

LINGUISTIC OPINIONS AND ATTITUDES IN TUSCANY:

verbal guise experiments on the varieties of Arezzo and Florence

Despite the scarcity of studies concerning the perception of Tuscan dialects, it is known that even in the region which is regarded as the cradle of the Italian language the different local varieties are not on the same level with respect to subjective evaluation [Calamai, Ricci 2005]. Moreover, the variety spoken in Arezzo retains some peculiar traits, as it shares some important features with dialects of other regions of Italy [Giacomelli 1975; Nocentini 1989; Giannelli 2000].

Therefore, the present work was aimed at investigating how young people from Arezzo perceive their own variety in terms of overt opinions and covert attitudes. Accordingly, the research method employed in this enquiry was a composite one, including both direct questions (suitable for examining linguistic opinions) and the *verbal guise* technique (useful for eliciting language attitudes) [Garrett, Coupland, Williams 2003; Calamai, Ricci 2005]. In addition to this, the study sought to prove that the variety spoken in Arezzo enjoys *covert prestige* among youngsters in Arezzo.

The empirical research involved 43 students aged between 18 and 19, who lived in Arezzo or in the surroundings and studied in the city. They were asked to complete a questionnaire made of three parts: the first part employed direct and indirect questions in order to elicit linguistic opinions concerning the variety of Arezzo; in the second part students were given a map of Tuscany and were required to indicate the areas where people talk in a similar way; the third part was dedicated to the analysis of the attitudes related to the varieties of Arezzo and Florence, which was carried out by means of the *verbal guise* technique.

The third part of the questionnaire has been carefully analysed. During the *verbal guise* test, the subjects listened to two very short recorded passages (about 8 seconds each), in which a boy from Arezzo and a boy from Florence, respectively, were giving directions. The subjects were then asked to rate the two voices on a number of traits, concerning socioeconomic condition, personality, and social distance/proximity [Baroni 1983; Volkart-Rey 1990]. The portraits of the two speakers resulting from the test appear to be extremely clear and significantly different one from the other.

The voice from Arezzo is thought to belong to someone who is nice (97,6%), sociable (97,6%), virile (90,6%), humble (79%), self-confident (67,4%), friendly (67,4%), but rude (95,3%), messy (86%), not very clever (69,7%) nor trustworthy (60,4%). In addition to this, the voice from Arezzo is supposed to have a low educational qualification (“*scuola media*” 53,4%) and to be employed in a manual labour job (83,7%) which does not pay much (79%), in which he does not apply himself as he should (58,1%) and only sometimes is successful (*sometimes* 74,4%, *rarely* 23,2%). The voice from Florence, on the contrary, is believed to belong to someone who is tidy (93%), self-confident (83,7%), trustworthy (79%), extremely intelligent (76,7%), elegant (67,4%), nice (67,4%), sociable (58,1%), humble (53,4%), with a medium educational qualification (“*scuola superiore*” 72%), with a well-paid (79%) clerical or commercial job (74,4%), to which he devotes

himself (86%), being often successful (*sometimes* 76,7%, *always* 18,6%). Nevertheless, he is thought to be an effeminate (51,1%) and is less frequently seen as a friend compared to the boy from Arezzo (48,8%).

Such data seem to suggest that, on the one hand, the dialect of Florence enjoys overt prestige because it is considered to be the origin of the Italian language and bears an important literary tradition. On the other hand, the dialect of Arezzo enjoys covert prestige because it carries with it certain values which, despite not being overtly recognised by the members of the community, are desirable and desired [Bouchard Ryan 1979]. In fact, the variety spoken in Arezzo seems to be associated to some typically masculine attributes, such as rudeness and vulgarity, which exert some sort of attraction on the speakers [Calamai 2004]. On the contrary, the variety of Florence seems to be associated to some typically feminine attributes, like elegance and neatness, which are not desirable according to the norms governing covert prestige.

Furthermore, the analysis of the data in relation to the variable of the subjects' origin (the sample was divided into subjects from the city, subjects from the province and subjects from other areas) has shown some interesting patterns. As far as the voice from Arezzo is concerned, the stereotype attached to the dialect [Hewston, Giles 1997] appears to be more evident among the subjects coming from other areas, and less manifest among the subjects from the city. The voice from Florence, on the contrary, seems to be appreciated more by the subjects coming from outside Arezzo and less by the subjects from the city.

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