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# Interference between Italian, Sicilian and Gallo-Italic in letters of emigrants from Sperlinga to New York between the 19th and 20th centuries

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## Résumé

A small set of late XIX century letters written by emigrants in New York to their friends and family in Sperlinga (Sicily) with the aim of raising funds to build a chapel for the Madonna della Mercede in Sperlinga gives the opportunity to study a peculiar variety of Italian spoken by Italian Americans from a Gallo-Italic linguistic colony of Sicily.

A series of circumstances (Trovato 1998: 555) encouraged the immigration to Sicily of groups from North-Western Italy between the end of the 11th and 13th century. Sperlinga (north-central Sicily), along with Nicosia, Piazza Armerina and Aidone, San Fratello and Novara di Sicilia, was one of the Sicilian towns where immigrants mainly settled. The contact between Gallo-Italic and Sicilian in Sperlinga gave rise, on the one hand, to a main code (henceforth MC), which retains a good many features of the motherland language, especially in phonology, but also in morphology and the lexicon, and, on the other hand, to a secondary code, referred to (Trovato 1998) as ‘Local Sicilian’ (henceforth LS), less prestigious, used by Sperlinghese people to interact with non-Gallo-Italic Sicilian speakers from the surroundings, which is characterized by more Sicilian lexical items, full Sicilian morphology and Gallo-Italic phonology.

Sperlinghese people who moved to New York since 1886 (Lo Pinzino 2003: 83) must have restructured their repertoire, due to the contact with English speakers and other Sicilian and Italian emigrants. In fact, in the aforementioned letters, traces of LC (or Sicilian) appear to be more relevant than those of MC. This suggests that MC might have then been perceived as a “minority”, less prestigious code than LC in the USA’s “Italian linguistic space” (De Mauro 1980, Orioles 2017); moreover, LC must have in turn been felt as more similar to Italian, the formal code the authors attempted to use in the letters.

In the presentation, examples of different types of interference between Italian, MC and LC found in these letters will be discussed and analysed, relating to phonology (e.g. errors due to the lack of contrastiveness of consonant length related to MC: *vi rrimeto* instead of *vi rimetto* ‘I send you back’), morphology (e.g. wrong agreement due to gender impoverishment in plurals in LC: *questi* (mpl) *due righe* (fpl) instead of *queste* (fpl) *due righe* (fpl) ‘these two lines’), syntax and lexicon (*se si avesse a vantare che [è] stato lui* instead of *se si dovesse vantare di essere stato lui...* ‘should he ever brag about having done this...’).

References

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\*Intervenant

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**Mots-Clés:** GalloItalic, GalloItalic colonies in Sicily, migration, contact, letters, uneducated writing, Sperlinga, American Italian, Sicily