

VERO ZARATINO, SÌ O NO? THE SPEAKER CATEGORISATION OF COMMUNITY MEMBERSHIP ON THE EXAMPLE OF ZARATINO SPEAKERS

Zaratino is Zadar's Venetian dialect which originated from a hundred-year long Roman-Slavic symbiosis and the Venetian presence on the Eastern Adriatic. It was at its strongest in the period between the great wars when the population of Zadar in 1936% counted 68% of Italian residents.¹ However, the bombings of the city nucleus in 1943/44 caused an abrupt exodus of 20 000 Zaratino speakers and interrupted the continuity of a long-lasting Venetian dialect in Dalmatia.² Zaratino speakers or Zaratini represent today an ethno-linguistic minority³ whose community vernacular, characterized for a severe language endangerment, by and large, ceded its domains of language use to Italian and Croatian as more prestigious varieties. The vernacular, is still however the only means of communication in intimate domains and still enjoys the role of an ethnic and identity marker.

For the purpose of my doctoral thesis titled *Zaratino dialect: a case study on the dissolution of a communication and social space* between 2015 and 2019 I conducted field interviews with 19 members of the Zaratino community. Already at the beginning of my work I noticed that the interviewees often stressed the importance of local ancestry as a prerequisite for the recognition of group membership. *Vero Zaratino* was only attributed to those speakers born inside the historic walls of Zadar peninsula, also the border line of the original Zaratino community⁴. The more I progressed with my field work, the more prominent was the dichotomy in speaker category. It further revealed the multifaceted character of *vero Zaratino* identity as vital for the understanding of community's true nature. The speakers distinguished between *Zaratini veri* and *Zaratini non-veri* or Zaratini within the walls and Zaratini outside the walls where the former often displayed social incompatibility with the latter. *Zaratini veri* typically

¹ Graovac, Vera. 2004. "Populacijski Razvoj Zadra." In *Geoadria*, 9/1: 51-72.

² Marković, Irena. 2011. *Usporedba Pellisove Istočno-jadranske Građe za ALI sa Suvremenim Mletacizmima u Zadarskom Govoru*. Doctoral Dissertation. Zadar: Sveučilište u Zadru.

³ Škevin, Ivana; Jazidžija, Antonia. 2017. "Linguistic and Social-Identity Aspects of Code-Switching: The Case of Zadar's Speakers of the Venetian Dialect." In *Applied Linguistics Research And Methodology. Proceedings from the 2015 CALS Conference*, Cergol Kovačević, Kristina; Udier, Sanda Lucija (eds.): 225-240. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

⁴ Barbarić, Philipp. 2015. *Che Storia che Gavemo Qua. Sprachgeschichte Dalmatiens als Sprechergeschichte (1797 bis Heute)*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag.

displayed their monolingual character, better language practices, education, family ancestry and social status. Oppositely, *Zaratini non veri* were usually bilingual of different social and educational background. So, my first field interviews brought to surface the issue of the appropriateness of the focus group. I was not sure whether to make apart between the two speaker categories and this way only investigate the vero Zaratino group as the core of the community. As I proceeded with my work, I realized that despite their disparateness and lack of peer recognition, both speaker categories still shared the same language and history and thus ought to be investigated as a whole. This paper thus has for an aim with the use of speaker excerpts to bring forward the complexity in the speaker recognition of group membership and the intracommunity differences it causes.

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