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THE EARLY DAYS OF ORAL LANGUAGE TEACHING THE DIFFUSION OF GERMAN IN FASCIST ITALY¹

This study aims at describing the German language taught in Italy during the crucial period of Fascism. This study adopts a sociolinguistic longitudinal perspective (G. Sankoff 2005:1003) in order to find out the relation between phonetic features and the representation of historical social identities. The work is mainly based on the acoustic phonetic analysis of some lessons of the German language course printed by *Linguaphone Institute* (office of Milan, Italy) and distributed in Italy from the thirties onwards (s. Russo 2010). The course (course A), which represents a relevant step forward in language teaching, is cut on 78 rpm discs for the gramophone and consists in 2 lessons of German phonetics recorded by Theodor Siebs and 30 "speech" lessons of growing level spoken by important linguists, phoneticians and experts of theatre of that period such as Paul Menzerath, Erich Drach and Karl Niessen – to quote just the most famous ones. In particular we want to shed light on the following questions: which kind of social variety of oral German was chosen to be taught as an "overall representative type of German vernacular"? Which regional or supra-regional (standard) variety served as a model for this purpose? To what extent was the first "electronic" course modeled on an artificial variety like German *Bühnensprache* (Siebs 1898) or *Sprecherziehung* (Drach 1922)? Does a phonetic and prosodic analysis of the variety taught reveal possible resonances and connections with the political (i.e. fascist) ideologies of that time? By answering these questions we aim at constructing a historical sketch of German identity.

The research was conducted from a synchronic as well as a diachronic point of view, by investigating with PRAAT the utterances of the different speakers within course A and comparing the results with a sample of a natural register of standard German (e.g. a piece of news about the Olympic Games given on the radio in 1936 by a sports reporter, Theodor Lewald) and with the edition of the same Linguaphone course recorded at the beginning of the fifties (course B). The contents of the latter, edited by Paul Menzerath in cooperation with Werner Meyer-Eppler, are only slightly different from those of course A and thus enable the comparison.

The outcomes of our study confirm that the period under investigation was characterised by a nationalist form of purism in Germany as well as in Italy. The samples of course A document some kind of artificial pronunciation and rhetorical register which intended to characterize each speaker as a persons of "high culture and high social standing" (s. the consideration about the role of the vernacular by G. B. Shaw in *LLE* 1935/1:1). We tried to find out whether the taught conventions were used in the everyday language or not, and how far they could be applied from an articulatory point of view. Our spectrogram analysis of the allophone /r/ (s. Pompino-Marschall 2009), for example, shows not only a different degree of the "prescribed" trilled apical alveolar [r] among the speakers of course A (rule imposed by the artificial Siebsian *Bühnensprache* 1898), but also a trilled uvular [ʀ], a fricative uvular [ʁ] and a vocal [ʁ] articulation in the other examined samples.

Insofar as the political question is concerned, we found some evidence for the intention to stage a formal "hyper-stylised" (theatrical) register of German, with an emphasized intonation, which goes beyond the so called "teacher talk" and "foreigner talk", whose characteristics – such as the hyper articulation or the slower rate of speech – we can find just in the first few lessons of course A. Some of these aspects are rather due to the fact that the speaker of course A were professors of linguistics with a high social status who – most of them being active members of the NS party – aimed at an academic register ignoring everyday behaviour.

¹ Valentina RUSSO is carrying out her doctoral research on the diffusion of German as a foreign language in fascist Italy through the linguistic Journal *Le Lingue Estere*, within the framework of the PhD "Teoria delle lingue e del linguaggio" at the University of Naples "L'Orientale". Her permanent external supervisor in the field of sociolinguistics is Prof. DITTMAR (Freie Universität, Berlin). From June until September 2010 Valentina Russo stayed in Berlin in order to work on the project. During this period an intensive cooperation with Prof. Dittmar and Prof. POMPINO-MARSCHALL (Acoustic phonetics, Humboldt Universität, Berlin) came into being. The present contribution represents the result of the mentioned intensive cooperation.

In particular Drach, who was responsible for the German syllabus under the NSDAP, attached very much importance to the way of speaking, having conceived the *Sprecherziehung* as *innere Sprachbildung* (1922) even before Leo Weisgerber (1929). Beyond these linguistic features, the Linguaphone course (A) was supported by the use of the gothic alphabet and of some emblematic pictures of that time. Furthermore, the course was also suitable for the purposes of the fascist ideology that wanted foreign languages to be learnt (motivation!) in order to propagate the proud "new Italian mankind" and the important (imperial) culture of "Italianization" (s. *LLE* 1934/12:1).

To sum up, the way of speaking used in course A reflects neither the everyday language spoken in the Third Reich nor a particular form of "nazi style and register", which was actually spoken only by leading politicians. It represents a model of language teaching – actually meant to be used in Germany as well as abroad – conceived by academic linguists favouring the high register of *Bühnensprache* and the rhetorical style of *Sprecherziehung*. Apparently the much more informal and natural vernacular of course B is due to the performance of the new speakers (all working for the *Nordwestdeutschen Rundfunk* of Cologne, apart from Menzerath and Meyer-Eppler) who had much more experience with the outer world of "normal" speakers. Although it cannot be excluded that a new didactic approach to oral language teaching had already taken place in the late thirties (s. the revealing work of Koesters Gensini 2008).

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