

A Contact Variety of English: the Case of the Bedford Italian Community

Language Contact: Italian immigration to Bedford (UK)

The last decades have seen a wide range of studies and research projects on language contact based on the most well-established sociolinguistic methodologies. Multilingualism is a well-researched domain¹ and linguistic minority languages represent an area of great interest where important projects are currently underway.² However, in spite of the state of ferment over linguistic minorities in the United Kingdom, there has still been little monitoring of the linguistic competence and language ability of specific communities, such as the Italian one, whose mother tongue is not English.

The town of Bedford in the British East Midlands has a large Italian diaspora community that began to arrive in the early 1950s to seek employment in the local brick works. Ethnically Bedford is one of the most highly mixed communities in Britain and is home to over a hundred immigrant languages, including Italian together with Punjabi, Turkish, Polish, Portuguese, Cantonese and Mandarin Chinese. With one language – English – per thousand residents, the town has twenty-five times as many languages as London in proportion to population size. According to the 2001 census, 2 in 7 of Bedford's population are of Italian origin, which means that the 28% of today's Bedfordians belong to the Bedford Italian Community (henceforth BIC) overall numbering 42,261 *Italians*. Significantly, Bedford is the only non-capital city in the world to have had its own Italian vice-consulate which was opened in town in 1954 to look after the needs of the Italian settlers, and closed in 2008.

Given the monolingual and uni-cultural tradition of Britain, speaking ethnic minority languages alongside English has become an 'act of identity'³ for individuals, and an important signal as a whole for British society. After all, today's Britain is generally a multi-cultural society, displaying a rich variety of family forms, traditions, and close and continuing links with extensive kinship networks originating in, or extending to, a number of other European countries, Africa, South and East Asia, and the Caribbean. Such diversity has invariably been part and parcel of the social and cultural changes occurring in contemporary Britain, within a globalising world. With regard to speaking minority languages, at the conflicting and contradictory time of globalisation where multiculturalism is so hotly debated, it is urgently necessary to have a closer understanding of the dynamics of what – socially, culturally and linguistically – is taking place among ethnic minority groups within and across national boundaries.

Historically speaking, the main reasons for Italian migration can be traced, on the one hand, to the London brick industry's hard-pressed need of labour, and

¹ Michael Clyne, "Multilingualism", in Florian Coulmas, ed., *The Handbook of Sociolinguistics* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000); Ben Rampton, *Crossing: Language & Ethnicity Among Adolescents* (New York: Longman, 1995); Safder Alladina and Viv Edwards, *Multilingualism in the British Isles* (London and New York: Longman, 1991).

² David Britain and Sue Fox, "Vernacular Universality, Allomorphic Simplifications, and Language Contacts: the Regularisation of Hiatus Avoidance Strategies in English Non-standard Accents", paper presented at *World Englishes: Vernacular Universals vs. Contact-Induced Change: An International Symposium*, University of Joensuu Research Station, Mekrijärvi (Finland), 1-3 September, 2006.

³ Li Wei, *Three Generations, Two Languages, One Family* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd, 1994).

on the other, to the Italians' desperate need to seize every opportunity to work and earn money to support their families. In those years, the world's largest brick factory, Marston Valley Bricks Co., suffered from a desperate shortage of English labourers. Today, over 60% of all Italians in Great Britain live in the South East, and the Italian community numbers at least 250-300,000 people.

As argued in previous research, either exhaustively or superficially, in the late 1940s and early 1950s a second and very important phase of Italian immigration to Great Britain began. Unlike the immigration of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the flow of the 1950s was mainly based on volunteer workers recruited in bulk.⁴ After World War II, Great Britain set out to rebuild its economy, and many sectors were in desperate need of new labour. An important inter-governmental initiative led to an agreement between the British Ministry of Labour and the Italian Government and the setting up of a bulk recruitment scheme offering jobs to Italian men and women in various industries where shortages had arisen.

During this second wave, the most significant flow began in the summer of 1951 and was directed to the Bedfordshire brick factories; throughout the 1950s and early 1960s entire villages moved from southern Italy to Bedfordshire, where one of the largest Italian communities was established in the town of Bedford, with related communities in Peterborough, Bletchley, Loughborough, and Nottingham. The migrants came from many villages throughout Italy, but predominantly from the poorer regions of Campania, Apulia, Calabria and Sicily. The steady flow and ongoing transferral of workers continued over the years, and although many of them did reasonably well and were able to return home after a few decades, today the southern Italian community in Bedford is striking in its size, tradition, way of life, and governmental institutions.⁵

Aims of the study

Earlier studies of the linguistic characteristics of Bedford Italians have shown English is the first language of the vast majority of the 2nd and 3rd generation speakers, though most proved to have a good passive competence in Italian, at least, and their ethnic identity as Italian, rather than British or English is *extremely* strong.⁶

In the course of time, over the past sixty years their immigrant language has been seriously endangered. Most of the past two generations have not learned Italian as their L1. Most of them only take Italian classes at school or do after-school activities in Italian, and although they speak Italian to their grandparents and go regularly to Italy to spend summer holidays, most Bedford Italians are functionally L1 Anglophones.⁷

In these circumstances, the transferral of Italian language features onto their English could possibly occur. Therefore, one of the purposes of this study has been to work on the hypothesis that some features of Italian might have been maintained and transmitted across the generations, thus affecting Bedford Italian L1 speakers of English. Moreover, given the speakers' perception of their ethnic

⁴ Arturo Tosi, *L'italiano d'oltremare. La lingua delle comunità italiane nei paesi anglofoni* (Firenze: Giunti, 1991).

⁵ Terri Colpi, *Italians Forward* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishers, 1991).

⁶ Siria Guzzo, "Multilingualism and Language Variation in the British Isles: the Case of the Bedford Italian Community", in Norman Fairclough et al., eds., *Discourse Analysis and Contemporary Social Change* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007).

⁷ Siria Guzzo, *Language Shift: the case of the Bedford Italian Community*, unpublished MA dissertation (Colchester: University of Essex, 2005).

identity and heritage as Italian more than English, their dominant feeling might have enhanced – consciously or unconsciously – the infiltration of Italian features into their English as markers of ethnic differences. It seems plausible that current speakers could focus on certain features of Italian and transfer those into English.

Based on the account of what my earlier studies have discussed, in this paper I shall focus on the phonology of just two speakers – one female BI adolescent and a demographically matched, male speaker. The micro approach enables investigation at a level of detail I have not previously attempted.

Methods

⁸ Siria Guzzo, David Britain and Sue Fox, “From L2 to Ethnic Dialect: Hiatus Resolution Strategies across the Generations in Bedford Italian English” (forthcoming).

⁹ Lesley Milroy, *Language and Social Networks* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987); see also Penelope Eckert, *Linguistic Variation as Social Practice* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) and “Age as a Sociolinguistic Variable”, in Florian Coulmas, ed., *The Handbook of Sociolinguistics* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

¹⁰ Lesley Milroy and Matthew Gordon, *Sociolinguistics: Method and Interpretation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003).

¹¹ Michael H. Agar, *The Professional Stranger: An Informal Introduction to Ethnography* (San Diego: Academic Press, 1996).

¹² William Labov, “Field Methods of the Project on Linguistic Change and Variation”, in John Baugh and Joel Sherzer, eds., *Language in Use* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984).

¹³ Lesley Milroy and Matthew Gordon, *Sociolinguistics: Method and Interpretation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003).

The present study is part of a wider project whose focus is language behaviour and identity within the BIC – whether speakers of Italian origins still use Italian and if so, to what extent, how well, and to whom, according to which social requirements, and how they use English to manifest their ethnic identity.⁸ Particular attention has been paid to the relationship between social structures and the interactional behaviour of the individual which contributes to the formation and transformation of these structures, also using the notion of social network.⁹

Considering the well documented lack of naturalness that can characterize a formal interview through written questionnaires or pre-organised forms,¹⁰ I opted for a combination of methodological procedures – participant observation, ethnographic questionnaire and informal ethnographic interviews – that seemed more promising in terms of naturalness.

In most cases, a researcher is not part of the community under analysis, which raises the issue of how to gain access to the life of the community the researcher wants to study. As Agar suggests “the only way to access those activities is to establish relationships with people, participate with them in what they do, and observe what is going on”,¹¹ which involves the processes of entering the community, being part of it, observing its activities, and studying its everyday life and language. Bearing in mind the principle of the naturalness of the talk, and wishing to be a good participant observer, for the first stage of the research I spent four months in the BIC engaging in everyday tasks: eating, talking, and living with the people I aimed at investigating. Nonetheless, a fieldworker will always be looked on as a stranger and will have to face the “observer’s paradox” of investigating how people speak when they are not observed.¹² Making use of participant observation as one of the methods to collect data can help minimise the observer’s paradox. Becoming part of the researched community helps understand the internal rules of the community itself; the initial outsider becomes an ‘internal eye’, almost a member of the group the fieldworker is studying.¹³

A complementary method used for the whole study consisted of informal interviews. As in casual conversations, no schemes were set out in advance, at least consciously, no opening statements were formulated, no effort to control the conversation was made on my part as a researcher; free and random speech was the

most common result of the interaction. I decided to allow the researcher and the researched to engage in everyday conversation among friends, aiming at obtaining more spontaneous speech data.

Ethical issues have been widely discussed in the literature¹⁴ and I opted for an ‘overt method’¹⁵ thus straightforwardly explaining the purpose of my research. Being informed made my interlocutors feel in charge of part of the job and willing to provide as much information as possible about their community. Generally, people from the 2nd generation complained of too little interest in their Italian community and this made them even keener to be involved in my study.

Data

The data for this study consisted of two samples of informants differing according to the methods. An overall number of 63 ethnographic questionnaires were filled in by BIC members of 2nd and 3rd generation, whereas 7 BI teenagers were asked to be recorded during informal interviews and compared to the recordings of 7 ‘Anglo’ peers.

	2 nd generation BIs		3 rd generation BIs	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Questionnaire Survey	24	13	9	17
Informal Interview	–	–	4	3

Table 1. Distribution of questionnaires and interviews among BI cohorts.

As reported in my earlier studies, the questionnaire was distributed ethnographically making use of informal network links among friends, acquaintances and church members. The overall aim was:

- (a) to monitor the BIC members’ competence in the two languages English and Italian. It is certain that many features of original L1 Italian will have been lost and are no longer present in their contemporary Italian, although we can still find them in the speech of older and fluent 1st generation BIs who have never learned the host language properly.
- (b) to verify the BIs’ level of ethnic identity perception, and
- (c) to outline their choices of language(s) according to different interlocutors and situations.

Based on the answers to the questionnaires consisting of a set of 14 questions, some general assumptions have been made.

The methods used for the ethnographic interviews involved face-to-face interaction between investigator and informant, and the interviews were usually conducted at an Italian-style kiosk located in the town centre of Bedford, “La

¹⁴ Kazuko Matsumoto, *Language Contact and Change in Micronesia: Evidence from the Multilingual Republic of Palau*, PhD Dissertation (Colchester: University of Essex, 2002).

¹⁵ Danny J. Jorgenson, *Participant Observation. Methodology for Human Studies* (London: Sage, 1989).

Piazza” which was the favourite meeting point for most members of the community or in a quiet indoor area where noise did not affect the recording. Informants were selected according to the social variables of age, gender and ethnicity and the ‘friend of a friend’ informal network technique based on the work of Milroy and Eckert was used. All were in their mid and late teens, male and female Bedford Italians of two generations vs Anglo Bedfordians. All interviews were of the same length and were as totally informal and spontaneous as casual conversations. As for the linguistic variables, my analysis focused on the FACE diphthong and the (de)aspiration of voiceless stops /p, t, k/. Thus, one vowel and one consonant variables were quantitatively analysed (see Figure 1).

The case study reported in this paper examines two of the seven BI informants – a male adolescent, whom we shall call ‘Amedeo’, and a female teenage, ‘Samantha’.

The FACE Variable	[eɪ] => [eɪ]
De-aspiration	[p ^h , t ^h , k ^h] => [p, t, k]

Figure 1. The two linguistic variables investigated.

The immigrants’ language ability and today’s BI situation

Several studies on language maintenance and shift among minority communities have analysed the level of linguistic competence displayed by immigrants. Language change and cultural assimilation within the same ethnic group and across the host community has been the focus of many investigations.¹⁶ Clearly, a high degree of mutual intelligibility between immigrants and the society they live in is not easy to achieve, partly because many immigrants typically do not even speak the standard language of their country, but rather the dialect of their hometown and partly because acquiring an acceptable competence in a foreign language requires time, devotion and personal inclination. Thus, communication across communities is even more complicated.

At the time of the Italian migration to Bedford, immigrants spoke village dialects as their mother tongue. Once in Britain, they had to acquire English as a foreign language in the host country. The vast majority of these immigrants had little schooling and spoke poor standard Italian; those who had had the chance of completing primary education were mostly males, while most females had never completed primary school. The vast majority were, therefore, almost illiterate, and their poor ability in reading was only slightly better than their writing skills.¹⁷ In their home village there had been no need to develop their language skills further – their oral communication was good, everyone was able to fully understand a speaker of standard Italian and that was considered enough. Once those people moved to Britain in the 1950s their contact with the national language decreased dramatically and they had to learn the new language, English. There are several reasons why

¹⁶ Alan Bell, “Maori and Pakeha English: A Case Study”, in Alan Bell and Koenraad Kuiper, eds., *New Zealand English* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1984).

¹⁷ Arturo Tosi, *Immigration and Bilingual Education* (Oxford: Pergamon Institute of English, 1984).

immigrants never learned the host language properly and one was represented by the fact their learning activity was based on exposure to the language rather than formal education. Since they spent time both working and living only with their fellow villagers, hoping merely to save enough money to go back home to Italy, most of them ended up by never learning English.

Today's Italian language competence of the BIC members I investigated turned out to be still quite widespread. Their social network is strong and close, and even today they tend to spend much more time with people from their community than with English people. For this reason, they keep using a sort of dialect-based Italian and maintain a reasonably good overall linguistic ability.

Some remarkable insights come from the responses concerning the speakers' Italian and English language competence. The questionnaire intended to produce evidence of the level of awareness and self-perception the speakers had with regard to their speaking, reading, writing and understanding abilities in both languages. Since Bedford Italians are L1 speakers of English nowadays, all appeared confident and competent as far as their English was concerned. Findings regarding Italian, on the other hand, showed 2nd generation informants to have an overall good Italian competence and good skills – at least passive – while the adult female speakers felt the most competent in the language. Moreover, 3rd generation Bedford Italians also claimed to feel as good at Italian as their older counterparts, although conversely, the young female speakers seem to be the least competent or to perceive themselves to be so.

As far as heritage is concerned, although the 3rd generation are completely integrated into multicultural England and although they were born speaking English as their mother tongue, sometimes having mixed parents (mostly Italian and English but also other 'mixtures'), the questionnaire survey revealed 'Englishness' to be very weak among them, with both 2nd and 3rd generation informants showing similar results. They claim to feel themselves to be not very English at heart, but *strongly* Italian. Interestingly, again female speakers seem to represent the two end of the spectrum, with adults feeling an Italian identity the most and young informants the least.

Finally, the last section of the survey concerns the speakers' choices of language(s) according to different interlocutors and situations (see appendix for question 14). Remarkably, although English proved to be more widely spoken than Italian, mainly at work, at school, in formal administrative settings and among acquaintances, a dialect-based Italian is claimed to be still used, most of the time at home and with members of the same ethnic group. The speakers, generally, keep the two languages separate, using one at a time according to the social requirements. They do, however, code-switch, mainly if their interlocutor does so.

Analysis

Earlier analyses of the phonological characteristics of the 3rd generation adolescents show realisations, especially among the males, which are highly atypical for this area

of Southern England, including significant amounts of de-aspiration of voiceless stops and relatively close, relatively monophthongal realisations of the FACE diphthong. Although the frequency and distribution of the two variables examined vary strikingly from one speaker to another, it is legitimate to suggest that the young males may be identified by some features while the girls are characterised by a different trend.

The case study reported here examines two of the seven BI informants of 3rd generation who led me to make these observations – a male adolescent, whom we shall refer to as ‘Amedeo’, and a female teenager, ‘Samantha’. Informant ‘Amedeo’ is a leader for his friends. He is part of the Italian community; besides, he seemed to be a point of reference for his group of friends: he handles his mates’ telephone calls, suggests what to do and where to spend the weekends, and sometimes takes decisions for himself as well as for the rest of the group. I approached him while he was chilling out at the kiosk “La Piazza” on a Saturday morning, and asked him to fill in my questionnaire about his life as a member of this extensive Italian community in the UK. He seemed quite reluctant at the beginning, not very interested in sharing his experiences with me, so after he finished filling in the questionnaire, I avoided personal questions about his life in Bedford, and started casual conversation. Accidentally, we met several other times at the kiosk, and finally became good acquaintances who enjoyed a conversation while sipping a good cup of coffee. When I had the chance of recording some of his friends, I drew him in and recorded all of them while having some chips and a soda at the cafeteria near the Italian kiosk. As for Amedeo’s knowledge of Italian, it revealed itself to be poor: he understands a little but hardly speaks the language at all. He goes to Italy with his family almost every year on vacation, but feels uncomfortable because of his poor knowledge of Italian.

As for my female informant ‘Samantha’, her father is English, but the rest of her family and relatives in town are Italian. She was brought up by her Italian grandparents and learned the language from her grandmother – *nonna*. Like most of her BI fellow citizens, she can speak her family’s hometown dialect much better than Standard Italian. Nevertheless, she speaks Italian quite fluently, reads, writes and understands the language.

Samantha and I first met at the end of a Sunday service at the Italian Catholic Church San Francesca Cabrini. During my stay, I used to go to Mass quite frequently, and there I met most of the BIC members and their families. I was introduced to many people there at the church, I met mostly first generation Italians and they introduced me to their children and grandchildren. Among them, I met Samantha, and asked her to fill in my questionnaire. After that we met again thus beginning a nice friendship. She was very interested in my job, and helped me a great deal providing me with various types of information about the community and her life in town, as well as looking for other friends of hers I could talk to. Thanks to Samantha, I had the chance of meeting many ‘Anglo’ female informants too, and this was a great help, it gave the proper balance to my research when it came to

compare the speech of the BI teenagers I had taped with their ‘Anglo’ peers.

I recorded Samantha and another female informant at the lounge of the hotel where I was staying. Samantha was very embarrassed at the beginning: she laughed a lot, her heart jumped every time I turned to her to say something. She displayed her agitation by playing with her hair or any other object within her grasp. She eventually relaxed when I decided to turn the focus of the conversation to myself telling them some funny stories about my life, and so the conversation (re)engaged in a more natural way. I recorded Samantha a second time some weeks afterwards.

Results

Though in the research literature there is not much reference to the phonology of Italians in the UK, the FACE diphthong and the aspiration of plosives have been increasingly considered significant variables to study with regard to minority languages.¹⁸ A generally conservative approach to coding variants was used and the two phonological features under study were coded impressionistically, with doubtful tokens categorized so as to minimize rather than maximise variation. Despite being on a very small scale, the present analysis supports the suggestion that FACE variants and unaspirated stops are very much more likely to occur in the speech of Bedford Italians. It will be worthwhile, then, to further examine their distribution in the speech of a larger matched sample of speakers.

Overall, Bedford being part of the South East of England, either the diphthong [ɛi] or [æi] of the FACE vowel were expected to be found in the speech of my informants. On the contrary, my analysis revealed a clear tendency towards the realisation of a mid-close front position [eɪ].

According to my data, the boys’ show a strong preference for [eɪ] or [e] in any linguistic environment where the diphthong variation is possible. The frequency of the variation from the standard form [ɛɪ], or the South Eastern variant [æi], in favour of [eɪ] or [e] is higher than 50% in all the four male informant recordings, whereas the female speakers never exceed 50%. Although the variation is widespread in both male and female speech, the latter are more likely to retain the standard form [ɛɪ]. This might suggest that BIC female speakers are more integrated in the local British society than the male informants.

¹⁸ Janet Holmes, “Maori and Pakeha English: Some New Zealand Social Dialect Data”, *Language in Society*, 26 (1997), 65-102.

The FACE Variable	Amedeo	%
ɛɪ eɪ		
Total number of tokens	63	
[ɛɪ]	7	11.1%
[eɪ/e]	56	88.8%

Table 2. Amedeo’s overall score with regard to the FACE variants

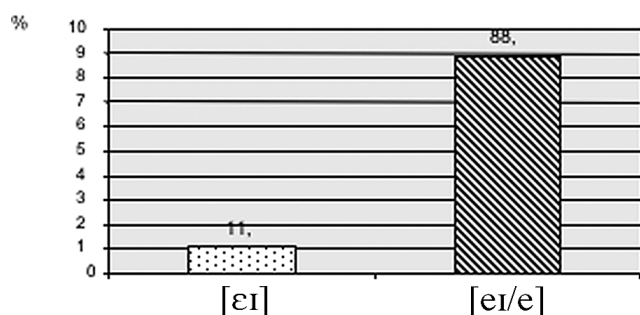


Figure 2. The FACE Variable $eɪ \sim eɪ$ with regard to Amedeo

Table 2 and Figure 2 provide information on the relative frequency of FACE variants from the interviewee Amedeo. Of all tokens, 89% show the speaker's preference for the diphthong variation $eɪ \Rightarrow eɪ$. For instance, Amedeo realises *play* [eɪ], *staying in* [eɪ], and *the match today* [eɪ]. Despite the standard acknowledged position is a front half open [ɛ] or a more south eastern half open/open [ɛ], the variant uttered by Amedeo revealed to tend toward an half close position. In this case, the FACE vowel glides towards a mid-close front position [eɪ].

The FACE Variable $eɪ \ eɪ$	Samantha	%
Total number of tokens	65	
[eɪ]	45	69.2%
[eɪ/e]	17	26.1%

Table 3. Samantha's overall score with regard to the FACE variants

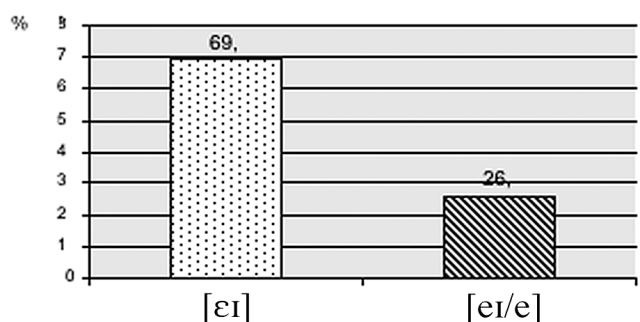


Figure 3. Variants of FACE diphthong in Samantha

On the other hand, for Samantha Table 3 and Figure 3 display a variation of only 26% of all tokens. Although the fronting of the glide represents less than the half of the tokens analysed, its level of variation is still very significant. Samantha gives clear examples of the mid close [eɪ] uttering *few days* [eɪ], and *all right, okay* [eɪ], for instance. Her realisation of the FACE vowel displays she is undergoing a process of variation even though she is not as consistent as Amedeo.

As for the consonant variable, recent work in sociolinguistics has shown that, what at first sight seems to be free variation in the plosives, may actually be a consequence of other factors.¹⁹ The variation in the aspiration of the voiceless plosive may be determined by stylistic factors or social circumstances. Moreover, both the selected variables can be evidence of linguistic variation in BIC English. Arguably, this variation may be the reflection of the Italian heritage in the language of the informants.

As for the de-aspiration of the voiceless stops /p, t, k/ in preceding stressed vowel environments, it is certainly quite widespread in both the male and female speech recorded, the level of variation never exceeding a remarkable 30%. BIC informants show a preference for using de-aspirated forms of plosives in both linguistic environments of preceding stressed and unstressed vowels.

¹⁹ John C. Wells, *Accents of English*, vols. 1 and 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

(de)aspiration of /p, t, k/	Amedeo	%
Total number of tokens	75	
[p ^h] [t ^h] [k ^h]	36	48%
[p] [t] [k]	39	52%

Table 4. Amedeo's overall score with regard to the (de)aspiration of voiceless stops /p, t, k/

It is quite clear from Table 4, and particularly from its visual representation in Figure 4, that Amedeo reveals a significant level of variation. Of all tokens, 52% shows the marked de-aspiration of the fortis voiceless stops /p, t, k/. Amedeo utters *a pack* [p] several times in the course of the interview and his bilabial plosive /p/ always proved de-aspirated in spite of the linguistic environment of a following stressed vowel. Moreover, Amedeo repeatedly says *Tuesday* [t], and each time he realises the voiceless plosive with no aspiration as happened in the previous example. The unaspirated variants indeed represent a clear feature of BI language. Amedeo did display a significant trend towards variation and can be considered as undergoing the process of plosive de-aspiration.

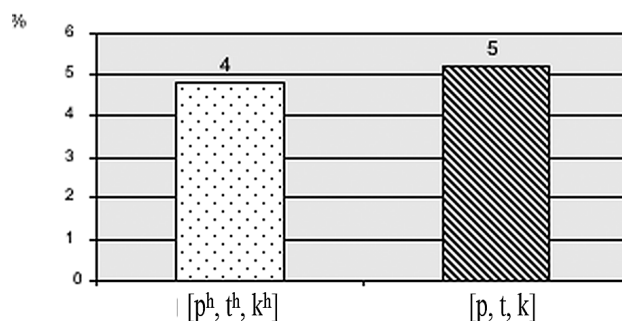


Figure 4. Variants of /p/, /t/, /k/ in Amedeo

(de)aspiration of /p, t, k/	Samantha	%
Total number of tokens	80	
[p ^h] [t ^h] [k ^h]	68	85%
[p] [t] [k]	12	15%

Table 5. Samantha's overall score with regard to the (de)aspiration of voiceless plosives /p, t, k/

Conversely, Samantha's voiceless stops /p, t, k/ seem not to be on a cline towards a non-standard form of English. On the overall score of potential de-aspiration, 15% of tokens display variation. Her level of de-aspiration is not very consistent, as shown in Table 5 and Figure 5. Nonetheless, it still denotes change is occurring in her speech. In the recordings Samantha releases interesting examples of de-aspiration, *just take it* [t], *Italian people* [p], and *is Piazza* [p], for instance. Although the linguistic environment suggests aspirating, some voiceless plosives are not aspirated.

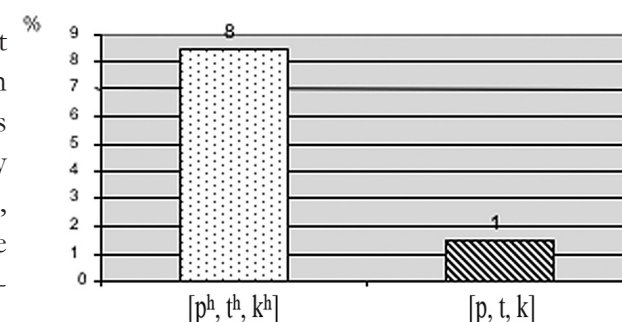


Figure 5. Variants of /p/, /t/, /k/ in Samantha

Discussion

It appears clear from the present quantitative and qualitative analysis that young BIC members, represented here by the case studies of 'Amedeo' and 'Samantha',

use a fair amount of non-standard features of English. Overall, the young males, as 'Amedeo' shows, are more willing to adopt non-standard features of English than the girls. Generally speaking, it seems that the boys tend to use more non-standard influenced vowels and de-aspirated voiceless plosives, while the young females pronounce the vowels and aspirate the stops in a more southern British English manner.

Arguably, the spread of these variants may serve as markers of ethnic identity. They might be an indicator to signal membership of a minority group, whether that means being Italian or simply other than 'Anglo'. In this respect, as for the source of these features, they might reflect the influence of Italian. Both the standard FACE variant and aspirated stops are not typical features of the Italian language. In this respect, the variants BIC teenagers produce are likely to be more familiar to Italian than English. Moreover, as discussed above, most BIs have contact with the Italian language, often through the interaction with older family members. Many use Italian at home or with relatives, both in Italy and in England. On the basis of their own assessments, many claim to be fluent users of the language, and this could possibly serve as explanation to the Italian influence.

Overall, although the numbers are so small that any suggestions must be very tentative, BIC speakers from the same ethnicity, social background, age and gender appear to share to a greater or lesser extent features of an *Italian*-influenced English as their common accent.

Conclusions

Features of Italian can be identified in the English of BIC teenagers. Similar situations have been found in many other speech communities where English, for various reasons, has gradually displaced an original language, and the variety of English that arises is characterized by identifiable features belonging to the replaced language.

The present study has focused on the language behaviour of the Italians resident in Bedford since 1950, with the purpose of throwing light on the socio-linguistic situation of the community, in order to verify the reflection of their local cultural diversity and identity on the English they speak. Based on a sample of teenage speakers this article has centred on two phonological features which have been suggested as potential features of BI English. The evidence here demonstrated that these features are currently undergoing some variation compared to the standard variants. The analysis thus provides a starting point for further research in this respect.

The two phonological features characterized the speech of BI adolescents and occur sufficiently frequently in my quantitative analysis to suggest that it may represent two salient features of BIE. The analysis of the FACE vowel revealed the informants' tendency towards the mid-close front position [eɪ]; the speakers' glide begins from slightly above the mid-open front position [ɛɪ], and moves towards the mid-close front [eɪ]. As for the variation in the *aspiration* of the voiceless plosives,

this turned out to be determined by stylistic factors and/or social circumstances. The *de-aspiration* of the plosives present in the speech of the informants seems to indicate that the process of de-aspiration is the result of Italian influence on the English language. Arguably, these features may serve as markers of BI ethnic identity. It is clear, however, that we are dealing with a continuum, and that the features described occur in different frequencies in the speech of different BIs according to a number of social factors.

In conclusion, this article makes a contribution to support the suggestions that some linguistic features which occur in the speech of BIs can be traced to the influence of the Italian language, and serve to signal their ethnic Italian identity.

APPENDIX – THE QUESTIONNAIRE (sections 6-9 and 12-13)

Please answer each question by ticking the most appropriate answer(s)

1 – Are your grandfathers Italian, English, Anglo-Italian, or other?

Italian	English	Anglo-Italian	Other
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2 – Are your grandmothers Italian, English, Anglo-Italian, or other?

Italian	English	Anglo-Italian	Other
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3 – If your father Italian, English, Anglo-Italian, or other?

Italian	English	Anglo-Italian	Other
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4 – If your mother Italian, English, Anglo-Italian, or other?

Italian	English	Anglo-Italian	Other
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5 – If your wife/husband Italian, English, Anglo-Italian, or other?

Italian	English	Anglo-Italian	Other
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please answer each question by ticking the appropriate answer(s).

6 – Can you **SPEAK** the following languages?

Italian:

Not at all	Very little	Quite good	Good	Perfectly
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

English:

Not at all	Very little	Quite good	Good	Perfectly
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7 – Can you **READ** the following languages?

Italian:

Not at all	Very little	Quite good	Good	Perfectly
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

English:

Not at all	Very little	Quite good	Good	Perfectly
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8 – Can you **WRITE** the following languages?

Italian:

Not at all	Very little	Quite good	Good	Perfectly
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

English:

Not at all	Very little	Quite good	Good	Perfectly
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

9 – Can you **UNDERSTAND** the following languages?

Italian:

Not at all	Very little	Quite good	Good	Perfectly
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

English:

Not at all	Very little	Quite good	Good	Perfectly
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please answer each question by ticking the appropriate answer(s).

10 – Do you watch the Italian television programmes? Yes No
if yes, how often?

Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

11 – Do you watch the English television programmes? Yes No
if yes, how often?

Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please answer each question by ticking the appropriate answer(s).

12 – Do you feel you are Italian? Yes No
if yes, how strongly?

Extremely	Very	Quite	Very Little	Not at all
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

13 – Do you feel you are English? Yes No
if yes, how strongly?

Extremely	Very	Quite	Very Little	Not at all
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

14 – What language(s) do/did you use in each situation?

AT	With	With	With	With	With	With	With	With
HOME	GPs	Ps	Pr	Ch	GrCh	Ns	friends	strangers
Italian								
English								
Both								

GPs=Grandparents; Ps=Parents; Ch=Children; N=Neighbours

AT WORK	With colleagues	With customers	With the boss
Italian			
English			
Both			

AT SCHOOL	With teachers	With classmates	Taking personal notes
Italian			
English			
Both			