Making Democracy Speak: Linguistic Foundations of Social Capital

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The North-South gap in Italy, and the range of theories that have been offered to account for it, mirror the broader debate about development …

Robert D. Putnam
Making Democracy Work, p. 159
…development of horizontal social networks that contribute favourably to governmental and to economic performance.

Robert D. Putnam
Making Democracy Work, p. 229
- The North-South gap: Italy and beyond
- Linguistics 1: Observations
- Linguistics 2: The European grammar of ownership
- Linguistic capital: A neglected resource
- Italy once again: Making Democracy Speak
The North-South gap: Italy and beyond

- Putnam’s Italy: regions ranked by Civic Community Index, c. 1970
Social capital research on Italy – ‘dependent’ variables

1) Presumed effects of social capital:

- Economic performance (Liberti & Sideri 2011)
- Entrepreneurship (Chiesi 2007)
- Financial development (Guiso, Sapienza & Zingales 2004)
- Employment rates (Andriani 2010)
- Health (Fiorillo & Sabatini 2011)
- Political accountability (Nannicini, Tabellini & Troiano 2010)
- Voter turnout (Guiso & Pinotti 2011)
- Etc.
Social capital research on Italy – ‘independent’ variables

2) Hypothetical explanatory factors:

- Cultural predispositions (Galassi 2001)
- Cultural legacy (de Blasio & Nuzzo 2009)
- Inter-generational value transmission (Tabellini 2008)
- Inter-gen. transmission of beliefs (Guiso, Sapienza & Zingales 2008)
- But not over centuries (McLaren & Baird 2006)
- Only ‘structural’ social capital (Sabatini 2005)
- Efficient public administration (Liberto & Sideri 2011)
- Institutions (Mauro & Pigliaru 2011)
- Organized crime (Peri 2004)
- Differences in IQ (Lynn 2010) ➔ Recently, a severe debate…
- Etc.
The North-South gap: Italy and beyond

In any event, certain mechanisms seem to work only in the North:

- Civicness (Ballarino & Schadee 2005)
- Free city-state experience (Guiso, Sapienza & Zingales 2008)
- Decentralization policies (Mauro & Pigliaru 2011)

→ Is this due to the fact that the grammar of the Northern dialects is different from the grammar of Southern dialects?
In any event, certain mechanisms seem to work *better* in the North:
Agenda

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Sociolinguistic situation in Italy:

- 8 minority languages, 3 statutory (French, German, Slovene)
- Standard Italian emerged only around 1970 (mass media)
- Today, dialect used mostly by elderly people and lower social strata
- However, dialect used differently in different regions:
  - Emilia-Romagna: dialect at home, Italian in public
  - Veneto: dialect used in public as well
  - Liguria: dialect no longer used by many

Historical background:

- No standardized ‘national’ language but literary ‘elite’ language
- Literary tradition in several ‘dialects’ (actually, different languages)
- Local dialects prevailed even after industrialization and WW1
Special grammar of northern dialects:

- Mandatory pronominalization of the subject
- Expletive dummy subject (e.g., *it is raining*, *it seems*, …)

Examples:

- Florence  *Maria la viene*  ‘Maria is coming’
  (Italian: *Viene Maria*)

- Veneto  *Dove ve tu?*  ‘Where do you go?’
  (Italian: *Dove vai?*)

- Emilia  *L e pyovú*  ‘It has been raining’
  (Italian: *È piovuto*)
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König & Haspelmath’s Europe (‘Standard Average European’)
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Linguistic particularity of ‘Standard Average European’

- Subject prominence (Li & Thompson 1976)
- Expression of pronominal subjects (Dryer 2011)
- Many more features: ‘SAE’ linguistic area (Haspelmath 2001)
- Abstract concepts allow for counterfactual reasoning (Bloom 1981)
- On the whole, an “exotic language” (Dahl 1990)

Outstanding linguistic means of…

- Identifying ‘subjects’ (e.g., actors, possessors)
- Relating subjects with ‘predicates’ (actions, attributes, properties)
- Subjects and predicates may be abstract, impersonal, counterfactual
Examples:

- *Look, there is my father* instead of just saying, *Look my father*
- *The tree has beautiful leaves* v. *Tree, the leaves beautiful*
- Alternative statement: *The tree’s leaves are beautiful*

Inevitable illocutive force:

- Almost every utterance becomes a logical declarative proposition
- The ‘speaker’ becomes the responsible ‘author’ of the statement

Hypothetical socio-psychological effects:

- Strengthened self-perception and social roles (accountability)
- More efficient communication? (Axel 2005)
Historical origins of ‘SAE’ features:

- Migrations and early Middle Ages (Haspelmath 2001)
- Language change in northern Italy: 1350–1550 (Spiess 1957)
- Full grammaticalization even later (Volodina 2009, 2012)

Hypothetical causes:

- Reanalysis of language structures by children acquiring the ‘same’ language with a new grammar
- Due to disemphasis of something that used to be salient in discourse before
- A discourse-pragmatic grammatical option grows into a formal grammatical requirement when the pragmatic intent withers away
- Diffusion of linguistic innovations usually due to higher prestige: central city → other cities, city → countryside
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Linguistic capital: A neglected resource

Capital ➔ Return on investment ➔ Growth ➔ …
Linguistic capital: A neglected resource

A. Social capital: alternative proposals

- Structural SC
- Cognitive SC

→ Performance
A. Social capital: alternative proposals (1)
A. Social capital: alternative proposals (2)
A. Social capital: alternative proposals (3)

- **Structural SC**
  - **Cognitive SC**
  - **Performance**
A. Social capital: alternative proposals (4)

Diagram:
- Structural SC
- Cognitive SC
- Performance

Relationships:
- Structural SC influences Cognitive SC
- Cognitive SC influences Performance
- Structural SC influences Performance

Diagram notes:
- Solid arrows represent direct influences
- Dotted arrows represent indirect influences
Linguistic capital: A neglected resource

A. Social capital: complex models (example)
B. Linguistic capital: observed effect

Linguistic capital: A neglected resource
B. Linguistic capital: observed effect
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B. Linguistic capital: observed effect
B. Linguistic capital: psychological effects (individual level)
B. Linguistic capital: social effects (system level)
B. Linguistic capital: total effects

![Diagram of linguistic capital]

- LC (Linguistic Capital)
- Cognitive SC
- Structural SC
- Performance

①, ②, ③, ④: Interconnections and effects between components.
Linguistic capital: A neglected resource

B. Tentative 2SLS regression with two independent variables:

- LC = linguistic capital (instrument for cognitive SC)
- SSC = structural social capital

\[ Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 f(LC) + \beta_2 SSC f(LC) + e \]

Though exclusion restrictions are not satisfied!
C. Accumulation of social capital
C. Accumulation of linguistic capital with language change
C. Accumulation of linguistic capital with standardized language
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- Liutprand’s Italy: Longobardia Maior and Longobardia Minor, 744
Italy once again: Making Democracy Speak

Longobardia Maior:
- High fragmentation (20–35 duchies, many gastaldias)
- Institutional instability, permanent internal competition
- After 774, full incorporation into the Frankish Empire

Longobardia Minor:
- Low fragmentation (2 duchies: Spoleto and Benevento)
- Institutional stability, no internal competition
- After 774, Benevento remained outside the Frankish Empire
Italy once again: Making Democracy Speak

North:
- High penetration of Germanic culture, e.g. *thing* (Gairethinx)
- Permanent competition among leaders and cities
- Binding legal norms of reciprocity (Launegild, Wadia)
- 1100–1150, quick revival of Roman Law
- 1200–1300, legal innovations (abolition of duels; factual evidence)
- 1300–1500, Commercial Revolution

South:
- Legal norms of reciprocity interpreted in an arbitrary fashion
- Stable political (i.e., administrative) institutions
- After 774, Benevento remained outside the Frankish Empire
- Slow revival of Roman Law, 12th–15th century
Italy once again: Making Democracy Speak

North:
- High salience of actors and property/properties in discourse
- Sudden social innovation, e.g. revival of Roman Law
  ➔ Grammaticalization of subject clitics?

South:
- Lower salience of relevant elements in discourse
  ➔ Not enough input for grammaticalization?
- Hesitant decline of Germanic law and traditions
  ➔ No opportunity to grammaticalize?
Summary:

Socio-economic effects of ‘linguistic relativity’ (Whorf 1956)

- Language structures as a stock of linguistic capital?
- Until around 1970, northern Italy had ‘more’ of this than the South
- In particular, SAE grammar seems to reinforce social capital

Speculative origins of SAE grammar in northern Italy:

- Lombard cultural and linguistic substratum?
- Frankish cultural and linguistic superstratum?
- Contact with contiguous languages within the Frankish empire?
- Interaction of all this with (the revival of) Roman traditions?
Thank you

Working paper shortly available at:

- https://www.alexandria.unisg.ch/persons/person/M/

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