

○ EXPLORING THE BILINGUALISM OF A MIGRANT COMMUNITY THROUGH LANGUAGE DOMINANCE

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This study outlines a linguistic profile of two subgroups of Italian English circumstantial bilinguals – one dominant in English and the other dominant in Italian – by exploring for the first time their linguistic repertoire through the Gradient Bilingual Dominance Scale (Dunn & Fox Tree, 2009). The scale takes into account language background/history, language use and phonological interference, three main clusters of indicators that make up their dominance. The analysis is further complemented by additional descriptors adapted from Marian, Blumenfeld and Kaushanskaya (2007) and Baker (2011). Over one hundred English dominants (EDs) and Italian dominants (IDs) of Italian descent living in Australia were administered a survey. Results indicate that the scores yielded by the scale broadly parallel the data on self-reported dominance. The contrastive analysis of single variables, however, reveals both discrepancies and similarities between the two groups. While both groups use and are exposed to both languages and self-report high proficiency in the four skills, EDs differ from IDs across indicators such as language attrition and phonological interference. These outcomes confirm that the examination of these subgroups of Italians through the components of their language dominance offers a concise analysis of their linguistic features that makes allowance for both the individual and the societal elements of their bilingualism.

KEY WORDS: Language dominance, bilingualism, immigrant language, Italian

INTRODUCTION

Linguistic inquiry on migrant groups in Australia has a long tradition (Clyne, 2005) and, specifically, Italian speakers have been object of research for decades (Bettoni, 2007). Previous research on Italians in Australia has focused predominantly on trilingual Italo-Australians, a speech community comprising post-war migrants from Italy and the later generations born in Australia. On the other hand, bilingual Italians in Australia – a rising group (Rubino, 2009) whose dominant languages are English and Italian (and not Italian regional languages) – have remained largely understudied. In order to fill this lacuna, this article explores for the first time the bilingualism of Italian English ‘circumstantial bilinguals’ (Valdes, 1992, p. 87) in Australia. In particular, it considers two groups of speakers, one dominant in Italian and one dominant in English, and analyses in detail some of their key linguistic features, thus creating a dominance-based linguistic profile.

This article proposes a method of investigation that takes into consideration both individual and societal elements of bilingualism, following the framework of François Grosjean (1982, 2010). In particular, the Gradient Bilingual Dominance Scale (GBDS) devised by Dunn and Fox Tree (2009) is employed for this purpose. This method allows one to create a distinction between English dominant bilinguals (EDs) and Italian dominant bilinguals (IDs), which, in turn, provides insights on a number of linguistic variables. The scale is complemented by additional measures adapted from Marian, Blumenfeld and Kaushanskaya (2007) and Baker (2011) that analyse the proficiency of the sample and their exposure to the languages. The exploration identifies differences and similarities between two groups of bilinguals characterised by different dominance and, accordingly, offers insights on how language dominance and its components can shed light on this group of speakers.

The investigation of these Italians in Australia presents an alternative method of differentiating subgroups of 'linguistically diverse communities' (Lising, 2009, p. 42) in a bid to go beyond the well-established approaches that have focused on comparisons between generations of speakers (e.g. Bettoni & Rubino, 1996). Therefore, this study takes on the challenge of initiating new developments in the study of migrant languages in Australia, intensely advocated by recent appraisals of the literature in this field (Rubino, 2010).

THE LINGUISTIC CONTEXT

A wide variety of disciplines have studied Italians in Australia due to the relative importance of Italo-Australians among the great quantity of migrant communities present in the country (Castles, Alcorso, Rando, & Vasta, 1992). Linguistic studies have delved into the repertoire of these speakers, underlying the fact that they do not constitute a bilingual but rather a trilingual community (Bettoni, 1981; Cavallaro, 2010; Rubino, 1993). In particular, alongside Italian and English, migrants carried with them a number of Italian regional languages, often termed 'dialects' by their speakers and by most researchers who have studied them (e.g. Bettoni, 1993; Caruso, 2010; Kinder, 1994). Studies have also revealed that, owing to the presence of this trilingualism, the diglossic situation of the community is highly complex. In particular, Italian has been found to be employed both in public and in private domains, although to different extents according to the speakers involved, for example, first versus second generation (Ciliberti, 2007, p. 49). Accordingly, the linguistic repertoire of Italo-Australians is characterised by a marked discrepancy among generations. In general terms, first generations have an Italian regional language as their strongest language, whereas Italian is their second language, often acquired and/or improved after migration because of its use within the speech community (Bettoni, 1991, p. 264). Their competence and use of English vary according to a number of factors, but it is usually low both in terms of passive and active skills (Baldassar & Pesman, 2005). On the other hand, English is the strongest language for second generations (Bettoni & Gibbons, 1990) and it is used in an ample range

of interactions. Italian regional languages are common in family-related settings and only marginally in other domains, whereas Italian is their weakest language by far (Bettoni & Rubino, 1998).

Overall, comparisons between first and subsequent generations have proved to be an insightful instrument in the analysis of the linguistic features of these trilinguals. In other words, in line with a large part of the literature on community languages in Australia (Clyne, 1991a, 1991b, 2004, 2005; Clyne, Hajek, & Kipp, 2008), clustering speakers into different groups has been a fecund method to highlight major features of their linguistic repertoire.

However, there is a group of Italians in Australia who are not trilingual, whose characteristics are largely unknown (Rubino, 2009, pp. 219–221). These are Italian English bilinguals who are not part of the community that arose from the period of mass migration. Some of them migrated after the 1970s and arrived in Australia as educated adults, working in skilled jobs often outside the Italian community (Baldassar, 2007, p. 387). Some others are subsequent generations, raised in Australia and yet exposed to Italian in various settings (Baldassar, Baldock, & Wilding, 2006, pp. 38–39) including the home, where their parents use Italian either because it is their strongest language or because it serves as a *lingua franca* (Cavallaro, 2006, p. 36). Some other speakers may have emigrated in their teenage years and have therefore acquired Italian not only within the household, but also in all the other domains.

In light of the heterogeneous nature of their language histories, an analysis of these bilinguals through comparisons between generations appears unsuited. Moreover, as will be discussed below, in order to take into account the complexity of their bilingualism, it is deemed necessary to adopt an approach that encompasses an analysis of the individual and societal elements of their linguistic repertoire. Such integration of different elements is achieved through the study of language dominance, which has been defined as the degree to which a bilingual ‘leans towards one language’ (Flege, Mackay, & Piske, 2002, p. 567), and finds its ground in the assumption that perfect bilingualism does not exist and that a bilingual always shows an unbalanced command of the two languages (Grosjean, 2010, p. 31). In keeping with Grosjean’s theoretical perspective, this study adopts a notion of bilingualism as lived experience, which indeed bridges the societal with the individual approach to bilingualism.

THE NOTION AND THE MEASUREMENT OF LANGUAGE DOMINANCE

The complexity of language dominance is such that its definition and description cannot be disjointed from methodological considerations involving measurement (Treffers-Daller, 2011, pp. 147–151). Although arguably researchers concur that the notion and the measurement of dominance are deeply intertwined, the way it has been described is not univocal and, consequently, has been studied through very different approaches.

According to some scholars, dominance is connected to the command of specific linguistic skills. Cutler and colleagues (1992), for instance, maintain that, for English French bilinguals, dominance can be identified by gauging bilinguals' different ability to segment syllables. For Macnamara (1969), faster reading rate in one language is an indicator of dominance in children and, similarly, Favreau and Segalowitz (1982) considered reading speed in identifying dominance amongst French English bilinguals. Cooper (1971) also used abilities to study bilingualism and found very different word naming scores in the two bilingual's languages and explained this with disparity in dominance. Disparity in dominance seems to be connected with differential use of fillers as well, more accentuated in the least dominant language than in the other (Rieger, 2003) and with disproportion in fluency (de Jong, Başbağı, Kan, Yıldız, & Daller, 2011).

Extent of interference has also been considered one of the indicators of dominance. Lambert (1990), for example, has argued that interlingual interference and dominance are strictly correlated. Prosodic and phonological interference have also long been found linked to dominance (Flege et al., 2002, p. 570). Analogous findings have emerged also from another study (Tahta, Wood, & Loewenthal, 1981) that considered phonological interference as an accurate detector of differences in dominance in speakers of 20 different languages. Other studies have evidenced that phonological interferences alone are not enough to account for dominance (Antoniou, Best, Tyler, & Kroos, 2011), while syntactic and pragmatic interference have been found related to dominance and able to bring about asymmetrical effects in the two languages (Kang, 2013; Vasilyeva et al., 2010). Yet, some studies on these types of phenomena have established that this is not to be applicable to all kinds of interferences and contexts (see for instance Argyri & Sorace, 2007).

Dominance has also been described as a product of a bilingual's language history (Bedore et al., 2012, pp. 617–618). While it is obvious that an individual's past experiences in regards to languages have a strong impact on bilingualism, the aspects of language background/history taken into consideration may vary a great deal. Years of residence in a host country is one of the most explored indicators in studying subsequent bilinguals, as it has been employed in most studies that investigate language history (Li, Sepanski, & Zhao, 2006, pp. 202–203). The same holds true for age of arrival in the host country, which has been found to correlate with a wide range of indicators such as vocabulary scores (Dolas, 2011; Portocarrero, Burright, & Donovick, 2007), verbal creativity (Kharkhurin, 2010) and auditory processing (Nguyen-Hoan & Taft, 2010). Similar results have emerged also from studies concerning first exposure to a language on subsequent bilinguals who did not experience emigration (Hazan & Boulakia, 1993). Other language history-related variables connected with dominance are language of education (e.g. see Hasson, 2006), cultural maintenance and self-identification (Shishkin, 2010), bilingualism of parents (Sekerina & Trueswell, 2011), and language input (De Houwer, 2007; Law & So, 2006; Tahan, Cline, & Messaoud-Galusi,

2011). Some other studies, however, seem to demonstrate that a number of variables pertaining to language history – such as age of first exposure, years of formal instruction, and years of exposure – exert a limited influence on dominance (Lim, Liow, Lincoln, Chan, & Onslow, 2008).

Finally, language use has been frequently viewed as an indicator of dominance (Flege et al., 2002, pp. 568–571). Specifically, frequency of use altogether (Sekerina & Trueswell, 2011), use in the home domain (Laubach, 1998), in the public domain (Fernandez, 2000) and, most frequently, the combination of several domains (Birdsong, 2006; Chincotta & Underwood, 1998; Hoffmann & Stavans, 2007; Law & So, 2006; Tamamaki, 1993; Treffers-Daller, 2011; Yip & Matthews, 2006) have accounted for dominance. Although there seems to be a lack of convergence among these studies, language use and its distribution across contexts, due to the complementarity principle, appear to be central factors able to impinge on dominance.

From the review of the studies dealing with dominance, it is again apparent that different researchers have labelled many different concepts as dominance and it suggests that, in order to capture the complexity of this variable, several factors need to be taken into account. In general, age of acquisition and language use are the main variables taken into consideration to find dominance in bilinguals (Dunn & Fox Tree, 2009, p. 275). Nevertheless, as explained earlier, there are more factors that have repeatedly been indicated as relevant to this specific matter. In addition, many of them have been found interwoven and, thus, need to be considered conjointly, e.g. language use, phonological interference and age of migration (Tahta et al., 1981) or language use and accent (Mackay, Flege, & Imai, 2006). Therefore, cognisant of their importance in studying dominance, this study avails itself of a combination of indicators that account for both individual and societal aspects of bilingualism.

In this research, the GBDS, devised by Dunn and Fox Tree (2009) is employed: a scale that encompasses variables pertaining to both language use and background/history. Dunn and Fox Tree prepared the scale by comparing a large number of self-reported data with a lexical translation task and a sentence translation task. The comparison confirmed the validity of the scale and its effectiveness in identifying the degree of dominance of bilinguals; that is, it properly assessed to what measure a bilingual leans towards a language or the other. The scale targets three main aspects of language dominance: 1) amount of language use for each language, 2) age of acquisition and 3) changing patterns of language use throughout the lifetime. It does so through nine questions, each associated with a particular score for English (values below zero) and for Italian (values above zero). The final computation of the scores provides a syncretic description of language dominance: EDs are expected to be represented by a negative value, whereas IDs by a positive one. Moreover, the closer a bilingual is to zero, the more balanced s/he will be.

The choice of this scale stems from three considerations. First, it is appropriate for analysing circumstantial bilinguals in the sense Grosjean intended of people who live their lives with two languages. The scale indeed makes allowances for the concurrent presence of the two languages in a bilingual life by accounting for several aspects of dominance. Second, it constitutes an instrument to verify that the self-reported dominance, according to which participants can be split into two groups, corresponds to their actual linguistic characteristics, thereby taking into account the complexity of their bilingualism.ⁱ Finally, the analysis of the variables that make up the calculation of overall dominance – considered one by one – provides a detailed linguistic profile of these bilinguals. In particular, it is possible to assess the difference between EDs and IDs in terms of age of acquisition, age of comfort in speaking the languages, language attrition, language of education, language use in the home domain, language preference, language of mental calculation and phonological interference.

METHODOLOGY

PARTICIPANTS

A total of 103 Italian English circumstantial bilinguals, born in Italy or of Italian descent and living in Australia, took part in the study. Participants were invited through notices placed in several Italo-Australian community buildings and media and were recruited in equal proportions based on their self-reported dominance. They were classified as dominant in English (N = 51) or dominant in Italian (N = 52)ⁱⁱ according to their answer to the question ‘please write the languages you know from the strongest the weakest’. One of the requirements to participate in this study was being bilinguals identified by use, i.e. individuals who use both languages in their everyday life (Grosjean, 2010, p. 4).

The educational background of participants was medium-high, with 76.5% (N = 82) of subjects with at least three years of tertiary education either in Italy or in Australia. The age ranged between 18 and 77 years (M = 46.67). Following Field’s (2000, p. 274) recommendations, it seemed appropriate to distribute subjects evenly in terms of age in order ‘to ensure that confounding variables are unlikely to contribute systematically to the variation’.

INSTRUMENTS & PROCEDURE

As anticipated, this study employs the GBDS (Dunn & Fox Tree, 2009), allowing self-reported dominance and calculation thereof to be combined, in line with the literature (Gollan et al., 2012). In addition to the GBDS, drawing upon Marian et al. (2007) and Baker (2011), the bilingualism of the sample was examined through further questions. This choice builds upon the discussion given earlier around the necessity of considering multiple factors that impinge on dominance, and seeks to provide additional details to the description of Italian dominant and English dominant bilinguals.

First, respondents were requested to state their proficiency in both English and Italian in all four basic language skills (Baker, 2011, p. 7). As discussed, self-rated proficiency has been proven a useful indicator in evaluating language dominance. Most importantly, in one study that compared both objective and subjective methods in assessing the dominance of Italian English bilinguals in another context, self-rated proficiency turned out to be highly correlated with performance tasks (Flege et al., 2002). Second, participants were asked to indicate their exposure to each of their languages in a normal week. This question was adapted from the Language Experience Proficiency Questionnaire (Marian et al., 2007).

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The overall score of language dominance was calculated by assigning numeric values to each variable in the scale, taking answers leaning towards Italian as positive (+) and answers leaning towards English as negative (-). The scores ranged in the following fashion: age of acquisition (+5/-5); age of comfort in speaking the languages (+5/-5); language attrition (+3/-3); language of education (+2/-2); language use in the home domain (+5/-5); language preference (+2/-2); language of mental calculation (+3/-3); and phonological interference (+5/-5). Moreover, -4 was added to the language dominance score of all participants on account of the fact that the language of the host country is English (Dunn & Fox Tree, 2009, pp. 287-288). Correlation between calculated and self-reported dominance was verified through point-biserial correlation. Statistical significance of mean differences between the two groups was identified through t-tests.

RESULTS

The analysis is presented in the following order: 1) overall calculated dominance compared to self-reported dominance; 2) contrastive analysis of EDs and IDs through the variables of the GBDS; and 3) contrastive analysis of EDs and IDs through complementary variables.

OVERALL DOMINANCE

As mentioned earlier, of the 103 bilinguals who participated in this study, 51 declared that their strongest language was English and 52 declared that their strongest language was Italian. That is, by taking self-reported language dominance as a tool to identify language dominance, the sample comprises bilinguals who are dominant in English and bilinguals who are dominant in Italian in almost equal proportions.

As expected, the calculation of language dominance carried out through the scale showed negative values for EDs and positive values for IDs. Table 1 represents the calculated language dominance for bilinguals who self-report being dominant in English, and bilinguals who self-report being dominant in Italian.

Self-reported Language Dominance			Statistic	
Calculated Language Dominance	English	Mean	-17.41	
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	-19.56
			Upper Bound	-15.67
	Italian	Mean	11.13	
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	9.69
			Upper Bound	12.58

1. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1997; 278: 1039-1044.

Table 1

speaking Italian at the age of 9.84 and English at 3.29, that is, during childhood. IDs felt comfortable speaking their dominant language in early childhood ($M = 1.57$), but English only once adults ($M = 26.17$). The groups are statistically different for both English, $t(103) = 13.16$, $p < 0.01$ and Italian, $t(103) = 6.27$, $p < 0.01$.

The third variable analysed was *language attrition*. When asked to indicate whether they had lost fluency in one or both of the two languages, no participants reported attrition in English, whereas 37 subjects reported attrition in Italian: 26 EDs and 11 IDs. EDs indicated that they started noticing loss in fluency in Italian at the age of 18.06, on average much earlier than IDs ($M = 34.09$), $t(35) = 4.08$, $p < 0.01$. These two different scores underlie two separate phenomena. In the case of IDs, attrition is due to the change of linguistic environment following migration. For EDs, instead, it is to be attributed to a number of factors, such as attending school in English and increasing interactions with non-Italian speakers that led to an incremental decrease in use of and exposure to the language (see Ciliberti, 2007, p. 49 for a similar phenomenon amongst trilinguals).

Analysis of *language of education* also confirms a clear distinction between the two groups. Bilinguals were asked to indicate how many years of schooling they attended in Italy (in Italian) and in Australia (in English). EDs attended school mainly in English ($M = 14.98$) and only marginally in Italian ($M = 1.31$). Similarly, the main language of education for IDs was Italian ($M = 15.38$), whereas they attended education in Australia only for about one year ($M = 1.36$). EDs were educated in English and IDs were educated in Italian, but both had some schooling in the other language for approximately the same amount of time.

LANGUAGE USE

Participants were also asked to indicate language use in the home domain, language preference and language of mental calculation.

Language use in the home domain was elicited by asking participants to indicate whether at home they use predominantly English, Italian, or both. Data regarding EDs indicate that the majority use English in the home domain, as shown in Table 2, where 70.6% selected English, 2% Italian and 27.5% both languages. Language use of IDs is different, with English only being employed by 19.2%, Italian by another 40.4% and the two languages together by 40.4% of the subjects. Bilingualism in the home domain is therefore more common among IDs than among EDs.

Table 2. Language use in the home domain

		Frequency	Percentage
English dominants	English	36	70.6
	Italian	1	2
	Both English and Italian	14	27.5
Italian dominants	English	10	19.2
	Italian	21	40.4
	Both English and Italian	21	40.4

The question relating to *language preference* was the following: ‘If you had to choose which language to use for the rest of your life, which language would it be?’ Results on this item indicate that an individual’s dominant language is more likely to be chosen. Out of 51 EDs, 45 (88.2%) chose English as their preferred language whereas only 6 (11.8%) chose Italian. 82.7% of IDs also showed preference for their dominant language ($N = 43$), while 9 (17.3%) chose English. The data referring to EDs therefore mirror those referring to IDs, marking a distinct pattern according to dominance.

Language of mental calculation was identified by asking ‘When doing maths in your head (e.g. multiplying 4×5), which language do you calculate the numbers in?’ Language of mental calculation shows this pattern even more markedly: only 3 EDs (5.9%) do mental calculus in Italian and only 2 IDs (3.8%) do it in English. The rest chose their dominant language.

PHONOLOGICAL INTERFERENCE

The last item included in the GBDS concerns *phonological interference* as reported by the subjects. Bilinguals responded to this question: ‘Do you have a foreign accent? If so, do you think you have a foreign accent when you speak in...’ They completed the sentence by writing either ‘no accent’, ‘Italian’ or ‘English’.

Contrasts between IDs and EDs reveal a different incidence of phonological interference between the two groups. While the large majority of IDs report phonological interference when speaking English ($N = 49$, 90.1%), over half of EDs ($N = 29$, 56.9%) report having no audible interference when speaking Italian. In other words, IDs tend to report the interference of their dominant language when speaking the other, whereas EDs less so, $t(103) = 10.61$, $p < .01$. These results are in line with the data presented earlier concerning the differential age of acquisition between EDs and IDs, and are also more broadly in line with the literature that has studied phenomena of cross-linguistic influence at the phonological level on account of language contact (e.g. Argyri & Sorace, 2007; Lambert, 1990).

SUPPLEMENTING LANGUAGE DOMINANCE

As mentioned earlier, considering the theoretical stance of this research, that is to say, the combination of individual and societal approaches to bilingualism, the linguistic profile described above is to be complemented with additional items. In particular, further data on language exposure are presented as integration to language use, as well as proficiency measures.

EXPOSURE TO THE LANGUAGES

Another question asked participants to state their exposure to each of the languages they know. The item devised to elicit them is the following: ‘Please indicate on average what percentage of time you are currently exposed to each language in a normal week (your percentage should add up to 100%)’.

The data on *language exposure* regarding Italian and English confirm that bilinguals in Australia are exposed more to English (68.9%) than Italian. Not surprisingly, exposure to Italian in an average week is lower among EDs (18.3%) than among IDs (39.6%), $t(103) = 6.24$, $p < .01$. This analysis thus confirms that these bilinguals are exposed more to English than to Italian, regardless of their language dominance. In a nutshell, English seems to dominate in the life of EDs in terms of language exposure, while in IDs’ life – although English is the language they are exposed to most of the time – Italian has substantial incidence.

PROFICIENCY

A central indicator for complementing this linguistic profile is *self-reported proficiency*. This was measured in regards to both Italian and English on a scale from zero to ten in terms of speaking, listening, reading and writing (cf. also Bettoni & Rubino, 1996; Wilson & Dewaele, 2010). Bilinguals wrote numbers beside each skill, in decimal numbers when they felt it was appropriate.

Data on proficiency show the expected significant differences between the two groups. In particular, with regard to English differences were significant, $t(103) = 8.16$, $p < 0.01$ for speaking, $t(103) = 7.45$, $p < 0.01$ for listening, $t(103) = 5.29$, $p < 0.01$ for reading, and $t(103) = 7.59$, $p < 0.01$ for writing. With regard to Italian differences were significant, $t(103) = 7.79$, $p < 0.01$ for speaking, $t(103) = 5.00$, $p < 0.01$ for listening, $t(103) = 6.87$, $p < 0.01$ for reading, and $t(103) = 8.26$, $p < 0.01$ for writing.

However, high values for both EDs and IDs are noted. On a scale from 1 to 10, EDs on average reported scores between 9.84 and 9.90 for the four skills in English, with an average self-reported proficiency of 9.88 (see Table 3). Proficiency in Italian was slightly lower (7.65), with receptive skills being higher than productive skills. This discrepancy between receptive and productive skills is consistent with the pattern of language competence found in second generation Italo-Australians (Rubino, 2006). Among these speakers, researchers have identified lower proficiency in writing than in speaking, on account of several factors, such as lack of education in Italian.

The difference in proficiency between the two languages is less marked among IDs. Mean proficiency in Italian is 9.71, with no significant divergence amongst skills, whereas proficiency in English ranges between 8.17 (writing) and 9.06 (reading). IDs are therefore more equally proficient in the two languages than EDs. This feature is probably due to the fact that a number of IDs might have started learning English in an educational setting prior to migration.

Table 3. Self-reported proficiency

			Mean
English dominants	English	Speaking	9.88
		Listening	9.90
		Reading	9.88
		Writing	9.84
		Total	9.88
	Italian	Speaking	7.55
		Listening	8.67
		Reading	7.71
		Writing	6.67
		Total	7.65
Italian dominants	English	Speaking	8.37
		Listening	8.63
		Reading	9.06
		Writing	8.17
		Total	8.56
	Italian	Speaking	9.71
		Listening	9.77
		Reading	9.75
		Writing	9.59
		Total	9.71

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The little research on non-trilingual Italian speakers in Australia has highlighted that bilinguals are likely to show linguistic features that render them different from the rest of Italians in this sociolinguistic context. This study has produced a linguistic profile of two subgroups of Italian English circumstantial bilinguals in Australia – one dominant in English and the other dominant in Italian – through the investigation of the components of their dominance, accompanied by additional variables. The data indicate consistencies and divergences between bilinguals of different dominance, thus shedding light on key linguistic features of this understudied group of Italians.

Italian English bilinguals of Italian descent were asked to provide information about their language background/history, language use and phonological interference, which were subsequently computed to obtain an overall score of language dominance. This score was shown to be a cumulative indicator that describes in a syncretic fashion the dominance of these bilinguals and was found to be consistent with self-reported language dominance, whereby participants had been recruited in almost equal proportions.

Overall, the variables used to examine the bilingualism of the participants offer adequate information to capture the complexity of their bilingualism. In particular, they describe bilingualism with the consolidation of an individual and a societal perspective, in keeping with the studies presented earlier (Baker, 2011; Dunn & Fox Tree, 2009; Flege et al., 2002; Marian et al., 2007) that have established that language background/history, language use and language competence are valid constructs to study bilinguals. Moreover, the analysis of the dominance of the sample and all the factors that have been taken into consideration to calculate it indicate that language dominance is, indeed, a construct able to account for the specificity of the sample's bilingualism. By targeting fundamental aspects of language dominance the GBDS succeeds in describing Italian English bilinguals, for it provides a comparative bilingual linguistic profile of two different subgroups. In addition to that, the measurement of supplementary linguistic variables complements language dominance and altogether offers a measurement of bilingualism that helps to incorporate individual and societal features.

This study, therefore, outlines a dominance-based linguistic profile of Italian English bilinguals, thus adding to the existing linguistic literature on Italians in Australia. Furthermore, it starts to take on the exhortation voiced by researchers (Rubino, 2010) regarding the necessity of reassessing traditional theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches also drawing upon disciplines other than sociolinguistics. This work offers a first attempt to undertake the exploration of an Australian immigrant group's linguistic repertoire

through a set of instruments that build upon bilingualism research (Baker, 2009). In so doing, it contributes to a diversification of approaches in the field.

Nevertheless, more research is needed to further examine these speakers. First of all, the analysis of their repertoire could be complemented with additional variables that have been proven insightful in analysing this kind of bilingualism, such as language preference (cf. Choi, 2010, pp. 192–196), or culture-related variables (Dewaele & Nakano, 2012, pp. 11–13). Researchers could also engage in the examination of bilingualism by adopting alternative approaches that have been increasingly influential in other contexts but largely disregarded in the study of this community. For instance both the analysis of the interaction between linguistic practices, mobility and place (Pennycook, 2012) and the blurring of demarcation lines between language varieties in superdiverse contexts (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011) may be prolific avenues for future research.

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ENDNOTES

- i As it will be explained, the scale is complemented with self-reported dominance, cf. Gollan et al. (2102), and other variables relevant to this research in order to obtain a validation of the scale and additional data on EDs and IDs.
- ii Equal proportions were necessary as they constitute an assumption for the execution of tests of difference (Perry, 2011).