

Analysis of the Causes and Characteristics of the New Standard Italian

Jianbo Wang^{1,a,*}

¹126 Middle School, Shenyang, 110000, China

a. 2484637492@qq.com

*corresponding author

Abstract: Italy has produced a new standard Italian, distinct from the traditional grammar, since the 1980s. The domain gradually extends from the spoken style to the semi formal and formal written style. The reasons for the emergence and development of the new standard Italian can be analyzed from three aspects: the internal driving force and flexibility of the language itself are the internal reasons for the emergence of the new standard Italian; The special historical, political and cultural background of postwar Italy became the external factor to promote its development; The oral features of ancient Italian, which were excluded from the standard language in the early stage, are the foundation of the new standard Italian. The main features of the new standard Italian can be analyzed from four aspects: pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax and morphology to explore its formation causes and specific manifestations in order to grasp the latest developments in Italian language and carry out domestic Italian language teaching work.

Keywords: Italian, New Standard Italian, Morphosyntax, Causes, Characteristics

1. Introduction

Since the 1980s, many linguists have begun to notice the emergence of a daily spoken language that is different from the standard Italian language throughout Italy. In 1987, the linguist Gaetano berruto [1] advocated that Sabatini's "average Italian" be changed to "Italiano Neo standard". Since then, the name "new standard Italian" has gradually been accepted by linguists. It is a new language variant formed by the invasion of non-standard languages (such as popular Italian, local Italian, conversational Italian, etc.) into the standard language specification and gradual solidification. Since the 1980s, the new standard Italian has gradually spread from the spoken language to the written language, and a large number of linguists have recognized the new standard Italian. The new standard Italian is currently undergoing integration and formation, and studying its new features at various levels of language, vocabulary, syntax, and morphology plays a crucial role in understanding its latest development trends and in carrying out domestic Italian language teaching work.

2. The formation and development of the new standard Italian

The emergence of the new standard Italian has its internal driving force of language. As stated in the text: "Standard language is usually established by grammar books and dictionaries, and its core concept is 'rules'. However, the establishment of any standard also means that a part of individuality,

freedom, originality and individual expression will be lost." In contrast, the popular language is more vivid and flexible, representing the communication needs of the general public, challenging the authority of the standard language, and serving as the soil for innovation[2].

Social factors have accelerated the integration of local spoken language and standard language. After World War II, Italy achieved political unification, laying a solid foundation for the standardization of culture and language. However, "the Italian dialect has an ancient origin, a long history, a large number and great influence. Even though the state promotes compulsory education and compulsorily defines the standard language as the official standard language, people still use the local dialect as the main communication tool in their daily life or family environment." Nowadays, mass media such as radio, film and television have made communication closer, prompting the integration of local spoken language into the standard official language. The new standard Italian is the product of the integration of dialects, local Italian and standard language, reflecting the trend of social homogenization.

It is also the revival of ancient Italian, based on ancient Italian and absorbing its oral features. For example, "Dante, the father of the Italian language, used colloquial expressions in *The Divine Comedy* to enhance the natural fluency of poetry, while Manzoni, a literary giant who made an important contribution to the unification of the Italian language, also used a hybrid form of Tuscan literary language and Lombardy dialect in *The Betrothed Couple*, so as to make the dialogue more in line with the identity characteristics of the characters." Previously, the oral phenomena in ancient Italian were excluded from modern norms, but now they have been restored.

Standard Italian is rooted in written language and unified only through compulsory education enforced by the state, which is a top-down process. On the contrary, the new standard Italian is a bottom-up process in which local dialects and spoken language invade written language. Its birth is due to the fact that people who used dialects as the sole communication tool in the early stage tried to use standard Italian, and the traditional grammar rules no longer apply[3].

3. Characteristics of the new standard Italian

With the gradual development of the new standard Italian, the features of pronunciation, phonology, rhythm, syntactic morphology and so on began to be paid attention to. For example, Sabatini summed up 35 features of "average Italian" [4] in 1985, and then in 1990 he reduced them to 14 features of syntactic morphology [5]. In 2002, Tavoni called the new standard Italian "Italian in motion", listing 51 syntactic, morphological and lexical features [6].

Italian is still changing. Many of the new standard Italian features discovered by linguists in the past have been widely accepted and are no longer regarded as errors. Combined with the actual changes in Italian in the new era, this paper summarizes the characteristics of the new standard Italian from four levels, and explains them from four perspectives: phonetic level, lexical level, syntactic level and morphological level.

3.1. Phonetic features

3.1.1. Blurry vowel boundaries of opening and closing mouth

Italian vowels have four degrees of opening and closing, so there are actually seven vowels, which are two closed accents [i] and [u], two semi closed accents [e] and [o], two semi open accents [ɛ] and [ɔ] and one open accent [a]. Vowels E and o have two ways of opening and closing at the same time. The standard language stipulates that the opening and closing vowels must be strictly distinguished, because words with the same spelling will produce two words with completely different meanings due to the opening and closing vowels, such as P è SCA and P é SCA. The former is an open accent, referring to the fruit "peach", while the latter is a closed accent, referring to "fishing". However, in

the actual spoken language, this grammatical provision is difficult to implement, so that the boundaries of open and closed vowels are gradually blurred. The general public, including those with higher education level, no longer make a clear distinction, and pronunciation errors such as reading the closed vowel e in perch é (because) into the closed vowel perch è often occur. [7]

3.1.2. The blurred boundaries of clear and voiced consonants

Voiced consonants between vowels means that clear consonants between two vowels should be voiced. The turbidity of consonants between vowels is an important change in the evolution of Roman language. S in Latin is almost all unvoiced, while s in Italian is divided into two kinds of unvoiced consonants. The consonant "s" has a clear geographical distribution in the Italian standard language, which is an important feature to distinguish the northern and southern dialects. The turbid phenomenon of "s" between vowels is very obvious in northern Italy, while the clear consonant "s" between vowels originally belonging to Latin is retained in central and southern Italy, such as the pronunciation of Casa in the north and south is/kaza/and/kasa/.

But in Modern Italian, the turbid phenomenon of the clear consonant "s" between vowels has spread from the northern region to the whole of Italy. The boundary between [S] unvoiced tone and [Z] is gradually blurred. Tuscany is located in the middle of Italy. At first, Tuscany dialect had no obvious phenomenon of voiced consonants between vowels, but linguist serianni pointed out that Florence had voiced most of the sibilantes, and the only words still voiced were CASA, cosa, così and words with -oso as suffix. [8]. In addition, the consonant "Z" will also become turbid at the beginning of a word, such as ZIO. This shows that the spoken language features of specific regions, which were initially limited to local Italian, have evolved into a common language phenomenon in the country.

3.1.3. Reduced repetition of phoneme morphology

Phoneme morphological repetition originally refers to a unique phonetic phenomenon in Italian and some West Germanic languages. It refers to that when two special words are combined, the consonant at the beginning of the second word should be prolonged, such as a ccasa, dove vvai, Ho ffame, etc. During the diachronic development of Italian, the phenomenon of phoneme repetition expanded from the phonetic level to the morphological level, forming consonant repetition (geminata) words, such as senno, VABB è and so on. In the new standard Italian, the repetition of phoneme morphology gradually decreases, for example, it does not exist in the North (spoken) and Sardinia [9].

3.1.4. The reduction of the usage of "d" consonant

"D" consonant refers to that when spelling or pronouncing two adjacent vowels, they should be separated by D to avoid phonological disharmony. It mainly includes ad (when a is a preposition), ed (when e is connected) and OD (when o is connected). The reduction of the usage of "d" consonant in the new standard Italian is reflected in two aspects: the D consonant is limited between two identical vowels and the "od" consonant is facing to disappear. In the new Italian standard language, in addition to the fixed idioms, such as ad esempio, ad Eccezione, etc., only D is used to co rhyme when the same vowel is repeated, such as ad andare, e anche, ed Ecco, ad ascoltare, etc. The usage of "od" in consonant gradually disappeared, such as ieri o Oggi. In Modern Italian, the reduction of the usage of D consonant reflects the simplification process of Italian.

3.2. Lexical features

3.2.1. Anglicization

The change of vocabulary reflects the influence of social culture on language. The penetration of English in finance, science and technology, entertainment, pop music, fashion, sports, politics, media networks and other fields reflects the trend of international integration in Italy under the background of globalization. The use of English has even evolved into a way to reflect "upper class", "modern" or "fashion".

The phenomenon of Italian Englishization usually has three forms: 1) directly absorb new words, such as sport, film, jazz, iceberg, stress, virus, etc. 2) Change the part of speech in English, such as "format" formatare (nouns become Italian verbs); 3) Create new Italian words according to the English phoneme form, such as Bi stecca (steak) corresponding to the English word "beef steak". More common is the "E - (Electronic) prefix since the new era, such as e-commerce.

The Anglicization of Italian is not only reflected in the lexical level, but also has an impact on the syntactic and even semantic levels. For example, the expression of ordinal numeral plus superlative is completely derived from English. It appeared in Italian after the 1980s, such as "larussia è IL Sesto mercato più Grande d'europa." (Russia is the sixth largest market in Europe). Such expressions are generally accepted without grammatical errors [10]

3.2.2. Dialect infiltration

The localization and dialectalization of Italian vocabulary in the new standard are prominent. Italian has a short history as the official language of national unity, and the influence of local dialects is still strong. In recent years, Northern dialects have spread significantly throughout Italy preferring to use Cornetti (northern dialect) rather than fagiolini (standard language).

Roman dialect also has great influence. For example, d'achille once pointed out that young people frequently use Roman dialect in oral communication, thus forming a new vocabulary. [11] For example, "Piotta" in the Roman dialect originally refers to a currency with a face value of 100 lira, and can also be used to refer to a currency with a face value of 1 euro. But then "Pitta" gradually became formal, deriving the verb "Piott à (RE)" which refers to "running". From the number 100, the concept of 100 kilometers per hour was transformed, and the symbolic meaning of "fast" was extracted [12].

3.2.3. The spread of the usage of specific prefixes and suffixes

In the new standard Italian, some specific prefixes and suffixes are used more frequently, forming a new way of word formation. Common "prefixes" include: Super -, mega -, maxi -, para -, inter -, Euro -, etc. Some superlative prefixes, such as iper, can be used alone as adjectives or nouns without forming compound words. For example, iper in "IL finalone iper" is used as the adjective list "super", or "iper" is used as the noun list "supermarket" [13]. In 2014, muoio mentioned the phenomenon of overlapping the superlative prefixes, such as "l'iper-giga-super-maxi-megascreen". [14] The increasing usage of the suffix involves nouns, verbs and adjectives. The noun suffix mainly includes: -ismo, -ista, -zione, -eria, -aro, etc. the Verb Suffixes include -zzare, -Eggiare, etc., and the adjective suffix mainly refers to -ale, etc. The phenomenon of the reduction of the nickname of "emotion" has also been rampant, such as attimino, regalino, pensierino, momentino, pullmino, filino, etc.

In addition, the usage of the highest level suffix "-issimo" has also spread greatly (especially in Milan). In standard Italian, the superlative suffix "-issimo", which indicates exaggeration or emphasis, was originally used only as an adjective, but in the new standard Italian, it has spread to nouns, such

as 'accordissimo, and even the past participle in the past tense, such as "Lo Spettacolo è stato applauditissimo." (the program is very popular) [12]

3.3. Syntactic features

3.3.1. Suspended topics

Suspended topics can also be called free topics (tema libero) or absolute topics (tema assoluto). Suspended topics indicate changes in the predicate structure, with topic or emphasis components shifted to the beginning of the sentence. Suspended topics are usually independent structures that are loosely connected to the declarative sentence at the syntactic level, with only semantic connections, and long pauses between nominal segments (SN) and their subsequent components. The biggest difference between the suspended topic and the shift structure lies in the mandatory syntactic connection between the topic and the sentence, which prepositions or pronouns repeat. The term 'suspended' refers to the fact that the topic component has no syntactic functional support and can only be 'suspended in the air'. In addition, suspended topics can usually only be located at the left edge of the sentence, while topic components in shift structures can also be located at the right edge (right shift). Left shifted topics are usually known information, while suspended topics primarily serve to emphasize an "unexpected topic" [15]

(Mario, è responsabilità sua prendere i libri.)

(Mario, it's his responsibility to take the book)

Suspended topics may appear among less educated communicators who, due to a lack of knowledge, are unable to correctly grasp standard grammar and mistakenly plan sentence layouts. In addition, using suspended topics may also be simply to highlight the topic being presented. The emergence of suspended topics in modern Italian is not related to language domain or text type, and is not limited to spoken language, but is becoming increasingly common in written language as well. Xu juju mentioned in "Modern Chinese Textual Linguistics" that suspended topics rarely appear in written or formal spoken language in major European languages such as English. [16] But it is not uncommon for Italian writers to use suspended topics in their works, and writers consciously break syntactic consistency, allowing literary language to acquire the characteristics of fluent and natural spoken language. As stated in Manzoni's "The Promised Couple":

Questo Signore, Dio gli ha toccato il cuore. (Chapter 24 of "The Promised Couple") [17]

(This gentleman, God has touched his soul.)

Suspended topics often appear in Italian proverbs, such as: Chi si fa pecora, il lupo se lo mangia.

3.3.2. Split structure

Splitting structure refers to dividing a sentence into two parts, the main clause and the subordinate clause. The first part emphasizes a particular grammatical/syntactic component, namely "new information", while the second part is "known information". The separated components are shifted to the beginning of the sentence, also achieving focus, introduced by Essere, while the second part is the 'Pseudo relative clause' (Pseudorelativa) introduced by the connecting word 'che'. Roggia pointed out in "Italian Split Sentences" that split sentences are an important way of expressing focus informative (focus informativo) in modern Italian, and the narrator can convey the most important information to the listener through split sentences. [18] Due to the emphasis function of split sentences, they are often used in negative and interrogative sentences to highlight a negative or interrogative message.

Era lui che e' arrivato prima.

(He arrived earliest.)

Non è per questo che lui è andato via.

(He didn't leave because of this.)

3.3.3. "Che" multivalued phenomenon

The Che multivalued phenomenon refers to the greatly expanded scope of use of Che, which almost assumes most of the functions of relational pronouns in spoken language. Traditional grammar only uses 'che' as explanatory conjunctions and relational words to indicate the subject or indirect object, but the new standard Italian allows 'che' to serve as conjunctions for time, purpose, result, and reason. The Che multivalued phenomenon is not innovative, and contemporary Italian (in informal settings) is the closest representative of 16th century literary language. The multiple values of che reflect the process of re establishing the standard of Italian language and are an important indicator of the new standard of Italian language. The use of che to connect the main clause and subordinate clause is one of the most typical features of sub standard Italian and lower level Italian. Due to economic and labor-saving considerations, Che multi value is very common in modern Italian spoken language. The phenomenon of Che multi value is mainly reflected in Che's use as a time conjunction, relative pronoun, cause, purpose, and result conjunction.

1) Che replaces *in cui* and *nel momento in cui* as a time conjunction, giving it a new "time value". The time value of Che is the most typical Italian grammar usage and the most tolerable grammatical phenomenon [19].

un ora che ti aspetto.

(I've been waiting for you for an hour)

2) Che replaces the relative pronoun *cui*, *il quale*, Use conjunctions in relative clauses. In standard Italian, 'che' can only refer to the subject and direct object antecedent, while indirect object antecedent must be prepositioned with '*cui*' or '*il quale*'. But in modern Italian, che can replace both, such as: *La ragazza che ho parlato era Maria.*

The girl who talked to me is Maria

3) Che acts as a conjunction in the cause, purpose, and result clauses,

Vieni, che te lo spiego. (Result)

(You come, I'll explain to you.)

Mangia, che ti fa bene. (Purpose)

(Eat it, it's good for your health.)

Vai a letto che è tardi (reason)

(Go to sleep, it's late.)

3.3.4. Ci Presenting Structure

The multifunctionality of Italian *ci* is a key focus of research for Italian linguists. Numerous different theoretical explanations have emerged throughout its historical development, leading to the widely recognized two structures of *ci*: existence (*esistenziale*) and presentation (*presentativo*) The CI presentation structure usually consists of three parts: a function word (*espletivo*) or a virtual subject (*soggetto nullio*), an existential verb essay, and a postverb logical subject. The representational structure of *Ci* is derived from *c'è* (singular form) or *ci sono* (plural form), indicating the existence or location of (*esistere/trovarsi*). *Ci* presentation sentence is a more convenient and economical way of communication, with a simple hierarchical layout and clear focus. Berruto pointed out that *Ci* presentation sentence refers to dividing a multi statement sentence structure (*polirema*) into two single statement sentence structures (*monorema*), usually emphasizing the information in the first single statement sentence. [20] *Ci* presentation structure breaks down information into multiple information units, which can better emphasize new information. However, from a pragmatic perspective, the postverbal noun phrase (postverbal NP) in the Italian *Ci* construction can only convey new

information to the discourse, and whether it is new information to potential listeners/readers is irrelevant.

C'è il cane che sta abbaiano.
(There is a barking dog.)

3.4. Morphological features

3.4.1. Reconstruction of Verb Tense System

1) Replacing the Far Past with the Near Past

In the new standard Italian, the near past tense (passato prossimo) is widely used throughout Italy and almost completely replaces the far past tense (passato remoto) in northern Italy. The frequency of using the far past tense in central and southern Italy was originally much higher than the near past tense, but now there is a growing tendency to choose the closer tense when telling about a distant event. The near past tense can even replace the anterior future tense in informal spoken language, such as *Appena l'hai fatto, esco io*.

2) Unfinished usage is rampant

In the new standard Italian, the function of the imperfect tense has been added. Unfinished tense in standard language refers to a sustained action in the past

It can also be used in compound sentences with the near past or far past tense to express the background of another action. However, in the new standard Italian, the incomplete tense has multiple functions, including "contrafactual" and uncertainty. It can be used in hypothetical sentences to replace the subjunctive form in subordinate clauses or the conditional form in the main clause, indicating impossible events. It can also be used in scenarios such as "nightmares" and "games" to indicate uncertainty [21]. It can replace the future tense to indicate future events and express a polite tone.

3) Direct presentation replaces virtual presentation

The phenomenon of virtual form giving way to expressive form mainly involves spoken language and some written language (mainly media)

Language is most evident in four types of clauses: thinking verb clauses, conditional clauses, indirect interrogative clauses, and restrictive clauses. For example:

Credo che loro devono venire.

(I think they will come)

Non so come hanno fatto.

(I don't know how they did it.)

4) The widespread use of Stare+subverbs

In the new standard Italian, the combination of Stare and auxiliary verbs has been influenced by English, and the usage of progressive expressions has gradually increased. The verb "Stare (in)" has two functions when used in conjunction with the auxiliary verb "gerundio", which can express both sustained action (durativi) and progressive action (pro gradivi). When it comes to persistence, it can refer to habitual actions or the continuous occurrence of a one-time event within a longer range of events, such as "Su questo progetto sto lavorando per tre anni (I have been working on this project for three years)". When expressing progressiveness, it refers to a change in the verb state, such as "Sto andando". In addition to the gradual increase in usage, the scope of use of "- ando" in the new standard Italian language is gradually expanding. It can not only be used for nouns that have not yet been verbalized, such as "pizza pizzando", which is located at the beginning of the sentence to indicate "end", such as "concludendo", but can also be used in passive sentences to express an active meaning, such as "Era stato convocato dichiarando la sua estraneità ai fatti." ("he is summoned and claims that this matter has nothing to do with him")

3.4.2. Reconstruction of Pronouns System

1) Lui/lei/loro replaces egli/ella/essi as nominative pronouns in the new standard of Italian pronouns. The important change in the pronoun system is that third person stressed nominative pronouns are gradually replaced by unstressed complements/accusative pronouns. The standard grammar from the 1920s to the 1990s defined third person nominative pronouns as Egli (singular masculine), ella (singular feminine), esso (singular masculine), and essi (plural masculine), while Lui, lei, and loro were complementary or objective pronouns. Therefore, "Lei parla" was considered an incorrect form. But in the new standard Italian, rereading the nominative pronouns egli/ella/essi/esso is considered outdated antiques, limited to extremely formal documents or other written language. Lui can refer to both humans and animals, while the pronoun esso, which previously referred to objects, is almost no longer used and has been completely replaced by quello. Lui, lei, and loro have long been the universal norms for nominative pronouns in Italian at different levels of variation.

2) Gli replaces le/loro as an indirect object personal pronoun

In modern Italian, gli (before verb) has gradually been used instead of loro (after verb) as a possessive pronoun, such as "Gli ho detto=hodetto (a) loro. (I told them)". Gli is the unstressed form of loro. When used as a possessive pronoun, there is no singular, plural variation, and it can represent loro, a loro, a essi, a esse. The use of Gli instead of loro is very common in spoken language, especially in home language. It is worth noting that although it has become a consensus to replace a loro with the case gli, the use of gli to replace the feminine singular and case le is still considered a serious mistake.

3) Te replaces tu as the nominative pronoun

The usage of the second person singular accusative (te) in the new standard Italian is gradually expanding, replacing the nominative pronoun (Tu) in the subject position, with "Io e te (me and you)" being the most common. When the first person singular and second person singular pronouns are used side by side, their correct form should be "tu ed io" or "Io e tu". However, in the dialects of central northern Italy and Sardinia, it is very common to use the accusative "te" instead of the nominative "tu", so "Io e tu" is often replaced by "Io e te". Initially, 'Io e te' was not accepted by linguists and was even relegated to an unbearable Tuscan usage. But since the 1990s, most standard Italian grammar books have recognized the legal status of "Io e te". Linguist Valle listed Io e te as a mandatory use of the accusative case in his book "Long Live Grammar". In actual spoken language, the use of Te as a subject pronoun is not limited to this usage, and it is also common to use it alone as a subject, such as "Vieni anche te.". [22]

3.4.3. High frequency use of Ci

There is a trend towards verbalization and lexicalization of the minor word 'ci' in modern Italian. Ci can be used as a place adverb in standard Italian, referring to "here/there", such as "Ci vado spesso". But in the new standard Italian, ci can also be used to emphasize the semantic and phonetic functions of the verb that follows it. The personal attachment word ci can serve as a complement and has a tendency to spread to verbs, often used in conjunction with the case, such as "pensarci" and "tenerci". In addition, the particle ci has a tendency towards lexicalization, with the most common expression being the combination of ci and the auxiliary verb avere, such as "ci hofame."

4. Conclusion

Since the 1980s, Italian has undergone significant changes, with a series of new features appearing in popular language, family communication language, and local language. Since the 21st century, written language has also begun to incorporate language features that were previously considered sub

standard or only present in spoken language, and a new standard Italian language is gradually forming throughout Italy. The new standard Italian follows a bottom-up reverse development path, reflecting the vitality and flexibility of the language itself. This article summarizes the new features of the new standard Italian language and provides an in-depth interpretation of the changes in modern Italian language on four levels: phonetics, vocabulary, syntax, and morphology. A big part of how the Italian language is changing is the syntactic morphology level. For example, left-right shift, suspended topics, split structures, and *ci* presentation sentences have become more common since changes were made to the tagging system. In addition, the tense voice system and pronoun system of verbs have undergone reorganization and shown a trend towards simplification. Studying the causes and specific characteristics of the emergence of the new standard Italian language is of great significance for grasping the latest developments in Italian language and carrying out domestic Italian language teaching work

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