[The Argentine-European mixed-languages are, as we saw, auxiliary languages. In other words, they're languages meant to be torn down – just like a rural Italian worker's ranch. They're not meant to be written at all. A literature that exists for its own good cannot be built on these mixed-languages. In these aforementioned languages, texts are usually obtained only in the form of transcriptions of phonetic records. Since mixed languages are, however, the most individualized form of languages, one could find various phonetic and lexical forms in almost every individual]

Großmann clearly disagrees with theories such as that developed by the French professor Abeille (1900) regarding the existence or necessity of a “national Argentine language”, whose work he calls “pseudo-scientific” (Großmann, 2008[1926]: 72), preferring to call the language spoken in Argentina and its varieties as “Argentine”. He was the first to attempt a linguistic study of the Spanish-Italian contact on the shores of Río de la Plata based on the reading of a Cocoliche corpus, followed by a translation to “everyday Argentinean”. This corpus is formed by various burlesque imitations of the immigrants' speech in the traditionalist journal *El fogón* between 1899 and 1901. Großmann's view of the language of Hispanic-Italian contact is based not only on the educated Argentine elite's self image, but also on an interesting analysis of a piece of Cocoliche literature from the early years; the “Carta de don Bertolo al Indio Qesú”, first published in Montevideo in 1901 in *El fogón. Periódico criollo ilustrado*. The features of the contact language underlined by Großmann in his individual example of popular literature are generally the same that can be found in our corpus of Argentine texts written in the same period and under the same conditions, which we will later examine in more detail. There are of course differences in the details determined by the different periods and perspectives of the analysis, but the general approach to the empirical material is relatively similar.

As was the case for Großmann in 1926, we have no choice but to use linguistic fragments that can be found in the popular literature of the time, in which Creole authors imitate immigrant speech. While it is a known fact that the supposedly massive scope of education had rather clear boundaries, its influence was sufficient to generate the phenomena of popular mass culture, which would later enable “cocoliche” to emerge, a personification of the Italian immigrant who tries in vain to speak the host country's language and adopt its customs. The term Cocoliche dates back to the first decades of the aforementioned intensive contact situation, when José Podestá's popular theatre company staged a “pantomime” version of the best seller *Juan Moreira* (1879) by Ricardo

Gutiérrez (starting in 1884). This was a true icon of the literature that popularised the figure of the gaucho and the Argentine tradition prior to the country's modernisation that was linked to the immigration process. In 1886, this staging adopted a script written by Podestá, based on Gutiérrez's text, which was very well received by audiences of his drama circus (Prieto, 1988: 60). Then, in 1888, a new character appeared, was fully established in the season of 1890, and later became a permanent character in the theatrical genres *sainete* and *grotesco criollo* (Cancellier, 2001, 2011; Goluscio de Montoya, 1979: 59). This Cocoliche¹³ character was an *italiano bozal*,¹⁴ a comic figure that followed the local *criollo*

13 According to Cancellier (2001: 74), the name comes from the Calabrian surname "Cocolliccio".

14 *Bozal* refers to the immigrant who hasn't learnt the local language properly yet, exhibiting traces of his origin which cause his discrimination. Not accidentally, this word has been lent from Cuban Spanish, where it designated the slave recently brought from his home country. On *habla bozal*, see Lipski (1996, 1998b). Taking a closer look at the description of the contact phenomenon underlying this word, the parallels with the problem here described seem to be striking: "Debido al traslado involuntario de más de seis millones de africanos a la América española, la reconstrucción de las contribuciones lingüísticas afrohispanicas al español de América es una tarea de suma importancia. Hasta ahora los principales planteamientos se han basado en documentos literarios de siglos pasados— en su mayoría parodias e imitaciones hechas por autores blancos, o en el estudio de algunas comunidades de afrodescendientes donde no quedan sino los últimos suspiros de lo que puede haber sido un antiguo dialecto "afro". El africano que adquiría el español de adulto— conocido como bozal por su supuesta falta de transculturación— raras veces alcanzaba un dominio completo, sino que hablaba con las características de una segunda lengua. No obstante estas circunstancias era muy amplia la interfaz entre la interlengua de los africanos y sus descendientes y el habla de los colonos europeos, con consecuencias inevitables para el destino del español americano" (Lipski s.d.).

[Due to the involuntary transfer of more than six million Africans to Latin America, the reconstruction of the linguistic contributions that the Afro-Hispanics made to Latin American Spanish is an extremely important task. So far, the main approaches have been based on literary documents of past centuries – mostly parodies and imitations produced by white authors – or on studies of communities with speakers of African descent, where we can find the last remnants of what may have been an ancient "African" dialect. Adult speakers of African descent who acquired Spanish as their second language hardly ever reached a near-native level of proficiency. They spoke Spanish with second language features, and, for this supposed lack of acculturation, they were considered ignorant. In spite of these circumstances, the contact between the interlanguage of speakers of African descent and their descendants on the one hand and the speech of European settlers on the other hand was very frequent, resulting in unavoidable consequences for the fate of Latin American Spanish]

hero, Moreira, attempting to learn the gaucho's language and behaviour, which was typical of the tradition interrupted by the Italian's arrival to the country.

There are several linguistic characterisations of this general contact situation that have been insufficiently documented with reliable data: "broken language" (Lavandera, 1984: 63; cf. Cancellier, 2001: 80), "pseudo-sabir" (Perera San Martín, 1978) or a product of incomplete pidginisation (Whinnom, 1971). We believe that in order to give a precise description of the contact variety (or varieties) in question, one must take into account its symbolic dimension; i.e. that which transforms it into a literary product, enabling us to listen to the immigrant's (refracted and distorted) voice. This dimension not only played an important role in the development of a popular literary genre, but also significantly determined the different communicative situations in the actual contact scenario. It is, therefore necessary to get as clear an idea as possible of the contact situation and of the people involved; there are at least two large groups of immigrants in an unfavourable situation speaking linguistic varieties of accordingly low prestige, that is those from inland and foreigners.¹⁵ A habitual audience of shows such as *circo criollo*, the *sainete* and the *grotesco criollo* (Rama, 1976; Goluscio de Montoya, 1979, 1980; Cara-Walker, 1987; Bremer, 2003) formed in both groups, as well as among the readers of the *criollista* literature (Prieto, 1988), i.e. the genres featuring the Cocoliche character and other forms of the *italiano bozal*. One could postulate a form of "code crossing" (Rampton, 1995) at this point, which takes place in the popular culture's transgressive use of the legitimate culture; it is a use of the media of the *belles lettres* (print and theatre)¹⁶ by the individuals and entities the hegemony deemed illegitimate.

It is thus a form of conceptual orality (cf. Díaz and Ludwig and Pfänder, 2002: 392–5; Koch and Oesterreicher, 1990) that stages a process of code crossing, i.e. a communicative situation for the description of different elements and parameters; On the one hand, the author must consider the distance

15 "Cabe consignar que los pobladores de los suburbios no eran hermanastros del gaucho, sino los mismos gauchos, desplazados del campo, que comenzaban a afluir a las ciudades, golpeados, resentidos, perdidos; pronto Viana los retrataría con agudeza, pero por ahora quien les permitía revivir el ciclo entero de sus vidas era el espectáculo pobretón de la carpa Podestá-Scotti" (Rama, 1976: 164). [It should be noted that the residents of the suburbs were not blood-related to the gaucho, they were gauchos themselves. Having been displaced from the countryside, they began to flock into the cities, beaten, bitter, lost. Soon, Viana would portray them sharply. But for now, the one thing that made it possible for them to rekindle their whole lives was Podestá-Scotti circus' lame show]

16 In the earliest forms of the scenario in the "Circo criollo" [*Creole circus*] (which initially was only mimical), the *script* is quite limited and the actors frequently had to improvise (Rama, 1976: 159).

between the character's speech and his or her own speech—although the author of the texts speaks the “target language”, he or she has not necessarily mastered the L1. This is where one group of linguistic traits or another is selected and focused on, as regards how they are perceived by the writer and his or her audience (cf. Di Tullio, 2003: 92; Golluscio de Montoya, 1980: 25). In this sense, it is likely that Cocoliche varies greatly depending on the author (Golluscio de Montoya, 1979: 66), as is the case in everyday communication, and therefore it is important to consider all of the available textual variants in order to document the most common and widespread forms of the linguistic phenomenon in each type of text. In this way, we can glimpse the traits through the eyes of the other, i.e. traits that, in some way or another, were probably purposely included in order to be highlighted. On the other hand, this form of expression is a phenomenon typical of the contact area (Pratt, 1992: 8) with all its tensions, crosses, appropriations and hybridisations, with its numerous cultural and linguistic practices; from the forms of code-switching and code-mixing that characterised the primary ethnolect perceived by the Spanish speakers, to the selection and focusing of its elements to form a secondary ethnolect moulded in the drama and melodrama of the time. The practices are also related to forms of cultural contact which, in this case, are defined by the idealisation of the contact culture—accepting the model of nationality proposed by the creole melodramatic literature (Prieto, 1988: 66)—and the immigrant's attempt to adopt this culture (accompanied by a growing indifference or rejection of his own), as well as the “creole's” conflictive relationship with the immigrant's contact culture, which is accompanied by an idealisation of his own and a clinging to the values represented in this idealisation. Both attitudes overlap in the “cocoliche” texts, revealing the marks of the construction of a monolingual and monocultural state, which results in a language and culture shift in most of the immigrant population as early as the second generation. In the following, we will proceed to present and describe the texts in question.

It is acknowledged to be impossible to acquire a direct or reliable documentation of this contact situation in its original historical context; researchers have thus had to be content relying on the analysis of written corpus material, such as that mentioned above. Therefore, one can find studies on dramatic texts and *costumbrista* press articles (Kailuweit, 2004, 2007; Engels and Kailuweit, 2011), texts of the *grotesco criollo* (Golluscio de Montoya, 1979, 1980), those of Florencio Sánchez's dramatic realism (Perera San Martín, 1978), and the more comprehensive corpus analyzed in the recent book of Katrin Engels (2012) that includes several dramatic pieces and other kinds of literary texts. In this article, we will present an analysis of Cocoliche in the popular creole literature at the turn of the century, an area of cultural production that has

hardly been studied at all in this regard (except in Ennis, 2006, 2008, and partially in Engels, 2012). The booklets we have had access to are those conserved in the *Iberoamerikanisches Institut* in Berlin (IAI), which are part of the collection donated to the library by Lehmann-Nitsche, a German scholar who was professor of anthropology at the Universidad de La Plata between 1897 and 1930. Prieto (1988: 63–64, cf. Chicote, 2011) explains that Lehmann-Nitsche's curiosity and eagerness to collect were crucial for conserving a representative background of the popular literature of the time, which despite its size would certainly have been lost given the disdain the dominant culture felt towards it. A small number of these booklets form the *corpus cocoliche*.

According to Prieto (1988: 66), the actor José Corrado Estroface, who received an award from the newspaper *La Prensa* for his performance as “the Neapolitan who ridicules the gaucho customs and wants to reach the more creole level of our fellow countrymen”, went from village to village reciting texts composed for his Cocoliche character that had been collected in a booklet titled *El nuevo libro de canciones napolitanas y criollas del popular napolitano criollo Don José Corrado Estroface* in 1901. Prieto goes on to list the rest of the “cocolichesque” volumes in Lehmann-Nitsche's “creole library”, which comprise the following titles: *Nuevas canciones del napolitano Cocoliche*, *Los amores de Cocoliche con una gallega*, *Amores de Cocoliche*, *Cocoliche en carnaval*, *Nuevas canciones de Cocoliche y El Cocoliche*, *Décimas napolitanas criollas para el carnaval*. Many of the works consulted in the course of this study were also attributed to Manuel J. Cientofante, even though only one of them is actually signed by him. We were able to consult the following texts in this series in the library of the IAI in Berlin.¹⁷ Next to the titles are the abbreviations that will be used for quotations in the following sections:

Nuevas Canciones del Napolitano Cocoliche, Buenos Aires, La Voz del Comercio, 1899: NCNC1

Cocoliche en Carnaval, Buenos Aires, Rolleri, 1902. CC

Nuevas Canciones del Napolitano Cocoliche, Salvador Matera ed., Buenos Aires, 1902. NCNC2

Nuevas Canciones de Cocoliche, Buenos Aires, Rolleri, 1905. NCC

Napolitano Cocoliche, Buenos Aires, Salvador Matera, 1905. NC 1905

El cocoliche. Décimas napolitana criollas para carnaval / El rastreador. Historia en versos criollos, series “Alma Nativa, Buenos Aires, around 1910.

DNC

17 I would like to express my thankfulness to Robin Oldenzeel (University of Freiburg) for his invaluable assistance in contributing generously to gather materials to this corpus.

Napolitano Cocoliche. Buenos Aires, Salvador Maleta, 1909. NC 1909
Amores de Cocoliche, by Manuel M. Cientofante. Buenos Aires, Salvador Maleta, 1905. AC
El Cocoliche (1909): EC
El verdadero Cocoliche by Pascualín Senzavergoña. *Famosas canciones y disparates cómicos cantados por Nicola Papastrulo, célebre cantor del Vesuvio. Con el tango "El caburé"*, Buenos Aires, 1912. EVC
Las peripecias de Franciscone Cocoliche es so moquier Ludonia. Rosario: Longo and Argento, s.a. [around 1917, according to the indication of the IAI library] PFC

The other part of the corpus abandons the voice of the Cocoliche character and uses that of a different character that later appeared in various forms of popular culture: *Los amores de Giacumina*. This story appeared for the first time in the mid 1880s, and versions thereof can be found in verse as novellas until 1910 and were even performed in theatres. The story is about the love affairs of Giacumina, a daughter of Genovese immigrants who live in the neighborhood of *La Boca*, and features several other characters; from other immigrant stereotypes (English, French, Basque) to the president Sarmiento himself (Di Tullio, 2003: 95; Prieto, 1988: 57). The first versions of the piece had very wide popular success and received a certain recognition in the lettered culture.¹⁸ This success probably explains its adaptation in verse and the appearance of *La hija de Giacumina*.¹⁹ The surprising aspect of this case is that even though the first novel version (attributed to Ramón Romero) features the secondary ethnolect during the whole narration (Prieto, 1988: 57), in the 1910 adaptation in verse, the immigrants' daughter Giacumina speaks Rioplatense Spanish with next to no traces of her parents' Cocoliche.²⁰ While *Los amores de Giacumina* was initially another way of projecting the voice of the other, it would later also become the fictionalisation of the second generation's

18 Prieto (1988: 57–58) reports that despite the fact that it was generally condemned, as were all publications of this type, Rubén Darío rescued it in his scrutiny of Hispano-American novels in 1898.

19 Phenomena characteristic of the popular literature between spoken and written language. This evolution of the fictions circulating in this environment also manifests itself in other ways. For example, Fernández Latour de Botas (1968/71: 281) describes processes of traditionalisation in spoken language in the case of the so-called Creole literature, especially in rural areas.

20 Thomason and Kaufman (1988: 120) discuss an interesting example as a correlate for Argentina: the second generation of European immigrants in the United States in that time as one of the most typical instances of language shift without interference.

abandoning their parents' language. *Enriqueta la criolla*, also mentioned above, is a novel that established an intertextual dialogue with the *Giacumina* series, signed and narrated by "il mimo dueño di la zapatería de los anquelitos".

The source of the records extracted from this corpus material is indicated with the following abbreviations in the analysis:

Enriqueta la criolla (so historia) (Buenos Aires, 1886): ENC

La hija di Giacumina, per lo porteros de la casa de Matirde (Buenos Aires, 1887): HG

Los Amores di Giacumina (Montevideo, 1887, 2 vols.): AG 1887

Los Amores di Giacumina (Montevideo, 1897): AG 1897

Los Amores de Giacumina. Sainete cómico en un acto y cinco cuadros, original por Agustín Fontanella. Buenos Aires: Salvador Matera Editor, 1906.

Los Amores di Giacumina (Buenos Aires, 1910): AG 1910

These texts date back to only ten years after the official beginning of mass immigration in 1876; i.e. to the years around the first Centenary of Argentina's emancipation from Spanish rule, which was a crucial movement for the political and cultural processes that provided the framework for the aforementioned linguistic policies. This data can provide, given the lack of direct sources, an image of one side—and not at all the least important side—of the early years of language contact; that is, how the voice of the Other is perceived (in a way, with a certain element of self-perception, if one looks at the names of the authors identified) then given back as a negative social brand. Being integrated into the circuit of a widespread literature of low prestige (according to the legitimate culture) and published in cheap editions in booklet form, these publications show how linguistic stereotypes formed in the contact situation.

In this context, the noteworthy content of the songbook *Napolitano Cocoliche*, which must be mentioned, was published anonymously (as were the majority of songbooks) in 1909, although apparently interpreted by a well-known artist. Among the *cocolichesque* pieces, it introduces one titled "En mi beneficio", in which the author addresses his listeners/readers in a gaucho manner, using words from gaucho poetry without, however, rejecting the use of certain literary expressions ("Tu aplauso es lauro y es palma"), and using a rhyme throughout the whole piece that mirrors the language applied in the rest of the booklet: "Aunque quisiera este día / hablarte en napolitano / crée público benevolano / que tal vez no lo podría / por qué es un deber de hidalguía / y más que deber es un gusto / brindarte como producto / esta humilde poesía". Noteworthy is also the 1910 volume where the figures of Cocoliche—in a

particularly extreme version of their language—and a gaucho-hero, “El rastreador” are gathered together in a few pages, allowing the reader to acknowledge the Creole hero’s and foreign antihero’s stories and language in quick succession. One last telling example is that which can be found in *Las peripecias de Franciscone Cocoliche*, containing a piece called “En una pulpería”, where “Franciscone” faces in a *contrapunto* the Creole gaucho “Mala Cara”.

4 Analysis

In previous publications (Ennis, 2006, 2008), we have given a detailed list of the recurring, albeit generally not uniform, characteristics of what is focused and hyperbolised in the perception of Cocoliche speech in a more reduced corpus of documents, which has the same characteristics we will present here in a more synthetic manner—although the corpus itself has been increased.

With regard to phonetics and phonology, it is common for the occlusive articulation /k/ of the velar fricative /x/ (written *g* or *j*, here *c*) (Kailuweit, 2004: 52, Meo Zilio 1989: 211) to appear irregularly in the *sainete* texts or in creole grotesque (Goluscio de Montoya, 1980: 26); the latter is more frequent in this corpus, which explains the absence of the sound /x/ in the phonetic inventory of the contact language(s). /k/ also substitutes the velar fricative /g/, especially in an intervocalic position [ɣ]: *Veca* (instead of *Vega*), *nieco* (instead of *niego*) (NC 1905: 4, 5). Perera San Martín (1978: 112) and Großmann (2008[1926]: 273) further mention the /k/ > /g/ lenition or confusion, to which one can add that of /x/ > /g/ (e.g. EC (5): *me suguetaba*). Moreover, the epenthesis of -g- in diverse vocal contexts is also widespread (cf. Engels, 2012: 94): *Yó sono crigollo vieco* (NC: 3), or initial: *pata gancha* (NC: 3). A further characteristic of the cocoliche literature is the epenthesis of final -e (cf. Goluscio de Montoya, 1980: 27; Kailuweit, 2004: 51; Engels, 2012: 90). Other forms of the addition of a consonant are more similar to characteristics of other manifestations of conceptual orality, of the “use” of the voice of the other, in this case the gaucho voice, e.g. in forms such as *dirse aluego* (HG: 4). The /d/ > /r/, /l/ > /r/²¹ rhotacism is also

21 Kailuweit (2004: 51) suggests that this might point towards a southern, possibly Calabrian, origin of the character in question (see also Engels, 2012: 96). It is true that this phenomenon can also be observed in other areas of southern Italy, from Abruzzo-Molese to Sicily (Devoto/Giacomelli, 1995: 102, 148, 160; cf. Bruni, 1984: 313), although the neutralisation of the liquids has also been documented in Rioplatense Spanish as “one of the most remarkable changes in African-River Plate Spanish” (Lipski, 1998a: 288). According to Zamora Vicente (1967: 313), the second characteristic is a common equalisation in Andalucía, as

frequent: it is present in other parts of the corpus (*re* instead of *de*, for example in ENC (3), although generally speaking, the preposition *de* is preferred both there and in the *Giacumina* series) and is characteristic mostly of the texts that contain the Cocoliche figure, so as the abolition of the distinctive feature voiced/voiceless, as in the alleged author's (Pascualín Senzavergoña, cocoliche for "shameless") dedication of the leaflet to his family: "A me tata, á me mama, é a toto me pariente le brinto la felonsofia re isto libro, co tuto lo corazone re lo pecho". Another typical trait is the assimilation nd>nn (cf. Engels, 2012: 99, this feature is common in central and southern Italy; Devoto and Giacomelli, 1995: 82, 138–9, 147; Bruni, 1984: 316). With regard to vowels, the closure o>u²² is as frequent as it is irregular: *hagu la rilaciun di aquellu qui tengu vistu* (ENC: 7), as well as other forms of assimilation, metathesis and diphthongisation /o/>/we/, /e/>/ie/. There are many passages where we can find as many hyperbolised features as possible:

Cocoliche: *yo ta quiero decire a gosté ca te quiero cu la garma re mi cuerpo*
(PFC: 4)

Spanish: *yo te [le] quiero decir a usted que te quiero con el alma de mi cuerpo*
I want to tell You that I love you with my body's soul

There are features characteristic of oral speech in other areas of the Spanish speaking world, such as the dropping of -s after a stressed syllable,²³ or typical for Rioplatense Spanish, e.g. the so-called *yeísmo rehilado* (see Fontanella de

well as in "other spanish region's vulgar speech". It is important to mention that even if cases of neutralisation (such as those presented here) existed, there is a general inverse tendency, in which the use of /l/ is dominant in areas in which the standard use would predict /r/ (Lipski, 1998a: 288). Moreover, it should be added that it is a phenomenon that also exists in Italian dialects, such as Ligurian (Bruni, 1984: 313).

22 This feature supports the postulation of a Ligurian dialectal background in *Giacumina*, since it is an extended phenomenon in the Genovese region (Toso, 1997: 21), although also in Calabria (Bruni 1984: 323). "The narrator, who refers to himself as "el hicos del duoño de la Fundita del Pacarito", uses cocoliche in a way typical of half-illiterate people, very close to the spoken variety – on the basis given by the Genoese dialect – and bearing a blatant parodic tone" (Di Tullio, 2003: 95). Großman (2008[1926]) identifies the predominance of [u] displacing [o] before a nasal consonant as a "dialectal form (from southern Italy)": *mi sun maridato*, tosc. *mi sono maritato*; *cume*, tosc. *come* 'como'; *bun*, tosc. *buono* 'bueno'; *nun*, tosc. *non* 'no'".

23 The instability emphasised in the loss of the -s is reinforced by the addition of -s where it is not needed (*mi amigos*) (Großmann 2008[1926]: 274).

Weinberg, 1979b, 1987: 25–26) which can be found in written form in a large part of the corpus.

The generation gap represented by the immigrant's children acquisition of Rioplatense Spanish, present in AG 1910, is mentioned by Kailuweit (2004: 52), who classifies the Italianised morphology in the texts he studied as a distinctive feature of the father tongue (*ho seguido, ho bajado, so ido*) and the characteristics of the colloquial speech in Buenos Aires as distinctive of the child's speech (the dropping of intervocalic -d- in *piantao*, the *voseo* and the loss of -s after a stressed syllable, *lunfardo* expressions). However, in the corpus analysed here, these features are combined with one another both in Cocoliche's speech and in the language chosen by the narrator and the other characters in *Giacumina* and *Enriqueta la criolla*. Therefore, the loss of intervocalic -d- and final -d—two widespread phenomena in Spain in various social groups in the 16th and 17th centuries (Frago Gracia, 1993: 471–4) that would integrate the “deliberada y molestante criollo” language in Borges' early works—can be found seven times in ENC just by looking at one page (27), although they do display some irregularity: “*si ha livantao, é ha istado bien hasta dispuei del almuerzo que vorvió a discomponerse é cume in escupetazo á largao cuanto habia imbochao*” (ENC: 29). A further characteristic marked as substandard in the Spanish of Buenos Aires and thought to be clearly regressing today (Fontanella de Weinberg 1987: 152), is the /f/~x/ alternation before /ue/, examples of which can be found in AG (1887 I, II, 1897), for instance *fugueti* (AG 1887 I: 5). This same feature was already integrated in the literary representation of the gaucho speech.²⁴

With regard to morphosyntax, one can observe the simultaneous presence of the article and the possessive pronoun as modifiers of the noun, an acceptable construction in Italian but not in Spanish: *la sua casa* (AG 1897 I: 9), *il suo colore* (NC 1909: 9).²⁵

The regular formation of irregular participles is a further frequent phenomenon (*rompido* (AG 1887 II: 27) instead of *roto*); the alteration of gender and number concordance in the nominal phrase (Perera San Martín, 1978: 113, cf. Di

24 Nevertheless, one must acknowledge the presence of this kind of phenomena in various Italian dialects: in Lombardy, the intervocalic -d- is dropped (Devoto and Giacomelli 1995: 22) and in Calabria, one can observe a development from an initial f- to a diffused h- (even though this is not a widespread phenomenon, it is also no isolated one in the context of Italian dialects) (Devoto and Giacomelli 1995: 139).

25 Großmann (2008[1926]: 275) reports that this is one of the salient features in his corpus. This type of construction also existed in medieval Spanish and its mutual exclusion in a modifying position is a result of the grammaticalisation of the possessive as a determinant in the complementary distribution of the article (Company Company 2001).

Tullio, 2003: 95); the construction of the compound past tense with “essere” where in Spanish, one would always use “haber” (cf. Großmann, 2008[1926]: 275); the agglutination of pronouns, prepositions and articles (*si moviera ocorido* (ENC 5) instead of *se me hubiera ocurrido*; *inta* instead of *en la*; *da ca* instead of *de acá*, PFC, 14; *ta comprendo lantansione* instead of *te comprendo la intención* (NC 1909: 22)); the re-establishment of the etymological -b- in the ending of the imperfect tense (*sabiban*, *traiba* (AG 1910: 9) instead of *sabía*, *traía*, *teniva* (PFC, 2) instead of *tenía*). With regard to the conjunctions, one can mention the alternating use of the forms *se* and *si* as conditional conjunctions (Perera San Martín, 1978: 114) and the use of *e* or *é* as a coordinating conjunction instead of *y* (Kailuweit, 2004: 51). Also, in a completely irregular manner, one can observe confusion of the reflexive pronoun and the conditional conjunction, since in Spanish and Italian, *se* and *si* are used differently. The appearance of the *laísmo* and *dequeísmo* is infrequent and is more likely an index of substandard forms than the result of interference from another language: *sempre la cunsecaban de que si casase cun in hombre trabacador* (AG 1887 I); *los hombres del paese de so mamás que la deciban era mucho lindo* (HG: 4). As for prepositions: in his corpus, Perera San Martín (1978: 116) points out the frequent omission of *a* before the complements that require it, which is not particularly frequent in the corpus presented here. In contrast, the use of *per* instead of *por* is more common and more regular than other cases. This also goes for the use of the preposition *a* instead of *en* and of *di* instead of *de*. In the *Giacumina* series, the form *inta* appears constantly and can be identified as a Genovism (Toso, 1997: 131–2) with a locative or directional function, depending on the context: *disembarcó inta Bucas* (HG: 4); *le pegó un guebaso inta cabeza* (AG 1887 I: 4). This form can be found too in some texts of the *Cocoliche* series: *Cuanto inta lu firmamento / la luna plantiata ondula*; (NC 1909: 14).

With regard to lexis, Goluscio de Montoya (1980: 26–27) shows in her corpus of Italianisms that it consist not only of isolated words, but also of collocations and uses. Kailuweit emphasises the abundance of lunfardisms, especially in the speech of the characters that represent the second generation of immigrants (2004, cf. Engels & Kailuweit 2011; Engels 2012: 225). In the texts analysed here, the elements attributable to the local variety of Spanish—including “lunfardisms”—can be found in the *Giacumina* series and to a greater degree in the *Cocoliche* series: *tano*, *gringo*, *macanudo*—even *macanutísimamente* (EVC: 10)—are the most frequent, as well as *matungo* (ENC: 7), *caquetilla* (ENC: 9), *manganeta* (ENC: 18), *safadas* (ENC: 5); *linyera* (EC: 4); *macaniar*, *soncera* (EC: 15). By contrast, the lexical Italianisms are relatively scarce—as can be predicted for a language of imitation, which Großmann (2008[1926]: 275) had already observed in the texts of *El fogón: picola* (AG 1897: 9), *giorno* (HG: 39),

parolo (EC: 4). Even words such as *trabajo* (or *trabaco*) are preferred over *lavoro* or *laburo*, which is still the case in Río de la Plata today. The literary elaboration of the language of the other is thus supported by the orthographic modification of the written L2 according to the perception of the phonetic modifications it underwent, as well as to the alteration of morphological features and the adoption of lexical elements that have more to do with a will to take on particularly emblematic cultural aspects than with a lexical interference of L1.

Despite the above mentioned regularity of the various phenomena characteristic of the language attributed to the immigrant in popular literature, considering the repetition and frequency of a good number of elements, it is plausible to assume that they were at least partially present in spoken language, since their presence in writing is a result of the perception (and social evaluation) of the immigrants' speech, and of the subsequent focusing on them in a hyperbolising manner. Moreover, some of the phenomena that can be found in both dialectal varieties of Italian and in various synchronic and diachronic varieties of Spanish, as well as in other contact situations, allow us to form a hypothesis of a convergence phenomenon, based on the typological proximity and the tendencies of universal unmarkedness (cf. Díaz, Ludwig and Pfänder, 2002: 396–97).

Finally, the contact between the Río de la Plata Spanish and the Italian varieties brought to the country by the immigrants is thought to not have left much more than several lexical elements in Rioplatense Spanish. What remains today as a consequence of this situation of mass contact? One can assume that the strongest presence of Italian in Argentine Spanish is in the lexical area. This is the view generally taken by specialists (Fontanella de Weinberg, 2004: 65; Di Tullio, 2003: 225), and rightly so, even though a study of the actual percentage of Italianisms in the lexicon of Rioplatense Spanish varieties is yet to be undertaken. The colloquial speech conserves many common expressions in lexical areas as significant in everyday life as e.g. work, food and anatomy: *man-yar*, *laburar*, *gamba*, *cuore*, *naso* and even several affixes such as the diminutive *-elli* and the augmentative *-ún* (Di Tullio, 2003: 225).

But the traces of that contact situation consist not only of words. It is the very music of the language spoken above all in Buenos Aires where contact varieties at play converged in an identity-relevant feature. Colantoni and Gurlekian (2004) explained the ostensible divergence of Rioplatense Spanish in contrast with other varieties in the production of the pre-nuclear accents and the final fall of the intonation in declarative statements of extended projection (Colantoni and Gurlekian, 2004: 117). This divergence, the authors speculate, did not occur in Rioplatense Spanish before the intensive mass contact with these *varieties*, which makes the convergence hypothesis plausible (Colantoni and Gurlekian, 2004: 109), according to which, two typologically close varieties become even closer following intensive contact. More recently,

studies on the intonation of *porteño*-Spanish, whose particular features have been demonstrated to function as identity-markers (see Kabatek, 2005) have extended this research, applying McMahon's theory about "transfer" in language contact-induced prosodic change (McMahon, 2004), stating that *porteño*-Spanish, as well as Spanish as L2 among Italian speakers "exhibit rhythmic values that pattern with Italian rather than with Peninsular Spanish. This suggests that the rhythmic properties of *Porteño* can be explained as an effect of transfer from the immigrants' L2 that occurred in the course of their acquisition of Spanish as an L2" (Benet *et al.* 2012, see also Pešková *et al.*, 2012). Nevertheless, while we can "hear" the traces left by contact in those precise aspects, the relation between the massive character of the phenomenon and its posterior consequences is remarkably disproportionate.

5 Conclusion

The problem that arises when studying these documents regards the nature of the question we wish to formulate. They provide only partial information about the early years of contact, showing how immigrants who needed to acquire a competence in the different varieties of the local language (so as habits, myths, preferences) according to their needs for integration were perceived and imitated in a very particular textual and social context. Therefore, the problem lies in knowing whether these documents can provide information about the linguistic situation they refer to. They can be considered a reliable source of linguistic information, since this is a report not only communicated in writing or artistic elaboration, but fundamentally because it is an elaboration of a part of what the speakers said, an attempt to give an account not only of the language of the other, but primarily of how it was perceived and socially embedded.²⁶ Furthermore, they provide us with both information about the

26 In this sense, Engels' observation on the two works belonging to this series included in her corpus offers an interesting perspective on the "staging" of the immigrant's voice: "In den Werken *Los amores de Giacumina* und *Canciones del Napolitano Cocoliche*, deren Erzähler Cocolichesprecher sind, können diese orthographischen »Schwächen« die Fiktion des dokumentarischen Charakters des Werks und die Authentizität des Erzählers unterstreichen. Ganz allgemein bewirkt diese Veränderung der Rechtschreibung einen weiteren Verfremdungseffekt neben den phonetischen, morphosyntaktischen und lexikalischen Merkmalen. Um den Sinn zu verstehen, muss der Leser genau hinschauen, so wie der Hörer beim gesprochenen Cocoliche genau hinhören muss. Nicht alles wird auf Anhieb entschlüsselt, sondern muss womöglich mehrfach gelesen werden, so wie in der Alltagskonversation mit Cocolichesprechern manchmal etwas wiederholt werden muss"

linguistic tendencies existing in the language contact situation, and clues to understand their sociolinguistic embedding. At the same time, we know that this information can't be properly filtered, organised, and is therefore not at all reliable, since we have access only to one highly mediated instance: it is not a direct record of the speech act, but an at least second grade elaboration of its perception and generalisation.

The situation is, in part, characteristic of all historical studies about language. Georges Didi-Huberman insists upon the perforated nature of the archive, which defines the precarious state of all historical knowledge: “nous devons prendre garde à ne pas identifier l'archive dont nous disposons [...] avec les faits et gestes d'un monde dont elle ne donne jamais que quelques vestiges” (2006: 23). Any scholar of historical linguistics would sign this claim. In this case in particular, we can only make presumptions which enable us to come closer to an image that is inevitably veiled and unclear. However, this image, as well as the traces of what lies blurry traces in the background, is a type of knowledge of the historical development of languages that is both poor—since it begins by acknowledging the lack on which the study is based—and enriching—since we have been able to obtain a more adjusted and global knowledge of the subject in question and its contingencies.

Historical linguistics has always attempted to re-establish continuity, restore a complete image of the existence and evolution of the world languages, based on the idea that language contact is no more than an accident. If there is a first theoretical step which, by inverting the relationship between monoglossic and homogeneous “normality” and contact, enables us to consider the complexity of our object of study more thoroughly, it is the consideration of and renewed interest in the archive, not only as a means with which to fill gaps in a homogeneous and continuous history of a language. This interest could result maybe not in an enriching, but at least in a beneficial, contribution to an economy of linguistic knowledge that is so often dubious.

(Engels 2012: 66). [In *Los amores de Giacumina* and *Canciones del Napolitano Cocoliche*, which are narrated by speakers of Cocoliche, these orthographic “weaknesses” can highlight the fictional character of the work and the narrator's authenticity. Generally speaking, changes in the spelling produce an additional alienation effect along with the phonetic, morphosyntactic and lexical features. The reader has to take a closer look to fully comprehend the text, in the same way that listeners of Cocoliche in its spoken form have to listen very closely. The text is not decoded straightaway but may have to be read several times, in the same way that bits and pieces of everyday conversation with speakers of Cocoliche may have to be repeated]

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