

Metadiscursive markers in the context of Italian migration in Germany: An intergenerational perspective

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Abstract. The present study investigates the use of Discourse Markers (DMs) in the context of Italian migration varieties using an onomasiological approach, i.e. looking at the functions that DMs entail in conversation. Thus, this study focuses on intergenerational variation, namely, how the use of DMs in terms of their functional space varies across generations. We will only consider the metadiscursive functions, i.e. all the microfunctions that aim at structuring the discourse, ensuring clarity and affecting the organization of discourse. They are analysed in two generations of Italian migrants living in Munich. Data are taken from a corpus of audio recorded interviews with 13 Italian migrants living in Munich (average length of each interview, 30 minutes). The results show that second-generation informants DMs undergo both a gradual loss of types, and a gradual reduction of tokens.

Key words: migration linguistics; Italian metadiscursive markers; intergenerational variation.

[it] I segnali metadiscorsivi nel contesto della migrazione italiana in Germania: una prospettiva intergenerazionale

Riassunto: La presente ricerca indaga l'uso dei segnali discorsivi (SD) nel contesto delle varietà italiane di migrazione utilizzando un approccio onomasiologico, cioè considerando le funzioni che i segnali discorsivi ricoprono nel contesto conversazionale. In particolare, questo studio focalizza la variazione intergenerazionale, ovvero il cambiamento attraverso le generazioni nell'utilizzo dei segnali discorsivi. Vengono considerate solo le funzioni metadiscorsive, cioè tutte quelle microfunzioni che mirano a strutturare il discorso, assicurare la chiarezza e influenzare l'organizzazione del discorso. Queste microfunzioni sono analizzate in due generazioni di emigranti originari della Calabria che vivono a Monaco di Baviera. I dati appartengono ad un corpus di interviste audioregistrate con 13 emigranti che vivono a Monaco (lunghezza media di ogni intervista, 30 minuti). I risultati evidenziano nella seconda generazione di informanti un processo di perdita graduale di types e una progressiva diminuzione di tokens.

Parole chiave: Linguistica migrazionale; segnali metadiscorsivi italiani; variazione intergenerazionale.

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Introduction

The aim of this contribution is to investigate the use of Discourse markers (DMs) in two generations of Italian speakers living in Germany. DMs are elements strongly linked to the discourse plane whose use in communicative interactions is described by linguists of conversation and more particularly by functionalist-oriented studies. DMs form a very heterogeneous set of lexical (and non-lexical) markers that allow immediate access to the level of negotiation of meaning present in everyday conversation. They constitute an area of considerable theoretical interest and studies have focused on their use in texts belonging to different kinds of discourse such as storytelling, political discourse, the language of the media, and interactive contexts, such as school contexts, linguistic contact settings, language acquisition and foreign language learning.

Despite the growing number of studies on more general and specific issues that have attempted a definition and characterization of DMs, the difficulty, repeatedly emphasized by scholars, of identifying this heterogeneous class of elements is evident. The perspectives on which the studies have focused are different and with elements of contact between them. The most influential in this field are certainly the discursive one (Schiffrin 2001, 2006), the pragmatic one (Fraser 1990, 2006) and the interactional linguistic one (Maschler 1994).

The reason why it is so interesting to investigate DMs in migration varieties is the fact that they are characterized by some contrasting forces: on the one side, they belong to the pragmatic level, which is less permeable to transfer in L2, on the other side, their independence from the propositional content and their pervasiveness of use in conversation make them easy to acquire and to transfer from one language to the other (Jafrancesco 2015). Furthermore, the use of DMs belonging to the language of the target country could be one of the first steps towards the creation of a mixed variety, a creation that could lead to the most disparate results: from the fusion of linguistic systems and the creation of a third system, if external factors allow it (Matras 1998: 298), or, alternatively, the pragmatic dominance of the language used to communicate outside the group of emigrants (Scaglione 2003: 46). These outcomes are far from obvious and may depend on either social factors or the structure of the two linguistic systems in contact (see § 2).

The paper is organized as follows: in § 1 we will give an overview of the general aspects of DMs from a descriptive-functional point of view. In § 2 DMs are contextualized in the field of migration linguistics. Next, we present our research goal, the theoretical framework (§ 3) and the methods and participants of our research (§ 4). We close our paper with an overall discussion of the data (§ 5) and the conclusion (§ 6) which includes limitations of our research and future directions.

1. Discourse markers: uses and functions

The research on DMs—regardless of the specific field of investigation—contends preliminarily with the difficulties of defining them from a descriptive-functional point of view. In fact, they are elements that cannot be immediately ascribed to a grammatical category and can also cover several functions at the same time, being elements of connection at all levels, useful for making explicit the interpersonal dimension,

serving as means of discursive planning or clarifying the cognitive processes in progress. Therefore, the functional identification of the DMs in a given context is not necessarily unique, being the result of the intertwining of the core meaning of the specific DMs, the co-textual elements (units of speech and portions of surrounding text) and contextual parameters (the discursive situation, the relationship between the interlocutors and the communicative purposes of the interaction within which the DMs are used, cf. Redeker 2006; Romero Trillo 2018).

The functional perspective (see De Marco 2017, 2018) highlights one of the characteristics that distinguishes the elusive character of these linguistic elements, namely the lack of denotative meaning, which is compensated by the presence of the pragmatic meaning. Pragmatic meaning is subject to continuous changes affected by the dynamics of conversation and speech (Matei 2010), which include the speaker's perspectives, attitudes or evaluations towards the relationships of what follows or precedes the DMs in the enunciative unit.

The value of the interactive function that DMs display within the utterances clearly emerges in the definition proposed by Bazzanella (2008: 222), who considers them as elements that contribute to connect the phrasal, inter-phrasal and extra-phrasal components and that underline the interactive structure of the text.

In our analysis we considered as DMs those elements that do not have a denotive meaning, i.e., that do not contribute significantly to the informative value of what it is said. In the following examples *allora* is used as an adverb with temporal value in (1) and as a DM with an inferential function in (2).

- (1) EM661A: non è più quella qualità e che delle volte si trovava che sapeva di tappo già allora già e questo...
 'It is no longer that quality, it is that even then it tasted like a cork and this'.
- (2) EM661A: *e poi ci son passato perché mi hanno riempito la testa. Dice ma tu sei uno in gastronomia / il tedesco lo parli / ci sai fare qua e là allora.*
 'And then I went through it because they filled my head. He says but you are someone in gastronomy /you speak German / you know how to behave here and there *then*'.

One of the main characteristics of DMs is undoubtedly their polyfunctionality, which operates at different levels of meaning, so that the same DM can take on different functions, i.e., to display a coexistence of different pragmatic values in a single occurrence in the discourse (Bazzanella / Borreguero 2011), depending on the variables mentioned above.

According to the classification of Bazzanella (2006), the DMs can be grouped into three functional macro-categories: the interactional function, the metadiscursive function and the cognitive function.

The interactional function refers to DMs as means used by the speaker to verify understanding such as taking or giving the turn, or fatisms to show closeness to the speaker, or, on the part of the receiver, as a confirmation of the attention to the speaker, as signals of successful reception: *eh, no? esatto, sì, davvero, certo* ('exact', 'yes', 'really', 'of course'; cfr. Bazzanella 2006; Sansò 2020).

The metadiscursive function includes all the microfunctions that structure the discourse in such a way as to ensure clarity of exposition: markers that facilitate the reception process or plan a change of topic (*comunque*, 'however', 'in any case'); the focal-

izers (*proprio, appunto*, ‘precisely’), which serve to underline some salient elements or parts of the utterance; the reformulators (*cioè, volevo dire*, ‘that is’, ‘I meant’), which also serve to compensate for certain difficulties in planning the discourse.

The cognitive function appears much more complex, since it concerns the micro-relationships between the context and the shared knowledge, linked in turn to the activation of the inferential function, the attitude of the speakers and the logical argumentative function: in this latter function DMs serve to create logical relationships between sentences or utterances in order to continue the discourse at an argumentative level, for example, *then, also*. The cognitive function also involves the textual content and the speaker’s attitude, which covers a wide variety of emotional states (Bazzanella / Borreguero 2011: 19-20). Sansò (2020: 26-28) includes in the cognitive function the inference markers, the modulation of the speaker’s level of confidence in the truth value of the utterance, and the intensification that modulates the illocutionary force of the speech act.

2. Discourse markers in the migration context

Migration linguistics is an area of study that has recently been enriched by some significant contributions that have largely dealt with issues related to the perception of identity with reference to language use (De Fin, 2007; De Marco / Palumbo 2015).

In the field of linguistic contact in a migratory context (see also “Migrationlinguistik”, Krefeld 2004), one of the central issues is the understanding of the processes of reorganization of languages in contact: in this sense, the study of DMs offers a particularly interesting perspective (see Retaro 2010; Fiorentini 2014, 2017). Although early pioneering sector studies (Haugen 1953; Poplack 1980) highlight the importance of observing the DMs of languages in contact, the interest in this field has manifested strongly in the last ten years, fully entering both in the study of bilingual discourse and in that of erosion phenomena.

Furthermore, bilingual conversation offers a privileged perspective from which to examine the DMs (Maschler 2000). The alternation of codes seems to suggest that DMs are perceived by speakers as a distinct category, so much so that they are expressed in a different language than the adjacent utterance and are used in the process of metalanguaging of speech, in order to mark the contrast between the different linguistic systems.

Clyne (2003) frames the study of DMs in the «dynamics of cultural values in contact discourse», specifying that the use of DMs belonging to the language of the host country is one of the first steps towards the creation of a mixed variety, a creation that can have the most disparate results, from the fusion of linguistic systems to the creation of a third system, if external factors allow it or, alternatively, to the pragmatic dominance of the language used to communicate outside the group of emigrants. In sociolinguistically asymmetrical contexts, different languages in contact with Italian (Dal Negro 2005) borrow from these elements that act at the level of the discourse rather than the propositional content of the utterances. These outcomes are far from obvious and may depend on both social factors and the structure of the linguistic systems in contact. In relation to the variables linked to the linguistic system in contact situations, the elements that are used in speech with a main function of “discursive operators” compared to those that have a more properly lexical or deictic value,

such as for example *dunque* ('thus') compared to *allora* ('then') are more sensitive to phenomena such as code switching and code-mixing. This happens because DMs occupy peripheral positions of sentences, phrases or clauses, in which these phenomena most frequently occur (Myers-Scotton 1993) or because, as shown in De Marco (2018), the functions which are more external to the propositional content, such as reformulations, fillers, turn holding functions are more sensitive to the passage from one language to another.

3. Research goals and theoretical framework

This study intends to explore the use of DMs by Italian emigrants living in Munich. We will focus on the use of metadiscursive discourse markers (DMs) and our research questions are the following:

1. How does the use of DMs in terms of their functional space vary across generations?
2. Is it possible to determine which forces drive the changes occurring from one generation to the other?

We have adopted a functional perspective using an onomasiological approach without referring to a pre-determined inventory of DMs but looking at the functions DMs entail in conversation, in order to see if speakers resort to some other strategy to convey the functions investigated (Borreguero *et al.* 2017).

In our research, the assignment of discursive functions to DMs is adapted on the taxonomy of functions presented in Bazzanella (1995), Borreguero (2015) revised in Borreguero *et al.* (2017) and Sansò (2020). In describing the functions, we have considered exclusively those found in our corpus.

The functions in the corpus were identified through careful cross-checks by the authors as it was often difficult to identify the primary functions of the DMs. DMs can in fact have more than one function within a given context and therefore we had to discriminate between a primary function (determined intersubjectively) and a secondary function. Secondary functions were considered only when the primary function was not metadiscursive, as in the following example where the DM *però* is both a topic conclusion marker and an inferential marker (§1). In such cases we decided to consider the primary function.

- (3) I: *però non vi preoccupate/ è un momento un po' di crisi/ però dovrà passare*
 'But don't worry, it's a bit of a rough time, but it will come to an end'
 EM661A: *eh sì io spero che passerà / lo spero / **però***
 'Eh yes I hope it will come to an end / I hope so / but'

The following table summarizes all the subfunctions found in the corpus:

Table 1. Metadiscursive functions (adapted from Borreguero *et al.* 2017; Sansò 2020)

| Functions | Subfunctions |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Information organization | Topic introduction |
| | Topic change |
| | Topic continuation |
| | Conclusion |
| | Marking out a reported speech |
| | List |
| | General extenders |
| Linguistic formulation | Focalizers |
| | Reformulation markers |
| | Self-confirmation |
| | Repetition |
| | Fillers |

All the functions related to text building and production converge in the metadiscursive macrofunction and can be divided into two main subfunctions (Borreguero *et al.* 2017: 10), «functions related to the organization of textual information» and those «related to the linguistic formulation of the text».

As shown in (4) *allora* marks the conclusion of the topic, while in (5) it signals the change of the topic:

(4) A: *non ha avuto troppi! / troppi problemi allora / mi fa piacere*

(Bazzanella / Borreguero 2011: 22)

‘A: He didn’t have too many/ too many problems *then*/ I am glad’

(5) A: *è molto che aspetta?*

B: *no no! tranquillo sono appena arrivata*

A: *sì?*

B: *sì sì*

A: *ok# // allora / vediamo un pò / ehh / lei / va be’ / ha letto l’annuncio sul giornale!*

(Bazzanella / Borreguero 2011: 26)

‘A: Have you been waiting for a long time?’

B: no no! no problem I have just arrived

A: yes?

B: yes yes

A: *ok # // then / let’s see / ehh / have you / okay / read the ad in the newspaper!’*

The second one «covers all the strategies to keep the floor while having difficulties to plan an utterance and are therefore strictly linked to online planning in spoken communication» (Borreguero *et al.* 2017: 10). Among these functions, reformulation is one of the most pervasive phenomena in discourse (Sansò 2020: 25). A reformulator marker is used to clarify the relation of two sentences in which the second segment is used to clarify, correct, explain the first one, as in the examples below:

- (6) *Ho comprato gli ingredienti per la torta cioè farina, latte, uova* (Sansò 2020: 26)
 ‘I bought the ingredients for the cake *that is* flour, milk, eggs’
- (7) EF661A: *perché si lavorava/ si guadagnava era tutta una... la gente era più... / gentile era più cortese/ invece adesso sono tutti... come dire... non sono gentili*
 ‘Because we worked we earned it was all a...people were more... kind, more courteous but now they are all...how can I say... they are not kind’ (Our corpus)

4. Methodology and participants

A corpus of about 7 hours of audio recordings has been analysed looking at the functions DMs entail in conversation. Data have been elicited through semi-structured interviews based on the following topics: migration, family, identity, job, Italian politics and tasks such as pictures descriptions. The familiarity with the interviewees led to more and more spontaneous interactions with the interviewer so that the speakers forgot to be recorded.

Semi-structured interviews (average length, 30 minutes) were carried out with 13 informants belonging to two generations of Italian migrants living in Munich. In analogy with other migration corpora³, informants are indicated using letters and number descriptive of those sociological features shaping migration contact: the first letter, E, means “emigrant”; the second one indicates the sex, male or female; the third number is the age of the informant; the Roman number indicates the informants’ generation. The last letter is used to identify informants who have the same features i.e., same age, sex and generation (for instance EF42IIA and EF42IIB).

As shown in Table 2, most of the informants live in an Italian speaking context since their marriages are endogamous, that is, they have an Italian spouse, but while informants of the first generation have studied in Italy, the second-generation informants have studied in Germany.

Table 2. The informants

| Informants | Job | Endogamous/ exogamous marriage |
|------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. EF66IA | Retired | Endogamous marriage |
| 2. EM66IA | Restaurant owner | Endogamous marriage |
| 3. EF40IA | Teacher | Exogamous marriage |
| 4. EF67IA | Housewife | Endogamous marriage |
| 5. EM77IA | Worker | Endogamous marriage |
| 6. EF54IA | Waiter | Endogamous marriage |
| 7. M57IA | Worker | Endogamous marriage |
| 8. F42IIB | Assistant | Endogamous marriage |

³ Interactions are transcribed following the Conversational Analysis annotation.

| | | |
|--------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| 9. M37IIA | Restaurant owner | Endogamous marriage |
| 10. M10IIA | Student | ----- |
| 11. EF42IIA | Salesperson | Endogamous marriage |
| 12. EF37IIA | Editor | Endogamous marriage |
| 13. EF33IIA | Assistant | Endogamous marriage |

In the following section we will present the frequencies of the metadiscursive markers used by the two groups of informants and we will analyse the most frequent functions that are conveyed by DMs in both groups.

5. Data discussion

5.1. Quantitative analysis

In order to give a quantitative account of the different functions in both groups, we have counted the total number of DMs in the corpus including those that entail the interactional and cognitive functions. We have therefore calculated the number of DMs with a metadiscursive function over the total number of all the DMs present in the corpus and we also calculated the relative frequency of DMs over the total number of words out of the whole corpus. We also considered a few DMs in German that speakers produced: *also*, *ja* and *aber* with a single occurrence.

As it is shown in Table 3. the relative frequency of metadiscursive markers in the first generation is slightly higher than in the second generation.

Table 3. Relative frequencies of DMs in both generations

| | Total number of words | Total number of DMs | Metadiscursive DMs |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| I Generation | 11359 | 400 tokens | 250 tokens |
| Relative frequencies | | 3,52% | 2,2% |
| II Generation | 6448 | 264 tokens | 104 tokens |
| Relative frequencies | | 3,05 % | 2,1% |

The following figures illustrate the frequency of metadiscursive functions in the first (Fig. 1) and in the second generation of speakers (Fig. 2).

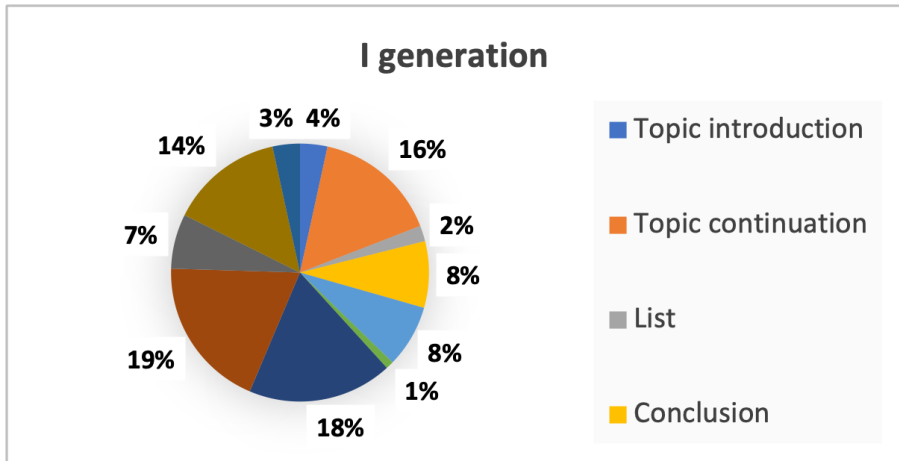


Figure 1. First generation metadiscursive functions

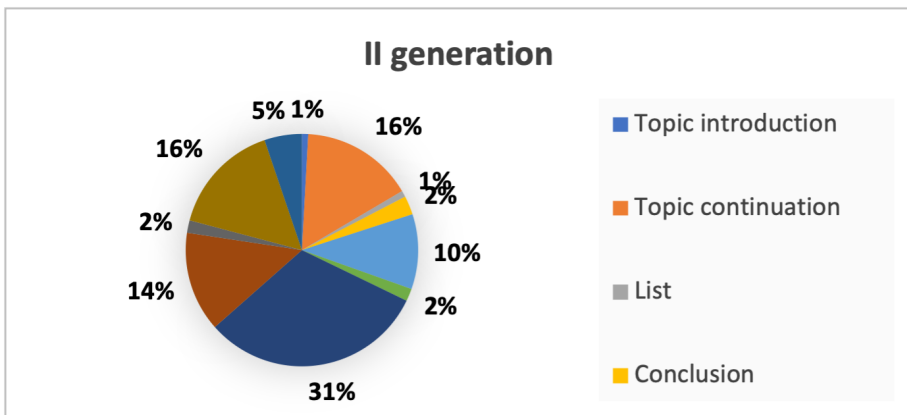


Figure 2. Second generation metadiscursive functions

As shown in Fig. 3, the functions related to the information organization and structuring of the text and those which deal with linguistic formulation are maintained from one generation to the other. What is evident from Fig. 3 is a slight loss of tokens throughout the functions in the second generation except for the reformulation function.

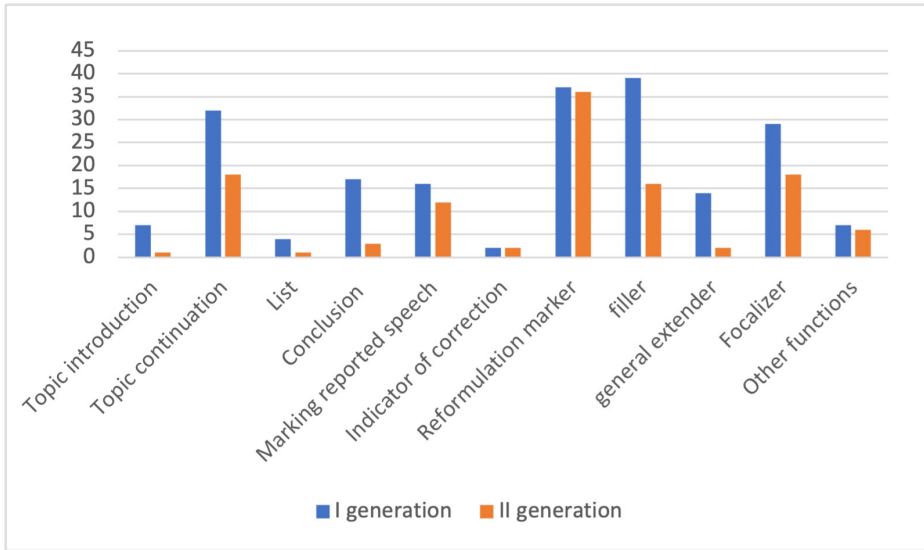


Figure 3. Metadiscursive functions (tokens) conveyed by DMs in the first and second generation

If we look at the types (Fig. 4) conveying the functions examined above, we note that the first generation produces a higher number of types than the second generation.

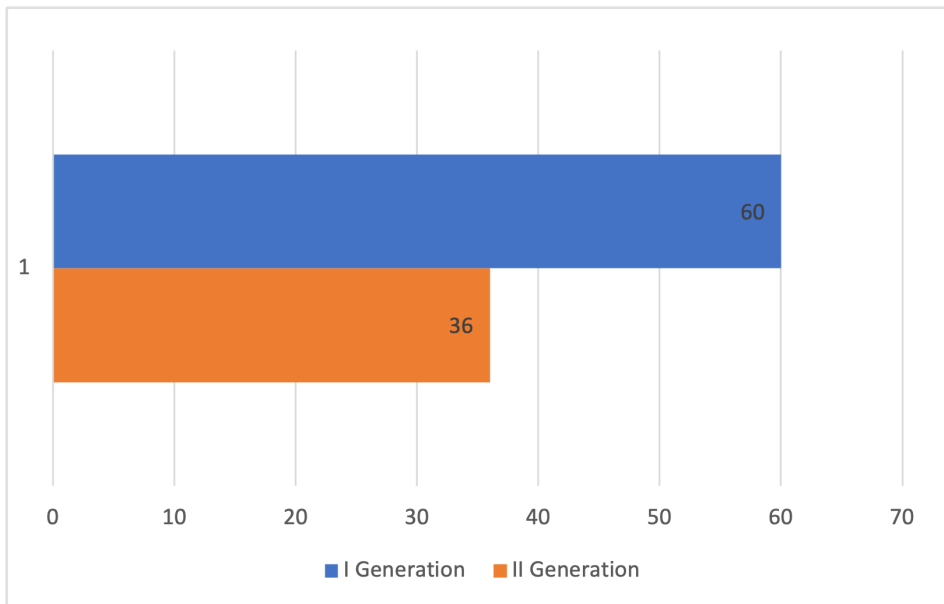


Figure 4. Number of discourse marker types in the two generations

5.2. Qualitative analysis: the most frequent types

We now turn to an analysis of the types of DMs employed by the informants for the functions shown above. We will look at DMs types in the most frequent and stable functions in the two generations: fillers, topic continuation, reformulation and reported speech.

The most frequent metadiscursive function is represented by fillers: these DMs reflect «the difficulties to keep on track with the online planning» (Borreguero *et al.* 2017: 47-48), and they are used to manage the flow of speech.

This function is quite stable in the two generations under observation: 17% of tokens in the first generation and 14% of tokens in the second one, as it is shown in Fig. 3 above.

The examples below show two DMs used as fillers, *proprio* and *cioè*:

- (8) EF66IA: *NO ADESSO NO che vado giù non sono proprio... che qua mi trovo / molto bene sia per l'assistenza medica sia per tutto*
 ‘no now no that I go down I’m not just... that I am comfortable both for medical assistance and for everything’
- (9) EM37IIA: *Ma l'Italia è BELLA non è che... l'Italia è bella l'Italia... un po' incasinata ma... cioè non...io sono -sono orgoglioso di essere italiano*
 ‘But Italy is beautiful, it is not that... Italy is beautiful Italy... a little bit chaotic but... that is not... I am I am proud of being Italian’

Although the function is maintained in the generations, types drop out from the first (13 types) to the second (3 types) as shown in Fig. 5.

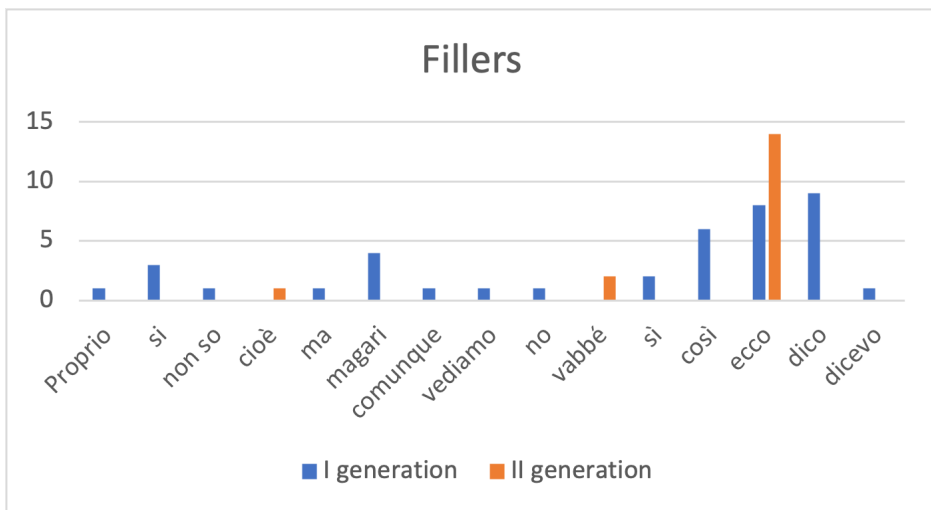


Figure 5. DMs with fillers function in both generations

The second most representative function in the corpus is topic continuation, a function related to the organization of textual information as it is shown in (10),

where the DM *si* is used to carry on a topic of conversation. In the second generation the same function is realized by *poi* but it is used in a code-mixing Italian/ German context (11):

(10) EFLL56IA: *Che ho cresciuto - si - ho cresciuto a mio fratello, a mia nipote*
 ‘That I have raised, yes I have raised my brother, my niece’

(11) EM10IIA: *Eh ti dà un foglio/ poi tu ti prendi... - und wie sag man tema*
 ‘She gives you a paper then you take... and how do you say composition’

In the corpus (see Fig. 6) this function is stable, but—as for the previous one—it is possible to observe a decline of types, from one generation to the other, 9 types in the first generation and 5 in the second.

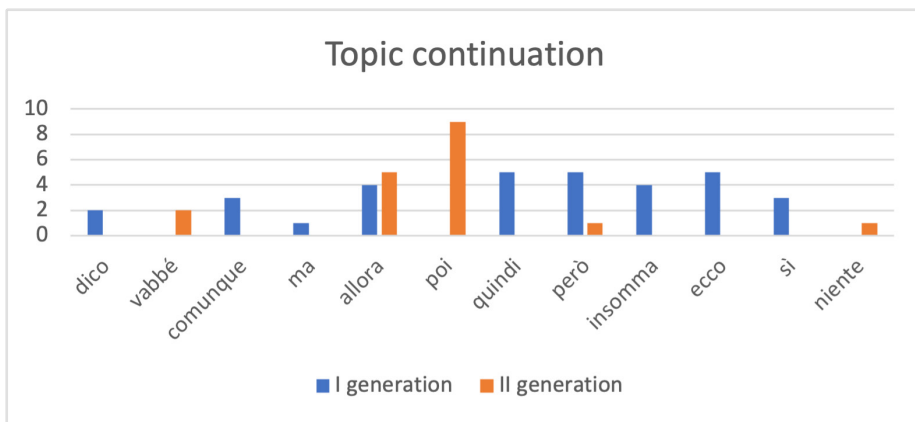


Figure 6. DMs with topic continuation function in both generations

Focalizers is the third most representative function, which underline the most relevant part of the speech. In particular, the use of *ecco* is manifested in the second generation of speakers. The DM is used to underline the element that follows (example 13). This is also evident from the prosodic traits which characterize the utterance i.e., a long pause after the DM and a high intensity of the voice volume when pronouncing the DM.

(12) EM77IA: *era 'na scuola che era pi figli di // di prigionieri di guerra di... mutilati di guerra ecco / era un po' riservata sta scuola*
 ‘it was a school that was for children of // war prisoners of... war mutilated well / this school was a bit exclusive’

(13) EF37IIA: *Penso che se avessi qualche handicap linguistico forse sarei ecco // no urtata da qualche parte avrei avuto qualche barriera però fortunatamente queste barriere non le ho dovute affrontare*
 ‘I think that if I had some linguistic handicap maybe well, I would be just bumped somewhere I would have had some barriers but fortunately I didn't have to face these barriers’

In our corpus (see Fig. 7) this function is stable across the generations: in the first generation, the number of types is 9 while in the second generation it drops to 3 types.

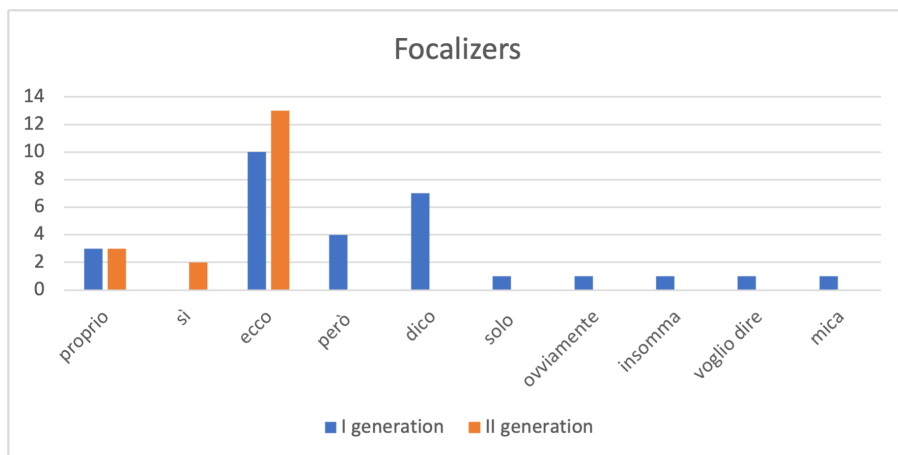


Figure 7. DMs with focalizers function in both generations

Among linguistic formulation markers (see Table 1), reformulation is a quite stable function, in both generations. This function (see Fig. 8) counts 11 types in the first generation and 10 types in the second generation. In the following examples, *cioè*, is used both by a first and a second-generation informant to introduce a reformulation.

- (14) EM661A: *però la tipografia era a Hundfieri // facevamo i turni mattina sera e pomeriggio **cioè** mattina notte e pomeriggio poi è CHIUSA*
 ‘However, the printing house was in Hundfieri we worked in the morning, evening and afternoon, *that is*, morning, night and afternoon, then it CLOSED’
- (15) EM40IIA: *Tranquilli a vivere a lavorare a... stare senza.. **cioè** // -a vivere una vita normale dai senza farti problemi a perdere il lavoro questo e quell’altro*
 ‘Take it easy to live and work to... be without... *that is* // - to live a normal life, give yourself no problems in losing your job this and that’

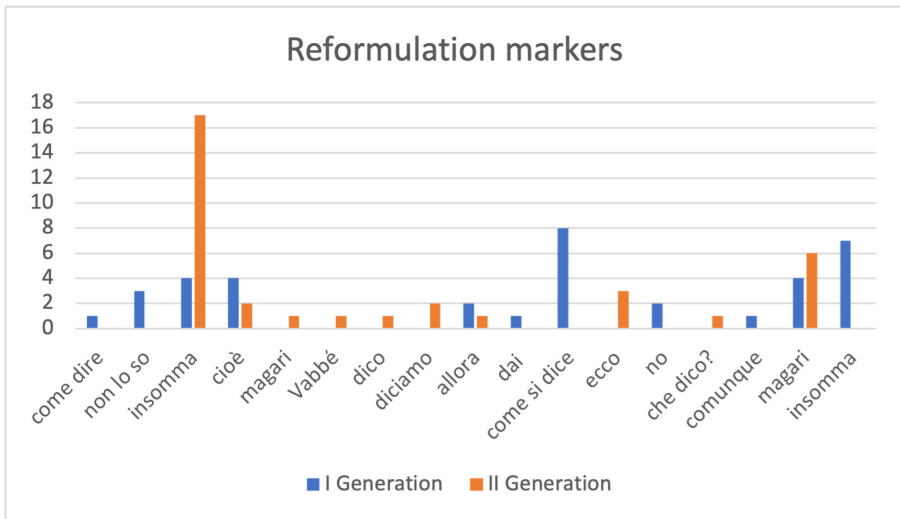


Figure 8. DMs with reformulation function in both generations

As for the second generation, it is important to underline that this function counts the highest number of DMs tokens. Another example shows how the marker *ecco* introduces the second segment which explains what is said in first segments (see also § 3):

- (16) EF40IIA: *Il tedesco / sì / l'ho imparato già dall'inizio // ecco da quando andavo all'asilo*
 'German yes I learned it right from the beginning *that is* since I went to kindergarten'

This same function is instead realized by *ciò* in the first generation:

- (17) EF40IA: *non ci è mai venuto in mente ci trasferiamo in Italia ciò - l'unica cosa che ci è venuta in mente se un giorno vinciamo al lotto compriamo un appartamento al lago di Garda*
 'We never thought we move to Italy *that is* - the only thing that came to our mind if one day we win the lottery we buy an apartment on Garda Lake'

This is the only function which does not decrease in the second generation neither in the number of types nor in that of tokens. This has probably to do with the search of clarity by informants who have a more limited competence of Italian.

Marking out reported speech is stable across generations. This function introduces a direct or an indirect speech, as in the example:

- (18) EF41IIA: *L'italiano è più calmo se le cose non vanno bene non... dice e vabbé domani riesco a farlo sono -*
 'Italians are relaxed if things do not work *they say* ok tomorrow I will do it'.

As shown in Fig. 9, this function is displayed by the forms of the verb *dire* or rarely *fare* in the sense of ‘to say’: in the corpus, this use is represented just by one type and one token, as in the following example, where a first generation informant is talking about Italian buses and their chronic delays:

- (19) EF40IA: (...) *oppure alla fermata dell’autobus ma l’autobus doveva essere già passato l’abbiamo perso. Non è venuto **mi facevano** le mie amiche. Non è proprio mai venuto*
 “or at the bus stop but the bus must have already passed, we missed it. My friends *told me* it did not come. It never came”.

This function counts 7 types in the first generation and 5 in the second generation.

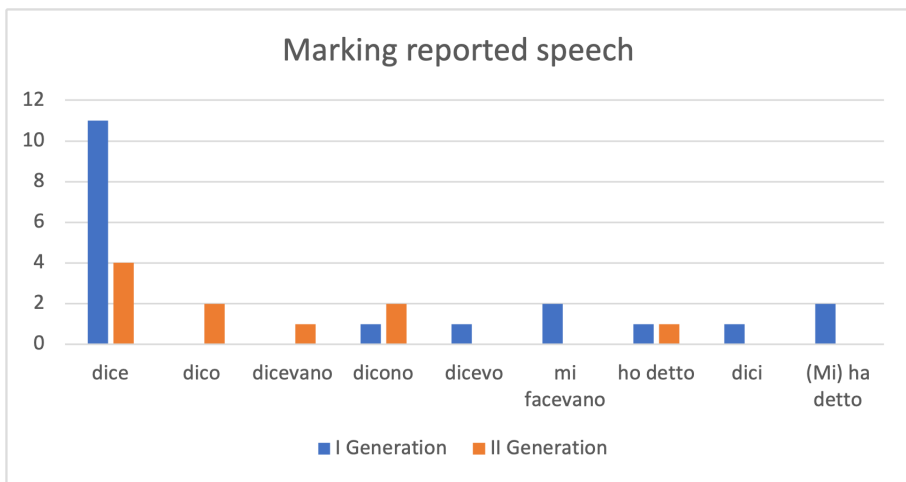


Figure 9. DMs with marking out reported speech function in both generations

The most striking difference between the two generations, however, concerns the frequency and variety of DMs: the first generation shows in general a higher number of types and tokens than the second one, where Italian DMs get gradually lost.

6. Conclusions

Our research questions wanted to shed light on the functional space of DMs across two generations of migrants. We have focussed on metadiscursive DMs (which is the most representative function in our corpus). As for our first research question, our data show that the first generation displays a higher number of DMs than the second one. Although there is general decrease in the number of types and tokens throughout the generations, some functions show a different picture. For example, if we look closely at functions as focalizers or reformulation markers we observe that in the second generation there is no equivalent reduction in tokens compared to the other functions. Regarding reformulation functions, the second generation shows an

increase of tokens (33,6% over the total of the metadiscursive markers) compared to the first generation (14,8%), while the types are stable through the generations (see Fig. 8). We assume that the second-generation informants is driven by a need to clarify what they mean, feeling themselves perhaps not very confident in their competence of Italian: the higher frequency of occurrences suggests a link with their reduced linguistic competence. The fact that the first-generation DMs functions are mainly concerned with the information organization and the structuring the text reveals, on the contrary, a greater solidity of the linguistic competence and a greater engagement of the speakers in terms of content.

We also observed that being DMs at the centre of two contrasting forces, namely their independence from the propositional content and their pervasiveness of use in conversation, they are easily preserved in the speakers of the first generation. A driving force of this behavior is certainly represented by the regular contacts that these speakers have with the Italian language. The exact opposite is true for second generation speakers, who despite the fact of having contracted an endogamous marriage, are immersed in a German context for work or study reasons, and, *virgola*, therefore they are not exposed to the same richness and quantity of input as the first generation of speakers are. Indeed, we assist to a gradual loss of types and a gradual reduction of tokens in the second generation of informants. Another of the reasons causing the loss of DM types may be that DMs, by their very nature, are neither essential to convey a propositional content, and therefore they can be omitted, nor very easily perceived in daily conversation. Contrary to what happens in other migration populations (see § 1 and 2), the presence of a large Italian community prevents the creation of a mixed variety. An initial process of erosion is shown by a sporadic use of some German DMs i.e., *also*, *ja*, *aber* and a gradual loss of the functional space of Italian DMs (see § 5) in the second generation of speakers.

Most of the problems that intervene in the analysis of the DMs are largely due to their belonging to the linguistic domain of discourse, essentially determined by the dynamics of the interactional processes underway in daily conversations. Meanings are constantly negotiated, modified and traceable to diversified levels of the discourse chain. This is why, in future research, it is necessary to analyse in detail a wider range of uses and to consider other elements that can provide more evidence for the determination of DMs functions, such as, for example, the prosodic structure. Similarly, greater attention and diversification of the sample of speakers based on sociolinguistic characteristics and a larger group of informants will help to better clarify the dynamics of linguistic change in relation to the use of DMs in migration and contact contexts.

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