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January 14, 2023

Dear Dr Emanuela De Blasio

Regarding the paper "Analysis of Arabic variety in Italy: the case of immigrant rappers" published in Romano-Arabica XXI, the Editors, on the indication of the authors, certify that notes 1,2 are modified as follows:

NOTES 1:

Emanuela De Blasio has dealt with the following paragraphs: the introduction, the structure of the work, the rap and immigration: the Italian case, the conclusion, the bibliography. She has carried out the corpus analysis and the paragraphs on Ghali and Zanko.

NOTES 2:

Ludovica Martini has collaborated on the sitographic sources and on the paragraph about Master Sina.

These changes will be reported in the next issue of the Journal.

Best regards,

Prof. George Grigore

Editor in Chef

Romano-Arabica Journal

Center for Arab Studies

University of Bucharest





University of Bucharest
Center for Arab Studies

Romano-Arabica XXI

The Outsiders' Arabic:
From Peripheral to Diaspora Varieties



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From Peripheral to Diaspora Varieties*



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ANALYSIS OF ARABIC VARIETY IN ITALY: THE CASE OF IMMIGRANT RAPPERS

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Abstract: There are varieties of Arabic spoken by Arab immigrants, whose language has witnessed various changes. In particular, the sons of immigrants are marked by a dual component in their language: the native language and the target language. Many young second-generation rappers express themselves in their lyrics in the dialectal variant, the language of oral communication, sometimes marked by the influence of the target language. The texts are characterized by interfrastic and intrafrastic transglossia, a phenomenon typical of contact languages. One of the main characteristics of rap, which is based on lived experiences and reflects the surrounding reality, is that of spontaneity and this is also manifested in language.

In Italy, pioneer of a rap characterized by a multilingualism is Zanko El-Arabe Blanco, of Syrian origin, who sings in Italian, Arabic and French. Other artists, mostly from North Africa, sing in different languages or alternate them within the same piece, through bilingual statements such as the Italian-Egyptian Amir Issaa, the Moroccan Maruego, the Maghrebizz group (whose Italian is marked by a strong Milanese accent) and the controversial Tunisian rapper Karkadan.

Through the analysis of the texts of some rappers of Arab origin, mostly second-generation immigrants in Italy, it is possible to make considerations of a linguistic and socio-linguistic nature. These texts can represent sources that reveal a tendency in the language of youth and therefore can provide us with data on the evolution of the Arabic language in the specific context of immigration examined.

Keywords: *Italo-Arab rappers, youth language, linguistics, sociolinguistics, Arabic dialectology*

Introduction

Among the peripheral varieties of Arabic we can include the Arabic spoken by first or second generation immigrants which testifies to the fluidity of the language in time and space.

In particular, the sons of immigrants are affected in their language by a double component: the language of their parents and the target language. Linguistic variation is sometimes connected to certain social factors: the characteristics of the speaker and the situations of use (Berruto 2011).

¹ The author has dealt with the following paragraphs: the introduction, the structure of the work, the rap and immigration: the Italian case and the bibliography. She has carried out the analysis of the corpus.

² The author has researched and collaborated in the study of the texts and has dealt with the sitographic sources..

Literature on source language and the language of the country of immigration, on linguistic variation and the passage from one code to another is quite extensive.³ Italy in the last twenty years is characterized by a neoplurilingualism⁴, but it took many years for the first results of sociolinguistic research⁵: in these studies various factors are taken into consideration, such as the recognition of the dynamics between language of origin and language of the country of immigration and the typological profile of immigrant languages (Gualdo, Clemenzi 2016).

Despite the phenomenon of Arab immigration in Italy is on the rise (we remember that the Moroccan community is currently the third largest in Italy⁶), studies on the interaction between Arabic and Italian and on the language of first and second generation Arab immigrants are small and mainly focused on learning Italian from Arabic speakers.

Specifically, linguistic analyzes on the texts of Italian rappers of Arab origin are almost non-existent. The lyrics of the songs can represent sources for investigating the changes inherent in the language that does not represent a uniform, immutable block but varies in diachrony, therefore it changes in the lexicon and its structures in relation to the passage of time and in relation to the changes in culture and society. About the Italian context, in the lyrics of rappers of Arab origin we witness the linguistic phenomenon of *transglossia* (Durand 2009): rappers share two languages Arabic/Italian and intertwine the use of the two languages regardless of the situation. In the texts we observe interphrastic transglossia in which the singer alternates utterances in the two languages, intraphrastic in which the alternation takes place in the single utterance and sometimes also translational; in the latter case, what is expressed in the original language, it is repeated and translated into the target language and vice versa.

One of the main features of rap⁷ is to reproduce the lived experiences and the surrounding reality (its motto is: “keep it real”⁸) and this spontaneity is also manifested in the language. This musical genre⁹ is based on the profusion of words, sometimes on improvisation, so it is possible to speak of a switching of linguistic registers, similar to what happens in spontaneous speech.

Structure of the work

This research focuses on preliminary reflections about the linguistic behavior of Arab immigrants in Italy, through the collection of linguistic productions deriving from musical texts realized by immigrant rappers of Arab origin. The singers taken into consideration for

³ Among the many studies see: Dabène, L. & Billiez, J. 1986.

⁴ Bagna, Barni, Vedovelli, 2007.

⁵ Among the first contributions on multilingualism in Italy we remember Favaro, 2000.
⁶ www.istat.it.

⁷ Here we will deal in particular with reality rap. For more information for reality rap see Krims 2000.

⁸ The interest in reality is often summed up by the hip hop language with the motto “keep it real”.

⁹ The studies on hip hop and rap are international and transdisciplinary, they include not only the analysis of aesthetics, but also embrace aspects of linguistics (Alim, Awad, Pennycook 2009; Terkhourafi 2010). Furthermore, research is not limited to the phenomenon in the United States (Forman, Neal 2004), but they address its different aspects in many different contexts.

the present study are Ghali, Zanko, Master Sina¹⁰. The selected *corpus* is composed of the most representative lyrics of the authors mentioned. We mainly analyzed the verses in which there are significant examples of alternating code and mixed languages¹¹.

The titles and Arabic parts of the songs are reported as they appear in the original text, that is in the Latin alphabet with no graphic normalization. In fact, for transliteration the authors make use of the so-called *3arabizi* or *Arabizi* (Yaghan, 2008), the Arabic language of the chats which relies on the most common European spelling in the country, English or French, and which uses the Latin alphabet for “common” phonemes while for all the other phonemes it uses numerical graphemes (Mion, 2016). The scientific transcription of the verses in Arabic is reported in the note together with the explanation of some words and the analysis of idioms and colloquial expressions. Only in the case of the singer Master Sina the lyrics appear on the sites in the Arabic alphabet.

The *corpus* is the subject of a linguistic and socio-linguistic considerations. The linguistic analysis of the texts is preceded by some information regarding the authors, useful for understanding the themes of their texts, as well as their linguistic and stylistic choices.

Rap and immigration: The Italian case

The real turning point in the recent history of immigration in Italy is the period 1990-1992¹².

The big picture is made very complex by various socio-economic and linguistic factors: the diversity of the migratory project between immigrants accompanied or not by a family and children; the economic and cultural level of the families (the case of parents who are completely illiterate in the native language is not uncommon) and the greater or lesser degree of integration into the local workplace; the different territorial distribution of immigrant communities, more numerous in the Center-North and in the large urban centers and the different impact of immigration on the pre-existing demographic framework; the greater or lesser typological distance between the language of origin and Italian.

Music has always recorded and preserved the traces of migratory flows (Gnisci 2006): in a globalized world we are witnessing the passage of genres such as salsa, raï, reggae and the so-called world music that contribute to mutual knowledge between different cultures. In England in the nineties, musicians of Indian origin made known bhangra-rap; in France the raï¹³ became an instrument for the affirmation of the cultural

¹⁰ The names of the singers are kept in the Anglo / Francographic version. Although in rendering a personal name with the Latin alphabet there is the possibility of resorting to scientific transcription, the Latin rendering of Arabic names and surnames must be based by convention on their dialect and non-classical pronunciation and adapts to the spelling of European languages of the colonial period, that is English and French.

¹¹ The full lyrics are available online at <https://genius.com/>.

¹² The Law of 28 February 1990 no. 39 (better known as the Martelli Law) which introduces for the first time a programming of entry flows, followed by an initial regularization of over 200,000 migrants coming mostly from North Africa. Other amnesties, of a more or less emergency nature, will follow one another in the following years and continue today.

¹³ This musical style, characterized by a strong vocal expressiveness with a ethnic value, was born in the 1920s, in the period of the great migration from the countryside to the city and has the port city of Oran as

identity of Maghrebi immigrants and since the nineties hip hop and in particular rap tells the social tensions of young immigrants from the French suburbs. Caubet (2007) conducted an analysis on the situation of music in France from the 1980s onwards, also in relation to the introduction of different languages, first of all Maghreb Arabic.

In Italy since the 1980s there has been the presence of musicians from different geographical areas¹⁴. Rap movement made by the children of immigrants in Italy has grown exponentially, but during the 1990s, no name of immigrant rapper or son of immigrants is present in the anthologies (Pacoda, 1996).

In our day among the languages of rappers of non-Italian origin, the most representative is certainly Arabic (Ferrari, 2018). At the beginning of the 2000s Issam Mrini, known as Lamaislam, born in Morocco and arrived in Bologna at a very young age, is apparently the first immigrant to rap in Italy and the first to mix Italian and Arabic in his songs. In the same years two second generation immigrant singers appeared on the music scene: Amir Issaa of Egyptian origin, born in Rome and Zanko, known as El Arabe Blanco, born in Milan of Syrian parents. Nowadays also other Italian-Arab artists make themselves known and have success as Maruego, Master Sina, Ghali, the controversial rapper of Tunisian origin Karkadan who praises the criminal life¹⁵ and Mahmood, born in Milan from a Sardinian mother and Egyptian father, who won in 2019 the Sanremo Festival, the most important Italian singing competition with the song *Soldi* ("Money")¹⁶ and represented Italy at the Eurovision Song Contest in Tel Aviv¹⁷.

A linguistically interesting aspect that is found in first and second generation immigrant rappers and what makes their lyrics innovative is the use of "the immigrant language"¹⁸, in our case Arabic (in particular the dialectal variety), of Italian (sometimes even of an Italian dialect) and of the traditional foreign languages of rap, especially Anglo-American, expression of a marked pluriguism.

In general, rappers of Arab origin use mainly the Italian language for their lyrics (even the titles of the songs are almost always in Italian), but they introduce some expressions or entire verses in Arabic in order to emphasize their original belonging, but also to reproduce the linguistic reality in which they live.

its main creative place. Among the themes of this kind, in addition to the narration of the hard life of migrants in the cities and the fight against colonialism, there are also loving suffering or the pleasure of the party. The invocation "*Ya rāy*" has a complex semantic value. With this expression, which means "opinion", the subjective vision is highlighted, also through the use of the singular personal pronoun. The messages of the song are enunciated with a rapid and incisive rhythm, following the style of a daily communication.

¹⁴ For further information see Sabelli 2006.

¹⁵ Karkadan is representative of the so-called "gangsta rap": this sub-genre of rap often describes the life of the ghetto from the point of view of a criminal figure.

¹⁶ The song is entirely in Italian except for a single verse: *walad-ī walad-ī ḥabīb-ī ta'āl henā* "my son, my son, my dear, come here".

¹⁷ All the biographical references of the authors can be found on the singers' Facebook pages.

¹⁸ A language belonging to one of the groups of foreign immigrants in Italy that responds to parameters of low social fluctuation, high roots in local social territories, vitality of intra-community use, visibility in linguistic landscapes (Vedovelli 2015: 97).

Corpus analysis

Ghali

Ghali Amdouni, better known as Ghali, is an Italian-Tunisian rapper. Son of two Tunisian immigrants, he was born in Milan in 1993. His personal experience often emerges within his songs: his childhood was deeply shaken by problems with his father, who ended up in jail in Italy and then returned to Tunisia; on the contrary, the relationship with his mother is the source of inspiration for many of his songs. In general, his texts deal with issues such as friendship, family relationships, the use of drugs, but also migration and racism.

The multilingualism of his songs gives the possibility even to those who don't know the Arabic language and culture to familiarize with words and concepts that are unusual in Italy. His songs go beyond the linguistic canons of Italian rap: Ghali, as he stated in some interviews¹⁹, sings in Italian with a Milanese accent, in French with a Maghrebian accent and in Tunisian with an Italian accent. Five different languages appear in his tracklist: French, Spanish and English, as well as Italian and Tunisian Arabic.

The songs examined are: *Wily Wily*²⁰ ("Oh my God") 2016, *Ninna Nanna* ("Lullaby") 2017, *Habibi*²¹ ("My love") 2017 and *Jennifer*²², 2020. We have chosen to highlight and to analyze the passages in which there are significant examples of the contact between the Arabic and Italian languages and remarkable examples of mixtilingualism.

In the Arabic parts of the lyrics, the singer uses the Tunisian dialect. We find some typical features, for example: the phoneme / ġ / is rendered ž [ʒ]; the phoneme / q / is sometimes rendered q [q], but the rendering g [g]²³ is also noted; there is the presence of the *imāla*; first persons of the imperfect have the prefix *n-* (sg. *nafʿal* and pl. *nafʿlū*); we find the typical Tunisian Arabic negation of the verb (*mā-fʿal-s*).

From the analysis of the texts, the passages in which Italian is completely absent appear to be rare. In fact, in Ghali's pieces, Arabic is always alternating or mixed with Italian, which remains the main language of his texts. The only cases in which Arabic prevails over Italian are the refrains of the songs *Habibi* (composed entirely of the repetition of the word *Ḥabīb-ī*), *Wily Wily* and *Jennifer*:

- *Baba menchoufuch / Wily Wily, Nari Nari / 3andi dra 9addech / 3andi dra 9addesh / 3andi dra 9addech / Nari Nari, Wily Wily / Wy golouly kifech / Wy golouly kifech / Wy golouly kifech / Wily Wily, Nari Nari*²⁴ (*Wily Wily*) ("I don't see my father / Oh my God, oh my goodness / For a long time / For a long time / For a long time / Oh my God, oh my

¹⁹ For interviews with Ghali see:

https://www.repubblica.it/spettacoli/musica/2017/06/04/news/ghali_il_ragazzo_della_via_rap_che_canta_l_islam_l_isis_e_i_migranti-167196276/ ; <https://www.youtube.com/c/radio105/search?query=GHALI> .

²⁰ *Wil-ī Wil-ī*.

²¹ *Ḥabīb-ī*.

²² It is a featuring with the Algerian rapper Soolking, who sings the first verse in French and then repeats the verses of the refrain together with Ghali.

²³ This phonological aspect is found in various areas of Tunisia; it can also be considered a typical variation of young Tunisian rappers slang: it is in fact also found in other rappers of Tunisian origin, for example Master Sina as we will see later.

²⁴ *Bāba mā-nšūf-ū-š / Wil-ī Wil-ī, Nēr-ī Nēr-ī / 'and-ī dra' qaddēš / W-igūlū-lī kif āš*.

goodness / And they ask me why / And they ask me why / And they ask me why / Oh my God, oh my goodness”).

- *Gouloulou-loulou-loulou sel3a zulu. Wa3lach? / 7attou lek elvoodoo fel bokhoukhou. Hachak!*²⁵ (Jennifer) (“They told him it’s rubbish. And why? / They gave you a voodoo ritual in the incense. For pity’s sake!”).

The language used by the rapper is therefore a hybrid language, in which Tunisian Arabic and Italian come into contact, alternating and mixing. This gives rise to sudden code-switches, in which the Italian sentence often acts as a descriptive paraphrase of the Arabic and vice versa, as in the following cases:

- *Salam alykom salam alykom / Son venuto in pace (Wily Wily). Selām ‘aley-kom* (“Peace be upon you”) is followed by *son venuto in pace* (“I come in peace”), here through the translation, the concept of the previous Arabic expression is explained.

- *Sto sopra i tetti: 9attous / Vengo dal niente: cactus (Ninna Nanna)* (“I’m on the roofs: cat / I come from nowhere: cactus”). In this case the word in Tunisian Arabic *qattūs* (“cat”), as well as creating the rhyme with the word *cactus*, is used to explain what is said in Italian: *Sto sopra i tetti* (“I’m on the roofs”) so “I’m like a cat”.

The phenomenon of transglossia is used to create alliterations or rhymes and assonances with Italian, as in the following examples:

- *Scusa bras la3jouza*²⁶ (*Habibi*). We observe the assonance between *scusa* and *‘ağūza*. Literally the phrase means “Sorry for the old lady’s head”, in the sense of “Forgive me, do it for the old woman, for my mother”. It’s a colloquial expression of the Tunisian mixed in this case with Italian.

- *Sa7by lascia stare / Non voglio più stress / Khoya, come sto? / Hamdoullah lebes*²⁷ (*Wily Wily*) (“My friend, forget about it / I don’t want to feel stressed anymore / My brother, how am I? / Thank God all right”). Here the Tunisian Arabic expression *lā bās* generates the rhyme with the word *stress*.

- *Nuba, nuba, nuba,*²⁸ *vedo jnoun*²⁹ / *E la mia bolla che diventa igloo (Ninna Nanna)* (“Nuba, nuba, nuba, I see spirits / And my bubble that becomes an igloo”). In this verse the rapper employs alliteration in *ū* using the words *Nūba*, *žnūn*, *igloo*.

²⁵ *Gūlū-lū(-lū-lū) sel’a zūlū. W-‘alāš? / Haṭṭū-lek əl-voodoo fī-l-būḥūḥū. Hašēk!* It refers to a witchcraft practiced in Tunisia. Ghali here uses the term *būḥūḥū* to indicate the word *buḥūr*: incense, used in many Tunisian homes, which is thought to drive away evil spirits. The rapper therefore means “they put a voodoo rite in the incense” then “they made you a witchcraft”.

²⁶ Although in the text it is written *bras la3jouza* the singer pronounces *b-rās l-‘azūza*: the word *‘ağūza* is rendered as *‘azūza*, assimilating *ğ* and *z*, as it often happens in Tunisian Arabic.

²⁷ *Šāḥb-ī lascia stare / Hū-yā, come sto? / Hamdu-llāh lā bās.*

²⁸ With *Nūba* the rapper refers to the indigenous ethnic groups who inhabit the homonymous mountains of Sudan.

²⁹ *Nūba / žnūn.*

- *Mamma weldek rajel*³⁰ / *Prendimi il cuore in bagher*³¹ (*Ninna Nanna*) (“Mom, your son is a man / Hit my heart with a bump”). We can observe here the assonance *ṛāžel* / *bagher*. In some passages Ghali uses other languages, especially French, and in some cases even Spanish and English. Among the songs examined, the most emblematic of the rapper’s multilingualism are undoubtedly *Wily Wily* and *Jennifer*.

In *Wily Wily*’s refrain we find mixed-language utterances in which Tunisian Arabic, Italian and French are mixed: *Ndiro lhala sans pitié*³² / *Fratello ma 3la balich* / *En ma vie ho visto bezaḥ* / *Quindi adesso raḥma leh* / *Sa7bi lascia stare* / *Non voglio più stress* / *Khoya, come sto?* / *Hamdoullah lebes* (“Let’s mess around with no mercy / Brother I don’t care / I’ve seen too much in my life / So now no mercy / My friend, forget about it / I don’t want to feel stressed anymore / My brother, how am I? Thank God all right”). In an other verse of the song we also find the phrase: *Ma 3la balich on s’en bat les couilles* (“I don’t care, we don’t give a damn”).

Ghali in these verses makes the most of the potential of multilingualism, by creating a sequence of paraphrases and equivalent expressions in the three languages. Some words and expressions in Tunisian Arabic have the same sense as the Italian and French ones; for example, *mā-’alā bāl-ī-š* (“I don’t care”) can be seen as the translation of the French *on s’en bat les couilles* (“we don’t give a damn”) and of the Italian *non voglio più stress* (“I don’t want to feel stressed anymore”); *ḥū-yā* is the equivalent of the Italian word *fratello* “brother”, epithet used to refer to a friend; *raḥma lā* (“no mercy”) is the equivalent of the French *sans pitié*.

The verse that most of all shows Ghali’s multilingualism is: *En ma vie ho visto bezaḥ*³³ (“I’ve seen too much in my life”) wherein the sentence is composed of French, Italian and Arabic mixed, creating almost a single language.

In the lyric *Jennifer* words and expressions in French, English, Arabic and Spanish alternate continuously:

- *Piccola, sei la mia piccola* / *C’est ma petite* / *Piccola, sei la mia piccola* / *C’est ma petite* / *Oh, nari, nari, nari, ne. Baby* / *So many, many jealousies. Coño* / *Oh, nari, nari, nari, ne. Wa3lach*³⁴ / *Jenni-Jenni-Jenni-Jennifer. I love you.* (“Baby, you’re my baby / You’re my baby / You’re my baby / Oh, my goodness. Baby / So many many jealousies. Pussy / Oh, my goodness. And why? / Jennifer. I love you”).

- *Bonita. Hbiba*.³⁵ *Yeah, on y va. Oh, la-la.* / *Fel 7oma, fumiamo shisha*³⁶. (“Beautiful. Darling. Yeah, let’s go. Oh, la-la. / In the neighborhood, we smoke the hookah”).

³⁰ *weld-ek ṛāžel*.

³¹ The word *bagher* in Italian refers to the return shot that is made in volleyball by hitting the ball from the bottom up by means of overlapping hands. It’s the Italian word for “bump”.

³² *Ndīrō l-ḥāla*.

³³ *bə-ṣ-ṣāḥ*.

³⁴ *Nēr-ī, nēr-ī, nēr-ī, nē. W-’alāš?*

³⁵ *Ḥbība*.

³⁶ *Fī-l-ḥūma* / *šīša*. Here Ghali refers to the Tunisian popular neighborhoods where there are the so-called “Shisha” bars, where you can smoke the hookah.

From a lexical point of view, we find some examples of linguistic loan as *igloo* from English “igloo”, a voice of Eskimo origin and *voodoo* (lit. “divinity”), from a voice of the Fon language of West Africa; through English “voodoo” this word has become part of the dictionaries of many languages.

We note in Ghali’s texts an evident use of the following expressions: *ḥū-yā* lit. “my brother”, *w-Allāh* “I swear” and *ḥabīb-ī* “my love”³⁷.

Ḥū-yā is used with a vocative function, to call and greet someone as a sign of friendship:

- *Khoya, come sto?* (“My brother, how am I?”) (*Wily Wily*);

- *Khoya indemoniato, 3endo jnuno*³⁸ / *Khoya, grrah, challet ro7o*³⁹ (“My demon-possessed brother has his demons / Brother, grrah, he’s on fire”⁴⁰) (*Jennifer*).

Kho is a calque from *fra’* (abbreviation for *fratello*), in its turn derived from the Anglo-American “bro” (from “brother”). In Italian and American rap lyrics, *fra’* and “bro” do not indicate a real kinship, but rather the same belonging, the same aims, a sort of street consanguinity. In these texts *kho* takes on the same meaning, alternating with *fra’* which is still quite used (less frequent instead the English “bro”).

The expression *W-Allāh* is used frequently and is often employed in conjunction with Italian *giuro* (“I swear”), with the effect of reinforcing the concept and the act of the oath:

-*Giuro, wallah, fra’ non mi piace*⁴¹ (*Wily Wily*) (“I swear, bro I don’t like it”);

-*Non è per soldi, giuro, wallah (Ninna Nanna)* (“It’s not about money, I swear”).

We find the expression *Ḥabīb-ī* as well as in the refrain of the song *Habibi* also in *Wily Wily* in the following verse: *Habibi / Ya nor l3in*⁴² (“My love / Light of my eyes”).

Finally, in all the texts we note the repeated use of exclamations like *Wily wily*, *Nari nari*; *Ah, Wily Wily / Ah, Nari Nari*. These expressions are generally used in everyday Tunisian Arabic speech to describe mostly negative situations and can be translated into English with “Oh my God”, “Oh my goodness”; we also find the expression *Aman aman*⁴³ which is used in the Tunisian dialect with an exhortative function and it can be considered as the equivalent of the English “come on, please”.

³⁷ *Ḥabīb-ī* is an expression that Ghali made famous in 2017 with the song that has this title. This expression had great resonance first among the young audience (also because Ghali repeats it nine times in the refrain of his song) and then reached the Italian general public in 2019, when the Italian-Egyptian rapper Mahmood used it in a verse of the song *Soldi*.

³⁸ *‘and-ō žnūn-ō*.

³⁹ *Ḥū-yā / šā’lat rōh-ō*.

⁴⁰ Lit.: “his soul has been ignited”, thus “he caught on fire, he ignited” figuratively.

⁴¹ We note in this verse the contrast given by the juxtaposition of an Arab-Tunisian expression with a religious connotation and the Italian colloquial one *fra’*.

⁴² *Ḥabīb-ī/Yā nūr əl-‘ayn*. Possible reference to Amr Diab’s Arabic song entitled *Nor El Ein*.

⁴³ *Amān amān*.

Zanko

Zanko El Arabe Blanco, stage name of Zuhdi Fahle, is a rapper born in Milan in 1985 from Syrian parents. He is one of the pioneers of multilingual rap in Italy: Italian, Arabic, French and some expressions in Spanish and English are alternated and mixed in his lyrics. The MetroCosmoPoliTown album is the first bilingual (Italian-Arabic) album and at the same time the most multi-ethnic in the history of Italian rap, with the participation of nine artists from four continents. The lyrics examined here are: *Essere normale* (“Being normal”) and *Stranieri in ogni nazione* (“Strangers in every nation”), both published in 2009⁴⁴.

In these texts, Zanko uses Italian as his main language, alternating verses in Arabic. In the lyrics, the rapper uses his native dialect, the Syrian Arabic of which we find some typical features, for example: the uvular phoneme /q/ is mostly rendered’ [ʔ], only in some cases k [k], the latter phenomenon is typical of the central rural dialects of the Mashreq area, but here it has above all the purpose of favoring rhymes and alliterations; the occlusion in t, d, ḍ of the interdental; the pronunciation in ž [ʒ] of the phoneme /ǧ/; from a morphological point of view the prefix b- for the present.

Sometimes Arabic is used in a realistic way to reproduce what the people of his country are saying to him when he returns to Syria: *Quando mi capita /di tornare a mon pays d’origine, mi pais, bladi / mi dicono iza ente zuhdi hada zanko min / imna an el rap / hei musiket majanin / e mi guardano strano / non è un po’ largo il tuo jeans / ma sei nostrano? / E se li rispondo di sì / quasi mi mostrano la mano iamin / hlef*⁴⁵, *giura sul Corano (Stranieri in ogni nazione)* (“When I happen to / go back to my country / they tell me if you are Zuhdi this Zanko who is it / stop rap / that crazy music / and they look at me strange / your jeans are not a bit wide / but are you one of us? / And if I answer them yes / they almost show me their right hand / swear, swear by the Koran”). In these verses we see an example of a marked translational transglossia: *mon pays d’origine, mi pais, bladi* in which the author chooses not to use Italian, but French and Spanish to translate *blād-ī*. He resorts to translation into Italian *giura sul Corano* to explain the Arabic term *hlef*.

We find again the presence of mixtilingual sentences, in which Zanko uses other languages, in this case English and also the Milanese dialect; the latter is used to favor rhymes and alliterations with Arabic and other languages: *Everything is gonna be all right Allah Karim*⁴⁶ / *dama tra tel disi mi*⁴⁷, *parola di Aarabi*⁴⁸ *Made in Italy (Essere normale)* (“Everything is gonna be all right God is generous / listen to me I tell you / word of Arab, Made in Italy”).

In the following verse the author chooses to use Arabic entirely (except for two words *storie arabe* “Arab stories”): *sadik / storie arabe akīd / fī min bisro’ u fī min birid / ieshteghel mnih, mshan ma idallu ihasbu shakhs gharib - mn tarik / bs ktir marrat hatta*

⁴⁴ Both texts were found on Zanko’s channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/worldmusix1>.

⁴⁵ *Blad-ī / iza ente Zuhdi hada Zanko mīn / əmna’ ‘an əl-rap / hey musiket maǧānīn / yamīn / hlef*.

⁴⁶ *Allāh Karīm*.

⁴⁷ Typical expression of the Milanese dialect used to create alliteration with Arabic *karīm* and *‘arabī*.

⁴⁸ *‘arabī*.

*iza shakhsito hadid el tekel aa dahro t2il / laanno bidallu ihasbu shaks / gharib mn ba3id*⁴⁹ (*Essere normale*) (“Friend / Arab stories sure / there are those who steal and those who would like / work clean / in order not to be judged as a strange one - a street person / but often even if he is a strong person⁵⁰ / the weight on the shoulders is too much / because he is always pointed out as a stranger, who comes from afar”).

We can observe: *ṣadīk*, *tarīk* and *təkʔl* (*sadīq*, *tarīq*, *təqʔl*) in these words the phoneme /q/ is rendered as k [k], probably to favor rhymes and alliterations.

We can observe in the lyric *Stranieri in ogni nazione* the use of Arabic colloquial expressions with religious connotations inserted within sentences in Italian:

- *noi Siriani mashallah*⁵¹ / *i visi pallidi dell'Islam* (“we Syrians how beautiful / the pale faces of Islam”).

- *ringrazio Dio, alhamdulillah*⁵² / *perché m'ha dato questa possibilità* (“I thank God, praise God / because he gave me this chance”).

- *poi li saluto con Assalamu Alaikom*⁵³ / *e lì capiscono che sono il compaesano cresciuto un po' lontano* (“then I greet them with Peace be with you / and there they understand that I am the compatriot who grew up a bit far away”).

Master Sina

Master Sina, stage name of Anis Barka, is a Tunisian rapper born in 1988 who immigrated to Italy at the age of thirteen and now lives in northern Italy. He has become very popular in Tunisia and throughout North Africa, thanks above all to his bilingual texts. In his lyrics Italian alternates and mixes with Tunisian Arabic. In most of his pieces there is a notable presence of sentences in Italian, which in some cases becomes the main language, despite the fact that his fans come in a clear majority from the Maghreb and that only a small part of them are immigrants in Italy or in any case people who actually speak Italian. The use of the Italian language alongside Arabic, as well as other European languages, has a symbolic role: Italian represents the dream of those who want to leave their country and move to Europe⁵⁴. The central themes of Master Sina's songs are in fact the desire for redemption and the sensations experienced by the young North African generations who hope to cross the Mediterranean.

In this work we have chosen to examine two of Master Sina's most popular lyrics: *Clandestino* (“Clandestine Immigrant”) (ft. Balti⁵⁵) and *Bye Bye* (ft. Reda Taliani⁵⁶), both published in 2016⁵⁷.

⁴⁹ *ṣadīk / akīd / fī mīn b-yāsro' w-fī mīn b-irīd / yəštəḡel mnīh / mənšān mā iḍallū yəḥsbū ṣaḥṣ ḡarīb mən tarīk, / bass ktīr marrāt ḥattā iza ṣaḥṣit-o ḥadīd / əl-təkʔl 'a-zəhr-o tə'əl / li-ann-o b-iḍallū yəḥsbū ṣaḥṣ ḡarīb mən ba'īd.*

⁵⁰ Lit.: “even if he has an iron personality”.

⁵¹ *Mā šā' Allāh.*

⁵² *Al-ḥamdu li-llāh.*

⁵³ *As-salāmu 'alay-kom.*

⁵⁴ <https://www.vice.com/it/article/3dy7ny/master-sina-i-sogni-degli-immigrati-e-il-rap-di-seconda-generazione>.

⁵⁵ He is a famous Tunisian rapper. In the piece *Clandestino* he sings the entire first verse in Arabic.

From the phono-morphological point of view, in the Arabic parts sung by Master Sina we observe the features of the Tunisian Arabic. Also in these texts we sometimes note the pronunciation *g* [g] of the phoneme / *q* /.

In this case the texts were produced in the Arabic alphabet and not in Latin characters, so the passages are reproduced here directly in scientific transcription.

In the following stanzas Italian is the main language with insertions of some verses in Tunisian Arabic, which create assonances and rhymes with Italian:

- *Sono venuto in Italia, venuto da piccolo / arabo in Italia, quello che dicono / scappato dal paese, su una barca / šuft 'alà 'aynā-yā wlād blād-ī kifāš ġarga (Clandestino)* (“I came to Italy, came as a child / Arab in Italy, it’s what they say / ran away from the country, on a boat / I saw with my own eyes how the people of my country drown”).

- *Buongiorno l'Italia, ciao la Tunisia / hārāb mən l-blād w mən mā trā-k əl-būlīsiya (Clandestino)* (“Good morning Italy, hello Tunisia / I run away from my country and from the police”). In this verse we observe the loanword *būlīsiya* from Italian *polizia* “police”. As we can see from the above examples, on a lexical level the singer makes extensive use of the noun *blād* “country, homeland”, in reference to Tunisia, term employed to emphasize his identity and origin.

We also find the expression *w-Alḷāh*; it is used here to reinforce the concept of truth, as a synonym for “really”, “I swear”: *‘āyšinā kīmā yaġī simpelment w-Alḷāh (Bye Bye)* (“We live as it comes, in a simple way, I swear, really”).

The rapper, within his verses, in addition to slipping from Italian to Tunisian Arabic, resort to the use of French or English terms, giving rise to multilingual sentences:

- *Io sono cresciuto, ho pagato / l-yōm nrawaḥ l-omm-ī b-əl-bagnole⁵⁸ fōq əl-bateaux (Clandestino)* (“I grew up, I paid / today I go back to my mother with the car on the boat”). Here the French word *bateau* is used to favor the rhyme with the Italian *pagato*.

- *Bye bye la vita solo mia/ bye bye sallem-lī 'alā l-fāmīlyā (Bye Bye)* (“Bye bye life is only mine / bye bye say hello to my family”). Here we observe the English expression *bye bye* and the foreignism *fāmīlyā* instead of the nouns *'usra* or *'āyla*. The term is more popular among the younger generations, especially among young people living abroad and it is a loanword adopted from Italian *famiglia*.

- *Rāžā' ya-mā, non ti preoccupare, weld-ek rāžel (Bye Bye)* (“I’ll be back mom, don’t worry, your son is a man”). Here, as in Ghali, we find the phrase *weld-ek rāžel* “your son is a man”, an expression addressed to mothers to reassure them about the state of their children away from home; it is a recurring theme in the lyrics of these rappers.

- *Mi hanno detto barrā / nhebb nwašī l-aḥbāb fī bāl-hom əl-ġorba žanna / l-ġorba rāhī klēt ržāl mā-hyā-š kīmā tātmanna (Bye Bye)* (“They told me leave / I want to give advice to my loved ones who think that being abroad is like being in heaven / estrangement actually destroyed⁵⁹ men, it’s not what you think”).

⁵⁶ He is a very popular Algerian singer. In the song *Bye Bye* he sings some verses in Arabic.

⁵⁷ The lyrics of both songs are available on the web in Arabic characters. For *Clandestino* see genius.com; for *Bye Bye* see: <https://testicanzoni.mtv.it>.

⁵⁸ Colloquial term for “car” borrowed from French and introduced into Tunisian Arabic.

⁵⁹ The verb used is *akal*, lit.: “to eat”.

In both lyrics examined, Master Sina uses Italian as the main language, except for the last verse of *Bye Bye*, which is entirely in Tunisian Arabic:

- *yəllī mrawəḥ li-l-ḥbība sallem-lī 'alà d-dār / ġorba w-d-dənyā ġrība / žanna w-trà fī-k nhār / ʔawəlt 'ale-yā l-ġība w-l-aḥḍar šfār / w-l-forga 'ale-yā š'ība ma'ā-yā l-'ālī l-žabār / tğarrabnā w-aḥnā šġār / lā šūrdī w-lā dūrū/ baddəlnā d-dīnār ḥəbbīnā nżībū l-ūrū / təzha fī n-nawār ḥūma⁶⁰ təhna umūr-ū / yā rabb-ī yā sattār mšà ḥārəg fī bābūr-ū/ blād əl-mustaqbəl wīnū, šabība maḥġūra/ w-d-dam'a mḥabīnū w-l-gulūb maḥġūra/ ḥūma ʔabb-ī 'ayn-ū məḥāžər w-l-ġorba morra/ 'aqliyya Al Bātšīnū⁶¹ fī blād əl-kamorrā* (“you who are getting back to the beloved, say hello to my family / life as an emigrant and the world are strange / heaven sees you during the day⁶² / distance has been prolonged for me and the green has turned yellow⁶³ / being distant is difficult for me, God the Almighty be with me / we emigrated as young people / without money, without a cent / we changed the dinar and wanted to bring the euro / flowers bloom and people of my neighbourhood celebrate⁶⁴ / oh my Lord, protect⁶⁵ who leaves as a clandestine on his speedboat / the country of the future where it is, ignored youth / with hidden tears and oppressed hearts / people of my neighbourhood, may God be with them; I expatriate, life as an emigrant is hard / Al Pacino mentality in the Camorra’s country”).

From a lexical point of view, we find in this verse loanwords from Italian that have become acclimatized to Tunisian Arabic: *šūrdī* “money, small amount of money” derived from the Italian *soldi* (“money”) and *bābūr* “speedboat”, that is used to indicate boats with which clandestine immigrants arrive in Italy from Tunisia. It probably derives from the Italian word *vapore* (“vapor”) from which the word *vaporetto* (“ferry, steamship”). The text mentions another term of Italian origin *kamorrā*⁶⁶ “Camorra” which indicates the Italian criminal organization of mafia connotation originating in Campania.

We also observe the word *dūrū* which literally indicates the coin corresponding to five cents of the Tunisian dinar, but it is used in everyday language to indicate “a few coins, a small amount of money”; it is a loanword from Spanish *duro*, the informal name used to refer to the Spanish five peseta coin.

Finally, a wide use of words such as *ġorba*, *ġrība*, *tğarrabnā* emerges from Master Sina verses. All these words are semantically referable to a theme that is central in the Arabic literature of the twentieth century, the *ġurba*: the feeling of loss, alienation and isolation that is felt by Arabs, intellectuals and not, when they are far from their homeland (D’Afflitto 2013).

⁶⁰ Lit.: “neighbourhood”. This term is used in the Tunisian colloquial language to refer both to the popular neighbourhoods themselves and to the people of the neighbourhood, to family members, loved ones. Throughout the verse it is used in the sense of “people from my neighbourhood”.

⁶¹ In the text in Arabic: الباتشينو Al Pacino, the famous Italian-American actor.

⁶² Here the rapper probably means that with daylight, heaven (i.e. God) sees you and therefore can judge you better.

⁶³ Here the singer refers to the passage of time that makes things age, makes them lose their colour and makes them uglier.

⁶⁴ *ḥūma təhna umūr-ū* lit.: “people of my neighbourhood are satisfied with their things”.

⁶⁵ *yā sattār* lit.: “Oh Protector” in reference to God.

⁶⁶ In the text in Arabic: كمرّا.

Conclusion

Although the number of Arab immigrants in Italy is growing as evidenced by the data, linguistic research is scarce: studies on the language of immigrants of Arab origin and on the interaction between Arabic and Italian are not numerous. The present study represents a preliminary starting point for reflection on this issue that certainly needs to be explored. Through the analysis of the texts of some rappers of Arab origin, first or second-generation immigrants in Italy, it is possible to make considerations of a linguistic and socio-linguistic nature.

These texts represent sources that reveal a tendency in the language of youth and therefore can provide us with data on the evolution of the Arabic language in the specific context of immigration. In fact, the lyrics examined are full of colloquial expressions, idioms and terms used by young people.

The choice of using rap texts as material for reflection was given by the fact that the language of rap is close to the spoken; it is essentially the so-called “street speech” which, in general, distances itself from the standard language by approaching more colloquial forms in the lexicon and syntax. The rappers reproduce through their songs the language they usually use: as highlighted by the analysis, Italian is the first language in which Italian rappers of Arab origin choose to express themselves, but their lyrics represent examples of plurilingualism. We can observe examples of mixed languages between Italian and Arabic (in the variety of dialect of origin): the singer constantly switches from one language to another, without it being possible to identify particular contexts for the use of one or the other. The singers resort to other languages such as English, French or Spanish, but to a lesser extent.

The use of Arabic fulfills an identity function that also plays an important role in youth jargon and becomes a tool to bring singer’s two worlds and two cultures closer together. For many of these rappers, Arabic is used to keep alive the bond with the motherland and to bring the Italian public closer to Arab culture.

Rappers, through their lyrics, often aim to break down stereotypes about their culture and society; in this sense, language can also represent a form of pedagogical and didactic expression⁶⁷.

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⁶⁷ The pedagogical and didactic function is also inherent in reality rap, a genre that tells the reality and informs young people and not only on current problems and issues.

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