Linguistic repertoires in Italian L2 classes: implications of the use of pidgin languages for learning and teaching

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Research on language teaching to migrant students is currently being informed by a conceptual shift from the marginal role of their native/home languages to a view of these as a valuable asset for learning the target language. This paper presents an exploratory study on Nigerian Pidgin English as used by learners and, occasionally, by the teacher, during L2 Italian classes. Adopting a conversation analysis approach to audio-recorded naturally occurring interactions, we discuss some excerpts to show how the pidgin dialogue emerging pursues immediate communicative goals and further learning objectives. This paper not only highlights the need to take into consideration students' non-standard, as well as standard languages, but also suggests an interactional view of language – and subsequent empirical analysis – as the crucial starting point for conceiving effective approaches to teacher training.

Keywords: language repertoire, Nigerian Pidgin English, classroom interaction, translanguaging, co-learning.

1. Introduction

Italian L2 classes attended by adult migrant students, whether in institutional settings or in non-profit associations, are complex and dynamic linguistic landscapes. Observation and empirical analyses of the interactions taking place in them reveal two interesting points related to the various languages involved.

The first is that, although languages that have an official status (English or French, for example) or a status as a national language (Modern Standard Arabic, Mandarin, etc.) in the students' countries of origin are generally assumed to be those which will emerge during learning activities, a wider diversity is likely to arise, including sociolinguistically marked varieties, such as vernacular or home languages, non-standard mother tongues, pidgin languages and creoles. That is, diversity can be represented not only by more than one language, but also by more than one variety within a single

language; it occurs spontaneously through communicative routines, code switching, voluntary translations or similar phenomena. The second notable point is that these native/home languages, compared to the target one, are subject to a range of reactions by the teacher. They can be variously noted or ignored, accepted or 'banned', tolerated or discussed in the communicative exchanges in which they arise. Sometimes their use is encouraged during lessons and they may even be produced by the teachers themselves, as happens when their linguistic *repertoire* includes some knowledge of the migrant learners' local dialects – often due to the very fact of teaching in these educational settings. Italian L2 classes are places where "you learn a lot", as one teacher said during a recent interview.

If these ways of dealing with linguistic diversity are also implicit modes of establishing bottom-up micro-level language policies (Spolsky 2004; Yaman Ntelioglou et al. 2014) which are likely to influence the engagement of students with their learning, the teacher's use of their language(s), while helping them develop the target one, offers insights for systematic research.

This paper[1] deals with linguistically diverse Italian L2 classes from this perspective. Its core topic is Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE), among other languages surfacing during interaction, mostly in beginner classes. The analysis we present draws on an exploratory study that grew out of a theory-practice dialogue, or rather a *co-learning* experience (Wei 2013) – a concept we will return to later with respect to the students – between the two authors: a researcher and university teacher in the field of Italian as a second language (Pugliese) and a Master's course student, at the time of the study, who was teaching Italian to adult migrants (Asta). The former was able to observe teaching practice by a teacher engaged in professional development to achieve a better understanding of his own 'instinctive' (at least, partly) pedagogy; the latter would access some key theoretical components and methodological tools for subsequent analysis. Therefore, a combination of both practical circumstances and theoretical interests led us to develop a collaborative project,

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[1] The contents and the structure of this paper were jointly discussed by the two authors. Regarding the drafting, sections 1, 2, 4.2.1 and 5 were written by Rosa Pugliese; sections 3, 4.1, 4.2, 4.2.2, 4.2.3 and 4.3 were written by Giulio Asta.

whose starting point was the fact that, while teaching Italian to Nigerian students, the teacher had 'incidentally'[2] learnt their Pidgin English. That is, he had become partially competent in NPE, adding it to his individual *linguistic repertoire*, according to the conceptual reconfiguration of this notion, as proposed by Blommaert and Backus (2013) and discussed in recent works (cf. Spotti and Kroon 2017).

Although this type of learning experience as an outcome of "linguistic goodwill" (i.e. an unbiased, open-minded interest towards unknown languages; cf. the LIAM-project 2017) is still not widespread, it is certainly not an isolated one. In fact, although monolingual teachers are most likely still in the majority, similar examples involving situated multilingual learning are mentioned by other teachers of L2 Italian with respect to other languages (e.g. Wolof or Bambara). However, we do not know 'how' and 'to what extent' this occurs. As highlighted by the authors of the DIVCON Project (2010), "while it is a common claim that immigration not only changes the immigrants but the receiving societies as a whole, it is surprising how little we know about the actual character and extent of such changes". What is lacking in the Italian context, too, is a two-way perspective. By addressing this research gap in the field of education, our paper aims at contributing to fill it. We will further specify our goals, before referring to both the theoretical framework on migrant students' plurilingualism and the analytical tools we adopted. After presenting the specific context of the data collection and some basic information about NPE, we will examine three excerpts from classroom interaction and conclude by discussing some practical implications for teacher training and further research.

2. Aims of the study and theoretical-methodological framework

Our exploratory study aimed to (i) identify how and when the use of more than one language is enacted in and affects the ongoing interaction; (ii) provide evidence of how language diversity is experienced by the teacher and the students in L2 Italian lessons; (iii.)

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[2] For the notion of 'incidental learning', see Hulstijn (2013).

consider, as mentioned above, the implications for teaching and for teacher training deriving from this descriptive basis.

These objectives join the international debate on (adult and young) migrants' plurilingualism and the current shift from a deficit view, where the target language was the main concern and the only *medium* of instruction, to an asset view drawing on the consideration of the L1 no longer as a peripheral resource, but rather as a central one. In this conceptual reframing, the native/home languages are paid increasing attention and even given centre stage. While the role that they can – and do – take in linguistic practice within beginner classrooms has previously been underemphasized or missed, because of the attention towards the target L2, much current academic thinking makes these languages central to the learning of the new language. Studies generally supportive of this idea are increasing and various authors not only consider the migrant students' native languages as a didactic asset, a bridge to the learning of the target language, and a stepping stone for further literacy acquisition and access to knowledge, but also document how native languages are used in a transition stage towards the L2 (cf. Conteh and Meier 2014; Cummins and Persad 2014; Garcia and Sylvan 2011; Yaman Ntelioglou et al. 2014, among others). Although we do not yet have a 'canon' of literature on the topic, this reconceptualization is a strong incentive towards change in L2 language education for migrants, as also recently stressed by van Avermaet (2019).

In the Italian context this paradigm shift draws the line between the long-standing discussion dominated by the view of lack of competence in the target L2[3] and a scientific debate that is now presenting a different picture, in the ways in which the non-standard languages are perceived and on the value they are acquiring. There have been some studies mainly concerning primary and secondary school settings, but there has not yet been systematic research on teaching to adult migrants, a field where the relationship between native languages and Italian as L2 on a practical level is less known.

In this context, our study seeks to extend the previous literature in two ways: it is concerned with a pidgin language and it provides a

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[3] A view that has been marked by typical utterances such as "he/she does not even know *a single word* of Italian".

description of naturally occurring linguistic practices in the classroom. While official or national languages in the students' countries of origin have been discussed in recent surveys (ISTAT 2015), the extant Italian works focus on sociolinguistic investigations into social dynamics and specific migrant minorities (cf. Chini 2004, 2009; Guerini 2011, among others). Non-standard languages as resources to enhance the comprehension and learning of the target L2 have not so far been explored. Moreover, while available descriptions of the world's languages (Eberhard et al. 2019; Mahlerbe 2007) are useful references for teachers to compare migrants' languages and the target L2 in the immigration country, they remain, by their very nature, records of languages, descriptions of discrete entities or "coherent packages" (Spotti and Kroon 2017: 99). On the contrary, in-depth descriptions of languages in action and of the procedures enacted by speakers allow us to notice discursive dynamics and recurrent patterns, through which we can build up a thorough understanding, not only of language variation phenomena in the classroom, but also of what kind of 'spaces for learning' might be opened up in interactions. The analysis of the sequences that we propose later (cf. Section 4) follows the analytical line of classroom interaction within the broader field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and using the methodological contribution of Conversation Analysis (CA); this sociological, micro-analytical approach considers verbal activities as social actions and describes in detail their sequential organization and mechanisms, regardless of pre-established categories, while following the speakers' orientation to the conversation. Participants, in a CA approach, "are therefore competent subjects […] who apply a set of implicit knowledge" (Fatigante 2006: 225), repertoires and communicative resources to ordinary conversation or conversations oriented to a specific function (here, the acquisition of a second language). The application to the field of SLA (also known as CA for SLA) grounds the analysis of the development of language competence precisely "on and in action", as Seedhouse and Sert (2011: 4) write.

However, the theoretical-methodological framework of our study is a multi-layered one. Besides CA applied to classroom interaction and its multilingual dimensions (Kasper and Wagner 2014; Sert 2015), it uses core concepts such as the above-mentioned *language*

repertoire (Berruto 2005; Blommaert and Backus 2013) and *code-switching* (cf. Berruto 2015, among others), from well-established areas of inquiry – such as *languages in contact* and *interactional linguistics* (Couper-Kuhlen and Selting 2017) – as well as the notion of *translanguaging* (Garcia and Wei 2014), from recent lines of investigations. It also refers to pidgin and creole languages, both in the sociolinguistic descriptions available (cf. APiCS 2013), and in works on the relation of these languages to the dominant language instruction (Siegel 2006a, 2006b, 2010; Yiakoumetti 2011; Alby and Léglise 2018).

3. Context, participants and data collection

The excerpts examined in the following sections are taken from a small corpus of 9 audio-recordings (8 hours and 39 minutes in total) of Italian L2 lessons. The recordings were made during class activities delivered by an association which receives and assists asylum seekers and refugees in Bologna within the National Immigration Policy framework and agenda[4]. This Policy addresses a number of issues concerning housing, health assistance, legal assistance, social and work inclusion and education. It is the area of education, especially teaching Italian as a second language, that provides the context of this preliminary study.

Another background factor must be mentioned. Italian L2 courses are compulsory for asylum seekers and refugees, in order to receive legal status and social assistance. This means that if migrants do not attend these classes, they lose their rights to any sort of assistance.

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[4] The audio-recording of the lessons was not originally carried out with a view to a systematic analysis. Rather, it responded to a practical professional need: to record some lessons in order to provide an opportunity for retrospective reflection on the ways in which lessons were managed, on the effectiveness of teaching and linguistic strategies adopted and on various other aspects that could not be the subject of particular attention during classroom activities, but could become such at a later time, in order to develop awareness of one's teaching. The idea of going beyond this reading of classroom interaction and to systematically observe it in its (micro) interactive manifestations, using the recordings as a small collection of data for examination with CA methodological tools, was agreed subsequently, during the co-learning experience mentioned previously (see Section 1).

The state education system is in charge of the majority of these courses, besides being the only organization allowed to provide valid certification for applications for long-term residency permits or citizenship. Thus, other organizations (associations and cooperatives) working with migrants are generally asked to provide classes to help students reach the level they need in order to be assessed by the public institution. Moreover, asylum seekers and refugees are very likely to attend their courses in the institutions they are living in.

Clearly then, the linguistic-cultural diversity found in reception centres is the same as within association-based language classes. Nigerians, for instance, might be considered as averagely fluent in Standard-English (even if such a consideration would not apply to the whole Nigerian population), although it is not rare to find social workers in Italy claiming that 'the Nigerian way of speaking does not really sound like English' or that 'their English is hard to understand'. This is not just an anecdotal point, but it can lead to possible misunderstandings when Italian social workers, as well as teachers themselves are not specifically trained. For this reason, linguistic and cultural mediation is likely to be provided in these settings.

4. Nigerian Pidgin English use in the Italian LESLLA classroom

Before examining some sequences of classroom interaction, a few structural points about the pidgin language here at issue will follow, in order to provide a better background for the subsequent analysis. In the given examples, we will refer to some utterances transcribed from the field recordings presented later, as relevant and useful complements to the ensuing interactional occurrences.

4.1. Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE): a few points

As Faraclas (2013) highlights, "home to a highly mobile, vibrantly enterprising, and intensely commercially-oriented population, the territory known today as Nigeria has for millennia been one of the most pluri-cultural and pluri-linguistic parts of the world". In fact, its people still speak about 517 languages, according to *Ethnologue*

(Eberhard et al. 2019). In this particular linguistic landscape[5], NPE plays an important role as it is used as a lingua franca all over the country, nowadays.

Some insights into the actual size of the NPE speaker community worldwide might be helpful. As reported in the *Atlas of Pidgin and Creole Language Structures Online* (APiCS 2013), the "estimate in 2010 is well over 75 million speakers. Nigerian pidgin is therefore the African language with the greatest number of speakers, the pidgin/creole language with the greatest number of speakers, and the fastest growing pidgin/creole language in the world".

The Nigerian community in Italy has become one of the largest among migrants seeking asylum in the country, as well as in the metropolitan area of Bologna, since 2015. This means that a large number of migrants attending Italian L2 courses are likely to speak NPE at different levels of competence, including a basic knowledge of NPE as a lingua franca; this usage is common within reception centers, as reported by students themselves. Therefore, this particular non-standard English variety here at issue is worthy of attention.

Let us now look at some core features of NPE[6]. One noteworthy element is that NPE displays double-word structures (a phenomenon we might refer to as *full reduplication*, see Rubino 2013) to amplify or reformulate the meaning of the doubled word, such as:

(1)   *well well*; *plenty plenty*; *small small*; *fast fast*

         how do I learn speak Italy small small.
         'the way I'm going to speak Italian step by step.'

Some question clauses are widely used during spoken interaction. The most common one is *abi*, while others are more likely lexified from indigenous languages, such as the Yoruba *shebi*. They may be put at

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[5] "From well before European contact to the present, the average West African child has grown up with a command of at least one or two local languages as well as a pidginized, creolized, and/or koineized regional market language. When the Europeans arrived, pidginized, creolized and standard varieties of European languages were added to this rich linguistic repertoire" (Faraclas 2013).

[6] For a survey of features and structures of NPE refer to https://apics-online.info/surveys/17; for an in-depth knowledge of them, refer to Faraclas (2013; 1996), among others.

the beginning of the utterance or at the end of it. In the following example, the question clause *abi* occurs in code-mixing with Italian. Its sequential context and the way it is prosodically produced suggest that its function is to introduce a question about the correctness of the utterance in the target language (i.e. Italian):

(2)   Question clause: *abi*

        abi quanto costa?
        'is it correct to say quanto costa?'
        'how much does it cost?'

Another NPE feature is the copula *nà* which we could possibly translate in English as 'is'. It is one of the most commonly occurring features of NPE, which in our data appears to be seamlessly used in code-mixing utterances, as in the following three-word sentence, involving three different codes: French, NPE and English:

(3)   Copula: *nà*

        après nà french
        'après is French.'

Here, a student (NPE speaker) was brokering the previous sentence, uttered in French by a francophone student to her fellow classmate (also an NPE speaker), who appeared confused about the meaning of the French word *après*.

    A brief note on the verb system is necessary. Verbs are not morphologically conjugated; instead, they are often preceded by markers such as *go* and *don*, which change the time reference of the following verb to produce future or past 'tenses', respectively:

(4a)   Future Tense Marker: *go*

        they no go laugh you again
        'they will not laugh at you anymore.'

(4b)   Past Tense Marker: *don*
        I don speak dat one

'I've already said that.'

With regard to the previously mentioned tendency to misunderstand NPE by those who are not familiar with the language, this feature is one of the most likely to cause misunderstanding. Clearly due to the fact that the past tense marker *don* in NPE is phonologically close to the English *don't,* it is the kind of misunderstanding where the opposite of what is intended may be understood. This gap between Italian speakers' normative expectations towards standard English and the actual language spoken by NPE migrants should be noted when it comes to teaching the host language.

    Further features of NPE to mention are prepositions, together with the resemantisation of some verbs. As shown in the example in (5), prepositions do not work in exactly the same way as Standard-English prepositions. Some of them present different phonology and orthography, others might be neutralized or resemantised and, therefore, used for multiple functions. A good example of this phenomenon is the use of *for* in terms of place preposition, as in the expression *for here* ('in this place'; see 4.2.2):

(5)   NPE *fit* (En. 'to be able to/can')

         e no fit be agbu for here
         'it cannot be/they cannot have goat meat, in this place.'

This example also shows that the resemantisation concerns a wide range of word classes. In fact, NPE displays a remarkable series of resemantised verbs and nouns, too. Another example can be added to the previous one:

(6)   NPE *hear* (En. 'to understand')

         maybe dis italy I will hear how to speak it o
         'maybe I will understand how to speak this Italian.'

Lastly, some idiomatic structures are worthy of consideration, for they are commonly used in ritual linguistic routines such as greetings, praise and approval display, dismay expressions, etc.:

(7a)   NPE *oya na* (Eng. 'come on')

         Oya na, let us go

(7b)   NPE *how far* (Eng. 'how are you')

         How far sista?   *I dey o*
         'How are you, sister?'   'I'm fine'

A teacher who is even partially aware of these and other idiomatic structures might choose to use some of them to ritualize greetings in class, as a way of establishing positive relations with their students, and − we would argue − of deploying a linguistically inclusive teaching approach, in line with what the LIAM project calls "linguistic goodwill" (see Section 1).

      Let us now move on to see how some of these basic features of NPE have a role in the sequential dynamics of class interactions.

4.2. Analysis

In the following three excerpts, teacher and students will be referred to as TCHR and by the first three letters of the students' names respectively. Since both the teacher (a man) and the students (five women, from Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire) have large individual language repertoires, it is helpful to show this, while giving a few personal details (nationality and age) on the participants, and the languages they display[7]:

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[7] Their voices were transcribed from the excerpts discussed and the transcription of utterances/turns in NPE (here highlighted in bold) was checked with the assistance of an NPE speaker and advanced learner of L2 Italian. However, it should be noted that the codification of NPE orthography is a debated issue. As Ojarikre (2013) observes in a review article, three possible options for writing NPE are considered in the literature: English Spelling/Alphabet (which implies a reader literate in English and may also give an impression of NPE as a deviant form of English); the Phonetic Alphabet (which makes the language accessible only to trained linguists) and New Modern Orthography, more an attempt towards this than a fully established system for a language "that is in need of a [standard] writing system" (Ojarikre 2013: 129), since it is evolving from the oral stage to a written status (cf.

- (TCHR): Italian; 28; (Italian, English, French, Arabic and NPE);
- (NAM): Ivorian; 21; (French, Jula[8], Italian and NPE);
- (ROK): Ivorian; 30; (French, Jula and Italian);
- (SAR): Nigerian; 22; (English, NPE and Italian);
- (GIF): Nigerian; 20; (English, NPE, Italian and Arabic);
- (BUN): Nigerian; 41; (English, NPE and Italian).

The first two excerpts are taken from a complete transcribed lesson, which can be thematically structured in four episodes and corresponding topics, as follows:

- 'The chances to learn Italian' (tt.1-640)
- 'Doing language practice at the supermarket' (tt.641–898)
- 'The people at home' (tt.899–995)'
- 'Come and eat with me' (tt.996–1047).

4.2.1. Excerpt 1: "They no go laugh you again"

From the first episode, this excerpt deals with the typical classroom practice of talking about (the target) language acquisition and use. After a turn uttered by SAR in English on the difficulties of speaking Italian 'at home' (i.e. the reception centre where all the students live), TCHR takes the interaction back to Italian:

209 TCHR: se tu non capisci bene è più difficile + allora brava S. + tu
capisci e dopo hai bisogno/ di fare pratica giusto?
*if you don't understand well it's more difficult + so that's
good S. + you understand and then you need/
to practice right?*

210   SAR: Sì
'yes'

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also Ekpenyong 2008).
[8] Spoken by millions of people, also as a second language, in West African countries such as Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast and Mali, Jula (or Dyula) is one of the Mande languages, closely related to Bambara and Malinke.

211 TCHR: di parlare parlare parlare con le persone [giusto?
            to talk talk talk to people   [right?

212   ROK: [sì!
                                                        [yes!

213   SAR: sì!
            yes!

214 TCHR: ecco, a casa/ è difficile? perché/ le altre ragazze ridono? [eh?
            so, is it hard at home? because/ the other girls laugh?   [hein?

215   SAR: [sì:
                                                                       [ye:s

216 TCHR: eh! lascia + lascia ridere\=
            h*ein! let + let laugh \=*

217   GIF: **= let dem make dem laugh**
             = let them laugh

218 TCHR: mh? lascia ridere + dopo[:
                                 then[:

219   NAM: [sì davvero =
                                  [yes really =

220 TCHR: = arriva un giorno + mh? che tu parli italiano/
            ((*schiocca le dita tre volte*))
              [benissimo
            = a day comes + mh? that you speak italian/
            ((*snaps his fingers three times*))
               [very well

221   GIF: [**fast fast**

222 TCHR: e loro + non ridono =
            and they + don't laugh =

223   GIF: **= they no go laugh you again**
             = they will not laugh at you anymore

224 TCHR: giusto? + loro non ridono
            right? + they don't laugh

In the first analyzable turn (209), as well as in the whole fragment up to turn 214, the TCHR is offering his understanding of the previous

students' talk, by glossing their English utterances in Italian. The connection with the previous students' turns is made explicit through the repeated question *right?* (tt. 211; 214). This action of interpretation or *formulation* – in conversation analysis terms – is confirmed by students, through minimal feedback (i.e. '*sì*'; tt. 210, 212, 213, 215), which also indicates their attention to the teacher's discourse. The first substantial element concerning the focus of our study is observable in turn 217, where GIF offers a consecutive interpretation, from Italian to NPE, of the teacher's turn (216) and his final suggestion (i.e. *lascia ridere* 'let them laugh') referred to the humiliating episodes in the household, described by the students and previously glossed (t. 214).

It appears, though, that GIF's utterance in turn 217 is actually slightly more sophisticated than the teacher's previous one. In fact, it displays an appropriate use of pronouns which was omitted or only implied by the teacher in turn 216. More specifically, the Italian sentence *lascia ridere* would more correctly be *lascia_le_ ridere*, but the third plural suffix pronoun is not uttered by the teacher, probably in order to provide simplified input for his students. The same sentence, conveying a suggestion, is then repeated by the teacher (t. 218). NAM confirms and emphasizes it, as it is recognizable both in the added word *davvero* ('really') and in the slight overlapping between the two turns (218-219).

The subsequent use of NPE, again by GIF (tt. 221; 223), is noticeable in another brokering sequence of the teacher's turns (t. 220; 222). First, the utterance in turn 221 *fast fast* appears as a translation of the teacher's gesture (he snaps his fingers three times), more than his final comment in turn 220, as shown by the overlapping occurring. Subsequently, GIF keeps her broker's role by translating the teacher's turn (222) into NPE (t. 223). Again, we notice the appropriate understanding displayed by her through the NPE utterance. GIF sets the sentence in the future by means of /*go*/ (cf. 4.1) as a marker of a future tense, which does not appear in the teacher's turn, where a present tense is used, although with future value. The meaning of the sequence is maintained and in the following turn (t. 224), the teacher acknowledges the translation offered. We do not know whether the turns uttered in NPE in this excerpt are addressed to the whole group or self-addressed. Their interactional relevance, however, is in the

speaker's orientation towards understanding/facilitating understanding of the teacher's ongoing discourse by other Nigerian students.

4.2.2. Excerpt 2: "Melanzane, okro e agbu"

In the following excerpt, taken from the third episode in the transcription, NAM is recounting her conversational experience in Italian, at the African-Chinese store. Besides NPE, other languages are at play:

870	NAM:	j'ai parlé italien j'ai ménagé je sait pas menager buongiorno e:: per favore oggi non c'è melanzana?
		I spoke italian, I managed I don't know manage good morning a::nd please is there aubergine today?
871	TCHR:	eh! brava!
		yay! good
872	NAM:	non c'è akoro?
		is there any akoro?
873	TCHR:	cos'è akoro? =
		what is akoro?
874	NAM:	= [[io ho bisogno
		I need
875	GIF:	[[**okro**
876	TCHR:	ah! **okro**
877	NAM:	io ho bisogno akoro io ho bisogne melanzana akoro carne mou mouton
		I need akoro I need aubergine akoro meat mou sheep
878	ROK:	cane::
		(mea::t)[9]
879	TCHR:	eh mouton è pecora!
		well mouton (fr.) is sheep (it.)

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[9] ROK does not utter the consonant /r/ which would differentiate the Italian words *carne/cane* (Eng. 'meat/dog'). Thus, the given translation (*mea::t*) refers to the interactional meaning of the sequence.

880   NAM: [[pecora!
                  [[*sheep!*

881   GIF: [[/**agbu**:!

882   TCHR: [[pecora pecora **that be sheep meat**

883   GIF: **e no fit be agbu** do they **see agbu for here?**
                  it cannot be agbu, do they have agbu, here?

884   TCHR: akbu?

885   GIF: [[((*laughs*))

886   SAR: [[((*laughs*))

887   ROK: mouton na mu no me:: on appelle ça italiano comment?
                  Sheep na mu no me:: *how do you say that in Italian?*

888   TCHR: pecora
                  sheep

While recounting her conversational experience, NAM recurs to code-switching from French (in past tenses) to Italian (in the present tense), which is accounted for by the shift from the time of the narration (in the lesson) to the dialogue 'represented' through direct speech in Italian (t. 870). It is to this latter part of a multi-unit turn that the teacher's positive assessment (*brava!*), in t. 871, is emphatically addressed, as also the preceding paralinguistic marker of wonder (*eh*) displays. Beginning in turn 872, then, we can recognize a sequence of negotiation of meaning, via the effective tool of NPE used by GIF to resolve a comprehension problem between students and teacher. In fact, while NAM continues to narrate and 'perform' her dialogue (with the shop assistant in the store), it is GIF who replies in NPE (t. 875) to the teacher's question, allowing him to grasp the meaning of the word *okro* (t. 876) previously uttered as *akoro* (t. 872). The reference object of the word pronounced differently does not change[10]. What is significant here is that, since the teacher appears not to be familiar with NAM's pronunciation of the plant's name, GIF takes on and deploys her role of language broker, thus keeping the

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[10] *Okra*, *okro* or *ochro* is a flowering plant of the mallow family, valued for its edible green seed pods.

class interaction flowing. In turn 876 the teacher's understanding is displayed through a paralinguistic comprehension marker (i.e *ah!*) and the repetition of the word, re-uttered with NPE diction.

The previous interaction is resumed in NAM's turn (877), but it quickly returns to a long meaning negotiation sequence (tt. 877–888). NAM is listing in Italian the ingredients she wanted to ask the shopkeeper for when she code-switches back to French, in order to list 'sheep meat' (i.e. '*mouton*'), as well. ROK intervenes in the sequence (t. 878) with an alternative pronunciation of the Italian word '*carne*' (Eng. 'meat'). The teacher then provides the Italian translation of the French word *mouton* (t. 879). Two out of four students overlap with the teacher (tt. 880–882), who provides a further explanation in NPE, given that GIF's overlapped turn displays another translation of the element here in negotiation (i.e. *agbu)*. Immediately afterwards (t. 883), GIF recurs to NPE to ask SAR for a further explanation of the chances of finding *agbu* in shops in Italy. Then it is the teacher's turn to require a meaning negotiation of the term *agbu*, which he utters as *akbu* (t. 884), in an attempt to pronounce the word and causing GIF's and SAR's subsequent laughs. Negotiation of the meaning is reached through an explicit request for translation into Italian, by ROK (t. 887) and replied to by the teacher (t. 888).

Generally, we find evidence of a conversational environment which is co-constructed in the class, through the uncommented, natural use of the various languages and their varieties.

4.2.3. Excerpt 3: "Novità"

In this excerpt, drawn on a partially transcribed lesson of the corpus, a 41-year-old Nigerian woman is engaged in a short conversation with the teacher just before class:

1   TCHR: Allora (3s) news?
                So

2   BUN: news?

3   TCHR: news eh? nuovo is new rinnovare is renew /novità news (3s)
                abi? **So if you want to ask somebody you don't see from
                long time** (2s) **you go say /e::hy oya na: how far na:**
                /novità? capito?
                news?   understood?

4   BUN: any news?

5   TCHR: esatto any news? ah? it's like what's up? mh? (2s) ok? (3s)
                capito?
                exactly   understood?

6   BUN: sì
                yes

7   TCHR: ok

In turn 1, the teacher takes the floor with an Italian discourse marker
(*allora*; Eng. 'so') – a typical conversational 'starter' in an encounter
with someone you haven't seen for a while – to which he adds
(perhaps, unconsciously) the English word *news*? This code-mixing
apparently surprises the student, who repeats the English word with an
interrogative intonation (t. 2): sufficient indication for the teacher to
interpret it as an explanation request, as his repetition of the word
shows. It is worth looking closely at his subsequent, extended, multi-
unit turn: it goes from the word just considered to an impromptu
lexical (a word-formation-rule-based) explanation, which includes
Italian terms related to the first (the adj. *nuovo*) and their
corresponding English translation (*nuovo is new*...). This is then
followed by a request for confirmation of the student's
comprehension, also drawing on the NPE question clause /*abi*/. We do
not have any video-recording showing the student, who might have
nodded or lifted her eyebrows to let the teacher continue his turn. The
teacher actually keeps his turn for another kind of explanation, a use-
related and pragmatic one (*and So if you want to ask somebody*...).
Here we can observe the ways in which the teacher attempts to speak
NPE, by using the future tense marker /*go*/, some idiomatic greeting
formulas (i.e. *oya na*; *how far na*) and prosody.
     All this results in a contextual explanation based on
translanguaging to illustrate the communicative situation where the
very first expression (i.e. *allora, news?*) could be used appropriately.

The student reply (t. 4) in standard English (*any news*?) displays her comprehension, which is then ratified by the teacher (t. 5), who code-switches again to Italian and English, before prompting the student's feedback, given in Italian, soon after (t. 6).

4.3. Languages in action: a quantitative picture

Faced with this linguistic diversity at play, one might assume that Italian is used very little, and that the use of students' non-standard varieties in class might prevent sufficient L2 input being delivered. However, this does not appear to be the case. It is worth complementing the qualitative picture given here by the interactional sequences with a quantitative one about the languages occurring, in order to visualize the actual share of their distribution, as shown by Figures 1 to 3[11].
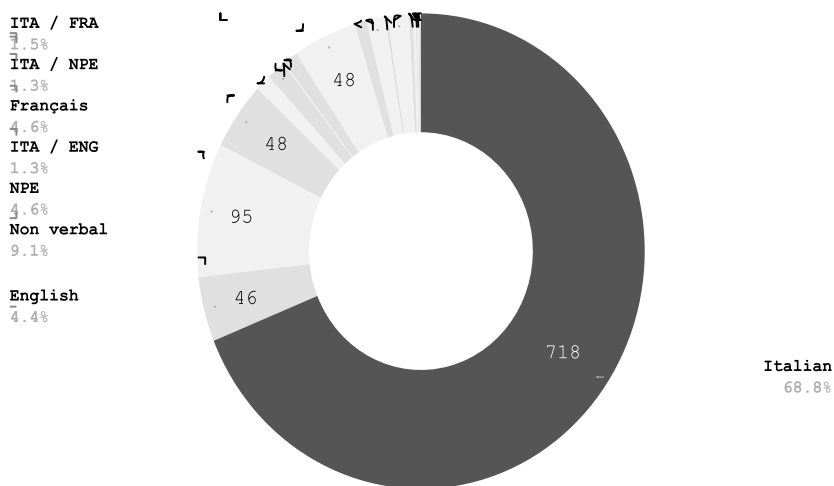

ITA / FRA
1.5%
ITA / NPE
4.3%
Français
4.6%
ITA / ENG
1.3%
NPE
4.6%
Non verbal
9.1%

English
4.4%

48
48
95
46
718

Italian
68.8%

Figure 1. Languages and occurrences

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[11] The figures refer to the fully transcribed lesson.
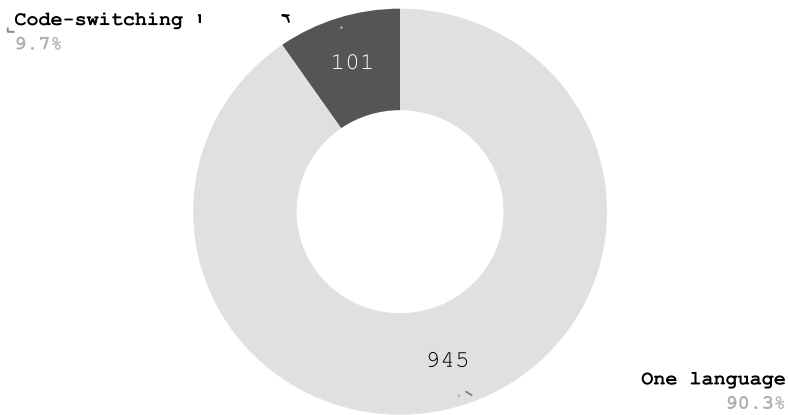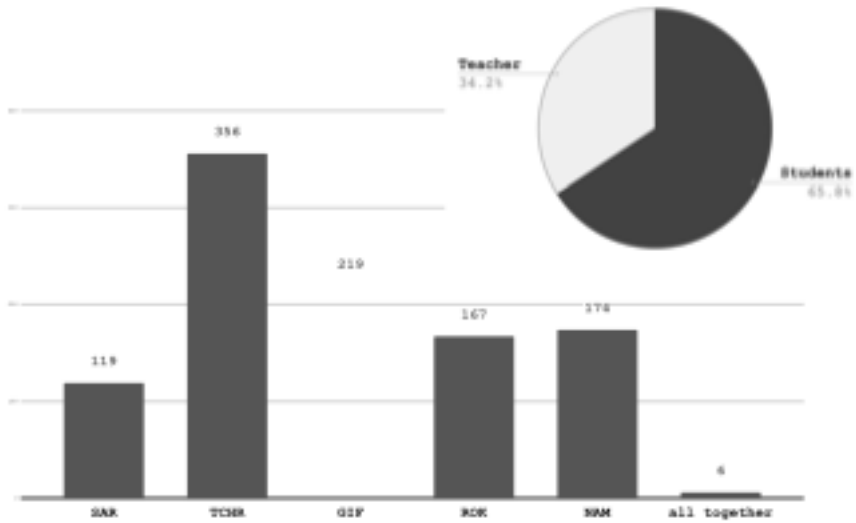
Figure 2. Turn-taking distribution

Figure 3. Codeswitching utterances in the whole interaction

As we can see, most of the interaction (65.8%) was conducted by the students, whereas the teacher took only 34.2% of the total turns. Moreover, almost 70% of the whole lesson was in Italian, while the

actual share of the different languages occurring shows that the main languages used are NPE, French and English.

5. Discussion and conclusions

Throughout the data examined, we have been confronted with language variation and hybridity, a process common to many migrant classes, where "students and also sometimes teachers make all their 'multilingual potential to maximize communication and learning' […]" (Alby and Léglise 2018: 2). Students' language practices involving NPE, French, English and Italian could be described as "flexible and dynamic, responding to their need for sense-making in order to learn", in Garcia and Sylvan's terms (2011: 397). We could also refer to the whole process as *translanguaging*, according to one of the current categorizations of the use of multiple languages in communicative exchanges. Garcia and Sylvan (2011: 385) define this as "the constant adaptation of linguistic resources in the service of meaning-making", to clarify the core sense of *translanguaging* as a sociolinguistic concept, while its pedagogical meaning is commonly used to refer to the teacher's communicative behaviour (Garcia and Wei 2014; Wei 2018).

From this perspective, looking at how the above interactions are sequentially, i.e. progressively, constituted, we can see evidence that, by relying on their languages, students also begin to make sense of their experience – in the classroom – *as learners* of Italian. In other words, their individual linguistic background appears to lend support to the learning of the additional language. If standardized foreign/second language programmes do not fit into educational settings such as those here (Krumm and Plutzar 2008: 6), it is also because the status as learners of beginner-level L2 students is not always taken into account. This is especially true for low-literate students, who might not be used to being in a classroom, but who are often proficient speakers of multiple languages.

The students' visible orientations towards collaborative brokering practices in the negotiation of meaning and their interest in talking about their learning demonstrate that their recurrent multilingual use acts as both as a motivation enhancement towards learning and as a

willingness to engage in the classroom conversation; this, together with a positive class dynamic, in turn fosters participation. We can also notice how the teacher draws upon his knowledge of the non-standard variety – spoken by his students, but less expected to be used in the classroom – to integrate it into the L2 instruction, with the aim of developing interactive practices of mutual recognition. Non-standard varieties are again at play on a reflexive and meta-communicative level, as both the students and the teacher resort to code-switching/mixing them when their concern focuses on the learning and the use of the target L2. In sum, these interactive practices appear to be the key to a *co-learning* process, i.e. "a process in which several agents simultaneously try to adapt to one another's behaviour so as to produce desirable global outcomes that would be shared by the contributing agents" (Wei 2013:169).

Clearly, there is a need for further and longitudinal interactional-based studies to gain a closer insight into the role that migrant students' home/native language varieties can play in facilitating L2 learning opportunities. However, despite their exploratory nature, the findings described here lead to some potentially useful implications for language teachers' training.

Given the wide linguistic diversity of migrant students' classes, one might wonder to what extent a teacher should give space to other languages and/or use them during lessons. On the one hand, it would be unreasonable to expect teachers to be knowledgeable about or familiar with the communicative repertoires of all their students from diverse backgrounds. On the other hand, "teachers' appreciation of the varieties' functions […] would serve as a solid foundation for students' learning", as Yiakoumetti (2011: 208) pointed out when dealing with non-standard language varieties in post-colonial educational contexts. Along the same lines, Siegel (2006a; 2006b) has provided insightful work on pidgin as a bridge to standard English and has called for a sociolinguistically-informed training approach based on "awareness programs" (Siegel 2010). Besides, acknowledging in a teacher "an attitude which recognizes that substandard dialects are regular systems of communication in their own right and are not disadvantaged, incomplete, immature, or irregular manifestations of a standard dialect" was already one perspective in the late 1960s in the area of research in teaching school-age pupils (Politzer 1968: 18).

Several pedagogical trends, nowadays, emphasize the educational importance of the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of adult and young learners in migration contexts. There is a need to "take account explicitly of the fact that students' L1s represent intellectual resources", as Cummins and Persad (2014: 6) say, while discussing – with reference to schools – a *teaching through a multilingual lens* approach. Similarly, in the Council of Europe's recent recognition of skills for language teachers working with adult migrants, 'learning' one or more migrant languages is seen as a potential part of "continuous professional development". The latter might usefully deal with language diversity in order to increase teachers' linguistic civility (LIAM Project 2017), to foster a shared linguistic culture and to promote the learning of an L2 target language by leveraging on the students' plurilingualism; in sum, to develop linguistically responsive teachers for contemporary multilingual classes. There is, therefore, a parallel need to reshape teacher education from this perspective, in order to ultimately support learners. In a recent publication by Haznedar et al. (2018), we find an interesting example of online teacher training and professional development modules, which were created by Leslla researchers in different countries, within the context of a European project (EU-Speak: Teaching adult immigrants and training their teachers).

Whatever the focus and procedures of future approaches to teacher training, it is important to keep an awareness of learners' language skills, as expressed by Blommaert (2013: 17): "differences in repertoires are rapidly converted into inequalities in life chances" […]. Tremendous human potential is wasted by the cavalier dismissal of the potentially valuable resources people bring along".

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Transcription conventions

>text<	fast talk
<text>	slow talk
text	emphasis
°text°	quiet talk
TEXT	loud talk
te::xt	extension of the sound or syllable
.	fall in intonation
,	continuing intonation
\	sharp fall in intonation
? o /	rising intonation
!	animated intonation
=	latched utterances
[text]	overlapping talk
(text)	problematic hearing; the transcriber is not certain about it
((*text*))	comments by the transcriber
+	a short pause; (0.0) timed pause in seconds