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*Lo vuoi co[z]ì o co[s]ì? A sociophonetic study on sibilants in the regional Italian of Livorno (Tuscany).*

The exact number of Italian consonants has often been discussed: researchers (Hall, 1944; Calamai, 2008) have been debating whether they are 21, 23 or rather 36. This disagreement is due to the fact that some consonants have a low functional occurrence which is sometimes geographically limited. This is the case of the phonemic opposition between the voiceless sibilant /s/ and its voiced counterpart /z/. The opposition seems to be valid only in Tuscan, in intervocalic context, where we still find minimal pairs such as: /<sup>h</sup>fu:so/ ('spindle') and /<sup>h</sup>fu:zo/ ('melted'), /<sup>h</sup>kjese/ ('he asked') and /<sup>h</sup>kjeze/ ('churches') and the inflected forms of the verbs *presentire* and *presentare*, i.e. /pre'sento/ ('I foreshadow') and /pre'zento/ ('I present') (Romeo, 1966).

The above minimal pairs appear to be active only in the older speakers of Tuscan. Younger speakers tend to use the voiced variant [z] perceived as a prestige label. This has been carefully demonstrated in the research conducted by Galli de' Paratesi (1984) who maintains that teenagers in Florence prefer the voiced sibilants in intervocalic context more than Roman teenagers do. Florentine speakers produce the variant they consider more similar to the standard represented nowadays by Milanese speakers.

Galli de' Paratesi (1984) focuses only on the city of Florence and does not consider the north-western part of Tuscany where the situation has never been investigated up to the present. The only sociolinguistics research is Calamai (2002) that investigates the perception different groups (from Pisa and Livorno) of Tuscan teenagers have on their regional Italian

Our study will therefore present a sociophonetic analysis of the pronunciation of the afore mentioned sibilant segments in Livorno. We will verify to which extent the voiced variant [z] is penetrating into the north-western territories and expanding to the coast. For this purpose, two groups of 20 young speakers (aged 30-35) have been selected. They have been divided according to gender, and the social categories 'working-class' and 'middle-class'. We intend also to examine if the speaker's ambition, intended as the effort driven by a middle-high educated speaker to be labelled through his specific use of language, could be another valid sociolinguistic marker (see Gerstenberg, 2009).

The *corpus* has been elicited using the Map Task technique (Brown et al., 1984), with the two maps being entirely designed for our sibilant's sake. We also recorded 50 sentences containing the words represented in the two maps together with other items. The read *corpus* has been repeated twice in order to verify whether speech context could play a role in the selection of the voiced sibilants. Digital recordings were made using wide-frequency response clip-on microphones onto a Fostex FR2LE recorder with a sampling rate of 22050 Hz and a 16 bits frequency.

As far as the words selection is concerned, we included some of the quoted minimal pairs and then we followed some advice given by the DOP, which maintains that <s> is pronounced voiceless when it is:

- in initial position within compound words (*girasole, trasecolare*);
- in adjectives ending with the suffix *-ese* (*cinese, marsigliese*, with the exception of *francese*);
- in simple past and past participle ending in: *-eso, -a, -i, -e* (p.e. *steso*) or *-oso*;
- in adjectives and words ending in *-oso* e *-osa* (p.e. *vanitoso, ventosa*);
- in some words such as *casa, cosa, così, mese, peso* .

This paper considers the acoustics of /s/ in the variety of Italian spoken in Livorno and attempts to answer the following questions: 1. What are the acoustic characteristics of /s/? 2. Is there evidence of gender

differences? (Stuart Smith, 2007) 3. To what extent is 'class' a factor? 4. Does the individual speaker's ambition play a role in the variants selection?

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