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Unbalanced bilingualism, a case study:
Italian foster families

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This thesis intends to present an analysis of the linguistic process of language attrition developed in internationally adopted children with a specific focus on the phenomenon of children in foster families. The latter is a unique condition which has not been investigated as the one of adopted children and for this reason it deserves attention. The analysis starts with the first chapter, which clarifies definitions of critical words like bilingualism and bilinguality and explanations of crucial concepts like the ones of mother tongue, second language, foreign language and adoptive language. Moreover, it is essential to understand how language acquisition works for a bilingual child, who has to deal with rules and inputs from two different languages. An additional area of interest is represented by bilingual education; the educational settings are extremely important for the development of bilingualism and for the personal fulfilment in the social and linguistic fields and we will examine some of the bilingual educational programs. This thesis will also approach the essential aspects of language heritage and the ones which lead to what is called unbalanced bilingualism, or rather the presence of a weaker language and a stronger language within the bilingual dyad. I will concentrate on a specific case study of a Nigerian-Italian family whose members have accessed the foster care service. The objective of this investigation is to highlight the different approaches the members of the family adopted in order to learn Italian as an L2 and how language attrition happened in their languages of origin. At the same time, through the case study, I will show how foster care system allow children to maintain their heritage language unlike what happen with internationally adopted children who usually forget their mother tongue after the adoption

CHAPTER 1: BILINGUALISM AND BILINGUALITY

1.1 Definitions

Bilingualism is a word generally used to indicate a linguistic community where there are two languages in contact that lead to the use of two codes by individuals who are bilingual. This concept might seem clear and non-problematical, yet through a deeper research we find many definitions which contrast with one another. According to Titone (1972), for example, being bilingual means "speaking a second language while following the concepts and structures of that language rather than paraphrasing his or her mother tongue"; in the opinion of the linguistic Bloomfield (1935:56) bilingualism is "the native-like control of two languages", which refers to only bilinguals with a perfect knowledge of the two languages. The latter definition differs completely from Macnamara's opinion (1967), who believes that a bilingual is a person with minimal competences in only one of the language skills, or rather listening, speaking, reading and writing, in a second language. These definitions cause a critical number of difficulties in fields of theory and methodology as they lack accuracy when taken into consideration; for example, Bloomfield's definition does not explain what a native like competence, yet it is crucial to clarify it as a native like competence incredibly varies in a unilingual population. Another example which underlines the lack of accuracy is the equivocation that can emerge from the definitions as in understanding who are the bilinguals accepted by these definitions. In other words, it is hard to understand, for instance, if an individual with an extremely high competence in a second language but who is not a native speaker can be included in the definitions or not. In addition, these definitions only refer to the linguistic dimension, excluding instead the other non-linguistic dimensions such as the social-communicative dimension. However, recent definitions took into consideration other dimensions and underlined the specific characteristics, as we can see with Baetens Beardsmore (1982) who in some of his definitions of bilingualism has reported a multidimensional approach. Bilingualism is strongly connected to bilinguality, which is a different concept referred to the psychological state of a person who has the ability to switch different linguistic codes in order to communicate. The access to different linguistic codes a bilingual has is

multidimensional and the dimensions involved are the following: relative competence, cognitive organisation, age of acquisition, exogeneity, social cultural status and cultural identity. (Blanc, Hamers, 2000, pp 6-7)

Bilinguality is the individual and subjective dimension of a bilingual who is aware of his or her multiple linguistic capabilities. (Contento 2022, p 14)

1.2 Different types of bilingualism

According to Mari and Porelli (2010), there are different types of bilingualism which can be classified based on three different factors: the age when language acquisition starts, the value of the two languages in relation to the context in which a person grows, and finally the fluency level. When considering the age factor, bilingualism can be divided into simultaneous, consecutive and late bilingualism. Simultaneous bilingualism usually takes place during the first 3 years of the child's life and it corresponds to the child's exposure to two or more languages at the same time; it is possible to say that a child in this case has two L1. Consecutive bilingualism corresponds to the acquisition of a language first (L1) and of another language later (L2). Both simultaneous and the consecutive bilingualism usually happen within the third year of life of the child. On the other hand, late bilingualism corresponds to the acquisition of the L2 after the first childhood, usually starting from 6-7 years old, when the language acquisition is significantly different in terms of learning process. When taking into consideration how the languages are felt in the child's environment, there are two types of bilingualism: subtractive and additive. In the environment there are many variables that are applied to language-contact situations. There might be the case of a bilingual person who encounters a monolingual interlocutor in a unilingual environment, or vice versa in a multilingual environment. There are many cases which can happen and which can lead to the two types of bilingualism. Subtractive bilingualism happens when in the environment of the child there is a devaluation of the child's first language and therefore, the acquisition of the L2 in that environment becomes more important and leads to the progressive erosion of the L1. In this case what happens is what is called "language attrition". Additive bilingualism is the opposite

situation; it stands indeed for the situation in which a child learns a second language while his or her first language is maintained and enhanced by the community where he or she lives. The last classification of bilingualism is the one based on the fluency level, which proves the existence of two other types of bilingualism: balanced bilingualism, when both the languages are known and maintained at the same level in terms of competence and fluency, and dominant bilingualism, when there is a person with a higher fluency in one of the two languages he or her speaks. (Mari, Porelli 2010, pp 10-18)

1.3 Important concepts:

mother tongue, second language, foreign language and adoptive language

The mother tongue, indicated with the acronym L1, is a word used to indicate the first language a child learns usually from the mother and from other close relatives. During the first stages of life of a child the mother, or the caregiver, plays a vital role for the child's language acquisition, which is always natural and spontaneous as it happens via affective and relational approaches instead of the mere linguistic ones. Already at the age of 3 or 4 months, children are able to significantly absorb a language. The way the infant approaches a language is through the so-called baby talk: exaggerations in the use of vowels, gestures, repetitions, songs give the message an emotive and linguistic value. The intonation used by the mother while speaking to the infant is fundamental, in fact if she changes the usual intonation the infant is used to hearing, the latter will not make any reactions to it. Therefore, the musicality of the Infant Directed Speech (IDB) attracts the infant and it works as an input for the language acquisition. The IDB opens the infant's mind to a complex communicative competence which is fundamental for the identity of an individual. However, it is necessary to specify that the word "mother tongue" reflects a typical condition, or rather the condition found in a family where all the components speak the same language. In internationally adopted children the concept of the mother tongue and the role of the adoptive mother is different as the linguistic, socio-affective and cultural conditions of

the adopted child are totally different. A child who has been adopted is an individual who experienced a delicate situation and who probably suffered from a physical and emotive point of view. There are many factors to take into consideration, such as from where the adoptive child comes, if he/she lived with the biological parents or not, which type of exposure to the L1 the child had and the age. Adoptive parents are subjected to a careful screening in order to be selected as suitable parents. The mother, and more generally the father and the future relatives of the adopted child, have to respect the needs of the child and therefore they have to control the affection for the child; for this reason, the role of the adoptive mother is delicate and crucial for the adaptation of the adopted child and, so accordingly, for the language acquisition. (Freddi 2014, pp 21-23)

The second language, indicated with the acronym L2, is a different language from the L1 learned in foreign context where it is daily used. The linguistic input is various and the L2 acquisition is closer to the one of the mother tongue.

The foreign language is a language learned in educational institutions. The linguistic input is reduced to the one given from teachers and professors and it offers rare occasions during the ones effectively using the foreign language. (Freddi 2014, pp 37-38)

The acquisition of a second language is totally different from the acquisition of a foreign language. L2 acquisition occurs informally and spontaneously, as Wong Filmore affirms, and occurs thanks to social interactions and relations with interlocutors in the every-day life. (Blanc, Hamers, 2000, pp 71)

Foreign language acquisition, on the other hand, is guided and taught, therefore it often occurs formally. Foreign language programs set complex goals in order to expose learners to a language or to raise awareness toward other cultures. Early foreign language programs dedicate restricted times to foreign language classes and the teachers' competences and motivation are often inadequate. (Nikolov, Mihaljević Djigunović 2006, pp 240-243)

Finally, the adoptive language is the language a child learns in the new Country where he or she has been adopted. An adopted child will probably learn the new

adoptive language and use it for the rest of his or her life, therefore in most cases the adoptive language will become a new L1. (Freddi 2014, p 39)

1.4 Language behaviour

Any bilingual behaviour must be reliable to a more general language behaviour. The latter in linguistics describes the language development in an individual and it serves a number of universal social and psychological functions, better defined as communicative and cognitive functions. Language behaviour must not be considered just as a pure biological heritage, but also as a product of culture, which generations have been transmitting to the next. According to Bates & MacWhinney (1982) there are more language processing levels to take into consideration, like the functional level and the formal level, the societal level and the individual level. The functional level is where functions construct meanings and forms. These functions can be semiotic-linguistic, social functions or cognitive functions. Language behaviour at the individual level is constantly interacting with language behaviour at the societal level. In a bilingual situation, between the two languages in contact there can be an equilibrium at each level and for each mapping, yet this equilibrium can be altered due to a change of the relation between the two languages with the following change of language behaviour too. Language behaviour indeed varies depending on many factors, such as social dimensions and it is linked to the markets, or rather to the environments where language acquisition happens, family, school, work and so on. (Blanc, Hamers, 2000, pp 8-13)

1.5 Bilingual situation and possible ways of bilingual acquisition

The monolingual situation indicates the presence of a unique language in a society and of a social network which is used for every function. In a bilingual situation the languages involved are at least two and they are used for a great deal of domains

for different purposes in a state of functional equilibrium. (Blanc, Hamers, 2000, pp 20-21)

There can be many ways to acquire an L2. According to Professor Romaine (1995) the ways an infant can grow bilingual are six as follow:

- one person, one language: both parents speak to the infant in their own native languages which are different from one another and the language supported by the community is the one of one of the parents;

- one language, one environment: both parents speak two different native languages and one of those is the dominant language in the community, yet both parents speak to the infant in the non-dominant language. The infant is exposed to the dominant language supported by the community outside the house;

- non-dominant language at home not supported by the community: both parents talk to the infant in a language different from the one of the community;

- non-dominant double languages at home not supported by the community: both parents speak to the infant in their own native languages, which are at the same time different from the one which dominate in the community;

- non-native parents: the parents speak both the same language which is also the same one of the community, but one of them speak to the infant in a different language;

- mixed-languages: the parents and part of the community are bilinguals and they mix languages. (Contento 2022, pp 20-21)

1.5.1 Bilingual acquisition

Language acquisition develops over years starting already from birth and it takes many years to an individual to reach the status of adult native speaker; there are many significant and crucial steps that both monolingual and bilingual children take at specific ages (Crain & Lillo-Martin, 1999; Guasti, 2002). In this paragraph we will focus on the bilingual acquisition. According to Sebastián-Gallés (2010), a bilingual child has to deal with rules and inputs from two different languages and bilingual children who

are just a few days old can already distinguish the two languages used in their two different environments. (Köpke, Schmid, 2019, p 421)

There are several stages, as we said before, which marks the bilingual acquisition process; Huttenlocher and Smiley (1987) explained that by about 6 months, infants recognize their native language or languages' sounds; from 7 to 10 months they start babbling and producing CV syllables and between 10 and 12 months of age they can already produce the first words and they can understand word's meanings months before starting producing them effectively. At 18 months the acquisition of new words starts and they begin to acquire around nine words a day until they reach the age of 6 years, as estimated by Carey (1978). Always at 18 months they start the two-word stage, or rather the combination of two words, however without producing any inflectional morphology (mommy food, daddy go). During this stage, bilingual children are also able to respect the word order of their language/s and they keep the developmental sequence established in both the languages they are learning. For example, if the word order of the languages, or one of the languages, they are exposed to is SVO (subject-verb-object), the child will start producing the first word combinations respecting that order, as in the example 'daddy go' (subject-verb). As declared by Maisel (1990), bilingual children follow both the developmental sequences established in each language of the bilingual dyad. Whenever developmental errors, or rather omission or wrong uses of morphemes, occur, they will naturally go away. (Köpke, Schmid, 2019, p 421)

Furthermore, at 30 months the utterances become more composite and longer and the children begin to produce the right morpheme when required. Obviously this depends on the language they are acquiring as not all the languages have the same features and not all languages require them at the same speed. For instance, Gillis & De houwer (2001) showed us how Dutch-speaking children acquire determiners and gender in nouns only at 4 years old, whereas Montrul (2004) showed us that gender agreement is acquired already at 3 years old by Spanish-speaking children. The preschool period is the stage where the first complex sentences begin, but from comprehension-based experiments of Chomsky (1969), Clark (1971), Sheldon (1974) and Ta akolian (1977) emerged that children do not understand many complex sentences until they start going to school. (Köpke, Schmid, 2019, p 422)

The school-age period has not been investigated as the preschool period maybe because of the Chomskyan view, based on a fast and efficient way to become a native speaker. Berman (2001) dissociates himself from Chomsky's view by affirming that becoming a native speaker takes more time as also the use in different contexts must be taken into account and not only the basic linguistic competences. He argued also that a language spoken by a 9-year-old child is significantly different from the one spoken by an adult in content, morpho-syntax and lexicon. (Köpke, Schmid, 2019, p 423)

1.6 Bilingual borrowing and code-switching

Bilingual borrowing and code-switching are two topics extremely important when discussing bilingual development. Until the 1970s, linguistic mixing and code-switching were seen as signs of incompetence. Therefore, nobody studied these phenomena because the paradigm recognized as the right one by society was the one of monolingualism. The turning point is with the paper 'Social meaning in linguistic structures: code-switching in Norway' of Blom and Gumperz (1972); thanks to this paper the phenomena of linguistic mixing and code-switching have been accepted and people widely understood that it is typical for bilingual speakers when they communicate. Bilingual borrowing refers to the adaptation of lexical figures of a language to the syntactic and morphological and sometimes phonological patterns of another language. The linguistic mixing reflects the use more or less spontaneously of lexical, syntactic or semantic elements from L2 in an utterance in L1. All bilingual children tend to mix codes and the reasons why they do that can be different; it can be, for example, because the child lacks the equivalent in one language, or it can be used as a communicative strategy, or once again it can be used to express meanings more suitably. According to Poplack (1980), it is possible to find three types of code-switching: extra-sentential, intersentential and intrasentential. Extra-sentential code-switching occurs when there are insertions of tags like 'you know', from one language into an utterance fully expressed in another language. Intersentential code-switching refers to starting a clause in a language and ending it in another one. Finally,

intrasentential code-switching relates to switches within the clause boundary and it can be insertional or alternational. The former type occurs when a constituent from another language is inserted in a structure of the dominant language. The latter is the alternation of two recognizable grammatical systems. Anyway, it is difficult to recognize when there is a case of insertional code-switching or a case of alternational code-switching. Generally, when the switched figures are well-defined constituents the type of intrasentential code-switching used is insertional, on the other hand, if there are long stretches and several elements from another language, or a high number of switched elements which together do not shape one constituent the type of intrasentential code-switching used is alternational. (Blanc, Hamers, 2000, pp 58-59, 258-261)

1.7 The importance of context

The role played by the social context is crucial for bilingual development. From the study on the social context of Goodz (1994) emerged that there are four stages that characterize the linguistic learning in bilingual children and that the bond child-parent is fundamental. At the first two stages the child can already recognize the languages just thanks to intonation and musicality used by the parents. At the third stage the parents utilize repetitions and expansions while expressing themselves in both the languages. Therefore, semantic and pragmatic features are underlined leading to a frequent code-switching. At the fourth and last stage the child achieves a higher competence in comprehension and the parents start asking the child to produce more difficult sentences pretending more from the child in both the languages. (Contento 2022, p 23)

The role of social context is important for language development. Educators and parents usually believe that separating contexts will increase bilingual acquisition as mixing context would lead, on the other hand, to confusion and lack of accuracy, yet there is no proof that this is true. Many studies have been conducted in order to prove lexical differences between children whose parents follow the principle previously explained and those whose parents did not, but they all failed. (Blanc, Hamers, 2000, pp 62-63)

CHAPTER 2: BILINGUAL EDUCATION

2.1 Bilingual education: what is it?

According to Hamers, Blanc (2000), bilingual education is "any system of school education in which, at a given moment in time and for a varying amount of time, simultaneously or consecutively, instruction is planned and given in at least two languages". This definition does not include the case where there is a language used for teaching and a foreign language taught only as a subject, and it excludes also the case where curricula ignore the child's mother tongue as they only teach in their language, a situation that typically happens with immigrant children. According to most of bilingual education' programs there are three typologies of bilingual education: instruction given in two languages simultaneously, instruction given first in L1 until the children are able to use the L2 as a mean of instruction, instruction given first in L2 and introducing L1 only as a subject and in a second moment as a medium of instruction.

Another taxonomy is the one claimed by Fishman & Lovas (1970), which includes three main categories, which in turn are composed by different types of bilingual programs. 1) The first category is defined by the variable intensity and includes the following types of bilingual programs:

- transitional bilingualism, a program in which L1 is used only for the transition to an unmarked language;
- monoliterate bilingualism, a program in which two languages are used in all the scholastic activities but only one of them for the literacy skills;
- partial biliterate bilingualism, a program in which two languages are used for both the writing and oral skills, yet, in which a language used for the so-called cultural subjects and another language is used for science, economics and technology, leading in this way to an educational diglossia.
- total biliterate bilingualism,a program in which both languages are used to develop each skill.

2) The second category is defined by the variable 'goal' and it includes the following dimensions:

- compensatory programs, programs marked by the will to school a child first in his mother tongue;
- enrichment programs, programs addressed for majority-group children, the goal of which is to develop an additive bilinguality;
- group-maintenance programs, programs which aim to preserve the culture and the language of the minority child.

3) The last category is defined by the variable 'status' and it includes the following dimensions: language of primary importance contrasted with language of secondary importance in the education field home language contrasted with school language, major world language contrasted with minor language and finally, institutionalised language contrasted with non-instructional in the community. (Blanc, Hamers, 2000, pp 321-323)

This taxonomy, however, only classify bilingual education. These types of bilingual educations ignore the determining factors in bilingual education, or rather social historical, ideological, power-relation and social psychological, but in order to classify bilingual education it is important to considerate all these factors as bilingual education is not an independent variable but an interaction between these disciplines. (Blanc, Hamers, 2000, 321-323)

2.1.1 Bilingual education for children of the dominant group

Certain dominant groups want to ensure bilingual acquisition to their children through bilingual immersion programs. An immersion program means that a group of L1 speakers go to a school where an L2 is used as a medium of instruction. Immersion programs started in Quebec when Canada's French province became unilingual; the Anglophone minority who was living there had to find a way to teach their children a better French than the one learned with the traditional learning methods and this way happened to be immersion. Immersion programs are founded on two assumptions, a first one which says that it is better learning in a stimulating context and a second one

which says that at the age of immersion an L2 and an L1 are learned similarly. (Blanc, Hamers, 2000, pp 331-332).
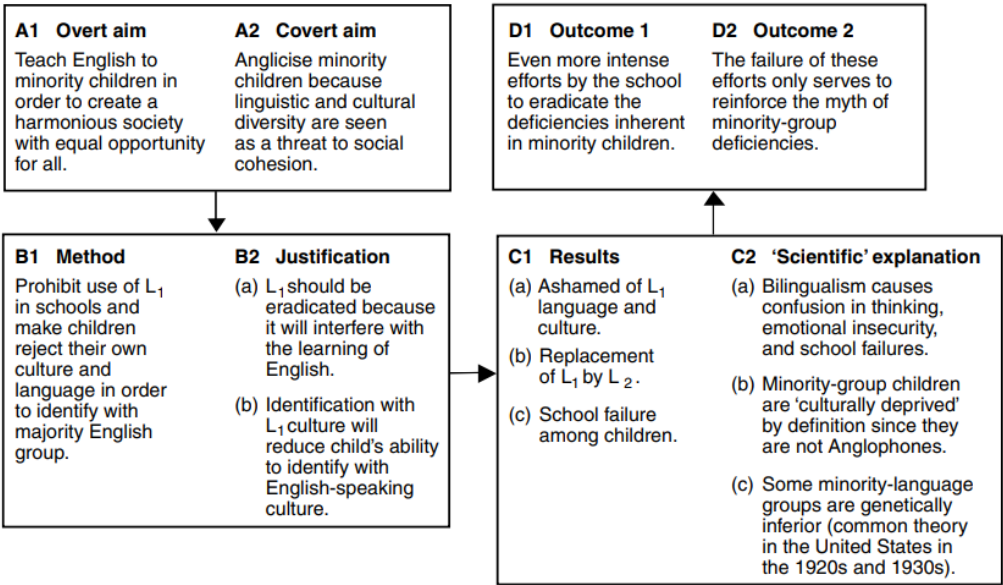
The first immersion program was the one started by parents in the St-Lambert neighbourhood in Montreal, for Anglophone children in order to learn French. Since that moment many types of immersion have been created. The most common ones are Early Total Immersion, Early Partial Immersion and Late Immersion. Early Total Immersion consists of teaching in the L2 already in the kindergarten by native speakers and the L1 is only introduced later as a means of instruction. In Early Partial Immersion both languages are used as a medium of instruction from the beginning and, finally, Late Immersion is for high school students who only received traditional L2 schooling before the beginning of the immersion program. (Blanc, Hamers, 2000, p 333)

2.1.2 Bilingual education for ethnic-minority children

Before analysing the bilingual educational programs for minority children, it has to be emphasised the 'bilingual handicap', which Cummins (1981; 1984a) calls the myth of bilingual handicap. The myth is based on the concept that minority children are incapable to reach academic achievement because of their state of bilinguality and therefore the solution to their failure is using exclusively the dominant L2 for education. Cummins schematised the myth in the following figure 1; in the latter we can see how the aim is to teach L2 to the minority children as in that minority children have equal opportunities. The consequence is the devaluation of the L1 and the prohibition to use it in the school in order to avoid the interference with L2 acquisition. This, in its turn, leads to the feeling of shame for minority children of their own language and culture and to the obtainment of poor academic results. On the contrary, the myth finds the cause of the poor results in the minority children bilinguality and for this reason the education insists even more on delating the L1. (Blanc, Hamers, 2000, pp 341-342)

This myth has to be discredit and the cycle has to be broken to eliminate the deficit of minority children, yet in order to do that school system has to recognized as real responsible. Cummins suggests that the school system must valorise the mother

tongue of minority children and enhance its use. There is not a single solution as each case needs its own treatment, or rather each case needs analysis, specific objectives, reliable tests for minority children and trainings for heritage language teachers. (Blanc, Hamers, 2000, p 342)

A1 Overt aim	A2 Covert aim		D1 Outcome 1	D2 Outcome 2
Teach English to minority children in order to create a harmonious society with equal opportunity for all.	Anglicise minority children because linguistic and cultural diversity are seen as a threat to social cohesion.		Even more intense efforts by the school to eradicate the deficiencies inherent in minority children.	The failure of these efforts only serves to reinforce the myth of minority-group deficiencies.
B1 Method	**B2 Justification**		**C1 Results**	**C2 'Scientific' explanation**
Prohibit use of L_1 in schools and make children reject their own culture and language in order to identify with majority English group.	(a) L_1 should be eradicated because it will interfere with the learning of English. (b) Identification with L_1 culture will reduce child's ability to identify with English-speaking culture.		(a) Ashamed of L_1 language and culture. (b) Replacement of L_1 by L_2. (c) School failure among children.	(a) Bilingualism causes confusion in thinking, emotional insecurity, and school failures. (b) Minority-group children are 'culturally deprived' by definition since they are not Anglophones. (c) Some minority-language groups are genetically inferior (common theory in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s).

Note: This figure reflects the assumptions of North American school systems in the first half of the twentieth century. However, similar assumptions have been made about minority-language children in the shool systems of many other countries.

Figure 1 The myth of the bilingual handicap (adapted from Cummins, 1981)

There are many examples of bilingual education programs for minority children which demonstrate the pointlessness of a subtractive form of bilinguality. One of these examples is the bilingual education program for Finnish immigrant children in Sweden (Hanson, 1979). The program is characterized by the use of Finnish as medium of instruction and Swedish as a mean of instruction only from Grade 3. The result is that already at the end of the elementary school minority children have the same results of Swedish and Finnish control groups. (Blanc, Hamers, 2000, p 343)

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2.1.3 Bilingual education programs involving dialects and creoles

Bilingual education programs involving dialects and creoles experience similar problems to the ones for minority children as in this case the children' mother tongue is a non-standard variety of the language, such as Black English Vernacular and creoles. Breiter & Englemann (1966) affirmed that lower-class Black Americans were linguistically deficient as they could not produce complete sentences, their utterances did not have the copula be and they could answer only with short answers. Some years later Labov (1972) discredited Breiter & Englemann affirmations. Labov argued that Black children involved in the study of Breiter & Englemann belong to a different culture and therefore their Black English has different rules like the optional use of the copula be and the double negation. Breiter & Englemann considered the Black English as a wrong and improper English, but it is simply a different language and attempting to change the latter lead only to confusion. (Blanc, Hamers, 2000, pp 348-349)

The school discredited and stigmatised their English by not allowing them to express themselves with it. However, the following solutions to bidialectalism have been proposed:

- Compulsory programs which aim at the re-education of children into the 'proper' language;
- Bidialectal programs which aim at the use of both the standard variety in school and the vernacular in the children' environment (Cheshire, 1987; Fasold & Shuy, 1970);
- Correcting the prejudices and attitudes of the children of the dominant group instead modifying the non-standard speakers' behaviour. (Blanc, Hamers, 2000, pp 348-349)

2.1.4 Community bilingual education programs

A community bilingual education program aims to a multicultural education where both minority children and majority children are schooled in the dominant language and in the subordinate languages based on the size of the minority groups

in order to reflect all the languages and the cultures of the community. (Blanc, Hamers, 2000, p 350)

An example of model of community education has been designed by Lambert & Taylor (1990), who suggested a model for American schools; they affirmed that the educational goals should be decided by Anglo-Americans, Black Americans and other ethnic minorities and that the teaching languages must be at least three: Standard English, Black English Vernacular and one heritage language chosen on the basis of the ethnic concentration present in the community. This ideal model was realized in the USA, in the so-called 'Two-Way Bilingual Education Programs' (Christian & Mahrer, 1992; Cazabon, Lambert & Hall, 1993; Nicoladis, Taylor, Lambert & Cazabon, 1998). The Two-Way Bilingual Education Programs begin in elementary schools where there is the same number of majority and minority children and goal is to reach bilinguality for both groups. These programs are a combination of immersion programs for majority children and bilingual programs for minority children and both groups are taught in English and Spanish. In 1998, Nicoladis, Tailor, Lambert and Cazabon noticed that the reading and mathematics' scores of African-American students were lower than the White American students in Standard American English, yet were at the same level in Spanish. This underlines that cause for underachievement is not to be found in the genetic but in social environmental factors and that Two-Way Bilingual Education is successful also with minority children who at home speak a different language from the one learned in school. (Blanc, Hamers, 2000, pp 350-351)

2.2 An example of bilingual educational offer in Germany

According to Torregrossa many Italian parents of the Italian community in Germany are afraid that their HL input given at home is insufficient for a complete HL acquisition due to lack of time. Bilingual schools in these cases are a crucial solution to the parent's fears in relation to HL maintenance as they make parents feel recognized as a community. After the first immigration wave of the 20th century, many German-Italian bilingual schools have been created

around the industrial centres and later on in other cities with the second and the following waves. Across regions the offer of bilingual schools is homogeneous with the '*bilingualer Zweig*' program. This program aims to teach to the students how to write and read both in Italian and in German. From the first year children have five hours per week of Italian language, one per day, and three additional hours for the content classes, the so-called '*Sachunterrich*t'. The subjects that are taught in Italian changes from school to school and from grade to grade and generally there are two monolingual curricula instead of one multilingual curriculum. There is a will from both communities to stay linked to their country of origin and to share with the youngers a bond thanks the formal education delivered in the HL. (Torregrossa 2021, pp 6-7)

CHAPTER 3: ITALIAN FOSTER FAMILIES AND THE PHENOMENON OF LANGUAGE ATTRITION

3.1 Language heritage: a brief introduction

To quote Tanja Kupisch, a language heritage (LH) is a minority language. It is indeed a language acquired at home which is not the dominant language in the national society where the heritage speaker lives. Heritage speakers are usually sequential bilinguals as most of the times they learn first their heritage language and in a second moment they acquire the Social language of a geographical area. Therefore, heritage speakers are usually more fluent in a first moment in their heritage language and in a second one in the social language and they experience what is called 'language attrition' of their language heritage. Obviously, the degree of attrition varies depending on the different situations, yet generally within the bilingual dyad, the language heritage is the weaker one which will experience attrition. Heritage speakers usually lack confidence and competence in their heritage language because the exposure to the heritage language occurs only in their childhood while during the school period they develop and use more the socially dominant language. Furthermore, heritage speakers often show gaps in many structural elements of language, or rather orthography, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and discourse. (Köpke, Schmid, 2019, pp 419-420)

Some factors which affect the language development of heritage speakers are the quantity and quality of the input and the contexts of language. Therefore, the amount and the type of terms and structures that the child is exposed to and that the child uses are crucial. Another factor which affects language development is the amount of time spent by the heritage speakers speaking the heritage language and the socially dominant language. In some contexts, one of the two languages might not be required and therefore it happens that there are contexts and purposes where only one language is required and another where only the other language. The consequence is that linguistic properties linked to a specific context might not develop. For example, the majority of heritage speakers do not use their heritage language at school and for this reason they do not develop basic linguistic competences, like writing

skills, in the scholastic subjects. In addition, the quality of input sometimes is affected by the proficiency of the interlocutors who speak to the heritage child. For example, if the parents are immigrants who lived in the new country for many years they might have lost some competences in their native language and therefore the heritage child might be exposed to weak inputs and learn expressions or structures that people in the homeland would never use. Nowadays, it is really common that adult heritage speakers opt for re-learning their heritage language. (Köpke, Schmid, 2019, pp 428-430)

3.2 Unbalanced bilingualism

The majority of bilinguals have one weaker language and one stronger language within the bilingual dyad. This phenomenon is called unbalanced bilingualism and it has been observed both in simultaneous bilinguals and sequential bilingual children. However, the language a bilingual considers dominant can change over the years; this is what occurs also, as seen above, with heritage speakers, whose heritage language starts as the stronger language and often ends as the weaker language because the HL is used only inside the household environment without experiencing a real exposure to other contests. According to Meisel (2007), a 'weak' language is a language which is not often actively used and which is not chosen as the referred language and that is less developed than the other languages. There are different quantitative measures used to define the dominant language in bilingual children which challenges linguists, speech pathologists and educators. This measures could be for example parental ratings or language scores. (Meir 2018, p 2)

3.3 Italian language as L2

The Italian language as an L2 can be assimilated for different reasons. For example, it can be assimilated by people coming from different Countries who moved

to Italy or it can be assimilated by children who are adopted. Starting from the first example, Children whose family decides to move to Italy looking for a better future often acquire the Italian language as L2 as a necessity not as a choice. They need to integrate in the new country and in order to do that they are forced to learn the language. Therefore, the interest for the second language can be weak as it might be viewed as a sort of obligation, yet it can vary depending on the life's context of the children who are included in the Italian school. It is difficult for a bilingual immigrant child to face a new reality, where there are new traditions, language and religion eve if the Italian school system tries to encourage the child's integration. If we take a look at the second example, on the other hand, international children who are adopted in Italy are more motivated in the Italian acquisition as they are not learning it as a necessity but as the language which will become their future L1. The exposure to the Italian language is totally different from the one of the immigrant children. The latter are exposed to their L1 during the acquisition phase but they keep being exposed to it during their entire life thanks to the relation with their country of origin and with their relatives, while the L2 is used in a school environment and for social bonds in a restricted way. When immigrant children are 3 years old they develop already the bilingual characteristics or in case they are born in Italy the situation get even more complex as the child is exposed to his HL and to Italian simultaneously. For adopted children, the exposure is complete as Italian becomes the only language used in the household environment, in the school environment, in interpersonal relations and for each type of communication. They experience changes in the linguistic dominance with important transformations in their L1 which usually suffers from language attrition's aspects until reaching the total disuse. In their case, there are no dominance problems because their language is the one used by all the speakers in the country they have been adopted, the only linguistic problems can arise during the first acquisition phase where there are interferences between the L1 and Italian. (Freddi, 2015 pp 74-75)

3.4 Language attrition in internationally adopted children

International adoption is often abbreviated as IA, an expression which is used to refer also to internationally adopted children. Internationally adopted children (IA) are children who are adopted from a family in a country which is not their homeland. Therefore, they are exposed to a language from birth and to another once they are adopted. Typically, after adoption IA only acquire the adoption language, dropping completely their heritage language. This is the pattern which makes the difference between IA and L2 learners who, on the contrary, keep learning and using their birth language. IA children usually learn their adoption language quickly in one or two years following adoption, yet the acquisition of the adoption language and the attrition of the birth language depend on the adoption age and on the exposure to the birth language. Indeed, the highest cases of attrition are attributed to people who lost contact with their birth language during childhood. Language attrition is a critical phenomenon since IA children are exposed to their birth language during the most optimal phase of the phonological development. (Köpke, Schmid, 2019, pp 470-471)

Language attrition generally refers to the loss of the first language due to the disuse of it. In fact, when people do not use a language over time, this tends to fade. Forgetting a language not only depends on the disuse of it, but it can also depend on other reasons, such as an interference of new memories over old memories, or mental health's issues like dementia or anomia. (Köpke, Schmid, 2019, p 7)

What can be experienced is attrition in all the subfields of linguistics: phonetic attrition, phonological attrition, morphological attrition and lexical attrition. Phonetic attrition usually describes changes in the pronunciation of the L1 when a L2 or a dialect are acquired in adulthood by an individual and when taking bilingualism into exam, it is often linked to long-term immigrations (Schid & köpke, 2007). Phonetic is the study of speech sounds, or better phones, of a language. For example, in the word 'love' at the beginning we find the lateral sound of the phone [l]. For instance, the seminal study by Flege (1987) showed the phonetics changes in native American-English speakers living such as the production of the French /u/ in a higher frequency than the one of a French monolingual (1333 Hz vs 1196 Hz). Phonetic represent the blocks from which all other languages blocks are created. Phonological attrition shows how changes in

an L1 can occur when another language is learned later in life due to social changes like for example migration to another country or international adoption; these changes can be for example in the vowel systems, in the obstruents in obstruents-vowel sequences and so on. (Köpke, Schmid, 2019, pp 204-205, 218, 228)

Morphological attrition studies which morphological markers remain resilient to attrition and which do not. Not all languages have inflectional morphology and this is the reason why there are fewer studies on morphological attrition compared to the other types of attrition. An example of morphological attrition can be when a speaker produces non-target-like utterances by omitting or adding incorrect morphemes. For instance, this utterance: 'the dog goes into this little liver, body of water, whatever it is, but it's very shallow, and they are safe' the word the speaker was trying to use was 'pond' (Olshtain & Barzilay, 1991, p.149). Lexical attrition analyses what we can call 'vocabulary loss', or rather the removal of words from memory. It affects fluency, lexical accuracy and lexical complexity. (Köpke, Schmid, 2019, pp 241-242)

Finally, also attrition of grammar and morpho-syntax (e.g. word order) have been analysed by adopting processing-based models, such as the 4-M model proposed by Myers-Scotton & Jake. (Köpke, Schmid, 2019, p 185)

Furthermore, there can also be differences based on the observation of behaviour or on the observation of the brain, or rather differences between behavioural attrition and neural attrition. (Köpke, Schmid, 2019, pp 470-471)

3.4.1 Behavioural attrition

Behavioural attrition shows how after adoption, inputs from the birth language quickly stop for internationally adopted children. Many studies, for instance the ones of Glennen & Masters (2002), of Nicoladis & Grabois (2002), of Price (2006) or of Snedeker (2012), indeed demonstrate that, within the first months post-adoption, even if there are efforts in continuing to expose the child to the birth language, there is a rapid loss of the birth language. These patterns have been demonstrated both for children adopted when they were young and for children adopted when they were

older. Anyhow, studies like the one of Oh et al. (2010) or the study of Bowers et al. (2009) prove that IA are advantaged when studying their birth language compared to other people who have never been exposed to the same language because some aspects of the IA's birth language remain even if they do not use it anymore after adoption. (Köpke, Schmid, 2019, pp 471-472)

3.4.2 Neural attrition

By analysing the neural responses to what can be called a 'lost' language, it has been found that over time some traces of the birth language survive even if the exposure to that language was discontinued. These traces refer to the ability to retain some elements of the birth language in the brain which leads to better performances on that language in an adult age compared to people who have never been exposed to the same language. The fact that some elements can be or cannot be retained in the brain, can prove how high or low the brain plasticity can be in an individual both during childhood and during adulthood. Although there are researches who noticed that the brain plasticity can enable the replacement of an L1 by another language if during childhood the status of discontinuous exposure to the L1 occurs, others which analysed the learning and memory's neural circuitry, like the ones of Mcgaugh (2000) or Rescorla (2001), found out that everything the brain learns will remain in it. Consequently, even if memories are added to the brain they do not cause an updating or overwriting of the previous ones. These researches prove, then, the continued existence of some elements of the birth language even if it is not practiced over years post-adoption. (Köpke, Schmid, 2019, pp 473-474)

An example is reported by Pierce in 2014, who used functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging to test three groups of participants. These participants were aged from 10 to 17 and were divided as follows: a first group composed by French monolingual speakers, a second group composed by IA participants from China adopted within 6 and 25 months from birth into French families who have experienced an exposure to their birth language, a third group composed by Chinese-French bilinguals who were exposed to Chinese from birth and who have also acquired at

more or less the same age French, who then speak both Chinese and French. The test was based on the Lexical tone because it is a fundamental feature of Chinese acquired already at 4 months by children. The participants had to recognize Chinese pseudo-sentences only on the basis of the final syllable's tone. The members of the second and third groups activated the left superior temporal gyrus/planum temporale, characteristic which belongs to native tonal language speakers. French monolingual speakers, on the opposite, did not activate that brain region. Pierce's test, therefore, shows how some aspects of a birth language can survive in IA even if they were exposed to it for a short time during early childhood. (Köpke Schmid, 2019, p 474)

3.5 A specific field of application: Italian foster families

An additional area of interest for analysing language attrition is the one represented by children who live in foster families in a country which is different from their motherland. This is a different condition which has not been investigated as the ones analysed before in the previous paragraphs. There are indeed few studies which shows the process of language acquisition and of language attrition in children who live between a foster family and a family of origin which uses a different language.

With foster care we refer to a temporary service for children who cannot live with their families for different reasons, such as parents' death or parents' insufficient financial means. This service is provided by the state which helps children in need finding new houses where to live; they can live in foster families with unrelated/ related foster parents or they can be placed in group homes, in emergency shelters, residential care facilities, and supervised independent living. (Cambridge online Dictionary)

The foster family care system can be a long-term service or a short-term service and what makes it different from adoption are the temporary nature, the maintenance of contact with the family of origin, the maintenance of the same legal status and the absence of any legal age requirements. In fact, a child after a period of time spent with the foster family goes back to the legitimate family and during the foster care period the child keeps the relationship with the family of origin. However, in certain cases, it

may be better, in the best interest of the child, to turn foster care into adoption, yet in Italy the decision has to be taken with the Juvenile Court. (Anfaa website)

According to the Italian association Anfaa (Associazione nazionale famiglie adottive e affidatarie), a national informative system with the aim to track all the minors who are living in foster families or foster placing settings is missing. The last national information about the foster care system in Italy were delivered by the Tavolo Nazionale Affido, which is a group juridically not recognized, composed by many official organizations which all work in the adoption field or foster field: Ai.Bi., Anfaa, Ass. Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, Ass. Famiglie per l'Accoglienza, C.A.M., Batya, C.N.C.A., Coordinamento Affido Roma, Co.Re.Mi. Friuli Venezia Giulia, Federazione Progetto Famiglia, Coordinamento Ubi Minor Toscana. (Anfaa website)

The paper about the situation of minors in Italian foster families of 2013 is based on data collected until 2010. The Tavolo Nazionale Affido reported the reductions of the financial public resources and public investments allocated to the foster care system, which can lead to the risk of not achieving the national guidelines established previously by all the members mentioned before. These reductions together with an inaccurate definition of all the social welfare levels are inducing an increasing inadequacy in the children's defence field. Another problem advanced by the paper is the incoherency of putting together data about both children in foster families and children in communities as it does not provide a rational analysis. (Tavolo Nazionale Affido 2013, p 1)

According to a sample investigation about foster care and residential care facilities by the Istituto degli Innocenti of 2019, based on the data collected until 2016, there are 26615 foreign children and teens (0-17 years old) who do not live with their biological family, of which 14012 live in foster families and 12603 in residential care facilities. (Bianchi, Milani, Moretti, Onida 2019, p 8)

3.5.1 Foster family care Italian system: a juridical insight

The foster care system in Italy is regulated by the law 'legge 4 maggio 1983, n.184', a law about the minor's right to a family. This law is composed by six titles: 'custody of minors', 'adoption', 'international adoptions', 'adoption in particular cases', 'changes of titolo VIII del codice civile' and the last 'final, penal and transitional rules'. According to what it is written in the first title, minors who are temporarily without a suitable family environment may be given into custody to another family, possibly with other children, or to a single person or to residential care facilities and communities. The foster care is provided by the local service of the municipality of residence, yet there has to be a consent of the biological parents or the legal guardians of the child and of the child himself. The judge of the site where the foster care takes place has the power to enforce the order by decree. The order has to indicate different elements, or rather the reasons and the duration of the foster care service, the local service assigned to the supervision during the custody and the obligation to keep the juvenile court constantly informed. The custody can terminate always by decision of the authority who order it by taking into consideration the interests of the minor. After the prescribed duration has elapsed, if necessary, the court can require further measures in the interests of the child.

The custodian, according to the law, must provide the child's upbringing and education and facilitate the relationship with the biological parents and the child's reintegration into the family of origin. (Legge 4 maggio 1983)

3.5.2 Introduction to the case of a foster family in Rovigo

This thesis intends to present a case study of a Nigerian-Italian family whose members has accessed via request to the social services of their municipality the foster care's service. The purpose of this case study is to give a representation of the bilingual situation of the family's members and to show how they all experienced language attrition in a different way in one or more of the languages involved. In order to collect data, I interviewed each member of the family by asking ten questions. These ten question were a simple but effective way to collect several information. I asked the

questions in Italian but before actually starting with the interview, I always made clear that I could also switch to English or that they could also answer me in English. Before taking a deeper look to the questions and answers, it is important to understand how this family is composed and its main characteristics.

The family reported in this case study is a family of Rovigo composed by a father, William[1], a daughter Stephany, and three sons Viktor, Patrick and Kevin. The mother died in 2011 when the children were respectively 15, 13, 8 and 3. The children were born in Lagos, Nigeria, except for the youngest who was born in Italy. The chronology of the events is important to understand the amount of time the children spent with their biological parents, above all their biological mother, a crucial point for the acquisition of the birth language.

After some months from the birth of the second born, William left Nigeria in order to come to Italy, looking for a better future for his family since the situation in Nigeria was unstable. He stayed one year before being able to get the necessary documentation to go back to Nigeria to meet his family again. He came back to Italy and find a new job which allowed him to earn money to help his family and to find a new home for his family in Italy. After two years from the birth of Patrick, the mother and the three children came to visit for the first time William in Italy; Patrick and his mother stayed while Stephany and Viktor went back to Nigeria alone. They spent some years living with their grandparents in Alor village and in the meanwhile the last son, Kevin, was born in Italy. At the age of 13, Viktor definitely moved to Italy, yet unfortunately after some months the mother died and Stephany had to move to Italy too to help the father with the rest of the family.

It is at this moment that the family asks for help from a foster family of Rovigo composed by a couple, Diana and Luigi. They are a foster family recognized by ULSS who took with them Kevin with a consensual fosterage after the death of the mother. Form a juridical point of view, every 15 days the foster parents have the obligation to bring Kevin home to his family of origin and every 2 years the fosterage has to be renewed in the '*Tribunale dei minori'*, or rather the Juvenile Court, where the child services show a report and the judge talks with the child first, and with the biological

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[1] The names used to describe the case study are invented in order to safeguard the participants' privacy

father and foster parents then, separately. Right now Kevin is 14 years old and when he will be 18 he will have the right to choose where and with whom to live.

3.5.3 The Nigerian multiculturalism

The Federal Republic of Nigeria is a multicultural and multilingual Country. The Nigerian population is composed of ten parts: Hausa Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo, Efik, Kanuri, Tiv, Ijaw, Edo, Urhobo and Nupe. Over two hundred languages are recognized in Nigeria, among which the main ones are English, Nigerian English, Nigerian Pidgin, Hausa, Kanuri and Fulfulde. (Paulson 1988, pp 345-346)

Looking from an historical point of view, Nigeria was built as a geopolitical unit by the British who definitely colonized it in 1914. There were many ethnic groups which had different types of cultural, social, political and administrative patterns of living. For example, the northern part was under the Islamic influence while the southwest and southeast were Christians. The British colonization introduced the English language in the already multilingual Nigerian context. English was imposed as the language of administration and became the most prestigious language which gave social and economic power to its speakers. Nigerian peoples were soon required to learn English and to become bilinguals, yet the process within each location was different. English was first imposed in Lagos where British traders introduced it to the Nigerian counterparts; through commercial interactions a secondary language called Pidgin English emerged. (Bratt Paulson 1988, pp 347-348)

Nowadays, the Nigerians are still characterized by a bilingualism-biculturalism, yet the educational system, which is fundamental to promote bilingualism, is not enough bilingualbicultural and is not accessible to everybody. In fact, the widespread economic situation impacted the opportunity to access to secondary and tertiary educational' levels. Only the primary school can be available to all citizens of Nigeria thanks to a Universal Free Primary Education Scheme installed by the government, even if to attend primary school is not compulsory. Therefore, there is a necessity to make the primary level effective as it may be the only educational opportunity for

children in Nigeria. The National Policy needs to implement the educational goals as English in schools is underrated and scholars do not develop an adequate level both in the English language and in their mother tongue. An example of implementation of the educational system may be to teach in the child's mother tongue during primary school and having both English and the child's mother tongue as subjects, and later in the secondary education to have also English as medium for teaching and as subjects English and one of the three Nigerian major languages Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. (Paulson 1988, pp 356-357)

3.5.4 Questions asked to the family's members

In order to understand the bilingual process of the four brothers and how attrition occurred over years, I asked the four to answer the same questions, which are the followings:

1. Did you live in Nigeria? If yes, how long have you lived in Nigeria? And when did you definitely go to live in Italy?

2. Until the age of 2 was your mother with you? And your father?

3. Do you remember which language your mother used to talk to you?

4. What do you consider to be your L1?

5. If you lived for a period of time in Nigeria, how many languages were you exposed to? If more than one, which ones?

6. When your mum left Nigeria to move to Italy did you move with her? If not, with whom did you live?

7. Where/how did you learn Italian?

8. Which languages do you use today to communicate with your brothers, with your father and relatives?

9. Which is the language you feel more confident with? What about the rest of languages you know or you knew?

10. When your Nigerian relatives talk with you, which language do they use? In which language do you answer? Do they understand you?

3.5.5 The answers

The answers of the four brothers are reported here; one important thing I noticed during the small interviews is that in order to answer Stephany used Italian but then switched to English without realizing, Viktor used only English while Patrick and Kevin answered in Italian. This is indeed already a signal which shows us which is the language each member is more confident with.

Stephany's answers:

1. Yes, I lived in Nigeria since I was born until I was 15 years old; before that moment I came to visit my father in Italy only once.

2. Yes, my mother was with me until I was 7 years old while my father moved to Italy when I was around 3 years old. I lived my first years of life with both my parents, but when I was a little kid there was poverty where we were living and my father was struggling in finding a way to bring food to his family so he decided to go to Italy to look for a better future.

3. In Lagos, my mother was talking to us in Igbo because she wanted to share with us her culture and language which was Igbo indeed. Something which is pretty common in Lagos, which is a huge city, is to forget your own culture and language and speak only English and Pidgin English, forgetting your Igbo culture, or Youruba, Hausa Fulani cultures and so on. My mother wanted to avoid that, so I grew up with my mother talking to me in Igbo, but I remember that I was answering in English. I remember also that when my mother was still alive every December of every year she took us to Alor village in order to make us understand our roots and traditions.

4. My L1 is English, I feel more confident with English. I always think in English, sometimes I think in English when someone is talking to me in Italian and to answer I translate my answers from English to Italian.

5. I was exposed to a lot of languages Hausa, Yoruba, English, Pidgin English, Igbo, Anambra…

6. I didn't move to Italy with my mum. I moved to Italy only after her death to help my father with my three brothers. From the moment she reached my father in Italy I went to live with my grandparents together with my brother Viktor in Nigeria. I remember it was really hard for me to accept this. I cried for a month but I then got used to it. With my grandparents we talked only in Igbo, maybe sometimes in Pidgin/broken English.

7. I only started learning Italian after the death of my mother. Before that moment for me it was useless learning Italian because I went to Italy only for "vacations" to visit my family. But after my mother died, my father decided I had to stay in Italy to help him. I remember it was at that moment I had to learn Italian. I was 15 and I couldn't communicate and understand. I felt empty because I couldn't express myself. I attended evening classes for two years where I learned Italian. Also Diana, Kevin' foster mother, was really helpful. She gave me a sort of small computer with a translator installed that I used a lot. Also by watching movies, cartoons, or listening to music.

8. With my father I speak Igbo or English too. With my brothers or in English or in Italian. With some of my cousins I speak broken English, with others in English and with my grandparents always in Igbo or Anambra which is an Igbo dialect.

9. I feel more confident in English obviously. As far as the rest of the languages I know are concerned, I can say I feel more strong in the oral with Italian Igbo or Anambra. I still have some difficulties with Italian, like with the genre of words, how to use the plural form sometimes and the double consonants.

10. When I speak with my Nigerian relatives we both use Igbo; they understand me but sometimes they laugh because I make some mistakes and they tell me that I should go back more often to visit them in the village. Another interesting point is also with broken English; when I go to Lagos and instead of English I speak broken English people from Lagos can hear that I am not from there, even if I was actually born there. I don't know why, but this always happens if I speak English they think I'm from there but if I start speaking broken they think I'm a foreigner.

Viktor's answers:

1. Yes, I lived in Nigeria. I was born there and I lived there for 13 years. I went to visit my father in Italy once, but I definitely moved there only at 13 years old.

2. My mother was with me in Nigeria during my first 5 years of life, but my father wasn't. He moved to Italy when I was still an infant.

3. I remember her speaking to me in Igbo even if we were living in Lagos and there the principal language you hear is English/ Pidgin English. I remember I was answering in English to her but I could understand Igbo. I started to speak Igbo only when I moved to the village with my grandparents once both my parents moved to Italy.

4. My L1 is English and I also consider it to be my L1.

5. I was exposed to a lot of languages: Hausa, Yoruba, English, Pidgin English and Igbo. When I was a kid and I was still living in Nigeria I could speak and understand them all.

6. When my mother moved to Italy I stayed in Nigeria with my grandparents in Alor Village.

7. When I moved to Italy it was hard for me to learn Italian. I had never used it before. The foster mother of my brother Kevin helped me. She found a sort of "private teacher" who taught me Italian. I found it hard, especially in school, both middle and high school. It was difficult to bond with my school mates, with professors, to learn and express myself as I wanted. I remember that every time I wanted to say something I had to mentally translate it into Italian from English, and also every time anyone would tell me anything I had to translate it into my language and this was frustrating and taking a lot of effort. I stopped using the translating mechanism only a few years ago.

8. I don't use the same language with everybody, but sometimes I mash the languages. With my father I usually speak a mixture of Pidgin English and Igbo. With my sister Stephany I speak English and with my other two brothers I speak Italian but sometimes I use English and Pidgin English with them too. With my

Nigerian relatives I speak Igbo, but sometimes I don't know how to express some concepts so I have to switch to English.

9. I still feel more confident in English, even if I improved my Italian a lot. I keep confusing the double consonants and I keep making mistakes when writing in Italian. I can speak Igbo too but I can't read it or write it. I lost my Hausa and Yoruba knowledge as I can recognize the two languages and understand some words/sentences but I can't speak them anymore.

10. My Nigerian relatives use Igbo and most of the time I answer in Igbo and sometimes in English too. They do understand me but they also make fun of my accent or when I forget some words or how to express some concepts in Igbo they joke about the fact that I became too Italian.

Patrick's answers:

1. Yes, I lived in Nigeria until I was 2 years old. When I was almost 3 years old I moved to Italy with my mother.

2. Yes, until the age of two my mother was with me but my father was not, he was already working in Italy.

3. She used English.

4. I have double citizenship but I don't know which should be my L1, I personally feel confident with both Italian and English, maybe a little bit more confident with English.

5. I only lived there for two years, I don't remember. I know from what my Stephany and Viktor told me the languages were English Igbo and various dialects.

6. Yes, I moved with my mum to Italy.

7. I learned Italian as every other Italian kid, during my day-to-day life

8. To talk to my family, I use Italian and English.

9. I feel more confident with English.

10. I talk to them in English but sometimes also in Igbo even if I don't speak Igbo very much.

    Kevin's answers:

1. No, I didn't.

2. Yes, she was with me.

3. I don't remember, I was only 2 when she passed away but my brothers told me my parents always talked to me in Igbo or English.

4. My L1 is Italian.

5. I didn't live in Nigeria but when I went there to visit my relatives they were talking to me in Igbo and English.

6. I was born in Italy after she moved here.

7. I always talked Italian, I guess I learned it by "living".

8. With my brothers I use Italian, with my father Italian and English together. I don't feel comfortable answering in English or in Igbo but I can understand most of the time when they talk to me in those languages.

9. I feel more confident with Italian. I know English better than my Italian peers in school, and I know other languages I learned in school like Spanish. I also speak the dialect from Rovigo.

10. Most of the time I use English with my Nigerian relatives but sometimes I also try to talk their dialects but it's a bit difficult for me to speak those dialects, I can understand them but I prefer to answer in English.

3.5.6 Observations and conclusions on the answers

By observing the answers of Stephany, Viktor, Patrick and Kevin we notice that each of them had a different Italian acquisition process. Stephany and Viktor are the ones who experienced more difficulties as they learned Italian during adolescence. Their language repertoire is really complex due to the socio-linguistics situations of the city where they grew up, Lagos. They still struggle with some Italian figures and still make grammatical mistakes. They also experienced the hardest time with the Italian learning process from a relational point of view. In fact, Stephany said she felt empty because she did not know how to express herself and Viktor encountered hard times in making friends as he did not know how to talk, leading to a weak interest for the Italian language from them. The situation differs if we look at the experience of the younger brothers. In fact, for Patrick English and Italian are at the same level, he can fully express himself in both languages, yet he still feels more confident with English. This is probably due to the fact that at home he speaks predominantly English because he lives with his father and Stephany, who both speak English with him. Kevin, on the other hand, experienced the opposite conditions of his sister Stephany; he grew up spending more time with the foster family, therefore, he got more used to hearing Italian in a household environment. As a consequence, he considers Italian as his first language and feels more confident with it. Anyway, he always maintained a constant relationship with his biological family, therefore he kept his English trained and he affirmed that he feels he knows English better than his Italian peers in school. This shows how so many elements of a birth language can survive in a child who is living in a foster family if he/she keeps having bonds with his/her family of origin. This already happens, as we saw in Pierce's test, in IA children, yet children who are in the foster care system, if they maintain the contacts with the biological family, are easily exposed more frequently to their heritage language and therefore they do not lose the knowledge of it.

They all experienced language attrition; Stephany and Viktor both affirmed that their Nigerian relatives laugh at their Igbo sometimes, yet while they were living in Nigeria their pronunciation was right and nobody was questioning their origin. They experienced indeed language attrition in their Igbo because they stopped using it once they started to live in Italy. On the contrary Kevin speaks Italian as his L1 and knows

less English compared to his brothers, even if during his first two years of life he was living with both his parents who only spoke to him in Igbo or English. At the age of two he was already answering in English to his parents but as soon as he started to live with his foster parents, he experienced language attrition for what concerns Igbo and English.

Overall, they can be all considered as bilinguals but their bilingualism is unbalanced. More specifically, Stephany and Viktor' dominant language is English and their weaker language is Italian, while for Kevin the situation is exactly the opposite. Patrick's bilingualism is the only one which is almost balanced as he knows both the two languages involved at the same level.

This case study is an example that underlines the most important concepts this thesis intends to explain. It shows how language attrition can occur differently for members of the same family based on the quality and quantity of inputs and contexts which are fundamental for the development of a language. We see how Stephany and Viktor still show gaps in many structural elements of language like phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and discourse due to the fact that the quality and quantity of inputs they had were minor compared to the ones the other two brothers experienced. We also saw that the foster care system allows children to maintain their heritage language, a fact that rarely happens with internationally adopted children, who usually forget the language once they are adopted because they only use the new language of the adoptive family. Kevin sees indeed his family regularly every two weeks, or sometimes even more, and he therefore maintains his English' knowledge and can understand Igbo and Pidgin English when his family uses them.

CONCLUSIONS

Does a child who grew up between a non-Italian biological family and an Italian foster family maintain his heritage language? This thesis, and the case study more precisely, tried to answer this question. The analysis in the first two chapters of fundamental concepts which set up the basis to fully understand the case study, together with the case study itself led to the answer.

With the first chapter we understood how bilingual acquisition works and how to distinguish various types of bilingualism. The second chapter underlined the bilingual educational systems and showed us the possible bilingual programs schools can use. Finally, the third chapter revealed many significant aspects for answering the question mentioned before. The case study demonstrated indeed that Kevin was able to learn Italian as an L1 but at the same time to maintain his English knowledge and this was possible thanks to the constant relationship he maintained with his biological family. This case study, therefore, showed us that living in a foster family means also keeping an exposure to the heritage language and therefore also means not losing the knowledge of it. Additionally, the case study highlighted what unbalanced bilingualism is and how the stronger and weaker position of the languages of a bilingual can change over time. The linguistic repertoire differences between the family's members show how individual socio-linguistic and biographical conditions can produce strong variations in the repertoire and in the language behaviour. HL attrition does not happen automatically but it is always conditioned by many elements like the input, the emotional involvement or the social relations. All these phenomena get more complicated when the language involved belongs to an even bigger and more complex repertoire, as for the older sister, Stephany, who was exposed to both Nigerian English and Pidgin English.

Anyway, it is important to remember that this case study refers to a specific case and that not always the foster care system allows the maintenance of the relations with the family of origin. For this reason, no absolute objective statement can be made about the bilingualism of children in foster care, it is not possible to develop a unique theory valid for every possible case.

BILINGUISMO SBILANCIATO, UN CASO STUDIO: LE FAMIGLIE AFFIDATARIE ITALIANE

Questa tesi intende realizzare un'analisi del processo di erosione linguistica sviluppato nei bambini adottati a livello internazionale con un focus specifico sui bambini che accedono al sistema dell'affidamento familiare. L'analisi si delinea in tre capitoli strutturati come segue:

capitolo 1 Bilinguismo e bilinguità,

capitolo 2 Educazione bilingue,

capitolo 3 Le famiglie affidatarie italiane e il fenomeno di erosione linguistica.

Nei primi due vengono illustrati i concetti fondamentali che andranno a costituire la base per comprendere il caso studio contenuto nell'ultimo capitolo.

Nel primo capitolo vengono date le definizioni di 'bilingualism' e 'bilinguality'. Con bilingualism, ovvero bilinguismo ci si riferisce generalmente ad una comunità linguistica in cui ci sono due lingue in contatto che portano al conseguente utilizzo di due codici da parte degli individui che ne fanno parte. Non vi è un'unica definizione riconosciuta di bilinguismo ma ve ne sono diverse che però omettono alcune chiarificazioni rendendo il concetto di bilinguismo problematico. Per esempio, secondo Titone (1972) essere bilingue significa "parlare una seconda lingua seguendo i concetti e le strutture di quella lingua piuttosto che parafrasare la propria lingua madre", oppure secondo Bloomfield (1935:56) il bilinguismo è "il controllo di due lingue". Un'altra definizione ci arriva da Macmanara (1967), il quale crede che un bilingue sia una persona con competenze minime in anche solo una delle competenze linguistiche, ovvero, ascolto, lingua orale, lingua scritta e lettura. Tutte queste definizioni provocano delle difficoltà nella teorizzazione e nella metodologia in quanto peccano di accuratezza. Più precisamente, se osserviamo la definizione di Bloomfield non viene spiegato cosa concretamente definisce un parlante nativo; più generalmente in tutte le definizioni emergono equivoci circa l'individuazione delle persone bilingue ammesse dalle definizioni stesse; in altre parole, è difficile capire per esempio se un individuo con un'elevata competenza in una seconda lingua ma che non è madrelingua può essere incluso in queste definizioni o meno. Il concetto di bilinguismo è fortemente

connesso con il concetto di bilinguità. Quest'ultimo si riferisce allo stato psicologico proprio di una persona capace di cambiare diversi codici linguistici per comunicare. La bilinguità è, dunque, la dimensione individuale e soggettiva di un bilingue che è consapevole delle sue molteplici capacità linguistiche. Vi sono numerose tipologie di bilinguismo. Queste tipologie differiscono l'una dall'altra per ragioni diverse, quali: età di acquisizione della lingua, valore delle lingue in relazione al contesto in cui un bambino cresce ed infine livello di fluidità. Quando si considera il fattore età, si distingue il bilinguismo simultaneo, consecutivo e tardivo. Quando ci si basa il fattore contesto del bambino vi sono il bilinguismo sottrattivo e additivo. Quando, infine, viene considerato il fattore del livello della fluidità, si hanno il bilinguismo equilibrato e il bilinguismo dominante. "Madrelingua", "seconda lingua", "lingua straniera" e "lingua adottiva" sono quattro concetti ben distinti. È importante apprendere la nozione di madrelingua, in particolar modo, in quanto rappresenta la lingua imparata da un bambino per prima dalla madre o dai parenti stretti. Quando, però, viene presa in esame l'adozione internazionale o l'affido internazionale, il concetto di madre lingua diventa più delicato perché subentrano meccanismi diversi rispetto alla 'condizione tipica' propria della famiglia tradizionale. Un bambino che viene adottato o preso in affidamento è solitamente un bambino che ha sofferto da diversi punti di vista, come quello fisico o psicologico. Il ruolo dei genitori adottivi o affidatari diventa dunque cruciale per l'integramento nei nuovi ambienti del bambino e allo stesso modo per la sua acquisizione linguistica. Quest'ultima viene dettagliatamente analizzata nelle sue varie tappe, partendo dalla nascita, attraversando la fase pre scolastica fino all'inserimento nel sistema educativo. Infine il primo capitolo termina con la spiegazione di alcuni elementi caratterizzanti nei bambini bilingue come ad esempio i prestiti linguistici e il code-switching, considerando l'importanza del fattore contesto.

Un'ulteriore area di interesse è rappresentata dall'educazione bilingue contenuta nel secondo capitolo; i contesti educativi sono estremamente importanti per lo sviluppo del bilinguismo. Secondo Hamers, H.A. Blanc (2000), l'istruzione bilingue è "qualsiasi sistema di istruzione scolastica in cui, in un dato momento e per un dato periodo di tempo variabile, l'istruzione è pianificata e data in almeno due lingue simultaneamente o consecutivamente ". Questa definizione non comprende il caso in cui vi sia una lingua utilizzata per l'insegnamento e una lingua straniera insegnata solo

come materia, ed esclude anche il caso in cui i curricula ignorano la lingua madre del bambino qualora sia diversa dalla lingua usata per insegnare nella scuola, una situazione che si verifica solitamente nel caso dei bambini immigrati. Nella tesi vengono illustrate diverse proposte di educazione bilingue come per esempio programmi di educazione bilingue per bambini di minoranze etniche o programmi di educazione bilingue che coinvolgono lingue non standard, come i dialetti o le lingue creole.

L'analisi si concentra, successivamente, su uno specifico caso di studio di una famiglia affidataria italiana di Rovigo. La famiglia riportata in questo caso studio è una famiglia di Rovigo composta da un padre, William, una figlia Stephany e tre figli Viktor, Patrick e Kevin, mentre la madre è venuta a mancare nel 2011 quando i bambini erano rispettivamente 15, 13, 8 e 3. I bambini sono nati a Lagos, Nigeria, ad eccezione del più giovane, Kevin, che è nato in Italia. La Nigeria è un Paese multiculturale e multilingue dove la popolazione nigeriana è composta da dieci parti: Hausa Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo, Efik, Kanuri, Tiv, Ijaw, Edo, Urhobo e Nupe. Sono riconosciute oltre duecento lingue in Nigeria. L'obiettivo di questa indagine è quello di evidenziare i diversi approcci adottati dai bambini bilingue e come l'erosione linguistica si sviluppa quando i bambini crescono in famiglie affidatarie. Prima di sviluppare il caso studio è necessario individuale il significato di 'language heritage', ossia una lingua minoritaria. È una lingua acquisita in un ambiente domestico diversa dalla lingua socialmente riconosciuta nell'area di residenza. In questo caso i bambini che parlano una lingua diversa da quella accettata nella società in cui crescono, acquisiscono di solito in un primo momento la lingua di origine e in un secondo momento la lingua dominante. Inizialmente la lingua in cui si sentono più forti è la lingua d'origine, ma essendo una lingua alla quale sono esposti solo all'interno dell'ambiente familiare, quando iniziano la fase scolastica e a costruire rapporti interpersonali con altre persone al di fuori del nucleo familiare, solitamente la lingua d'origine diventa la lingua più debole sperimentando il fenomeno di erosione linguistica nella loro lingua di origine, ovvero la perdita della prima lingua a causa del suo disuso. Al fine di raccogliere i dati necessari per lo sviluppo del caso studio ho intervistato ogni membro della famiglia facendo dieci domande. Queste dieci domande erano un modo semplice ma efficace per raccogliere diverse informazioni che hanno portato, in un secondo momento, a delle conclusioni

notevoli. Ho posto le domande in italiano ma prima di iniziare con l'intervista, ho sempre esplicitato la possibilità di passare all'inglese. Alcuni membri infatti mi hanno risposto in italiano durante tutta l'intervista ed altri hanno preferito l'inglese. Questo studio costituisce un chiaro esempio di come il logoramento del linguaggio può avvenire in modo diverso per i membri di una stessa famiglia in base alla qualità e alla qualità degli input linguistici ricevuti e in base ai contesti nei quali hanno vissuto. Inoltre, il caso mostra come il sistema dell'affidamento familiare consente ai bambini di mantenere la loro lingua d'origine, un fatto che accade raramente con i bambini adottati a livello internazionale, i quali di solito dimenticano la lingua una volta adottati in quanto usano solo la nuova lingua della famiglia adottiva. Kevin vede infatti la sua famiglia regolarmente ogni due settimane, o a volte anche di più, ed è riuscito infatti a mantenere la sua conoscenza dell'inglese e, seppur solo a livello orale, anche la conoscenza dell'Igbo e Pidgin English. Inoltre, lo studio del caso ha evidenziato che cos'è il bilinguismo squilibrato e come la posizione della lingua ritenuta più forte e quella ritenuta più debole di un bilingue può cambiare nel tempo. Più precisamente, tutti e 4 i fratelli possono essere considerati bilingui ma con bilinguismo sbilanciato, dove la lingua dominante di Stephany e Viktor è l'inglese e la loro lingua più debole è l'italiano, mentre per Kevin la situazione è esattamente l'opposto. Il bilinguismo di Patrick è l'unico che è quasi equilibrato in quanto conosce le due lingue coinvolte allo stesso livello.

In ogni caso, è importante ricordare che questo caso studio si riferisce ad un caso specifico e non sempre il sistema di affidamento consente il mantenimento dei rapporti con la famiglia di origine. Per questo motivo, non è possibile fare una dichiarazione oggettiva assoluta sul bilinguismo dei bambini in affidamento e non è possibile sviluppare una teoria unica valida per ogni caso possibile.

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