

Italian Newcomers to Germany and Cultural Identity

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Introduction

Since the start of the 2008 economic crisis, an increasing number of qualified and highly educated young women and men from southern Europe have been leaving their countries of origins, often moving to other European countries in search of better opportunities. This new economic migration wave was described in the German press in the first half of the 2010s as *Wirtschaftsflüchtlinge*¹ (economic refugees), an echo of a term which had been already used from the 1960s in local public opinion to define people who left their homeland with no political motivation seeking for an improvement in their standard of living. What distinguishes post-modern migration flows from the traditional ones seems to be the lack of a structured recruitment like in the 1960s. The current flow results from a conscious individual choice to leave. Moreover, post-modern mobility is not only economic and political; it also results from a constantly evolving cultural pattern of life that, because of its specific features, cannot be identified as a traditional migration flow.

Newcomers' identity attitudes towards the target society in social and linguistic behaviours represents a still unexplored field of study in the analysis of new mobility. This paper will focus on the linguistic and cultural identity attitudes of Italian newcomers settled in the urban area of Munich. The Bavarian city stands out as a relevant example not only for its geographical proximity to Italy, which traditionally led to strong relationships and to a considerable migration flow to Munich, but also because of the synergy of modern infrastructure, technological development and the presence of multinational companies, which have been attracting a large number of people.

The first part of the present contribution will focus on the problem of attempting to define the composite group(s) of newcomers who form a part of the so-called *comunità italiana* in the city of Munich. The main section presents the most relevant empirical findings on identity attitudes and perceptions, which result from data gathered in German and Italian in May

2014 in the form of semi-structured interview with 21 Italian people aged 21-45, who have settled in Munich and are employed in various professional contexts. This method represents the key to discovering their deep world and to revealing their perceptive viewpoints. Through the discourse analysis of the complete transcription of all the orally recorded contents, this methodology permitted a subject-centred perspective in the analysis, illuminating processes for their self-construction from a social and linguistic perspective.

Current Immigration Forms and New Mobility

According to data provided by the Munich Statistical Office, the number of people with Italian citizenship living in the Bavarian city on the 31st July 2016 comprised 27,758 people, 16,464 men and 11,294 women.² Data provided by the same source reveal only 20,847 registered residents at the end of the year 2005 and 21,038 residents at the end of 2010. This means an increase of almost 7,000 people in the last ten years, most of them between 2011 and 2016.³

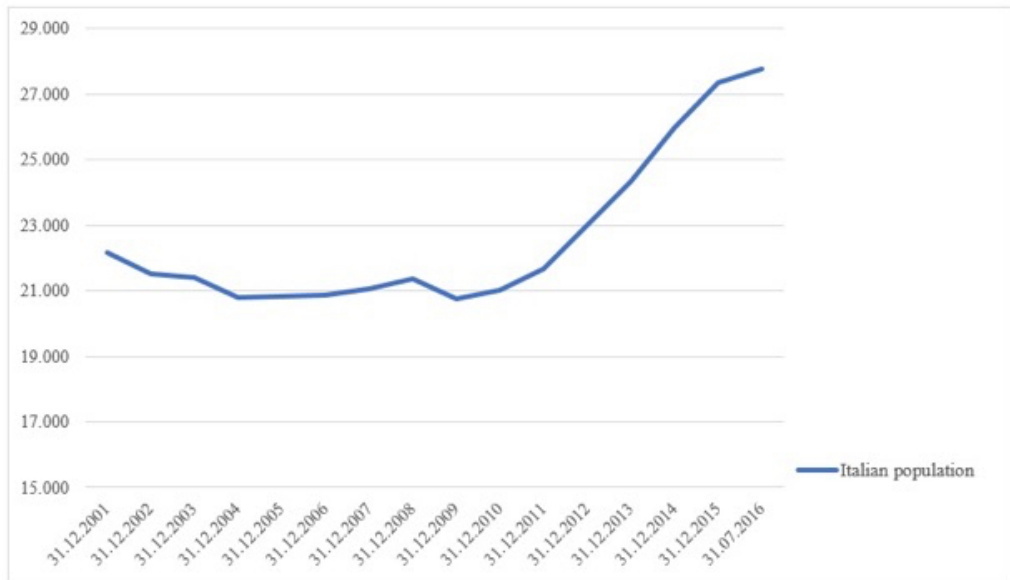
Working with statistics reveals the extremely difficult issue of quantifying the phenomenon of the new mobility. Due to the lack of borders and freedom of movement, short-term stays, seasonal workers and others cannot be registered and included in any statistics. Nonetheless, data provided by local municipalities may permit a better comprehension of the phenomenon in comparison to Italian consular sources, based on the AIRE (Register of Italians Living Abroad). In fact, facilities – such

Table 1: Italian population in Munich according to gender from 2001 – 2016. Courtesy of the Munich Statistical Office.

	Italian population		
	Total	Male	Female
31/12/2001	22.169	13.739	8.430
31/12/2002	21.519	13.204	8.315
31/12/2003	21.384	13.075	8.309
31/12/2004	20.797	12.635	8.162
31/12/2005	20.847	12.655	8.192
31/12/2006	20.871	12.681	8.190
31/12/2007	21.064	12.748	8.316
31/12/2008	21.346	12.874	8.472
31/12/2009	20.769	12.474	8.295
31/12/2010	21.038	12.586	8.452
31/12/2011	21.679	12.947	8.732
31/12/2012	22.988	13.711	9.277
31/12/2013	24.337	14.512	9.825
31/12/2014	25.978	15.458	10.520
31/12/2015	27.340	16.203	11.137
31/07/2016	27.758	16.464	11.294

as renting accommodation or signing an employment contract – are only permitted after registering at the local German registry office. Although registration in the Italian consular register and an official transfer of residence are officially compulsory one year after leaving Italy, the dark figure is still very high. Within the framework of this essay, a direct comparison between German and Italian sources was not possible, but recent studies,⁴ participant observations and the interviews carried out for the analysis revealed that a large number of newcomers said that they were not registered in the AIRE register. Such incomplete statistical data offer a partial and incomplete picture of intra-European mobility, because people in a changing and continuous development can hardly be categorized and quantified.

Fig. 1: Italian population in Munich from 2001 – 2016. Courtesy of the Munich Statistical Office.



Heterogeneity and fragmentation also play a central role in the attempt to describe the composition of new arrivals. Despite the growing presence of well-educated and qualified young Italian people, newcomers are included in widely differing professional fields in Munich society. This is mainly due to their motives for leaving Italy. On the one hand, there is increasing internationalisation and the attraction of new experiences, which are facilitated by rising opportunities in the European Union; on the other hand, there is the recent economic crisis in southern Europe as a result of the lack of guarantees and perspectives in the country of origins. Therefore, contemporary migration flows are difficult to categorize within a unanimous general definition. Even the word “migration” could be questioned. New trends also introduced

the term “expat” in an attempt to describe and define the subcategory of immigrants in a good employment situation, who are often in a given place for a short time. According to the definition provided by Gatti (2009), expats:

appear to be a special subgroup of immigrants characterised by a high level of education and a relatively high professional status [...], between 25 and 35, here for a limited time, [...] this group is also formed by artists, scientific researchers, engineers, etc., as well as by the families of many who have a stable professional position (Gatti, 2009: 5-6).

If the heterogeneous subgroup of new arrivals is included among the whole Italian population living in Munich, which also comprises traditional old migrant workers and their offspring, it can be seen that despite the same migratory

background, the Italian population does not form a close social community. It is a rather large and not homogeneous group, difficult to subsume among its various components; hence it is difficult to talk about a community to define people who in some cases just have a common citizenship. This leads to the question if the term *comunità italiana*, which should imply by its etymology a cohesion and a common membership, is the correct one to express such a complexity. If it is not, local and Italian institutions and associations in Munich, which were founded in the last decades to increase a sense of togetherness among the traditional migrant workers, have to face a great challenge to adapt to present issues. The need for such a framework is relevant when considering identity issues in the personal and social approaches to the topic of migration.

Theoretical and Methodological Aspects

The pilot study was carried out in Munich in 2014 and aims to investigate the perception of language and identity attitudes of individuals belonging to a group which is difficult to categorize. The survey sample involved 21 Italian citizens, 12 women and 9 men, aged between 21 and 46, who have been living abroad for no more than 15 years and have been settled in Munich for less than 5 years. The oral survey provides access to the subjective and deep side of the migration experience. The semi-structured interview permits on the one hand a structure and an orientation throughout the interview, on the other the opportunity for the test persons to express their

opinions openly and to recall the subjectivity of their migratory experience. Migration change involves new dynamics in the development of cultural identity. For this reason, the young Italian newcomers interviewed were asked to talk about their new experience and their confrontation with the local language, and to express the way they perceive themselves as individuals.

Before the presentation of empirical results, it is necessary to focus on the conceptual explanation of identity, a term which is a constant and complex subject of academic and public discussion. If postmodernism is characterized by pluralism and the multiplicity of paradigms in all areas of life, most recent theories also argue about plurality in identity. In this regard, the model developed by Keupp (1999) tries to describe this pluralism of identity by considering the complexity of contemporary cultural and historical times. Identity does not act at a single level and is not represented by a simple issue, but is an endless biographical process formed by dominant parts, feelings and biographical narratives.⁵ According to his definition:

Identität verstehen wir als das individuelle Rahmenkonzept einer Person, innerhalb dessen sie ihre Erfahrungen interpretiert und das ihr als Basis für alltägliche Identitätsarbeit dient. In dieser Identitätsarbeit versucht das Subjekt, situativ stimmige Passungen zwischen inneren und äußeren Erfahrungen zu schaffen und unterschiedliche Teilidentitäten zu verknüpfen. Auf dem Hintergrund von Pluralisierungs-, Individualisierungs- und Entstandardisierungsprozessen ist das Inventar kopierbarer Identitätsmuster ausgezehrt (Keupp et.al., 1999:60).⁶

This concept of a patchwork identity-composite may be included in the contemporary debate concerning the modern liquidity in current migration issues, as this approach considers the complexity of the subject within its social, historical, and cultural background.

Multiple Identity Patterns

Migration is a very unique and individual process. Comparative evaluations in qualitative analysis in case studies may therefore be difficult to investigate, as every single person has his/her own background, personality, education and a series of collected experiences. Nonetheless, similarities and parallels could be found in the different speech sequences in the analysis provided, too. Through the exploration of language and content analysed in the interviews, construction processes of a multiple self within composite identity patterns could be demonstrated in Italian newcomers in Munich.

First, the old ethnic sense of belonging related to one single nation appears obsolete in the autorepresentation⁷ provided by the oral histories, as different ethnic patterns are now acting simultaneously. One of the most relevant aspects is that the perceived cultural identity transformation is in most cases conscious and acknowledged by the informants. As indicated in example (1), multiple identity perceptions range from local to global attitudes and go beyond one single ethnic affiliation, creating a composite identity perception.⁸

“I would say I am European but I would also say Sicilian. [...] A Sicilian

in Europe” [M34-2013 – PhD Student of Physics (00:46:56 - 00:47:05)].⁹

Multiple perceptions obtained from the interviews confirm the hypothesis that new immigrants are considered to belong to different worlds simultaneously. Such glocalism indicates that they are and feel themselves to be bearers of different identities, which coexist in one individual simultaneously. The speaker recognizes this complexity and is able to express his glocal self-perceptions, identifying himself as Sicilian and European at the same time. The source identification with his home region is not cancelled, but exists side by side with the acquired feeling of being European. The contexts where these overlapping and intersecting multiple identities are situated may be better explained in example (2). Here the informant tries to express her heterogeneity, describing her way of dealing with transformations including different feelings of ethnic membership.

“We can’t say I am the typical Italian girl [...] but we negotiate it. [...] I am rather German, but [...] my lifestyle is Italian. I eat pasta, I don’t eat at six o’clock. My habits are Italian. Regarding my approach towards life, towards my professional life, I am rather German” [F25-2013 – Engineer (00:26:19 - 00:27:27)].

The multiple self and the awareness of a transformation are here perceived in the varying fields of daily life, fields that have been defined by Keupp (1999) as identity parts. The individual trans-

formation process is recognized by the speaker herself. Original habits and traditions can be identified with the country of origin; professional life can be identified with the country of destination. According to this example, cultural identities are built within personal experience and are inserted into the various activities in everyday life, transforming the individual progressively. New contexts and activities also contribute to this transformation, with the acquisition of new abilities and skills in daily life shaping a more complex individual. Previous habits belonging to the culture of origin are therefore joined to others belonging to a different world in one single person, resulting in a complex individual who is aware of this transformation process.

Moreover, if multiplicity indicates on the one hand that the sense of a composite sense of belonging is impressed into their self-perceptions, on the other hand new migrants are not able to find any individual and social membership in any place. The bi-directional state of isolation and exclusion provided in example (3) emphasizes the partial and undefined sense of broken identity, which derives from the liquidity of all patterns.

“I felt like a stranger in Italy [...] and now I feel like a stranger here” [M30-2013 – IT worker (00:41:32 - 00:41:40)].

The relevance of the example lies in its meaningfulness from a linguistic perspective, too. The pragmatic use of a past tense referring to Italy and the present tense with regards to his current

location seems to indicate not only a conscious separation from two different worlds, but also a permanent self-perception of non-belonging. In which geographical place the individual is located does not play any role, a limited and unsettled belonging place will be perceived. Whether this is a structural deficiency in current migration forms is not known. Still, the continuous lack of constancy and sense of affiliation within one place is one further characteristic of new mobility, which remains unstable in its continuous identity-building processes.

Multilingualism and Multiple Identities

According to the sociolinguistic approach in the identity definition by Bucholtz & Hall (2005), “identity does not emerge at a single level [...] but operates at multiple levels simultaneously” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 586). With regard to this, the social means of conveying cultural and linguistic identity are given at an interactional level by linguistic signs. Language is the medium of expressing these compound issues, shaped by strategies in performative acts, grammatical constructions and linguistic interactions. Identity is the result of such interactions. In this respect, performative acts by a multilingual subject work as an indicator of individual and social attitudes, whereas language represents the medium to conceive and understand the full range of interactions. Hence, language is not just a tool to convey information, but also a central practice to understand social meanings.

A sense of identification with the lo-

cals may be therefore expressed by the pragmatic use of language, as provided in example (4):

“You can really understand what people say and become part of those people” [F24-2011 – Student and Italian teacher (00:15:55 - 00:16:05)].

In other words, language is able to measure perceived inclusion and exclusion by certain language signs. The value of the example given lies in the expression of a personal sense of belonging in the self-perception of her own social identity, which is given by expressing language signs. The pragmatic use of a third person form indicates to what extent language performs the role of an indicator of personal and social inclusion, assuming in this concrete case that the person who is speaking does not feel herself entirely included. For this purpose, language arises from the interaction constituted by the social action and is “viewed as the emergent product rather than the pre-existing source of linguistic and other semiotic practices and therefore as fundamentally a social and cultural phenomenon” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 588). The involvement of language signs in immigrant discourse is therefore required to communicate multiple identity patterns, because a self-multiplicity is given by language performances. Within the context of contemporary migrations, newcomers experience a fragile and fluid distance from and closeness to both the country of origin and the country of destination. A state of isolation and separation may also occur, as given in example (5):

“It doesn’t matter how much you study German and how well you speak it. You are a stranger. People in Munich are very kind. But you can’t become German or someone from Munich” [M30-2013 – IT worker (00:29:30 - 00:29:45)].

Phenomena of isolation and cultural detachment are present in immigrant discourse. The inability to find the one’s own place among local people is expressed in the performative act, conveying a meaningful and powerful identity positioning, given by the lack of relationship between self and other. Under these circumstances, it is possible to observe another type of self-detachment. The speaker refers to himself using the second person. Is this another sign of a further absence of inclusion? This separated self is compared to local people, who are referred to – as in example [4] – using the third person. It is not a matter of discrimination, but membership is perceived as unattainable. Hence, language is the way of performing and transporting the expression of this post-modern patchwork identity pattern.

Outlook: Multiple identity patterns in ingroup communication

All the Italian newcomers interviewed stated that they used a certain specifically ingroup communication with fellow countrymen settled in Munich or in other urban areas of Germany. This is done to convey and express details and concepts of their particular migration experience. Therefore, further investigations will have to be conducted to determine whether a certain linguistic variety

of their native language is developed among newcomers who have a multilingual repertoire. The discourse analysis reveals first the pragmatic use of certain lexical items and neologisms. These elements emerge from contact between the Italian source language, the German target language and other lingua franca (in most cases English). This defines communication in the intragroup relationship.

For example, the newly coined term *anmeldarsi* occurred frequently in all narrations and was perceived in full consciousness as a neologism created among the Italian population to express a newly shaped identity pattern in the new migration context. This a verb which derives from the German substantive *Anmeldung* (here: registration) and consequently from its reflexive verb *sich anmelden* (here: to register oneself). Among the Italians in Germany, this new term indicates the process of registering at the local German municipality at the moment of arrival. The same reflexive form from the German is maintained, while the Italian *-are* ending (which is most frequently chosen in the creation of neologism into the Italian language) suggests a process. It is not known for certain if it is possible to talk about a diatopic variety of the Italian language, a common interaction code which is spoken by Italian immigrants settled in the area. What may certainly be assumed is that the pragmatic use of certain terms reveals ingroup identity behaviour expressed using language signs.

Conclusions

Contemporary migration flows reflect the fragmentation of post-modern and global society. Newcomers have not been recruited like traditional migrant workers; they left their homeland as individuals. People who left their country as a consequence of the economic crisis also made the choice to leave individually. They are difficult to quantify and statistical data are not able to include the instability of their displacement. The old concept of the term *comunità italiana* to define people with Italian citizenship who live in the metropolitan area of Munich should be revised in favour of a more appropriate term which could reflect all aspects and facets of the heterogeneity of the Italian population set in this urban area. Not only because newcomers are employed in widely differing professional contexts, but also because this term links them to traditional migrants who arrived in the second half of the 20th century and their offspring, who are employed in widely differing professional and social contexts in local society, too.

In this respect, identity is a process acting at multiple levels simultaneously as a product of social, cultural and linguistic practices. This multiplicity ranges from local to global attitudes (diatopic) in the various identity parts within other individuals (diastratic). Language is the medium of expressing an identity positioning. Because of this, the existence of a diatopic variety of the Italian language, which has been and is being developed among the Italian population in Germany, can be hypothesized. Cultural words are adopted by the multiplied individual, influencing their

interactions. The semi-structured interviews conducted with Italian newcomers to Munich permitted the discovery of a deeper and more complex world. Complex attitudes demonstrate the need for Italian associations and institutions in the target destination to review the old parameters which were conceived and developed for traditional immigration. This challenge will hopefully lead to a better comprehension of today's migration issues.

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Notes

- 1 Süddeutsche Zeitung, 02.04.2013: R3.
- 2 Courtesy of the Munich Statistical Office (*Statistisches Amt München*).
- 3 All the data provided by the *Statistisches Amt München* refer to people settled in the City of Munich and include people with a dual nationality, too. Information courtesy of the Munich Statistical Office.
- 4 Cf. Valisena, 2016:176; Tirabassi & Del Pra', 2014:24.
- 5 For the entire explanation of the patchwork-identity model developed cf. Keupp et.al., 1999:218.
- 6 Identity is understood as the individual framework of a person, within he/she interprets his/her experiences as a basis for everyday identity work. In such identity work, the subject tries to create situational coherences between inner and outer experiences and to connect differing partial identities. Against the background of pluralization, individualization and de-standardization processes, the inventory of copyable identity patterns is weakened (Keupp et.al., 1999:60 – Translation into English S.I.).
- 7 Krefeld & Pustka, 2010:14.
- 8 For easier comprehension, all the examples provided in the present contribution have been translated into the English language.
- 9 Informants have been anonymised within the following schemata: sex, age, year and month of arrival in Germany. Professional status is also given for a better understanding of the social background. Finally, the recorded time during the interview is indicated.