

Narrating “Made in Italy”

Brand and responsibility in Italian corporations

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In this article, we examine how executives in Italian family-owned firms use their corporations’ histories to associate particular moral discourses of cultural values, responsibility, and authenticity with the “Made in Italy” brand. These links render Made in Italy a national brand – a brand representing all goods produced in Italy and an “authentic” national treasure. Through an analysis of Italian executives’ oral narratives, this article explores how collective identities are constructed in interview settings and how Made in Italy emerges through the various stances that these managers take regarding certain topics. We focus on the ways Italian executives align their corporate narratives, family histories, and brand identities with circulating ideologies on the significance of Made in Italy. By looking at how Italian managers enact Made in Italy as a national brand with collective responsibilities, this article contributes to recent research on narrative discursive practices in the corporate world.

Keywords: authenticity, brand, collective identities, face-to-face interaction, Italy, Made in Italy, oral narrative, stance

Introduction

Viewed by many as the crib of the Renaissance, Italy promotes art and history as centerpieces of Italian culture. The imposing figures of medieval churches, Renaissance palaces, and ancient Roman ruins in the Italian landscape create an aura that infuses a high regard for Italy’s rich artistic history still today. This aura of “authenticity” (cf. Benjamin, 1936; Hansen, 2008) is not limited to works of art and important historical sites. It permeates through many other aspects of Italian sociocultural life, becoming – as many of our interviewees emphasized – part of Italy’s cultural DNA. Due to the importance that art and history have for Italians, artistic and historical values have also filtered into Italy’s business sector, often through ideological associations with the “Made in Italy” brand.

In this article, we¹ examine how executives in Italian family-owned companies use their own corporations' histories to associate particular moral discourses of cultural values, collective responsibility, and authenticity with the Made in Italy brand. We focus on the ways Italian managers align and disalign their corporate histories, family narratives, and brand identities with particular visions of what Made in Italy means to them and their companies. To investigate their strategies of alignment and disalignment, we analyze two interviews drawn from a pool of twenty-five interviews we conducted with Italian executives in Italy in the summers of 2011 and 2012. The premise that Italian companies draw from a collective "Italian culture" of art, design, and imagination rooted in a supposedly Italian DNA was recurrent in all our interviews and conversations with Italian executives. In their oral narratives, our interviewees performed their Italianness by elevating Made in Italy as a recognizable, admirable, and respected marker of collective identity (Van De Mieroop, 2015). They did so by telling stories about their own historical and traditional backgrounds, their extended families, their friends, and their geographical location. In this article, we merge existing literature on brand and Made in Italy with recent linguistic anthropological and sociolinguistic research in narrative studies to show how executives create, enact, and then solidify a collective brand identity through Made in Italy. More broadly, the main theoretical contributions of this article are twofold: (1) it contributes to the existing linguistic anthropological and sociolinguistic literature on oral narrative as a dynamic, emerging, and multifaceted discursive practice (De Fina, 2003; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015; Wortham, 2001, 2006); (2) it shows that a careful analysis of storytelling events helps researchers unveil how collective identities are co-constructed in interview settings.

Methodologically, this article advances research on oral narratives as discursive practices in the business world by investigating how Italian managers construct a shared sense of the Made in Italy brand. We collected a broad sample of interviews with executives from family-owned companies across various sectors of the Italian economy, which provides a comprehensive view of Italian family firm identity. Despite the diversity of our interviewees in terms of region and industrial sector, we found that Italian managers root their identity in a sense of collective responsibility to their families and to the values associated with Made in Italy more generally. After an outline of our theoretical framework, we will turn to an analysis of five examples taken from two interviews – one with a male executive and one with a female executive.

1. The authors of this article have evenly contributed in this project, both theoretically and analytically. Their names are listed in alphabetical order.

Collective responsibility and Made in Italy

In our study, we look at the Made in Italy label as a form of national branding that serves to boost the nation's position in the global marketplace. While both cultural and linguistic anthropologists have explored the interplay between political economy and brand (e.g., Foster, 2008, 2013; Nakassis, 2012a, 2013; Manning, 2010; Moore, 2003), we draw in particular on debates around counterfeiting (Lempert, 2014; Nakassis, 2012b; Vann, 2006) and national brands (del Percio, 2016). We focus on the relationship between small- and medium-sized family firms in Italy (Blim, 1990; Yanagisako, 2002) and their shared sense of responsibility in protecting a common Made in Italy brand. While most brands serve as individual wealth to be protected through legal means, we explore the ways executives treat Made in Italy as a collective patrimony – one that needs to be constantly protected from internal fraud. Although many studies on brand and counterfeit have focused on reproductions of branded goods in Asia (Nakassis, 2012b; Vann, 2006), in our interviews we heard more about threats of counterfeit from within than from the outside world. That a famous Italian fashion brand, such as Dolce & Gabbana, Gucci, or Versace, might buy textiles from abroad, add a few stitches, and then pass the finished product as Made in Italy is a common theme in our data. The Made in Italy brand thus functions as a type of national branding, which del Percio defines as “a governmental strategy transforming the nation into a commodity that can be branded to successfully position the nation internationally” (del Percio 2016, p. 86). Similar to the Swiss case del Percio examines, the promotion of Made in Italy as a brand relies on a combination of state regulation and private investment. The laws regulating Made in Italy are the most restrictive national laws for determining what can and cannot be branded as being made in a country (Aichner, 2013). In addition to laws regulating the Made in Italy label, Italian companies self-regulate on how to use the label through national industry lobbying organizations (such as *Confindustria*²) and through the *Istituto per la Tutela dei Produttori Italiani* (‘Institute for the Protection of Italian Manufacturers’). Just as Switzerland uses its multicultural and multilingual history in promoting a national Swiss brand (del Percio, 2016), Italian companies enroll Italy’s art history going back to the Renaissance as a basis for the perceived creativity and authenticity of the Made in Italy brand today.

2. *Confindustria*, an acronym for *Confederazione generale dell'industria italiana* (‘General Confederation of Italian Industry’), is the largest national association of companies in Italy and acts similarly to the Chamber of Commerce in the United States. *Confindustria* has over 150,000 member companies.

Made in Italy as a specific form of economic organization has also been the focus of scholarship on Italian business, which has given considerable attention to small businesses and their relationship to Italian capitalism. More specifically, these works examine the benefits small businesses bring to the Italian economy compared to other advanced economies through the success of industrial clusters (Blim, 1990), cooperatives (Vargas-Cetina, 2011; Zamagni & Zamagni, 2010), and artisans (Cavanaugh, 2007). Despite the decreasing significance of Italy's industrial clusters to its economy since the 1990s, Blim's (1990) research on their importance to the Made in Italy brand has inspired our analysis in this article. These industrial clusters composed of many tightly-knit small-scale firms involved in similar production activities served as a backbone to Italy's industrial success and formed the basis of a "third way" in opposition to large-scale industry and rural agriculture (Bagnasco, 1977). These clusters of small-scale family firms are concentrated in central and northern Italy – the same area where we conducted our research. Building on Blim's work, Yanagisako (2002) shows how sentiments, gender, and kinship foster the reproduction of Italian capitalism. Yanagisako's work provides insights into the important role family relationships play in shaping both the family's class identity and their firm's identity.

As we conducted our interviews with executives on various topics, they expressed strong feelings about Made in Italy and its role in Italian companies' global success. They articulated their desires for an improved national image by recounting their various stories of the past, present, and future relating them to key issues of Made in Italy. Oral narratives thus became central sites for exploring these issues.

Enacting Made in Italy in and through oral narrative

This study is inspired by research on the role of narrative in constructing collective identities and mobilizing these identities for specific interactional purposes, such as aligning with a vision of what Made in Italy should be. As several linguistic anthropologists and sociolinguists have demonstrated for quite some time, storytelling is one the most important modes of human communication (De Fina, 2003; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015; Goodwin, 2015; Wortham, 2001, 2006; to mention a few): speakers tell stories about their past, present, and future, and stories are key moments in children's socialization (Ochs & Capps, 1996, 2001). Recently, researchers in this field have demonstrated that stories cannot be studied as isolated texts but must be analyzed and appreciated in their interactional surroundings. Scholars in this field have also started to consider interviews as an important component of this interactional context (De Fina, 2011; De Fina & Perrino,

2011; Koven, 2015), which had been neglected in previous studies on narrative. In this respect, exploring narratives told in interviews can assist analysts in two important ways. First, it allows researchers to access the intricacies of speakers' interactional moves as they occur during the interview and how these dynamics might themselves change the meaning of the "denotational text" (Silverstein, 1998), or the content of the story. Second, by looking at the parallels between the "narrated event" and the "narrating event" (Jakobson, 1957; Wortham, 2001) researchers can better understand circulating ideologies and stereotypes in society.

In this vein, our article centers on narratives told by executives of Italian corporations, something that has been studied sparingly at the intersection of business studies and linguistic anthropology. Yet, stories told by executives can reveal ideological work that could better explain their political and financial agendas, their strategic plans and choices, and their perspectives on their social and corporate everyday life more generally (Perrino, 2013). In our analysis, executives' stories are studied both for their content, or "denotational text" (also called "narrated event," or, simply, story), and for their "interactional text" (also called "narrating event," or storytelling event) (Jakobson, 1957; Silverstein, 1998; Wortham, 1994, 2000, 2001). In this sense, executives' stories emerge dynamically in interview settings and the study of their enactment can be very significant for researchers in these fields (De Fina & Perrino, 2011; Wortham, 2001).

One key framework for studying the ways ideological views around Made in Italy emerge in interaction is Goffman's (1959, 1981) participation framework. In particular, we draw on his notion of "footing" and the various types of speech participants' alignments and disalignments in interaction, which are resourceful analytical tools for exploring participant roles in oral narrative. Oral narratives are key discursive practices in which speech participants' identity construction becomes visible, and in which ideological work is enacted at various degrees of explicitness and covertness. Through a careful linguistic anthropological analysis of these discursive enactments, analysts can unveil subtle patterns that would remain unseen otherwise. Our article will advance studies in this field by exploring the ways executives align and disalign with differing visions of what Made in Italy is and what it ideologically represents. After a brief overview of our data and methodology, we will turn to our five examples and analysis.

Collecting stories in the Italian business world

Our data stem from a corpus of twenty-five interviews with executives of various small- to medium-sized Italian companies that we collected in the summers of 2011 and 2012 as part of a larger project on oral narratives in Italian corporations.

Our interviews with executives were collected in various towns in the following regions: Emilia-Romagna, Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, Lombardy, Piedmont, Sardinia, and Veneto. We interviewed executives from a wide range of businesses such as glassmaking, fashion, wine production, dairy production, manufacturing, historical cafés, and financial institutions. We started each interview with general questions about each company's history and then went into more specific questions about the industries in which they operate. We audio-recorded these interviews and then fully transcribed them afterwards over the course of two years.

In this article we use five examples from two interviews conducted with the executives of two Northern Italian corporations: (1) three examples with Moreno,³ the executive of a company belonging to the fashion industry, which we will call M.Modà, based in the town of Mantua, in the Lombardy region; (2) two examples with Marina, the executive of a company in the manufacturing industry, which we will call M.Manifattura near the small town of Vicenza, in the Veneto region. We decided to use these examples to show how collective identities surrounding Made in Italy emerge in businesses as diverse as clothing and manufacturing. As family businesses form the backbone of Italian capitalism (Blim, 1990; Yanagisako, 2002), we believe that M.Modà and M.Manifattura provide important insights into the ways family-owned businesses view Made in Italy. While we noted similar patterns across our data corpus, future analysis of our interviews with non-family-owned companies might offer new perspectives into Made in Italy and its role in fostering Italian corporations' success.

Solemnity and authenticity in Mantua, Lombardy

The first segment we analyze in this article comes from an interview we conducted with an executive of M.Modà S.p.A. (henceforth "M.Modà"), a men's fashion company headquartered in Mantua (Mantova), Lombardy, in Northern Italy. Moreno, our interviewee, was a grandchild of the founder, and one of many family members directly involved in management positions within the company. In particular, he was in charge of the company's marketing department. M.Modà prides itself in producing all its products in Italy, and its advertising often prominently displays local landmarks from their town Mantua. Mantua itself is an important cultural

3. In this article, we use pseudonyms for both our interviewees and their respective companies to protect their identity.

center in Italy, as its historical downtown is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the town served as the 2016 Italian Capital of Culture.⁴

On the day we conducted this interview, we arrived in Mantua by train early in the morning and then took a bus to Mantua’s *zona industriale* (‘industrial park’) located in the countryside surrounding the city. Once we arrived at the headquarters, a secretary led us into a spacious conference room with a large wooden desk where we met Moreno. As is common among many upper-managers in Italy, he wore his dress shirt with the cuff buttons undone and his watch over his dress shirt – styles first popularized by one of Italy’s most prominent industrialists, Gianni Agnelli, while head of FIAT. Our interview with Moreno lasted one and a half hours. As with most of our interviews, our first question centered on the history of the company, to which he replied:

Moreno Example 1

Original Italian Version

1. [...] il papa Carl-
Carlalberto e lo zio maggiore Claudio
ripartirono
2. praticamente **ricominciarono**
da zero con trenta sei dipendenti
3. e **fondarono** quella che è la M.Modà
S.p.A.
4. quindi in realtà se guardiamo le- le- la
storia
senza nessun tipo d’interruzione
5. diciamo la storia data dal ’58
ad oggi quindi 54 anni- anni
6. però se prendiamo invece
anche la parte precedente
7. quindi diciamo il DNA le
origini del nonno
8. allora ne fa molti di più con
circa intorno a cento anni

*English Translation*⁵

- [...] our dad Carl-
Carlalberto and our older uncle Claudio
started again
basically [they] **started again**
from scratch with thirty-six workers
and [they] **founded** what is M.Modà S.p.A.⁶
(i.e., public company)
so in reality if [we] look at the- the- the history
without any kind of interruption
let’s say the history starting from 1958
until today so 54 years- years
but if [we] also take
the previous part instead
so let’s say the DNA,
our grandfather’s origins
then there are many more [years of history]
about one hundred years

4. Every year the Italian nation selects an Italian town and assigns the title of ‘Italian Capital of Culture’ (*“Capitale Italiana della Cultura”*).

5. All translations are ours unless otherwise stated.

6. *Società per Azioni* is the Italian juridical designation for a joint-stock company with legal personhood separate from its shareholders.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 9. perché è iniziata all'inizio
degli anni degli anni venti
ven- col nonno [...] | because [it, i.e., the company] started at the
beginning of the 1920s
twent- with [our] grandfather [...] |
|--|---|

As many of the other executives we interviewed for this project, Moreno started to recount the history of his company by telling us the history of his family. The two histories merged immediately in line 1 when he mentions first his father and then his uncle, the founders of the company. Due to the large role the family plays in Italian firms, the boundary between the two often blurs (Yanagisako, 2002). In Moreno's narrative, the history of the firm seems impossible to separate from the history of the family – they become one and the same. In fact, earlier in this interview, Moreno said 'let's say that our firm establishes its roots in the '30s, because our grandfather, Bernardo, was already active in this type of sector' ("*diciamo che la nostra società fonda le radici negli anni trenta, perché il nonno, Bernardo, era già in questo tipo di settore*"). Through his family's history, Moreno extends the history of the firm from the '50s, when M.Modà was legally founded, to the '30s, when the family began working in the fashion industry. He then links the firm's identity to 'the DNA, the grandfather's origins' in line 7, rooting this narrative of his family's business success in both the metaphorical DNA of Italian heritage and his family's biological DNA.

Moreno further emphasizes the rootedness of both his family and M.Modà in Italian cultural heritage through his use of the Italian remote past tense, the *passato remoto*. This remote past tense is mainly found in literary works, but is less frequent, and thus "marked," in speech (Rohlf, 1968). There are some regions, however, including parts of Southern Italy and Tuscany, where its everyday use is more common. In Northern Italy, including Lombardy where this interview was conducted, this tense is rarely used in conversation. The more common past tense, *passato prossimo*, is used instead. Moreno used the *passato remoto* many times throughout the interview, especially when mentioning historical facts pertaining to his family and company. By using this tense, Moreno not only projects an identity of someone whose speech is sophisticated and marked in Northern Italy, but he also makes the historical facts related to his family more authentic by removing them from the here-and-now interaction and by placing them back in their historical times.

Moreno's use of the *passato remoto* roots his family and company's history in the cultural importance of Mantua during the Renaissance. Right during the first minutes of our interview, Moreno uses three instances of the remote past tense, "*ripartirono*," "*ricominciarono*" (both meaning 'started again') and "*fondarono*" ('founded') in lines 1–3 (bolded in the above transcript excerpt). By using

these three instances of *passato remoto* in the beginning of our interview, Moreno emphasizes how the histories of his company and family are rooted in the area around Mantua and in its traditions. History and art are, indeed, part of their DNA, he claims in line 7, since his grandfather’s times. By displaying the long and traditional history of his company and family through his marked use of the *passato remoto*, Moreno wishes to fade away any possible doubts that the two interviewers in front of him might have. History and art are part of the family’s company identity, which must retain its purity and authenticity. While the two interviewers maintain a professional and supportive demeanor throughout the interview, Moreno continues to talk about the DNA of his family and company soon after his first remarks, when he says:

Moreno Example 2

M: Moreno; I: Interviewer

Original Italian Version

10. M: [...] e::hh sicuramente
un altro punto di forza
11. diciamo di successo
12. viene un po’ dal nostro DNA
13. il fatto che Mantova cioè
sia di essere nati in Italia prima di tutto
14. che ovviamente ha un DNA di
cultura rinascimentale
15. il gusto del bello
16. ehh quindi l’arte un po’
il gusto di vivere bene
17. di saper realizzare dei prodotti
che abbiano un grande appeal
18. quindi il fatto del DNA italiano
19. e in particolare Mantova
20. che ha rappresentato per la
cultura dell’abbigliamento
21. I: mmhmm
22. M: Isabella d’Este
cultura rinascimentale
[clears throat]

English Translation

- M: [...] e::hh [it is] certainly
another advantage
- let’s say of success
- [it] comes a bit from our DNA
- the fact that Mantua that is to say
being born in Italy first of all
- which obviously has a DNA of
Renaissance culture
- the taste for beauty
- ehh so art a little bit
[like] the taste for living well
- for being able to create products
which have a great appeal⁷
- so the fact of the Italian DNA
- and in particular Mantua
- which represented for
the clothing culture
- I: mmhmm
- M: Isabella D’Este
Renaissance culture
[clears throat]

7. The English term “appeal” has become part of the Italian vocabulary among managers in companies and ordinary speakers as well.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 23. è sicuramente un punto di forza | [it] is certainly an advantage |
| 24. quindi direi la tradizione
no? | so [I] would say tradition [is an advantage],
right? |
| 25. la tradizione italiana e la
tradizione la mantovanità [...] | Italian tradition and the tradition
of being from Mantua [...] |

In lines 10–15, Moreno emphasizes, again, that the company’s success springs from its history and the local DNA of his town, Mantua (lines 12, 14). He then links this local DNA with a broader Italian DNA in lines 13–14, which contributes to a vision of Made in Italy as a badge of cultural and artistic authenticity. The DNA that Mantua holds is “*rinascimentale*” (‘from the Renaissance’), thus contributing to an authentic historical and artistic aura (cf. Benjamin, 1936; Hansen, 2008) that pervades his birth town Mantua, its museums, churches, companies, including M.Modà. This idea of holding an authentic Made in Italy is recurrent in all our conversations with Moreno and with other executives as well. It is this particular DNA that gives managers like Moreno, and Italians more generally, the “*gusto del bello*” (‘the taste of beauty’, line 15), which emerges in all his products and which constitutes a quality inherent to Made in Italy. For Moreno, the taste of beauty is connected to art and to living well, to the fact that Italians are able to create products with a great “appeal” (line 17), which resonates in his company’s fashion goods. After all, this derives from Mantua’s art and history – what Moreno calls “*tradizione*” (‘tradition’), which is part of the Italian DNA (line 18) and connected to the idea of being produced in Mantua. In a word, its “*mantovanità*” (‘being from Mantua’, line 25). Interactionally, the fact that the two interviewers are silent (one interviewer just utters a minimal response in line 21) reinforces the solemn tone that Moreno gives to his narrative and supports the authentic character of his family and his firm. This is even more pronounced in Example 3 when Moreno says:

Moreno Example 3

Original Italian Version

26. [...] ma per noi è ovviamente una cultura e
un DNA che abbiamo
27. e che ovviamente abbiamo dentro di noi
28. e che ovviamente ci gratifica
29. e ci fa-
ci responsabilizza
30. anche sul fatto di dover
31. ovviamente rappresentare il
Made in Italy nei migliori dei modi

English Translation

- [...] but for us [they] are a culture and
a DNA that [we] have
- and that obviously [we] have inside ourselves
- and which obviously gratifies us
- and [which] makes us-
holds us responsible
- even on the fact of having
- to obviously represent
- the Made in Italy in the best way

- | | |
|--|---|
| 32. e quindi è un valore che abbiamo | so this is a value that [we] have |
| 33. un valore aggiunto che
abbiamo che ci portiamo dentro [...] | an added value that [we] have and [that we]
carry inside ourselves [...] |

In Example 3, Moreno emphasizes that Made in Italy is something that “we” (referring to Italians generally, including himself) culturally have – a DNA that gratifies Italians but also makes them responsible for representing it to the world (lines 26–31). This distinguishes Italians from other cultures, argues Moreno, since Italians have the DNA of their Made in Italy which needs to be represented fairly. The fact that Moreno uses the inclusive first-person subject and object plural pronouns “*noi*” (lines 26–30) and “*ci*” (lines 28, 29) indicates that he includes all inhabitants of his birth town, Mantua, and all Italians more generally, in his participation framework (Goffman, 1981). Through his use of first-person plural pronouns, Moreno aligns with a less restrictive and more inclusive version of Made in Italy, as if all Italians have the duty to participate in salvaging and maintaining it. Made in Italy is a value that Italians have, continues Moreno, ‘a value [that we] reached that [we] carry inside ourselves’ (“*un valore raggiunto che abbiamo e che ci portiamo dentro,*” line 32). A few lines later, Moreno reinforces this idea with short relaxed bursts of laughter in lines 38, 39 and 43 (see below), an idea which is fully supported by the two interviewers who laugh in concert with him (Gumperz, 1982; Glenn & Holt, 2013). Furthermore, Moreno starts a series of parallelistic clauses in the following lines (lines 38–41, lines 44–48, and lines 49–52), as if he wanted to make sure that his message was conveyed in its entirety. These three instances of parallelism not only emphasize what Moreno tries to convey to his two interlocutors, but also adds solemnity and prominence to his words. At lines 38, 40, and 41, for example, Moreno uses the modal verb conjugated in the first-person plural “*dobbiamo*” (‘[we] must’ or ‘[we] have to’)⁸ in:

Parallelism in lines 38–41

- | | |
|---|--|
| 38. dobbiamo cercare oggi questo
leadership @@ | [we] have to look for this
leadership today @@ |
| 39. rischiamo di perdere o
comunque di annacquare @@ | [we] risk losing it
or watering it down @@ |
| 40. dobbiamo fare molti sforzi in Italia | [we] have to make many efforts in Italy |
| 41. dobbiamo essere molto bravi per
mantenere questi valori al nostro interno | [we] have to be very good at
maintaining these values internally |

8. In Italian, personal subject pronouns are optional. Although their optional character varies regionally, they are mainly used for resolving certain discursive ambiguities and for emphatic purposes.

The repetition of the modal auxiliary “*dobbiamo*” in the beginning of each clause creates a rhythmic solemn discourse in which Moreno uses a sermonic tone in delivering his message to the interviewers: *we have* to find this leadership, *we have* to make a lot of efforts in Italy (to maintain this leadership in the fashion industry) and *we have* to be excellent at maintaining these values internally in Italy. In this example, there is a repeated use of parallelism – a rhetorical device, which can be simply defined as repetition with variation (Silverstein & Urban, 1996; Tannen, 2007). The highly parallelistic structures in these lines create an emphatic effect at every line that is typical of political oratory (Lempert & Silverstein, 2012) or religious sermons (Wilce, 1998). The intertextual effect of Moreno’s parallelism emphasizes the uniqueness of Made in Italy. As has been widely demonstrated in recent linguistic anthropological studies on this topic, parallelism helps any discursive practice “call attention to itself,” making it “memorable, repeatable, decontextualizable” (Wilce 2001, p. 191). Moreno continues his solemn statements with more parallelistic structures when he starts repeating the Italian preposition “*di*” followed by an infinitive verb (translatable in English as ‘to’ plus infinitive) to convey different meanings in lines 44–48 as highlighted in bold in the following extracted lines from the transcript:

Parallelism in lines 44–48

44. però diciamo che nel mondo dell'imprenditoria c'è molta responsabilità e molta volontà di fare-	but let's say that in the entrepreneurship's world there is a lot of responsibility and a lot of willingness to do-
45. di fare bene	to do well
46. di mantenere questa leadership	to maintain this leadership
47. di fare cioè di mantenere questo valore che abbiamo dentro di noi	to do- that is to maintain this value which [we] have inside ourselves
48. e quindi di cercare di fare dei prodotti	and so to try to make those products

In these lines, Moreno emphasizes the fact that managers share responsibility in maintaining this leadership in the Made in Italy brand and in keeping these values high and respected. He continues with more parallelism in lines 49–52 by repeating the phrase “*nel campo*” (‘in the field’) and by adding different ending to his clauses. He then picks up again the ‘to plus infinitive’ structure to end his thoughts on this (lines 54–55).

Parallelism in lines 49–55

49. nel campo ovviamente della moda	in the field obviously of fashion
50. nel campo del design	in the field of design
51. nel campo dell'arredamento	in the field of home furnishing

- | | |
|---|--|
| 52. nel campo anche del food | in the field of food as well |
| 53. direi di mantenere delle cose | I would say to maintain some things |
| 54. di mantenere questa- questa creatività
che abbiamo dentro di noi | to maintain this- this creativity
that [we] have inside ourselves |
| 55. che dobbiamo insomma farne tesoro | which [we] have to treasure |

Made in Italy has to maintain strong Italian cultural values not only in the fashion field, Moreno asserts, but also in the fields of design, home furnishing, and food. This “creativity that Italians have inside” (line 54) needs to be cherished, thereby preserving Made in Italy’s value as a national treasure. This idea that the values surrounding Made in Italy are inherent to Italians emerged in almost all our interviews for this project. The link between specific cultural values and Italian bodies becomes more explicit through the association of these values to DNA, a link many executives in our sample made. As seen in our analysis above, Moreno mentions DNA six times while explaining the value and importance of his company in the global market. By so doing, Moreno reinforces the widely circulating ideology of Made in Italy as the confluence of twenty different regional identities through shared history, tradition, and artistry. Through his repetition of the phrases “*di fare*” (“to do”) and “*di mantenere*” (“to maintain”) in lines 45–47 and 53–54, Moreno also adds emphasis on Italian managers’ agency in protecting the “treasure” of Made in Italy and the values tied to it.

Collective responsibility in Vicenza, Veneto

In another interview we conducted a few weeks later, another executive, Marina, emphasized the responsibility all Italian managers have for upholding the Made in Italy brand. Marina, the owner and CEO of M.Manifattura S.p.A. (henceforth M.Manifattura), inherited the company from her father, the firm’s founder. M.Manifattura is an Italian manufacturing company headquartered near Vicenza, in the Veneto region. This firm produces parts for different types of machinery. We arrived in Vicenza by train, and Marina picked us up to drive us to the company headquarters where we conducted our interview with her. As we approached the company headquarters, Marina pointed out different sculptures the company commissioned and the headquarters modernistic design. She then accompanied us to her office, again pointing out the different paintings hanging along the staircase up from the lobby to the second floor. Her office was spacious, and we took our places in two leather chairs opposite her desk. Italian art and design are an integral part of companies’ exteriors as well, as she pointed out several times during our conversations with her. Compared to many of the other executives we interviewed,

Marina was dressed very casually and greeted us as if we were old friends. Her friendly demeanor emerged throughout the interview through the use of repeated laughter, jokes, and informal forms of address. In contrast to Moreno's support for a Made in Italy in which the fashion industry plays a key role, Marina emphasized her disappointment with the Italian fashion industry:

Marina Example 1

M: Marina; I: Interviewer

<i>Original Italian Version</i>	<i>English Translation</i>
1. M: [...] la moda ha rovinato il Made in Italy	M: [...] fashion has ruined Made in Italy
2. quello è uno degli aspetti che secondo me è negativo per noi	That is one of the aspects that according to me is negative for us
3. I: mmhmm	I: mmhmm
4. M: allora la moda è molto riconosciuta al livello mondiale	M: so fashion is very well known around the world
5. ancora promuoviamo però il Made in Italy fatto dall'inizio alla fine	however [we] still promote Made in Italy as [it] is done from the beginning [of the production] until the end
6. rispetto alla moda non ce n'è più così tanto	as far as fashion is concerned there is not that much [of Made in Italy] left
7. I: mmhmm	I: mmhmm
8. M: ci sono molte piccole aziende che fanno il Made in Italy	M: there are many small companies which produce Made in Italy
9. e::h anche se per esempio una cosa che pochi conoscono	e::h even if for example something that few [people] know
10. il cotone non lo produce più nessuno in Italia	nobody produces cotton anymore in Italy
11. lo compriamo tutti al livello mondiale in India	[we] all buy it [i.e., the cotton] globally in India
12. I: mmhmm	I: mmhmm
13. M: nessuno più produce il filato di cotone	M: nobody produces cotton yarn anymore
14. magari fa il cotone il batuffolo ma il filato di cotone	perhaps [they] make the cotton- the cotton swab but the cotton yarn
15. non so in America	[I] don't know in America
16. ma al livello europeo con l'Asia	but in Europe with Asia

- | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 17. lo fanno tutti gli indiani | all Indians make it |
| 18. presumo anche | [I] assume |
| [per l'America] [...] | [the same for America] [...] |

While in our previous interview Moreno praises and valorizes Made in Italy for clothing, in this excerpt, Marina explicitly attacks the fashion industry, which ‘has ruined Made in Italy’ for her (line 1). Her reasoning behind this remark might be that some firms counterfeit from within – not in the sense of producing an illegal copy of a trademarked product, but rather in the sense that companies fraudulently brand some goods made outside Italy as “Made in Italy.” She argues that the actions of these few companies erode the general public’s trust in Made in Italy beyond fashion, including her manufacturing firm. She continues by saying that despite the willingness to promote a complete Made in Italy “*dall’inizio alla fine*” (‘from the beginning [of the production] until the end’, line 5), only a few small fashion companies do so (line 8). Yet, in general, an authentic Made in Italy in the fashion industry doesn’t exist anymore, argues Marina. She continues by giving the example of cotton, which is primarily farmed outside Italy (lines 10–15). By outsourcing the first stage of the production process, the fashion industry compromises its very Italianness, hence Marina feels that this is not an authentic Made in Italy anymore. She continues by invoking an important designer⁹ who she feels is emblematic of this attitude:

Marina Example 2

- | | |
|--|---|
| 19. [...] <i>zta zercando</i> anche lui
di non fare più delle gaffe | [...] [he, this particular designer] too <i>is trying</i>
not to make gaffes anymore |
| 20. però faceva cucire tutte quante le paillettes
e le cose in India | but [he] used to have all the sequins
and the [other] things sewn in India |
| 21. e poi te le vendeva Made in Italy | and then [he] would sell them as if they were
Made in Italy |
| 22. e poi quando magari le pagava anche
bene | and then when perhaps [he] even paid them
well |
| 23. ma non le pagava certo come
eh la mano d’opera italiana | but [he] certainly didn’t pay them as [well as]
uhm Italian labor |
| 24. allora questo secondo me ha rovinato
il Made in Italy per certi aspetti | So in my opinion this has ruined
Made in Italy in certain respects |
| 25. tant’è che noi se avessimo continuato | so that we if [we] had continued |

9. We do not mention the name of this particular designer and his brand, as we could find no evidence of her particular claims against him.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 26. e magari penalizzando un po' i numeri a fare veramente tutto in Italia | and by perhaps penalizing a bit the numbers [i.e. by sacrificing profits] to really make everything in Italy |
| 27. oggi anche il Made in Italy della moda avrebbe un riconoscimento molto più ampio [...] | today too the fashion industry's Made in Italy [brand] would have broader recognition [...] |

In this excerpt, Marina continues to criticize the fallacies of the fashion industry and the fact that Made in Italy has lost some of its authenticity as a consequence. Perhaps to create a sense of solidarity with us, her interviewers, she quickly code-switches into Venetan¹⁰ (the local language of the Veneto region) in line 19, when she argues that this designer is trying not to cause any more scandals. However, she immediately switches back into Standard Italian when she gives detailed examples of the Italian fashion industry outsourcing labor. According to Marina, this designer had all the sequins of his clothes sewn in India (line 20), where even in the best-case scenario for workers, wages would be lower than in Italy. She ends her thoughts by saying that if these outsourcing practices had been avoided, even at risk of sacrificing profits, 'today too the fashion industry's Made in Italy [brand] would have broader recognition' (line 27). By using the imperfect tense in Italian (*imperfetto*), which indicates habitual action in the past, Marina takes a stronger stance against the decisions of this fashion company in lines 20–23. This fashion company had all the sequins sewn in India and then sold them as if they were made in Italy. By using the imperfect tense, Marina aligns against this fraud and tries to elevate an authentic, uncontaminated, Made in Italy instead. In her view, as in the view of many of the executives we interviewed for this project, a sense of responsibility needs to be foregrounded to maintain the authenticity of Made in Italy. In her words, if the fashion industry hadn't betrayed Made in Italy, Italian fashion brands would be even more widely recognized today (lines 25–27).

In her strong critique of the fashion industry's abuse of the Made in Italy national brand, Marina unveils similar concerns to the ones Moreno raised in the examples analyzed earlier: she repeats Moreno's assertion that Italian executives have a collective responsibility to preserve Made in Italy as a national treasure. These invitations to operate within a framework of collective responsibility also call for a long-term view of corporate profit and of the role corporations play in

10. While this is one of only a few instances of codeswitching in this interview, it is important to note the role codeswitching often plays as a discursive strategy (Gumperz, 1982). In this instance, we analyze codeswitching for its socio-cultural functions and not for its typology. One of the pragmatic functions of codeswitching is the creation of solidarity and intimacy between the bilingual or multilingual speech participants who share both codes (Bailey, 2000; Gumperz, 1982; Heller, 1988; Perrino, 2015).

national histories. They draw on Italian histories going back to the Renaissance and looking into the future, often at the cost of lower short-term profits. Retaining the integrity of Made in Italy also represents a responsibility to other stakeholders, including past generations that have built the foundations for the current success of family companies, future generations of entrepreneurs, Italian workers, and consumers around the world who value the Made in Italy brand. In the process, these executives enact a collective identity through their oral narratives, an identity that places high value on their responsibility vis-à-vis Made in Italy and its ramifications around the world.

Conclusion

What is the significance of praising and preserving an authentic Made in Italy for these Italian family-owned companies? In this article, we have explored the moral ideological discourses of collective responsibility and authenticity that Italian executives infuse into the Made in Italy’s brand as they emerge in their oral narratives. In their stories, Italian executives emphasize that Made in Italy is a national brand (del Percio, 2016) – a brand representing the authenticity of Italian products through all stages of production, and a national treasure to be safeguarded. Through all the recurrent themes examined in our interviews – the strong cultural values rooted in the Italian Renaissance, a collective responsibility to future generations, and the importance of a national DNA – the authentic character of Made in Italy as a national brand emerged in every instance as a point of pride in executives’ collective identities. In their narratives, they highlight their own roles in treasuring Italy’s prestigious historical and artistic heritage for future generations. While Italy’s national history and artistic talent often emerged as important markers of corporate identity, managers placed more emphasis on the history of their families and of their regions – themes that rooted the company’s success in the family’s DNA.

In this article, we advance theories and practices on national brands, corporate branding practices, and the construction of collective identity in oral narrative. In particular, we have investigated how managers mobilize the Made in Italy national brand to construct collective identities in which their regional (on a local scale) and their Italian (on a national scale) DNA becomes a unifying principle. By examining executives’ narratives in interview settings, this article centers on how these speech participants enact and construct their individual and collective identities in interaction (Van De Mieroop, 2015). In our data, these identities are enacted through the use of the past tense (the *passato remoto* [‘historical past’] and the *imperfetto*, [‘imperfect’]), deictics (such as personal pronouns), and parallelistic structures.

Through these enactments, both interviewees align and disalign with certain notions related to Made in Italy, including authenticity, responsibility, and family.

Through an analysis of oral narratives as discursive practices, we could examine these executives' ideological stances and their identity construction both at an individual and at a collective level. In our 5 examples, both Moreno and Marina elevate Made in Italy and reinforce the sense of responsibility and pride that Italian executives have, but did so in different ways. While Moreno emphasizes the value of Made in Italy as a national treasure through a solemn and decisive tone, Marina takes a critical stance vis-à-vis the fashion industry for undermining Made in Italy's legitimacy. In the process, she reinforces her social and collective identity, and she emphasizes the sense of collective responsibility that Italian managers must have in order to safeguard the integrity of Made in Italy. In this light, executives' oral narratives not only carry referential meaning, but also give significance to the whole speech event. Our interviewees construct an individual and collective identity, by linking their company history to their family and by connecting the values of their companies to a larger collectivity of Made in Italy, which shares a common DNA.

In this way, these executives of Italian family firms aligned their corporate histories with the histories of their family and their region through the ideological discourse of DNA. Both Moreno and Marina construct, and enact, an authentic Made in Italy that Italian managers must cherish and protect through difficult historical times. While these visions of authenticity differ in the specifics of time, place, and notions of quality, these visions root the authenticity of this national brand in the local histories of Italian products and Italian family firms, shared Italian cultural values, and the collective responsibility on the part of Italian executives who align with these values.

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Transcription conventions

:::	syllable lengthening	Regular Font	Standard Italian
-	syllable cut-off	Bold and Italic	local language
.	stopping fall in tone	Bold	highlighted portions of the transcript discussed in the analysis
,	continuing intonation		
?	rising intonation		
@	laughter		
[...]	omitted material		
[]	transcriber's comments		

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