ENGLISH FOR MIGRATION:
INTERACTION BETWEEN AFRICAN REFUGEES AND PROFESSIONALS IN THE HUMANITARIAN SECTOR

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> Having failed to achieve a general means of communication, mankind, in the realm of language, has permitted itself to rest internationally upon the level of dumb animals. [...] and, with a smile and shrug of inept apology, powerful industrialists, famous statesmen, and learned savants confess their inability to exchange with each other the simplest of ideas.
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> *Sylvia Pankhurst*, 1927
> *Delphos: The future of International Language*

The massive migratory flow of refugees and asylum seekers from Africa represents one of the key issues in the current European agenda. Although economic and socio-political factors related to this phenomenon have been widely investigated and exposed through international institutions and the media, little attention has been paid to the linguistic implications. Hotspots, refugee camps, reception and accommodation centres in Europe are currently defining new linguistic contact zones, where the overlapping of diverse cultural and linguistic elements shape new ways of communication and produce new linguistic practices. This article presents the data from a project that aims to record, describe, and analyse these practices with a particular focus on Italy. The data include different textual typologies and audio and video recordings gathered in selected settings: hotspots and reception centres in the south and the north of Italy. The populations migrating from Africa to Europe present heterogeneous characteristics in terms of nationality, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Furthermore, the journey to Europe forces migrants to develop or strengthen their sociolinguistic competencies and skills, as they experience, adapt to and accommodate different contexts and conditions. The study investigates the varieties of English spoken in the interactions between Anglophone African migrants and Italian professionals in the humanitarian sector, exploring the implications of a translanguaging approach, which could offer an

innovative perspective on the dynamics of language contact, acquisition and teaching, providing pragmatic solutions to communication failure in institutionalized settings, and emphasizing the fluidity of the linguistic scenario in the domain of migration.

Language contact, translanguaging, migration, interaction

1. Introduction

The massive migratory flow of refugees and asylum seekers from Africa represents one of the key issues in the current European political agenda. n the last three years (2020-2023), almost 6,000 migrants[3] have died or disappeared during attempted crossings on the Mediterraneanroute[4], n the same period, Europe registered more than 325.000 irregular arrivals[5]. With reference to the African continent, as reported by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), West Africa records the highest number of migrants moving towards Northern Africa and Europe[6].

However, the nature and trajectories of migration from East Africa and the Horn of Africa also deserve careful consideration, as the political and socio-economic condition of the area is complex and dynamic, and features countries simultaneously hosting and assisting internally displaced persons, refugees, returnees, victims of trafficking and labour migrants. In this context, in November 2014, the European Union and the African Union launched the "EU-Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative", involving the European Union and the countries in the macro-area, with the aim of reducing the trafficking and

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[3]   As the present contribution focuses on linguistic features related to the migration of English speakers, the umbrella-term 'migrant' is used to include a multiplicity of interactional situations, without the intent of dehumanizing refugees and asylum seekers. On this debate, see also Al Jazeera's decision to ban the term 'migrant': the English online editor, Barry Malone, publicly announced that "The umbrella term migrant is no longer fit for purpose when it comes to describing the horror unfolding in the Mediterranean. It has evolved from its dictionary definitions into a tool that dehumanises and distances, a blunt pejorative" (retrieved from https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2015/08/20/why-al-jazeera-will-not-say-mediterranean-migrants/).

[4]   Although there has been a decrease in the number of landings on European shores over the last three years, migrants are still dying at sea, in particular in the Central Mediterranean, which stretches from Africa to Italy. The number of dead and missing migrants trying to reach Europe via the Mediterranean reached a peak in 2016, with more than 5,000 cases (www.ismu.org). For more statistical data on the Central Mediterranean, see also the 'GMDAC Briefing Series: Towards safer migration in Africa: Migration and Data in Northern and Western Africa', published by IOM.

[5]   Data provided by https://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/mediterranean, an institutional platform comparing IOM, national authorities, and media sources.

[6]   See also the IOM project 'Missing Migrants', tracking the number of people who died or disappeared in the process of migration: https://missingmigrants.iom.int.

smuggling of human beings from the region (Martìn and Bonfanti 2015). The economic and socio-political issues related to these events have been widely investigated and exposed through local and international institutions and media, often producing a narrative of migration based on the oversimplification of complex phenomena and reinforcing stereotypes, prejudice and intolerance.

On the contrary, little attention has been paid to the linguistic implications of the phenomenon, which deserve careful consideration, particularly because of their long-term effects. European societies are experiencing a physiological change, which will eventually come at an even faster pace, entailing a growing need for reliable resources on the topic of migration. Hotspots, refugee camps, reception and accommodation centres in Italy and the rest of Europe are currently defining new *linguistic contact zones*, where the overlapping of diverse cultural and linguistic elements shape new ways of communication and produce new linguistic practices. This paper presents data aiming to record, describe and analyse these practices, through a comparative study on specific linguistic contexts, in Africa and in Europe, with a particular focus on Italy. The critical question that underpins the article is: What kind of language is spoken in the interaction between migrants (refugees and asylum-seekers) and staff in the humanitarian sector?

The research aligns with the European ideals of cultural and linguistic mediation in the context of migration. According to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (*CEFR*), "the written and/or oral activities of mediation make communication possible between persons who are unable, for whatever reason, to communicate with each other directly" (p.34), highlighting the need to establish shared protocols and communication practices. However, the application of these principles is complex. The opening paragraph of *The linguistic integration of adult migrants and the CEFR*, produced in 2012 by the Council of Europe (p.1), notes:

In order to secure rights of entry, permanent residence or citizenship, adult migrants are increasingly required to demonstrate proficiency in the language of the host country. Language requirements are usually defined in terms of the proficiency levels of the CEFR. [...] The priority that the CEFR gives to the needs of learners (rather than teachers, educational authorities or testing agencies) is fundamental. It is also important to emphasise, however, that its descriptive apparatus and proficiency levels were not developed with the communicative needs of adult migrants in mind, and they should be applied to them and their situation with caution.

Caution seems to be a rather ambiguous word to use in this context. It begs the question: Who should be cautious? Is it Europe as a system, or its institutions and their staff, or migrants themselves?

The normative scenario with regard to linguistic issues in this context is continually evolving and reflects the progression of the migratory phenomenon

on the one hand, and the political agenda on the other. An example is provided by the amendments made in 2018 by the Italian Minister of Internal Affairs, Matteo Salvini, to the norms regulating the prerequisites for the long-term residence permit, which have raised the level of the mandatory language proficiency test from A2 to B1 (Article 9, Consolidated Immigration and Security Act, 04.10.2018).

There is an undeniable need for more effective communication in the field of migration reception and management of European institutions to be addressed by the same set of institutions instead of professionals. One of the emerging priorities is the establishment of shared protocols in the domain of communication, which must be based on theoretical models developed by researchers and scholars, and driven by the observation, study and description of objective, reliable and comparative data.

2. African linguistic context

The population migrating from Africa to Europe presents heterogeneous characteristics in terms of nationality and cultural and linguistic background. Notably, the data indicate how the major sources of sub-Saharan African migrants to Europe are from Nigeria, Ghana and Kenya, countries where English holds the status of official language[7]. More specifically, regarding the presence of English, the African scenario features the coexistence of several standard varieties and non-standard speech forms, which are the subject of a rich literature given the British colonial history of the countries.

Most of this literature, centred on national linguistic scenarios, has contributed to the definition and international recognition of African standard varieties of English, as evident in the following dictionaries and descriptive studies: Kenya (Whiteley 1974; Zuengler 1982; Kembo-Sure 2003), Tanzania (Mafu 2003; Higgins 2009), Uganda (Criper and Ladefoged 1972; Nassenstein 2016), Ghana (Criper 1971; Huber 1999; Anderson 2009) Nigeria (Bamgbose 1982; Igboanusi 2001), Cameroon (Todd 1982; Harrow and Mpoche 2008), South Africa (De Klerk 1996; Mesthrie 2003), Botswana (Mathangwane 2008; Bagwasi, Alimi, Ebewo 2008). While these linguistic specificities have been extensively described using a national approach, more recent studies address the topic through categorization of the different standards of English in Africa on the basis of geographical macro-areas: East Africa, West Africa and Southern Africa.

The established literature has described each area in terms of common phonology, morphology, syntax and vocabulary. The most significant resource

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[7]   Data from Eurostat, available at https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database. See also www.pewresearch.org.

validating this approach is *The Oxford Handbook of World Englishes*, which outlines the similarities between national varieties in East Africa, West Africa and Southern Africa (Filppula, Klemola, Sharma 2017)[1]. Comparing the map of Varieties of English in Africa with the figures related to the migration flows from Africa to Europe, an almost total overlapping in terms of macro-areas (West Africa, East Africa) is observed, except for the southern region, which, instead of producing migration, is characterized by increasingly high rates of continental immigration (South-South migration). The main route from West Africa goes from Nigeria, through Niger and Libya (Western-East route), and the main route from the Horn of Africa goes from Kenya, through Sudan and Libya, reaching Italy via the Strait of Sicily (Eastern-central Route).

In addition to the established and recognized standard varieties of English, there is an increasing number of new contact languages, juvenile jargons, and speech forms in Africa. Since Labov's epoch-making survey of *Black English Vernacular in New York City* (1966), research on youth language has been growing steadily, albeit slowly (Stenström and Jørgensen 2009). Recently, the analysis of youth language has received considerable attention with regard to its metropolitan aspects, particularly in Africa, where new Anglophone varieties are emerging. The studies on AYUL (African Urban Youth Languages), an emerging field that challenges the traditional approach to the varieties of World English are a case in point (Ebongue and Hurst 2017; Nassenstein and Hollington 2015).

While the traditional approach to the global spread of the English language has always been considered in terms of movement from the centre to the periphery of the Empire, it is evident that the current linguistic scenario is more complex and features the existence of a new poly-centre system, where what was once at the margins is now capable of producing independent cultural outputs. Jennifer Jenkins, in her *English as a Lingua Franca in the Expanding Circle*, provides interesting insights on the role of English as a contact language among expanding circle users from different first languages, highlighting how the context and the accommodation process affect communication and shape new speech forms (Jenkins 2017).

Furthermore, the migratory experience from Africa to Europe forces the migrants to develop, or strengthen their sociolinguistic competencies, as they experience and adapt to different contexts and conditions, enforcing practices of linguistic acquisition, adaptation, and accommodation (Britain and Trudgill 1999). Equal attention must consequently be devoted to both recognized standard

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[1]   Moreover, the Electronic World Atlas of Varieties of English provides visual tools to better conceptualize the idea of the macro-areas (http://ewave-atlas.org/languages). This interactive tool designed and implemented by the University of Freiburg confirms the distribution of African Anglophone countries and recognized varieties in the three principal areas.

varieties and non-standard speech forms in East and West Africa, considering their coexistence within the local linguistic scenario and their contribution to the development of a migrating linguistic background, constituting the starting point of the author's current research project.

3. Italian immigration context

On their arrival in Italy, probably not the final destination of their journey, multilingual and multiethnic groups of migrants and asylum seekers are faced with legal and institutional representatives, law enforcement agencies, social workers, intercultural linguistic mediators and educators. The level of complexity of communication rises as interactions take place in institutional settings and require a more formal approach. Furthermore, these often consist of questions that require articulated answers, thus causing further disorientation in the migrants, whose freedom of speech has been up until then violently denied by their captors, smugglers, and traffickers.

One of the key effects of the dynamism of the phenomenon of migration is the volatility of the policies related to the assistance provided to migrants on their arrival. Currently (the latter part of 2020), the Italian Ministry of Internal Affairs recognizes different types of formal centres:

  a. Hotspots, first aid and reception facilities defined as "crisis points" (Pozzallo, Lampedusa, Messina, Taranto),
  b. First Reception Centres (CPA), located in Bari, Brindisi, Capo Rizzuto, Gradisca d'Isonzo, Udine, Manfredonia, Caltanissetta, Messina, Treviso,
  c. CAS (extraordinary reception centres),
  d. Permanent Repatriation Centres (CPR), for foreigners arriving irregularly in Italy, who do not apply for international protection or do not meet the requirements for such protection,
  e. SIPROIMI (ex SPRAR), currently only for holders of other kinds of protection status (not humanitarian),
  f. Reception centres for victims of trafficking and/or corporal exploitation (ex art.18 Dlgs 289/96).

These and all the informal non-governmental organizations and institutions working on migration issues represent privileged points of observation, where the contact between African Anglophone migrants and Italian professionals takes place.

In Italy, Maria Grazia Guido has worked extensively on the cognitive and communicative processes occurring in situations of interaction between African immigrants and Italian immigration authorities and operators, investigating variation and change in ELF (English as Lingua Franca) and demonstrating how the misunderstanding and misinterpretation of pragma-

linguistic behaviours and interpretative strategies lead to communication failure (Guido 2008; 2012; 2015). She concludes that:

to achieve a successful communication in specialized ELF interactions, each group in contact should, first of all, become aware of those of the other groups' L1 features which are typologically divergent from the equivalent ones in their own L1s – and, as such, perceived as formally deviating and pragmatically inappropriate when transferred to ELF. (Guido 2008: 173)

The studies conducted in this field raise parallel pedagogic questions related to the actual linguistic competence of the professionals working in migration contexts. The training provided by Italian universities and institutions for cultural and linguistic mediators, for example, features advanced courses of English language, literature, culture, interpretation, and translation, but, in the large majority of cases, without differentiating between standard and other varieties of English and contact languages featured in the context of migration[2]. The need for more specific training focusing on the development of linguistic and intercultural skills has been expressed and discussed by several scholars, revealing the status of professional (and personal) *uncertainty* of cultural and linguistic mediators (Katan 2015).

Mediation is not the only professional context requiring socio-cognitive awareness of intercultural communication and specific linguistic competencies. Focused training on these subjects should also be mandatory for professionals engaging with migration issues in the legal field (e.g., law enforcement agencies, governmental institutions, lawyers, judges, and other legal operators such as forensic translators and interpreters) and in the scientific field (e.g., medical doctors, psychologists, sociologists, educators, social workers, and mediators).

4. Data presentation and analysis

The present contribution refers to a selection of the data from a corpus developed by the author, including different textual typologies and audio and video recordings gathered in the selected settings (Italian reception centres and migration-related institutions). The main source for the generation of data was direct observation and recording of language choice, use and change. Markers operating at morpho-syntactical level, discourse level (oral interactions, group conversations), and intertextual level (use of jargon, media-derived language) are taken into account. Furthermore, the heterogeneity of the research settings requires a variational flexibility in data gathering, urging researchers to consider a combination of different methods, techniques, and integrated

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[2]   In addition to professional courses, often offered by the regional administrations, several universities have implemented specific academic courses for linguistic and cultural mediators (e.g., University for Foreigners of Siena, University of Milan).

textual typologies (i.e., interviews and focus groups, video and audio-recording, questionnaires and tests, private communication).

At a methodological level, this research project relied on the tools provided by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Conversational Analysis (CA), with the objective of exploring, in the words of Blommaert:

(the) intersection of language/discourse/speech and social structure. [...] It is not enough to uncover the social dimensions of language use. These dimensions are the object of moral and political evaluation and analysing them should have effects in society: empowering the powerless, giving voices to the voiceless, exposing power abuse, and mobilising people to remedy social wrongs. (Blommaert 2005: 25)

In the context under scrutiny, it is of primary importance to investigate – also through the analysis of transcriptions – the relations between the actual interaction and its referential content, the way the elements of the interaction are produced, their collocation in the discursive sequence, and the presence of other contextual factors affecting the participants' interpretation.

In particular, the specific interrelation between context and interactional practices has been redefined by Zimmermann as "discursive", "situated" and "transportable" identities (Zimmermann 1998). According to CA, identity categorization is represented and performed during the interaction (Antaki and Widdicombe 1998; Hutchby and Wooffitt 2008). Yet, as stated by Blommaert, "identities can be there long before the interaction starts and thus condition what can happen in such interaction" (2005: 206). Adapting the example Blommaert provides to our specific context, one could imagine a conversation between a Nigerian immigrant and an Italian police officer, in which the speakers may not show any interactional trace of active and explicit orienting towards the categories of "Nigerian immigrant" or "police officer" but both parties in the interaction are in all likelihood much aware of each other's identity, since these categories, as well as particular attributions of these categories and typical relationships between them, have been pre-inscribed in the interaction[3].

Unquestionably, identity is one of the key factors to be considered while approaching migration-related issues, and language is the first and most immediate way of expressing it. What from a purely linguistic perspective may count as minor distinctions can often, for largely ideological reasons, attain great social import as badges of identity (Gumperz 2003: 110). One example pointing to the relevance of the relationship between language, culture and identity is provided by the fact that victims of trafficking and smuggling, in the majority of the cases Nigerian women and consequently

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[3]   With reference to the attribution of identities in migration contexts, the social practice of categorization called *othering* deserves more consideration. On the topic, see Van Houtum and Van Naerssen (2002).

aware of the semantic collocation of English lexis, always avoid the use of 'prostitution', 'sex', 'rape' and 'abuse', and tend to replace them with 'to sleep with'[4].

Moreover, the experience of the journey forces the migrants to develop, or to strengthen, their sociolinguistic competencies and skills, as they face and have to adapt to and accommodate different contexts and conditions. As also demonstraed by previous scholars, the interactions between migrants and professionals/staff feature the same dynamics of transfer characterizing ELF practices (Guido 2008). The interlocutors tend to adapt to the new communicative situation features of their first language, in terms of syntax, morphology, phonology and semantics. This is a spontaneous process, and it concerns both parties, the African migrants, and the Italian and European professionals. Yet, the latter's lack of awareness of the basic elements of African languages and varieties of English may produce confusion, misunderstanding and conflict[5].

What follows is an excerpt of the transcription of a conversation between a Nigerian female victim of trafficking (M1) and an Italian female educator (O1) that took place during the recent Covid-19 pandemic. The examples featured in this contribution represent a very limited selection from a wide corpus of interviews and audio-video recordings, transcribed using the CA system of conventions[6].

Excerpt 1
1   O1:   Ehy (.) you ha::ve to wash your hands
2   M1:   =I <u>don</u> wash my ha[n-

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[4]   In a forthcoming publication on the topic of the research, I specifically address the contextualization and the use of these words, describing and discussing their identity-related implications, in particular in the context of human trafficking and smuggling.

[5]   In this regard, the work of the Italian researcher and educator, Giulio Asta (also an informant of the present research) deserves mention. In his *Professor come teach me na* (PhD thesis), he discusses the implication of the use of non-standard varieties, in particular Nigerian Pidgin, as an effective resource to teach a second language (with particular reference to Italian L2). Furthermore, he recently launched a series of courses on Nigerian culture and Nigerian Pidgin for operators in the context of migration. The description of the courses reads: "Integration is done by coming together. Approaching the culture and language of others is a way of showing respect, and it becomes a formidable instrument of contact. Learning about Nigeria, Pidgin English and Nigerian Culture means getting new keys to access, interact, and work with the people of the most populous country in Africa." (https://dico.education/formazioni/). Moreover, BBC News has recently launched its Pidgin official website: https://www.bbc.com/pidgin/tori-51187437.

[6]   Transcriptions have been made using the system of conventions for CA, initially developed by Gail Jefferson and subsequently described, discussed and integrated by several scholars. See in particular Have 1999; Hutchby and Wooffitt 2008. In the excerpts featured in this article, the following conversation symbols are employed: pause in tenths of a second: (0.5); pause of less than two-tenths of a second: (.); overlapping talk: [ ]; emphasis: underlining; loud talk: CAPITALS; quiet talk: ° °; quick talk: > <; cut off of the prior word or sound: soun-; stretching of the preceding sound: :::; latching: =; non-verbal activity: (( )).

3   O1:   [NO NO! You wa::sh your hand EH!
((pointing at O1 with an extended finger))

In cue 1, O1 is reminding M1 to wash her hands due to the recent sanitation requirements of the pandemic. M1 confirms that she has already washed her hands, but her use of the Nigerian Pidgin pre-verbal marker 'don', indicating the perfect aspect (Faraclas 1996), is interpreted by O1 as a refusal to follow the instruction (I *don't* wash my hands). The discomposure is conveyed by O1's imperative reduplication 'no no' as emotional intensifier.

The even more conflictual evolution of the conversation, not reported here, confirms that apparently less relevant linguistic features may generate insurmountable obstacles in terms of mutual understanding. The restoration of a peaceful environment was possible only due to the intervention of another Nigerian woman who disambiguated the sentence, translating it with a more intelligible "she wash it already"[7].

Similarly, the use of paralinguistic elements (e.g., O1's imperative pointing) may be decisive in multicultural domains featuring status and power asymmetries, where individuals may have different perceptions and interpretation of elements such as conversation overlaps, interruptions, pitch, intonation and loudness (Mead 1990; Hall 1990; Katan 1999).

In this regard, Excerpt 2 reports a conversation between a Sudanese Muslim female asylum seeker (M2) and an Italian male member of staff (O2), taking place during an interview.

Excerpt 2
1   O2:   Why you do like thi::s? ((gets physically closer to M2))
2   (0.7)
3   M2:   ((does not answer and keeps her head down))
4   O2:   Look at ME (.) you understa::nd?
5   M2:   (.) °° yes °°
6   O2:   =SO LOOK ME::?

According to Islamic etiquette and based on the interpretation of sacred texts, there are strict rules concerning physical contact and eye contact between different genders[8]. O2's complaint (1) and the insistent request

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to establish eye-contact (4) generate in M2 a cultural shock, explicit in her silence (2) and wavering (5). In this situation, the operator's lack of awareness of Islamic religious and cultural practices, and consequently of intercultural communication competence, produces a dramatically negative effect on the interaction, jeopardising the entire interview process.

Furthermore, the analysis of transcriptions represents a useful tool to examine the occurrences of translinguistic phenomena. The data gathered revealed that the linguistic complexity in the interactions between migrants and staff increases over time, and a diachronic study would probably provide further evidence. On the one hand, after the initial reception phase, migrants attend Italian language courses and progressively develop their Italian linguistic competence; on the other, the establishment of more informal relationships with the reception centre staff fosters the mutual use of L1 linguistic features and culture-specific items (CSI). As a consequence, interactions involving staff and migrants (in particular those who have been residing in Italy for more than one year) are characterized by the presence of translanguaging. According to the literature on the subject, translanguaging represents an act performed in multilinguistic contexts by bilinguals (or multilinguals) of "accessing different linguistic features or various modes of what are described as autonomous languages, in order to maximize communicative potential" (García 2009: 140), challenging the existing theories on monolingualism and bilingualism, and the traditional concept of (a) language, as a static, circumscribed and politically imposed construction[9]. Excerpt 3 is an exchange between a Gambian male asylum seeker (M3) and an Italian male member of staff (O3).

    Excerpt 3
    1   M3:   What is DIS? ((showing a picture of a parking fine))
    2   (0.8)
    3   O3:   <u>Fine</u>
    3   M3:   >What do you mean?<
    4   O3:   (.) Mu::lta
    5   M3:   =Aahaa! Mudiir (مدير), I know is multa e::h

M3 asks O3 for information regarding a parking fine he has received. Not being aware of the polysemy of the word, he interprets O3's answer as a derogatory comment (Fine) and asks for further clarification. O3 offers

and to display of their adornment only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils over their bosoms, and not to reveal their adornment save to their own husbands [...]." (Sura An-Nur, 24:31). In the preceding verse, the same instruction ("to lower their gaze and guard their modesty") are given to men (Sura An-Nur, 24:30). Specific literature on counselling (mainly in the field of psychology and medical science), has addressed the need to develop "culturally appropriate counselling intervention strategies in working with Muslim clients" (Rassool 2016: vii).

[9]   For a more detailed description of translanguaging practices, see also García and Wei 2014; Wei 2018; Baynham, and Lee 2019.

the Italian alternative 'multa', which M3 seems to be surprisingly familiar with. To express this familiarity, M3 uses the Gambian Mandinka cognitive interjection 'Aaahaa' (Gamble 1987), followed by the Arabic word 'mudiir' (ريدم), translating as 'boss', used by migrants to address Libyan traffickers. The study thus revealed the presence of salient linguistic features that have been acquired and shared by migrants during the various stages of migration and survival (e.g., crossing the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea and being imprisoned and tortured in Libya). Some of these words and expressions, as in the case of 'mudiir' and 'forsa forsa', are now part of the *migrants' idiolect* and are frequently used in their linguistic interactions with other migrants and with Italian professionals[10].

5. Conclusion

The recognition of the linguistic specificity of the field of migration is not as yet supported by in-depth scientific production. Data-derived studies in this context should not only attempt to provide factual bases for the implementation of the debate on migration, but also address practically the undeniable need for more effective communication, providing literature and educational materials for the adequate training of specialized professionals working for European institutions and organizations[11]. IOM publishes a large variety of reports and volumes on the multifaceted scenario of migration, addressing a multiplicity of related issues, divided into specific subjects, from asylum, border management and capacity-building, to women, xenophobia and youth. Surprisingly, with the exception of the 'Glossary on Migration', IOM does not produce publications related to linguistic issues, and language is not included in the list of relevant subjects[12].

Certainly, describing, interpreting and systematizing the linguistic dynamics of migration is not an easy task. One of the initial ambitions of the wider research presented in this article is that of contributing to the field of study of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), in introducing a new variety

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[10]   As in the previous case of the language related to the sexual sphere, the presence of specific words acquired during the journey from Africa to Europe also requires further study and it will be the subject of a future publication, based on a diachronic study of the phenomenon.

[11]   There are few glossaries related to the topic of migration (also available online) but the focus is on legal and political terminology: see the glossary in the United Nations' *Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration* (1998); the UNHCR's *Master Glossary of Terms* (2006); *UNESCO's Glossary of Migration related Terminology* (2013); UNAOC's *Media-Friendly Glossary on Migration* (2014); IOM's *The Key Migration Terms* and the *Glossary on Migration* (updated in 2019); the European Migration Network's *Glossary* (updated in 2020).

[12]   The comprehensive list of texts published by IOM, organized in 28 macro-categories and 80 specific subjects, is available at the IOM Online Bookstore: https://publications.iom.int.

which could be called *English for Migration*. However, the observation of the communicative practices occurring in this specific domain fosters critical considerations regarding the collocation of such practices under the umbrella-term 'English'.

The conceptual evolution of English, from hegemonic language to contact language, has paved the way for the emergence of new phenomena and the creation of new linguistic forms and identities. The complexity of the contemporary global sociolinguistic scenario highlights the inadequacy of some of the concepts that have traditionally been accepted by the scientific community and supported by a rich and long-standing literature (e.g., 'mother tongue', 'native speaker'). While educational programs and projects on mother tongue languages have gathered great interest and funding by the international community, including governmental and non-governmental institutions, little attention has been paid to more recent studies investigating and challenging the institutionalized setting of multilingualism and multiculturalism, providing interesting perspectives and practical outcomes (Mishima 2009; García and Wei 2014; Baynham and Lee 2019).

This article has emphasised the need for professionals involved in legal, health, and other social domains related to migration, at all levels, to develop special linguistic and cultural competences. The data analysed reveal the presence of ELF (used by and developed by non-native speakers), Nigerian Pidgin and other Anglophone and English-lexified contact languages, African languages (e.g., Edo, Igbo, Esan, Mandinka, Twi, Wolof, Amharic, Tigrinya) and several Arabic (predominantly Libyan) and Italian words and expressions. Yet, the high level of complexity of the interactional practices occurring in the context under investigation does not entail a sharp classification and codification of the phenomenon in terms of standardized/institutionalized languages or varieties. In this regard, the translanguaging approach offers an innovative perspective on the dynamics of language contact, acquisition and teaching, providing pragmatic solutions to communication failure in institutionalized settings, and emphasizing the fluidity of the linguistic scenario in the domain of migration.

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