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This is the author's manuscript

Original Citation:

Availability:

This version is available http://hdl.handle.net/2318/1522213 since 2016-06-06T16:18:32Z

Publisher:

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14 September 2026

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This is an author version of the contribution:

Massimo Cerruti, Riccardo Regis (2015),

The Interplay between Dialect and Standard: Evidence from Italo-Romance.

In: Eivind Torgersen, Stian Hårstad, Brit Mæhlum, Unn Røyneland (eds.),

Language variation. European Perspectives V,

John Benjamins, Amsterdam-Philadelphia, pp. 55-68.

The interplay between dialect and standard: evidence from Italo-Romance

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Abstract

The paper is inspired by the theoretical framework provided by Auer's (2005) typology of "dialect/standard constellations", which aims to detect common dynamics in the current processes of dialect/standard convergence in Europe.

Some adjustments to Auer's proposal will be suggested to better suit it to a specific sociolinguistic situation: that involving Italian and Piedmontese in the north-western Italian Region of Piedmont. A set of linguistic features will be analyzed with the aim to depict dynamics of intralinguistic and interlinguistic convergence related to the ongoing standardization processes in Italian and Piedmontese.

1. Introduction

The paper addresses the main dynamics in the process of convergence from an Italo-Romance dialect towards Italian.[1] Such dynamics are investigated within the theoretical framework provided by Auer's (2005) typology of "dialect/standard constellations".

As is well known, Auer attempts a uniform description of the European repertoires by distinguishing five sociolinguistic types. Among them, the type of dialect-standard relationship which proves to be the most widespread in Europe is termed *diaglossia*, following Bellmann (1998). Such a relationship is characterized by dialect-to-standard convergence, resulting in a continuum of intermediate varieties between the dialect and the standard; these varieties are called *regiolects*. Furthermore, the standard variety tends to converge to lower varieties and hence tolerate regional features, leading to different regional norms depending on the different dialectal substrata; such regional norms are called *regional standards*.

In recent years, some attempts have been made to better fit this model to specific sociolinguistic contexts. In a similar fashion, we will attempt to adapt the diaglossia type to an Italo-Romance situation.

The Italo-Romance dialect we will focus on is Piedmontese, which is spoken alongside Italian in a north-western region of Italy (Piedmont). All of the Italo-Romance dialects, including Piedmontese, can be defined as "primary dialects" (see Coseriu 1980), since they are sister dialects of Florentine, the dialect from which Standard Italian has developed. Like every Italo-Romance dialect, Piedmontese is hence a language which is separate from Italian (cf. Berruto 2005).

Moreover, Piedmontese is the low variety of the repertoire and Italian is the high variety, also serving as the language for daily use. As with the bulk of Italo-Romance situations, such a repertoire is termed *dilalia* by Berruto (1989), a notion which shares some fundamental features with that of diaglossia.

2. The Italian continuum

First of all, it is worth recalling some crucial steps in the re-standardization process of Italian. By using the term *re-standardization*, we aim to stress that the process is giving rise to a new standard variety.

To put it simply, until the Unification of Italy was reached (in 1861), Italian was used by a clear minority of the population and almost exclusively in writing and in formal styles. The relationship between Italian and Italo-Romance dialects was that of *diglossia*. Since Unification, and in particular in the last century, Italian has increasingly spread as the language for daily use. In fact, this period has witnessed the transition from diglossia to dilalia. In order to be suitable for spontaneous speech, the codified written standard has undergone a process of convergence towards spoken informal varieties and "low" social varieties, i.e. a process of "downward convergence", as termed by Auer and Hinskens (1996). Such a process has led to the emergence of a new standard variety: the so-called *neo-standard* Italian (Berruto 1987).

At the same time, Italian has increasingly spread among speakers of Italo-Romance dialects (see Section 3 below). In the process of acquiring Italian, dialect speakers have transferred dialect features to Italian, thus giving rise to different regiolects. As a result, the conventionalization of some of these features, even in writing and in formal styles, has come to constitute accepted regional norms, i.e. *regional standards*. Neo-standard Italian is conceived as being made up both of linguistic features shared nationwide and linguistic features which characterize different regional standards.

The foremost dynamic characterizing the re-standardization of Italian is thus the aforementioned downward convergence of the standard[2] (which represents a "corollary", as termed by Auer and Hinskens 1996, 12, of dialect-to-standard convergence). One relevant example is the use of personal pronouns with a reflexive meaning. As shown in Table 1, Standard Italian makes a distinction between reflexive pronouns and personal pronouns for 3sg and 3pl; conversely, in Piedmontese (and in other Italo-Romance dialects) the same forms are used both as reflexive and personal pronouns, as is the case for 1sg/pl and 2sg/pl.

Tab. 1. Personal pronouns and reflexive pronouns

		Personal pronouns		Reflexive pronouns	
		Masculine	Feminine	Masculine	Feminine
Standard Italian	3sg	*egli, esso* (*lui*)	*ella, essa* (*lei*)	*sé*	
	3pl	*essi* (*loro*)	*esse* (*loro*)	*sé*	
Piedmontese	3sg	*chiel*	*chila*	*chiel*	*chila*
	3pl	*lor/loràutri*		*lor/loràutri*	

The regiolect behaves similarly to Piedmontese; in the regiolect, indeed, personal pronouns also convey a reflexive meaning, as in utterance (1), in which the personal pronoun *lui* is used with a reflexive meaning ("himself"):

(1) *il deputato offende lui e il partito*

'the member of Parliament offends both himself and the party'

(Flavia Amabile, *La Stampa*, 28.12.2009).

Cf. Standard Italian *il deputato offende sé e il partito*; Piedmontese *ël deputà a ofend chiel e so partì*

Furthermore, it can be argued that this feature is part of a regional standard. In fact, it is worth noting that the utterance is taken from *La Stampa*, a national daily newspaper published in Turin (the capital of Piedmont); and, as is known, a newspaper article can be considered among Ammon's (2004) "model texts".[3] Moreover, personal pronouns are used with a reflexive meaning in various regiolects, even in formal styles, as noted in recent grammars (i.e. one of Ammon's 2004 "codices"); cf. Cordin (2001, 610).

Emphasis should be put on two further aspects, each characterizing most linguistic features involved in the downward convergence of standard Italian. First, the tendency to generalize personal pronouns as reflexive pronouns is widely shared by Romance languages; second, the same phenomenon is formerly attested for old Italian, albeit excluded from the standard literary variety (cf. Cerruti 2009, 83–86). Broadly speaking, contact-induced forces and language-internal forces are often intertwined in the advancement of features towards the standard, and re-standardization does not lead to the emergence of linguistic features formerly unattested in Italian but rather to the acceptance into the norm of formerly sub-standard features.

Moreover, a regional standard can include some phenomena that do not occur in other regiolects. For example, in Italy the use of *già* as a pragmatic marker of repetition is attested only in Piedmont (and, outside Italy, in the Italian-speaking region of Switzerland). In this area, the adverb *già* can be used in interrogative clauses to signal that the speaker is asking for the repetition of information that he once knew but cannot retrieve at the time of speaking (the same holds true for Piedmontese dialect, whereas no counterpart exists in standard Italian). Below is an utterance taken once again from *La Stampa*.

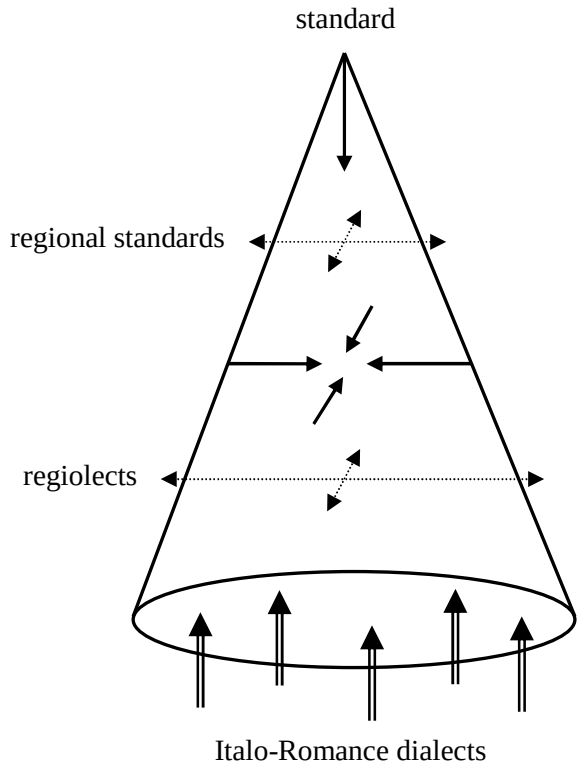
(2) *com'è già che lo chiama? ah, sì! albero da passeggio*
'what does he call it again? oh, yes! walking-tree'
(Anna Berra, *La Stampa*, 14.09.2012).

The second most relevant re-standardization dynamic observable nowadays is that of convergence between different regiolects, i.e. horizontal convergence. This happens primarily in two ways. The first involves the diffusion of a certain linguistic feature from one given regiolect to another, even before possibly being accepted into neo-standard Italian. Such is the case with the presence of the intervocalic voiced alveolar fricative [z] in environments in which standard Italian prescribes the voiceless [s] (e.g. ['ka:za] 'house', instead of ['ka:sa]), a phenomenon which spread from northern regiolects to central and southern regiolects, ultimately being accepted into the "modern" standard pronunciation of Italian.[4]

A second way consists in the (substantially) independent emergence of the same phenomenon in different regiolects. A case in point is represented by phrasal verbs, which increasingly tend to be used alongside their single verb counterparts (e.g. *tirare fuori* vs. *rimuovere* 'remove', *andare avanti* vs. *procedere* 'proceed', *tirare su* vs. *sollevare* 'lift', etc.), even in writing and in formal styles. The presence of phrasal verbs in contemporary Italian partly is due to contact between the regiolects and the respective dialectal substrata (phrasal verbs correspond to the prevailing pattern of expression for motion events in various Italo-Romance dialects, especially in Northern Italy; see e.g. Benincà and Poletto 2006), and partly can be regarded as an inherent feature of Italian. It should be mentioned indeed that phrasal verbs were already attested for old Italian, although only nowadays do they tend to be accepted into the norm (see their occurrence in "model texts", as attested e.g. in Bernini 2010). Furthermore, it is apparent from the latter case, as well as from the reflexive use of personal pronouns (see above), that a given phenomenon can be involved in the dynamics of both horizontal and downward convergence.

We can now try to depict the main dynamics dealt with thus far; see Figure 1. We assume as a starting point Auer's (2005) cone-shaped representation of *diaglossia*.

Fig. 1. The Italian continuum



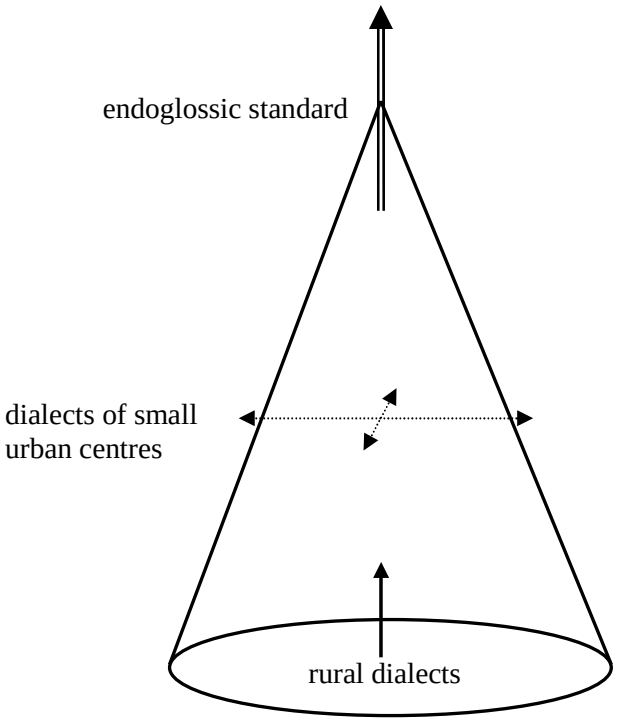
The cone in Fig. 1 reproduces the language space of Italian. The lower part of the cone contains non–standard varieties (those most affected by substratum influence), whereas the upper part also contains neo–standard Italian, which tends to include features from different regional standards. The downward arrow symbolizes downward convergence, while the continuous horizontal arrows represent horizontal convergence. (The development of innovations is represented as well, indicated by the dotted horizontal arrows: “regiolects may develop linguistic innovations of their own which have no basis in the standard variety, nor in the dialects”, Auer 2005, 31). Such intralinguistic dynamics are kept apart from interlinguistic convergence, which in turn is represented by double upward arrows.

3. The Piedmontese dialect continuum

Using the term “Piedmontese”, we intend a series of dialect varieties spoken in the central part of Piedmont. As of the late 18th century, the dialect of Turin (the capital of the Kingdom of Sardinia) started to serve as a reference dialect for the surrounding varieties; as a consequence, both the dialects of smaller urban centres and the rural dialects oriented towards Turinese (i.e. the dialect of Turin), replacing some of their original features with those from Turinese (cf. Regis 2012, 11–15). The spread of the 4th person ending of the present indicative tense *–oma*, [uma], can be taken as a case in point. In fact, the dialect of Mondovì, a small town situated 80 km to the south of Turin, changed its original verbal ending *–mà* (cf. *portmà*, [purt'ma], ‘we bring’ and *tenmà*, [ten'ma], ‘we keep’, still attested in the mid-19th century) to *–oma* (*portoma*, [pur'tuma], and *tenoma*, [te'numa], respectively, just as in Turinese); similarly, the dialect of Asti, a larger town situated 50 km to the south-east of Turin, turned its original verbal ending *–ema* (cf. Alione’s *Opera Jocunda*, early 16th century) to *–oma*. The reduction of palatalized plurals in the dialects of small urban centres is yet another clue of the influence exerted by Turinese; the urban dialect of Vercelli at present contains only the non-palalatized plural form *tuti*, ['tyti] (sing. *tut*, [tyt]) ‘all’, the same as in Turinese, while the palatalized plural form *tucc* ([tytʃ]) was still used in the early 19th century, though already in free variation with *tuti* (so, [tytʃ] vs. ['tyti]). No metaphonetic plural is used nowadays in the dialects of small urban centres, although such plural forms as ['ømi] ‘men’ where still documented in the 18th-century dialect of Mondovì (subsequently replaced by the Turinese invariant form [om] ‘man’/‘men’).

An appropriate label to describe the relationship between Turinese and the other dialects of Piedmontese seems to be that of “geographical diffusion” (cf. Chambers and Trudgill 1998, 166–186). This kind of process, involving an intralinguistic upward convergence from a series of low varieties (i.c. the dialects of small urban centres and the rural dialects) to a more prestigious one (i.c. Turinese, the basis for endoglossic standard Piedmontese), can be described as in Figure 2, resorting to the diaglossic model already sketched for Italian. The intralinguistic upward convergence is here represented by a simple arrow, pointing from rural dialects to Turinese; in this view, the dialects of small urban centres can be regarded as transition or intermediate varieties between the rural dialects (base of the cone) and standard Piedmontese/Turinese (tip of the cone). In parallel to this intralinguistic upward convergence, all varieties of Piedmontese were, and still are, generally involved in an interlinguistic upward convergence towards Italian, the roof language for Piedmontese (represented by a double arrow in Figure 2).

Fig. 2. The Piedmontese dialect continuum



Speaking diachronically, this kind of process first touched Turinese, then the dialects of small urban centres, and finally the rural dialects, usually in a weakened form. It comes as no surprise that "Turinization" (intralinguistic convergence) and "Italianization" (interlinguistic convergence) often went hand in hand; most of the changes mentioned above, in fact, made the rural dialects and the dialects of small urban centres closer not only to Turinese but also to Italian, the latter having been an unavoidable touchstone for the codification of Piedmontese/Turinese.

The interlinguistic convergence from Turinese to Italian dates back as early as the first part of the 18th century and can be observed from both a lexical and phonetic perspective. In terms of lexicon, adapted borrowings from Italian are used alongside, or in place of, the more authentic Piedmontese/Turinese words: see *profond* 'deep' (It. *profondo*) vs. *ancreus*, *albicòch* 'apricot' (It. *albicocca*) vs. *armognan*, *conciador* 'tanner' (It. *conciatore*) vs. *faitor*, *tantissim* 'very much' (It. *tantissimo*) vs. *motoben*, *sorgent* 'source' (It. *sorgente*) vs. *sorgiss*, etc. As for phonetic features, we are witnessing three different phenomena, already investigated in detail by Clivio (1972) (to which we refer for further examples): 1) the reintroduction of voiceless alveolar

plosives in intervocalic position plus the etymologically preceding unstressed vowel, as in *fratèl* ‘brother’ (It. *fratèllo*) vs. *frel* (< Vulg. Lat. **fratellu(m)*), or in *vitèl* ‘calf’ (It. *vitèllo*) vs. *vel* (< Lat. *vitŭlu(m)*); 2) the affrication of voiceless alveolar fricatives, as in *cerv*, [ʧɛrv], ‘deer’ (It. *cervo*, ['ʧɛrvo]) vs. *serv*, [sɛrv] (< Lat. *cĕrvu(m)*), or in *cimes*, ['ʧimes], ‘bug’ (It. *cimice*, ['ʧimiʧe]) vs. *simes*, ['simes] (< Lat. *cimĭce(m)*); and 3) the breaking of consonant clusters by the reintroduction of a protonic vowel, as in *diventé* (It. *diventare*) vs. *dventé* (< Vulg. Lat. *deventare*), or in *verità* (It. *verità*) vs. *vrità* (< Lat. *vērĭtate(m)*).[5]

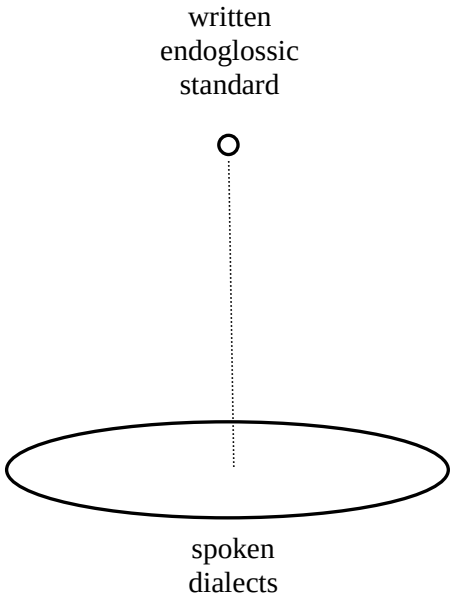
As long as Italian remained a far-away reference language, its use being very restricted in everyday life, no barrier against Italianization seemed to be necessary. However, the relationship between Piedmontese and Italian changed dramatically in the second half of the 20th century, when a considerable loss of speakers of Piedmontese occurred. Since the decreasing use of Piedmontese witnessed, as a counterpart, an increasing use of Italian, the latter was no longer taken as a model for the former, but began to be felt as a menace to the dialect and to its survival. This new picture led to a sort of re–standardization policy for Piemontese/Turinese, which was essentially based on extensive lexical borrowing from French: it is an *Ausbauization* policy (i.e. functional elaboration) attained through an *Abstandization* approach (i.e. structural distancing from the superposed standard language, i.c. Italian). In regards to this process, Tosco (2011, 238–240) cites an ample list of Piedmontese words in which distancing from Italian, as well as nearing to French, has been systematically pursued; thus, for instance, *antrapreneur* ‘entrepreneur’ (Fr. *entrepreneur*) is suggested to be used instead of *imprenditor* (It. *imprenditore*), *crajon* ‘pencil’ (Fr. *crayon*) instead of *matita* (It. *matita*), *fornisseur* ‘supplier’ (Fr. *fournisseur*) instead of *fornitor* (It. *fornitore*), *grandeur* ‘size’ (Fr. *grandeur*) instead of *grandëssa* (It. *grandezza*) and *vitura* ‘car’ (Fr. *voiture*) instead of *màchina* (It. *macchina*). It is worth underlining that a French model has also been followed for neology, as evident in computer and Internet vocabulary, e.g. *giari* ‘mouse’/‘computer mouse’, a semantic loan from Fr. *souris* ‘mouse’/‘computer mouse’ (note that Italian does not employ *topo* ‘mouse’ in the sense of ‘computer mouse’), as well as *ordinator* ‘computer’ and *claviera* ‘computer keyboard’, both borrowings from Fr. *ordinateur* and *clavier* respectively (It. *computer* and *tastiera*) (cf. Tosco 2011, 240–241).

It appears clear that these recent efforts to standardize Piedmontese point to French as an “ideological” and “artificial” roof language, considered less menacing for Piedmontese than its (geopolitically and genetically) “natural” roof language, Italian; however, the choice of French as a reference language, though not lacking in historical and cultural justification (for centuries

French was the preferred language of the Piedmontese aristocracy), runs counter to the long-standing orientation of Piedmontese towards Italian.

Following Joseph's (1984, 88) terminology, we can say that while Piedmontese of previous centuries resulted mostly from a "circumstantial" emergence, i.e. "a secondary consequence of more imposing social, political, economic, racial, religious, military, literary factors", present-day "Frenchified" Piedmontese results mostly from an "engineered" emergence, "attained through direct, conscious effort". As a consequence, it is not advisable to apply the diaglossic model proposed in Figure 2 to "Frenchifed" Piedmontese as well; the hypothesis of endoglossic medial diglossia (Auer 2005, 12–13) seems in fact to better suit the case. "Frenchified" Piedmontese is orienting towards, or already displays, an endoglossic standard which is restricted to written domains. In spite of their clear genetic relationship, the written standard and the colloquial varieties operate in separate domains, as in Figure 3:

Fig. 3. "Frenchified" Piedmontese and spoken Piedmontese



4. Between Italian and Piedmontese

As stated before, convergence leads to a continuum of varieties, but such a continuum is actually made up of two separate (sub)continua: that of the dialect and that of Italian. It is rare for intermediate forms not to be ascribable to either the dialect continuum or to the Italian continuum. Let us consider, for example, utterance (3):

(3) *bisogna duvrare il cervello*
'you need use your brain'
(Regis 2006, 483)

This is a clause with a hybrid lexical form, *duvrare* ("to use"), in which the dialect stem *duvr-* is combined with the Italian infinitive ending *–are* (cf. Piedmontese *duvr-é*, Italian *adoper-are*). Such a form can be treated as an adapted borrowing displaying an Italian inflectional morpheme, and hence it can be attributed to Italian.

Similar hybrid lexical forms are attested in the dialect as well. One such example is the case of *preparé* ("to prepare"), showing the Italian stem combined with the dialect infinitive ending *–é* (cf. Italian *prepar-are*, Piedmontese *pront-é*). According to Berruto (2005, 88), "the formation of hybrids […] may promote the birth of a mixed or fused lect. At the present time, however, the forms it gives rise to are […] still attributable either to Italian or to the dialect (and here [it] is the inflectional morphology which decides). Moreover, hybrids are sporadic manifestations that do not form paradigms". Hence, it can be argued that there exist intermediate forms between Italian and Piedmontese but no intermediate varieties; that is, intermediate forms do not co-occur regularly.

5. A continuum of continua: the Italian/Piedmontese continuum

Leaving aside the case of "Frenchified" Piedmontese, which is the product of an intellectual *élite*, we may wonder whether the Italian continuum and the dialect continuum can be presented together in a single diagram. So far, we have suggested depicting the Italian continuum and the dialect continuum separately from each other; our main concern has been to describe the intralinguistic convergence taking place at the level of the "architecture of language" (*Architektur der Sprache*: see e.g. Coseriu 1988), in Italian and in Piedmontese respectively. Now we have to deal with the interlinguistic convergence between Italian and Piedmontese taking place at the level of the linguistic repertoire. As we have seen, intralinguistic convergence basically consists in a change of the sociolinguistic salience of a given (set of) linguistic feature(s), while interlinguistic convergence consists in a transfer of linguistic features from one language to another.

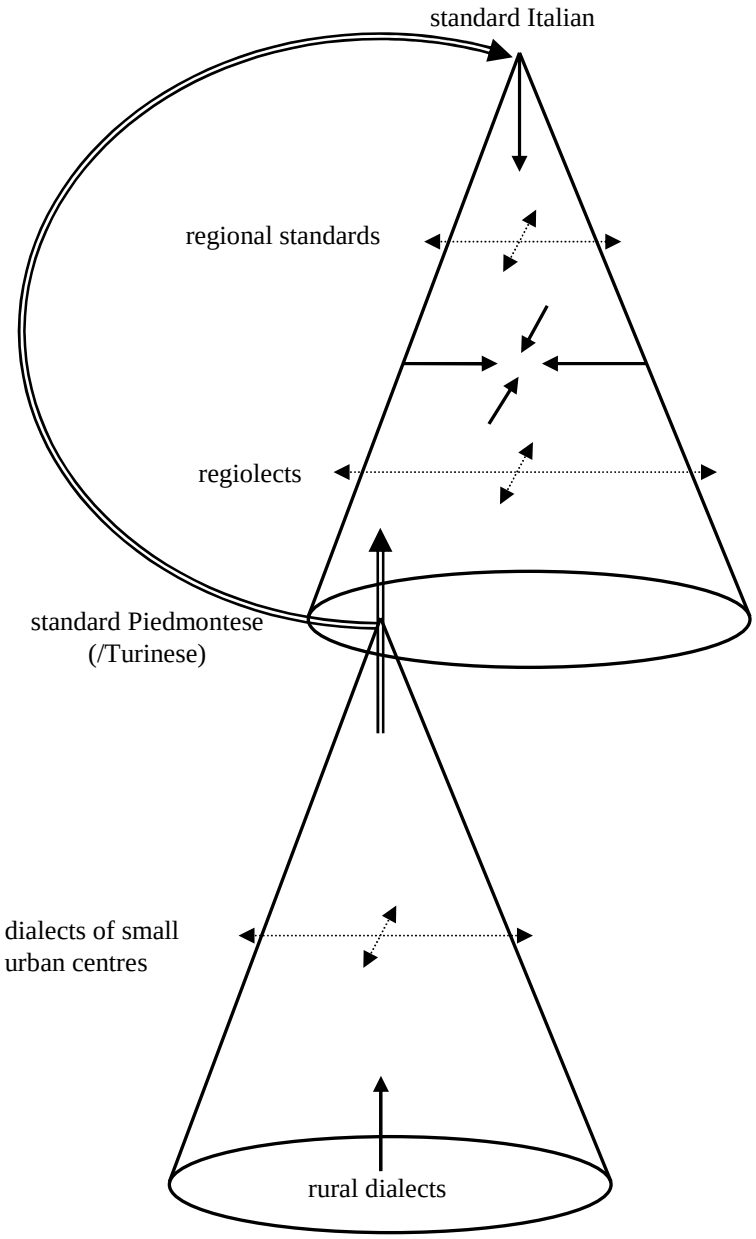
Our general diagram should try to capture a peculiar case of Auer's diaglossia. *Diaglossia* may in fact serve as a cover term for at least two different sociolinguistic scenarios, in which the dialect and the standard language can be (A) separate systems, with the standard also serving for daily use, or (B) varieties of the same language, with the standard seldom used in everyday conversation. The former scenario, *dilalia*, turns out to be the most typical in Italy, while the latter, *bidialectalism*, is restricted to some areas of Central Italy, as Tuscany and Rome (see Berruto 1989). Whereas both (A) and (B) display a dialect/standard continuum, (A) would be better represented by a "continuum of continua", i.e. two separate intralinguistic continua connected with each other at the interlinguistic level. Auer himself (2005, 19) suggests the existence of such double continua in Europe, including a number of Italo-Romance situations.

All that considered, and given the roofing relationship between Italian (roofing language) and Piedmontese (roofed dialect), we are led to propose the diagram in Figure 4.

The Italian cone is situated above the Piedmontese cone. Double arrows and simple arrows denote "interlinguistic convergence" and "intralinguistic convergence" respectively. The point of contact between the two cones is supposed to have taken place at the tip of the Piedmontese cone; indeed, on the basis of historical evidence, Turinese can be regarded as a sort of "foot in the door" for the influence of Italian on dialects. Compared to the dialect continuum above, a double curved arrow ("codification arrow") has been added, providing a direct connection from Turinese to the tip of the Italian cone; this is a way to show that throughout the codification process standard Italian has been chosen as a privileged model language for Turinese. As in the dialect continuum, the double arrow starting from the tip of the Piedmontese cone accounts for the synchronic interlinguistic convergence between Italian and Piedmontese (i.e. Turinese, dialects of small urban centres and rural dialects); this means that Turinese is no longer the only channel through which Italianization can take place.

In conclusion, the Italian/Piedmontese continuum proposed here seems to be applicable to situations where two genetically related standards co-exist, one of which is roofed by the other and does not have official status. More specifically, as for the dialect side, such a continuum may be suitable for "geographical diffusion" scenarios in which a roofing relationship between a full-fledged language (like Italian) and a dialect (like Piedmontese) is clearly discernible, in Italy (see the influence of Genoese, Venetian, and Milanese on their surrounding dialects) and probably elsewhere as well (e.g. in Andalusia: see Villena Ponsoda 1996).

Fig. 4. The Italian/Piedmontese continuum



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[1] The paper is the result of close collaboration between both authors; however, for academic purposes, Massimo Cerruti is responsible for Sections 1., 2., 4. and Riccardo Regis is responsible for Sections 3., 5. We would like to thank Frans Hiskens and an anonymous reviewer for their insightful comments on a previous version of this paper.

[2] Each dynamic will be accounted for by analyzing a single representative phenomenon. We refer the reader to Cerruti (2009) and Cerruti and Regis (2014) for a systematic research on this topic and a discussion of a wider set of linguistic features.

[3] A linguistic feature "that is regularly used by model speakers or writers in their model texts [...] becomes standard by usage" (Ammon 2004, 2).

[4] Note that, according to Canepari (2005, 23-26), nowadays there coexist four types of standard pronunciation, none of which is strongly regionally marked: "traditional", i.e. Florentine-based, "modern", "acceptable" and "tolerated"; each form can be used by broadcasters, dubbers and actors. At the same time, different standard regional pronunciations have been established.

[5] Frans Hinskens (p. c.) suggests that these three developments should be considered a cue of relexification, the dismantling of historical reduction processes.