How standard regional Italians set in: the case of standard Piedmontese Italian

Abstract: This chapter will focus on standard Piedmontese Italian, i.e. the standard variety of Italian spoken and written in the northwestern region of Piedmont. First of all, I will sketch the sociolinguistic dynamics lying beneath the formation of both regional and standard regional Italian, and discuss the concepts of destandardization and restandardization, with relation to the Italo-Romance context. I will then examine three syntactic features lato sensu, their degree of standardness in Piedmontese Italian being tentatively proved by their occurrence in spoken and written model texts: 1) a phonotactic phenomenon, i.e. the selection of the definitive articles lo ‘the’ (singular) and gli ‘the’ (plural) before suocero ‘father-in-law’ / suoceri ‘fathers-in-law’, whereas standard Italian would only allow the selection of il and i (thus, il suocero / i suoceri); 2) a lexical/morphosyntactic element, i.e. the focus particle solo più ‘lit. only more’, which has no correspondent in standard Italian; and 3) a morphosyntactic construction, i.e. the omission of the preverbal negation when a postverbal negative quantifier or a postverbal negative reinforcer is used (e.g. importa niente ‘it does not matter’, lit. ‘it matters nothing’, as opposed to standard Italian non importa niente, lit. ‘it does not matter nothing’).

The interpretation of the data will be suggested in terms of both simplification/complexification patterns, assessing if a new standard feature simplifies or complicates the linguistic system, and source language/recipient language agentivity, following Frans Van Coetsem’s model of language contact phenomena.

Keywords: regional standard, restandardization, dialect, language contact, Piedmontese

1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is on the rise of standard regional Italians from the vantage point of a specific variety, that spoken and written in Piedmont. As is well known, regional varieties play an important role in the current dynamics of standardization of Italian, regional Italian being the variety of Italian which is...
actually used in contemporary Italy: since nobody is a native speaker of standard Italian, it often happens that regional varieties exert an influence on the developments of present-day Italian, thus contributing to set the features of a new standard variety (i.e. a standard regional Italian).

The chapter is structured as follows: Section 1 deals with the main dynamics underlying the birth of both regional varieties and standard regional varieties of Italian; in Section 2 some features of standard Piedmontese Italian are presented and discussed; and in Section 3 a general interpretation of these features is offered.

2 Standard Italian, Regional Italian, Italo-Romance dialects

While discussing the historical developments of the Spanish language, Coseriu (1980: 113–114; 1981: 114) introduces the distinction between primary dialects, secondary dialects and tertiary dialects (see Krefeld 2011 for a critical overview of Coseriu’s model). According to Coseriu (1980: 114), primary dialects are those dialects which already existed before the spread of a common language (Gemeinsprache); such is the case of Asturian-Leonese, Navarro-Aragonese and Castilian. Secondary dialects instead developed after the diffusion of a common language (again, Gemeinsprache) and its geographic (or diatopic) differentiation; examples include the Spanish varieties present in Andalusia, the Canary Islands and Latin America, all of which may be attributed to the same common language, i.e. Castilian. When a common language exhibits a standard variety, referred to as “exemplar language” by Coseriu (das “Exemplarische” einer spache; exemplarische Sprache in Coseriu 2005: 116), then geographic varieties of the standard, i.e. tertiary dialects, will develop; hence, we are no longer faced with an Andalusian version of Castilian, but rather with an Andalusian version of standard Spanish, and standard Spanish will be realized differently in Andalusia and in Madrid (Coseriu 1980: 113–114).1

As we have seen, Coseriu distinguishes between Gemeinsprache (‘common language’, i.e. “language of common use”) and exemplarische Sprache (‘exemplar language’, or in other words, “standard language”). In Coseriu’s view, while primary dialects and secondary dialects relate to a common language, tertiary

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1 In more recent papers, Coseriu (1988: 143–144; 2005: 116–117) equates tertiary dialects to pluricentric languages, in the sense of Clyne (1992), a shift in meaning with which I do not agree.
dialects need to be considered together with a standard language. The distinction between common language and standard language may prove to be useful, in that whereas a standard language is always a common language, it is not always the case that a common language is a standard language (see Mesthrie 1994: 1865; Tuten 2003: 84–86; Regis 2012: 11–13). For example, given the period in which Pietro Bembo (*Prose della volgar lingua*, 1525) selected the fourteenth century Florentine variety as the basis for common Italian, i.e. a language of common “literary” use, it is hard to define this common language as a full-fledged standard language. There existed many literary texts for reference, primarily by the so-called *Tre Corone* (‘Three Crowns’) – Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio – but no codices were yet available, as grammars and dictionaries would be produced only starting in the sixteenth century (the third book of Bembo’s *Prose* is indeed one of the first grammatical descriptions of literary Italian).

Nevertheless, the usefulness of Coseriu’s distinction is counterbalanced by the difficulty of drawing a line between the notions of “common language” and “standard language”. Let us consider the linguistic situation addressed by Coseriu. When did Spanish tertiary dialects come into being? Did it happen under the reign of Alfonso X (1252–1284), during which an initial phase of codification of Castilian was achieved (Pountain 2001: 82–82; Penny 2002: 20–22)? Or was it after Antonio Nebrija’s grammar was published in 1492 (Lapesa 1981: 289–291)? Or did it occur after a massive standardization policy was started by the Real Academia Española during the Enlightenment (Lapesa 1981: 418–424; Pountain 2001: 167–168)? It is thus not at all clear when a common language develops into a standard language, as the criteria defining a standard are very vague (see Berruto 2007).

However, the term *Gemeinsprache* might not so much refer to a common language before it shows the bulk of features of a standard language (whatever they may be), but rather to a common language not yet conditioned by a standard ideology. And a standard ideology establishes itself especially through literacy and schooling (Milroy and Milroy 1999: 30). It is after all significant that Coseriu prefers the use of the term *exemplarische Sprache* to that of *Standardsprache*, as the former seems in fact to convey an ideological perspective, referring to a variety which sets an example or acts as a model for the other varieties.

All in all, Coseriu’s threefold distinction can be adapted to the Italo-Romance sociolinguistic situation, thereby rendering some of its features more perspicuous. *Mutatis mutandis*, primary dialects such as Piedmontese, Lombard, Venetan, Campano and Sicilian are as ancient as the Florentine dialect from

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2 As a matter of fact, Italian would become a language for common *everyday* purposes only four centuries after Bembo’s theories were accepted. For some historical details, see below.
which the common language developed in the Middle Ages; they are thus pre-
existing to the spread of the common language over the national territory. These
primary dialects share with Florentine their origin from Vulgar Latin and the
fact that they belong to the same subgroup of Romance languages, the so-called
Italo-Romance. In the conventions of Italian and Romance research, they are
simply called dialects, or more precisely Italo-Romance dialects. Regional Ital-
ians (RIs) emerged after the spread of Italian as a common language for every-
day purposes, and hence they are secondary dialects; instead, tertiary dialects
are standard regional Italians (SRIs), i.e. versions of the standard language used
in regional (or perhaps superregional) environments. Yet Coseriu’s threefold
distinction overlooks one important fact, i.e. the degree of Abstand of primary,
secondary and tertiary dialects with respect to the common/standard language.
In the Italo-Romance situation, primary dialects are separate languages from
Italian, albeit closely related to it, whereas secondary dialects and tertiary dia-
lects belong to the same diasystem as Italian and are thus regional varieties of
Italian.

In Italy, secondary dialects and tertiary dialects developed in different his-
torical periods and socio-cultural environments. RIs emerged among a “primary
dialect”-speaking population; they arose mainly from the influence exerted by
primary dialects on Italian during the period between the two World Wars. At that
time, for the vast majority of the population, Italian was hardly a mastered target
language, its daily use as a common variety still being in the very early stages. In
light of this sociolinguistic picture, Telmon (1994: 603–604; 2001: 47–48; 2009:
96–97) argues that RIs came into being as interlanguages, that is, as learners’
varieties for those whose mother tongue was a primary dialect (see also Hinskens,

This kind of analysis fits in very well with the initial developments in RIs,
when their users’ L1 was not yet Italian; today RIs, however, are not merely inter-
languages, because if such were the case, geographical varieties of Italian (RIs)
and social varieties of Italian (the so-called italiano popolare, see also Cerruti,
Crocco and Marzo, this volume) would coincide. While it is undeniable that the
more Italian is socially marked, the more it is geographically marked, and that
italiano popolare is always a RI (Berruto 1983: 71), the reverse is not always true.
After World War Two, and especially during the last three or four decades of the
twentieth century, the increased level of schooling and the longing for social
advancement led parents to speak predominantly in Italian with their children
instead of in their primary dialect; the existence of speakers having Italian
as their L1 would thus go on to produce outcomes different from those men-
tioned above. RIs as secondary dialects began to be flanked by RIs as tertiary
dialects, which resulted from the convergence – or rather, the advergence – of
the standard towards lower varieties, Italian being now expected to adjust before unknown informal domains. The diffusion of some regional features both in popular RI and educated RI “has given rise to a regional norm that is socially accepted and shared” (Cerruti 2011: 13). This new regional norm has been termed SRI.

Given the underlying dynamics of popular RIs, one would be induced to read their formation as a process of destandardization. As a matter of fact, popular RIs did not undermine standard Italian in any way: they did not reduce its geographical dimension or reduce its prestige, nor did they directly increase its internal variability (Auer and Spikermann 2011: 164). Moreover, it should be considered that, when these varieties developed in the early 1900s, no widespread standard ideology was still at work; for a large part of the population, in fact, Italian was not a product of literacy and schooling (the main hives of standard ideology) but rather of an awkward accommodation to native speakers of different primary dialects, the chances of contact with them having increased after the Unification of Italy (1861): people who for the most part did not possess the standard language could not play any destandardizing action on it.

Far more problematic is the case of SRIs, in which regional features once excluded from bon usage now enter the standard. This process seems to be in line with what Mattheier (1997: 6) labels Demotisierung, i.e. demotization or popularization, of the standard language. However, as far as the Italian situation is concerned, I would hesitate to use the term destandardization, as Mattheier does, to refer to the developments which result from the demotization of the standard variety (Auer and Spikermann 2011: 163); instead, I would speak of restandardization, i.e. the development of a new standard variety, the so-called neo-standard Italian (Berruto 2012 [1987]: 24), which exists side by side with the “old” standard variety. In my opinion, restandardization may be considered one of the outcomes of demotization: “the ‘standard ideology’ as such stays intact while the valorization of ways of speaking changes” (Coupland and Kristiansen 2011: 28). It is interesting that in his “architecture” of the Italian language, Berruto (2012 [1987]: 19–27) places neo-standard Italian beside standard Italian, the latter being a variety devoid of geographic and social markedness which is described and governed by grammars/dictionaries and restricted to very formal styles. The “new” standard does not modify or replace the “old” standard, which will remain, in Coseriu’s words, an “exemplar” variety, or, to quote Milroy (2001: 543), “a variety that is never perfectly and consistently realized in spoken use”. Berruto (1987: 24) also defines neo-standard Italian as an educated RI (i.e. italiano regionale colto medio), the latter label stressing the fact that a) a regional differentiation is present in each and every user and b) standard varieties have emerged/are emerging in regional environments (Berruto 2012 [1987]: 24). This statement
makes the relationship between neo-standard Italian and SRI even clearer: SRI is the version of neo-standard Italian spoken and written in a given area (Coseriu’s tertiary dialect), whereas neo-standard Italian is made up both of linguistic features shared by the whole country and linguistic features typical of different standard regional varieties (Cerruti and Regis 2014: 86). Neo-standard Italian, educated RI and SRI are thus labels referring to the same object, but, whereas neo-standard Italian focuses on the uniformity of features, educated RI and SRI point to their regional differentiation.

What distinguishes literary SI most from neo-standard Italian is its monocentrism, i.e. the presence of “a single set of universally accepted norms” (Stewart 1968: 354), as opposed to the polycentrism of the latter, in which “different sets of norms exist simultaneously” (Stewart 1968: 354). The basis of standard Italian is what Galli de’ Paratesi (1984: 57) has called *fiorentino emandato* (‘amended Florentine’), a Florentine dialect deprived of its more locally-marked features; instead, the basis of neo-standard Italian is supplied by different regional sources. In this view, the set of standard features accepted in neo-standard Italian is broader than that usually tolerated in standard Italian; this situation seems to recall the most classic cases of polynomy (Marcellesi 1984), in which features from several regional varieties are all approved in the standard language, thus paving the way for a composite standard variety (Deumert and Vandenbussche 2003: 5).

The fact that “the standard variety may […] increasingly tolerate regional features” (Auer 2005: 25) makes the situation outlined here compatible with the type of repertoire termed *diaglossia* by Auer (2005, 2011), following Bellmann (1997). In Auer’s view, a diaglossic repertoire may be graphically depicted by a cone; the base of the cone is meant to host “the most ancient, rural conservative dialects” (Auer 2005: 8; “traditional dialects” in Auer 2011: 487), whereas the “tip of the cone” is occupied by the standard variety. The language space between the base dialects and the standard variety is represented by a continuum involving intermediate varieties, such as *regiolects* and *regional standards*, situated from bottom to top. Auer’s model is general in scope and thus requires some adjustments in order to be applied to specific contexts. In particular, Auer seems to refer to sociolinguistic situations (the majority in Europe) in which dialects, regiolects and regional standards belong to the same diasystem as the standard language; hence, they are all involved in a process of *intra*linguistic convergence. This kind of sociolinguistic situation instead represents a minority in Italy, applicable only to Tuscany and some other areas of Central Italy (e.g. Rome), in which there is a very low *Abstand* degree between the base dialects and the standard. In these environments, base dialects are indeed geographic or social varieties of the standard language; moreover, the community has a good knowledge of both the
dialects and the standard, but only the former is used in everyday conversation. This repertoire typology is not far from that of English-speaking countries and has been termed *social dialectia* by Hudson (1980: 55) (see also Ferguson’s 1959: 336–337 notion of “standard-with-dialects”). However, this does not reflect the typical Italo-Romance situation, in which the primary dialect and the standard are two separate systems, both being used in ordinary conversation; such a repertoire, called *dilalia* by Berruto (1989), should be kept distinct from both bidialectalism and diglossia. In order to depict dilalic repertoire, it may be advisable to pick out two different language spaces, i.e. two different continua, that of the primary dialect and that of Italian (Cerruti 2014a: 445–448). The main hypothesis is that there exist two cones, one depicting the language space of the primary dialect and the other depicting the language space of Italian; in order to account for the *interlinguistic* dynamics between the primary dialect and Italian, the dialect cone should be placed below the Italian cone, the tip of the former touching the base of the latter (cf. Cerruti and Regis 2014: 104–106, 2015: 60–62; Berruto in press).

Concentrating now on the Italian portion of this double cone diagram, Auer’s regiolects can be considered roughly equivalent to popular RIs, bearing in mind that these varieties are the most distant from standard Italian and the most “diffused” (in the sense of Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985: 115–116) within the repertoire, that is, the least stable with respect to *interindividual* variation (cf. Kerswill 2002: 689). Auer’s regional standards, on the contrary, can be paralleled to standard regional varieties of Italian, i.e. regiolects which have already undergone a process of “focussing” (again in the sense of Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985), a certain amount of geographically marked features now being used by the whole community without any social distinction.

### 3 Standard Regional Piedmontese and some of its features

Some features of restandardization will now be described and discussed from the vantage point of Piedmontese regional Italian (PI), i.e. the regional variety of Italian as it is observed in contemporary Piedmont. I will deal with three syntactic features *lato sensu*: a phonotactic phenomenon and a lexical/morphosyntactic

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3 It is worth noting that neither *toscano* nor *romanesco* can be properly considered *secondary dialects* because they developed as of the Renaissance, thus long before the spread of Italian as a language for common everyday purposes took place. See Telmon (1993: 96–98).
element are explored in 2.1. and 2.2. respectively, whereas a morphosyntactic construction is examined in 2.3.

3.1 Lo suocero, gli suoceri

Italian definite and indefinite articles are organized in Table 1 (Serianni 1988: 140) according to the gender (masculine/feminine) and number (singular/plural) of the noun that follows:

Table 1: Italian definite and indefinite articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Definite</th>
<th>Indefinite</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>Feminine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singular</td>
<td>il, lo, (l')</td>
<td>la, (l')</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘the’</td>
<td>‘the’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>i, gli</td>
<td>le</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘the’</td>
<td>‘the’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The selection of the article is unproblematic with feminine nouns. La and una are used before singular feminine nouns (la casa ‘the house’, una casa ‘a house’) and l’ or un’ before feminine singular words beginning with a vowel (l’isola ‘the island’, un’isola ‘an island’), whereas le is used before plural feminine nouns (le case ‘the houses’). Far more complex is the use of masculine articles. While il / i e un are used before masculine words beginning with a “Consonant + Vowel” cluster (il cane ‘the dog’, i cani ‘the dogs’, un cane ‘a dog’) as well as before masculine words beginning with a “Consonant + [i]” cluster, the consonant not being a dental fricative (il cloro ‘the chlorine’, un trono ‘a throne’, i gruppi ‘the groups’), lo / gli and uno are used in the following cases:

a. before words beginning with a vowel – lo and uno always in elided form: l’orologio ‘the clock’, un eroe ‘a hero’, gli orologi ‘the clocks’, gli eroi ‘the heroes’;

b. before words beginning with the glides [j] and [w]: gli iati, [ˈjaːti] ‘the hiatuses’, gli uomini, [ˈwɔːmini] ‘the men’. Note that lo and uno are used before [j]: lo iato ‘the hiatus’, uno iato ‘a hiatus’, while l’ and un are used before [w]: l’uomo ‘the man’, un uomo ‘a man’;

c. before words beginning with an “[s]/[z] (both spelled as <s>) + Consonant” cluster: lo sbarco, [ˈzbarko] ‘the landing’, uno spettacolo, [speˈtːakoˈlo] ‘a spectacle’, gli sbarchi ‘the landings’, gli spettacoli ‘the spectacles’;
d. before words beginning with [ɲ] (<gn>) and [ʃ] (<sc>): lo gnomo, [ˈɲɔːmo] ‘the dwarf’, uno sciame, [ˈʃaːme] ‘a swarm’, gli gnomi ‘the dwarves’, gli sciami ‘the swarms’;

e. before words beginning with [ts] and [dz] (both spelled as <z>): lo zucchero, [ˈʣukːero] ‘the sugar’, uno zio, [ˈʦiːo] ‘an uncle’, gli zuccheri ‘the sugars’, gli zii ‘the uncles’;

f. before words beginning with [ks] (<x>) and with other consonant clusters, provided that the second element of the cluster is not [l] or [r]: lo xenofobo, [kseˈnɔːfobo] ‘the xenophobe’, uno psicologo ‘a psychologist’, uno pneumatico ‘a tyre’, gli xenofobi ‘the xenophobes’, gli psicologi ‘the psychologists’, gli pneumatici ‘the tyres’.

Considering the bulk of rules dictating contemporary Italian, it is no surprise that even in the first half of the twentieth century the use of lo / gli and uno was still characterized by a certain degree of variability, especially with regard to cases b., e. and f. above. Migliorini (1994 [1960]: 632, 1990: 34) points out that it was not unusual for the same author to alternate between lo iato, l’iato and il iato (case b.), and that i zoccoli ‘the clogs’, il zitellaggio ‘the spinsterhood’ and il zenith ‘the zenith’ coexisted with lo zibaldone ‘the commonplace book’ and lo Zambrini (surname) (case e.); il psicologismo ‘the psychologism’ (case f.) was even used by the Nobel prize poet Giosuè Carducci.

More importantly for our purposes is the use of the masculine article before nouns beginning with [j] and [w] (case b. again) and when [j] and [w] appear after [s]. In the conventions of Italian research, [j] and [w] are often considered semi-consonants. This label clearly represents a compromise devised to account for their “amphibious” behavior: to some extent, [j] and [w] act like consonants, occurring in a syllabic-edge position, yet they also act like vowels in that they are produced with reduced frication. The alleged double nature of [j] and [w] leads to a series of rules contradicting each other. Words beginning with [j] do not require elision of the singular masculine article, as if the “[j] + Vowel” sequence were comparable to the consonant clusters in c., d., e. and f.; conversely, words beginning with [w] require elision of the masculine singular article, as if the “[w] + Vowel” sequence were vocalic. In order for the system to be symmetrical, we should have lo iato / *lo uomo or *l’iato / l’uomo, while contemporary normative grammars only accept lo iato / l’uomo; it is, however, worth noting that ‘l’ is the elided form of lo, and that the plural form of both lo and l’ is gli: gli iati and gli uomini.

What is important to underline here is the utter lack of grounding behind the concept of semi-consonant; sounds like [j] and [w] should be considered for what they really are, i.e. two approximant consonants (palatal, [j]), labio-velar, [w]) (on
this matter, cf. Canepari 2003: 14, 2006: 54–55). Hence, the consonantal status of [j] and [w] should lead us to select *il iato, like *il cane and *il cloro and lo / gli and uno when these sounds appear after a dental fricative (case c.: *lo suono, like lo sbarco and lo spettacolo). Instead, Italian grammars dictate solutions which are not consistent with the phonological status of [j] and [w], a phenomenon which is probably due to the fact that the rule has been influenced by an entrenched spelling habit: since [j] and [w] are spelled respectively <i> and <u>, they have been treated as vowels or as allophones of [i] and [u] (Hall 1952: 16). This interpretation is supported by the behavior of articles before borrowed words: when [w] is spelled as <w>, the articles lo / gli and uno are usually selected, as in lo swing (Italian pronunciation [swiŋg]), uno switch (Italian pronunciation [swiʧ]) and lo swahili (Italian pronunciation [swaˈili]; cf. Bartoli 1938: 194).

The custom of selecting lo / gli and uno before [sj] and [sw] has been considered typical of Northern Italy (D’Ovidio 1934: 269; Migliorini 1990: 34), and especially of Piedmont, Emilia-Romagna, Lombardy and Veneto (Bartoli 1938: 194; Bolelli 1988: 124; Telmon 1993: 107). With respect to the SI rule, the “northern” solution, however, turns out to be more consistent with the consonantal nature of [j] and [w], equating [sj] and [sw] with “[s]/[z] + consonant” clusters (case c.). This phenomenon has been observed by various scholars. D’Ovidio (1934: 269), in particular, registers such northern habits as “lo siero, lo suono, e soprattutto lo suocero, col rispettivo plurale gli suoceri” (‘lo siero [the serum], lo suono [the sound] and above all lo suocero [father-in-law], with its plural form gli suoceri [parents-in-law]’); and it is in fact the couple lo suocero/gli suoceri which most strikes the linguist for its persistence in northern varieties of Italian. Although some eminent examples of the use of lo siero, uno siero were still attested in the late nineteenth century,4 such forms are nowadays restricted to popular RIs (it is likely that in the speech of lower classes the selection of lo and uno is promoted by the frequent assimilation of [s] to [ʃ], the actual pronunciation being hence [ʃɛro] instead of [ʃjɛro]). The same social markedness may be attributed to lo suono, whereas lo suocero and gli suoceri continue to be very widespread in the oral and written use of educated people, especially in Piedmont.

This northern – and above all Piedmontese – exception must sound surprising to Tuscan ears, as the norm of using il before suocero was already categorical in Michelangelo Florio’s Regole de la lingua Thoscana (mid-sixteenth century):

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4 Some occurrences of lo siero, uno siero have been found by Prati (1950: 103) in Michele Lessona and Carlo Valle’s Dizionario universale di scienze, lettere ed arti, Milano, 1875. Lessona (1823–1894) was a celebrated zoologist and anatomist at the University of Turin.
Dassi anche questo stesso Articolo [lo] à quei nomi che cominciano da la consonante .s. purche dopo quella seguiti un’altra consonante; si come sta in questi nomi Suergognato, Suenturato, Suegliato [...]. Da questa regola è assente un’ nome che da l’.s. comincia, alla qual’ seguita la vocale che sta per consonante, ciò è Suocero, ciò è Socerus, uel Socer, si che mai, se non da goffi parlatori, si dirà Lo suocero, ma il suocero” (Pellegrini 1954: 111).

[‘This same article, lo, must be assigned to nouns beginning with the consonant .s., provided that. s. is followed by another consonant, as in Suergognato ‘shameless’, Suenturato ‘unfortunate’, Suegliato ‘woken up’. This rule does not concern a noun beginning with .s. followed by a vowel which stands for a consonant, i.e. Suocero ‘father-in-law’, i.e. Socerus, or Socer, so only clumsy speakers will say Lo suocero instead of il suocero’].

Florio seems to acknowledge a particular status for [w] (during a period in which [v], [w] and [u] were conveyed by the archigrapheme <U>), but then firmly states that before suocero the article il is required. Nevertheless, the fact that Florio considers it appropriate to point out that saying lo suocero is typical of goffi parlatori means that this custom was not so unusual outside Tuscany.

Prati (1950, 102) acknowledges some occurrences of lo suocero in the Mitologia illustrata (Hoepli, Milan, 1914, pp. 245, 316) by Felice Ramorino (Mondovi, 1852–Florence, 1929), an antiquities scholar of Piedmontese origin who taught at the universities of Palermo, Pavia, Florence and Milan. Lo suocero was also used by Natalino Sapegno (Aosta, 1901–Rome, 1990), an Italianist who worked at the universities of Palermo and Rome, in his Compendio di storia della letteratura italiana (La Nuova Italia, Florence, Vol. 1, p. 68). Both Ramorino and Sapegno were renowned university professors who, despite having lived and taught for a long time outside of Piedmont, stubbornly held onto this regional feature in their written Italian (and in texts widely adopted in Italian high schools).

Bonomi (2002: 29n) notes that she has sporadically found lo / gli used before suocero / suoceri still in the early years of the twentieth century in some daily newspapers published in Milan and Turin. Here are some examples taken from the national newspaper La Stampa (Gazzetta piemontese), based in Turin, from that period:

(1) *Nel migliore degli suoceri vi è sempre un po’ della suocera*  
‘In the best parents-in-law there is always a bit of a mother-in-law’  
(translation of the penny dreadful La via di Damasco by Leon de Tinseau, La Stampa-Gazzetta Piemontese, 25.04.1896)

5 Note that until 1927 Aosta came under the province of Turin and that the RI of the Aosta Valley shares many features with PI (see Diémoz 2012).
Riccardo Regis

Egli si trovava nascosto nella casa dello suocero
‘He was hiding in his father-in-law’s house’
(Anonymous, La Stampa-Gazzetta Piemontese, 03.01.1900)

[…]
cercando di strappare il Picchione dall’affetto dello suocero
‘trying to tear Picchione (proper noun) away from his father-in-law’
(Anonymous, La Stampa-Gazzetta Piemontese, 09.09.1900)

Non assistetti al parto di Cenzina, perché gli suoceri, molto gelosi, la vollero seco
‘I was not present at Cenzina [proper noun]’s childbirth, because my parents-in-law were very jealous and wanted her to be with them’
(Anonymous, La Stampa, 25.01.1903)

The use of lo / gli before suocero / suoceri, however, is not restricted to the northern RIs of a century ago and can even be found in the new millennium. The following examples all involve authors of Piedmontese origin:

nell’occasione, omaggiò lo suocero
‘on that occasion, [he] paid homage to his father-in-law’
(Guido Davico Bonino, I Maestri del Grand Siècle: Corneille, Molière, Racine, in Roberto Alonge, Guido Davico Bonino [dir.], Storia del teatro moderno e contemporaneo. I. La nascita del teatro moderno, Einaudi, Turin, 2000, p. 642)

di Luigi d’Orléans era nientemeno che lo suocero
‘he was none other than Louis of Orléans’ father-in-law’
(Daniela Brussino, Baldassarre Molino, Pollenzo. Da contea a frazione lungo un millennio, Artistica piemontese, Savigliano, 2003, p. 53)

ci abitavano i Lisa, giardiniere reale lo suocero, minusiere6 di sua maestà il genero
‘the Lisas [proper noun] lived there, the father-in-law being the royal gardener and the son-in-law His Majesty’s carpenter’
(Luca Rastello, La Repubblica, 03.09.2010)

possono essere considerati a carico, se convivono con il contribuente o ricevono dallo stesso assegni alimentari non risultanti da provvedimenti dell’autorità giudiziaria: il coniuge legalmente ed effettivamente separato […]; gli suoceri […]

6 Minusiere is a regional term borrowed from the French menuisier ‘carpenter’. The Università dei Minusieri, Ebanisti e Maestri di carrozza ‘University of Carpenters, Cabinet-makers and Coach Masters’ was founded in Turin in the seventeenth century.
‘the following may be considered dependents if they reside with the taxpayer or receive alimony from the taxpayer that does not come from legal action: a legally separated spouse [...]; parents-in-law’
(Paola Aglietta, Tassazione e famiglia, Giuffrè, Naples, 2011, p. 120)

(9) [...] il rispetto dovuto agli suoceri nella loro qualità di genitori acquisiti
‘the respect due to parents-in-law in their role as acquired relatives’
(Elena Rosina, Il sistema dei saluti a Rivarolo Canavese tra tradizione e attualità : analisi sociolinguistico-pragmatica, unpublished degree thesis in Humanities, University of Turin, 2002/2003, p. 182)

The above examples are taken from what we may define, following Ammon’s (1989, 2003) terminology, model texts, i.e. texts produced by “journalists and [...] authors or news-real speakers and actors” (Ammon 2003: 2). Our examples indeed come from essays on various topics – Sachprosa (Kloss 1978: 37–55) dealing with literature (5), history (6) and law (7) – and national newspaper articles (8). The degree thesis in (9) is not a model text stricto sensu but certainly a formal text, and it is all the more interesting in that it reveals that neither a Humanities student nor her thesis supervisor perceived the regional markedness of the feature. This is further evidence of the diffusion of lo suocero / gli suoceri among educated writers (or speakers).

As a matter of fact, sometimes it is linguists themselves who help to promote forms which would otherwise be deemed unacceptable by grammars. For example, Gian Luigi Beccaria, for many decades a renowned professor specialized in the history of the Italian language at the University of Turin, writes that “suocero [...] inizia con s + semivocale, dunque vuole l’articolo il, che al plurale ha sempre come forma corrispondente gli: gli suoceri/il suocero” (‘suocero [...] begins with s + semi-vowel [semi-consonant in the terminology used above, RR], hence requiring the article il, and in the plural it always takes gli: gli suoceri/ il suocero’) (Beccaria 2010: 4). It is not at all clear why Beccaria maintains that the plural form of il is gli instead of i, thus endorsing the odd couple gli suoceri / il suocero; at any rate, it is impressive to read how the Milanese psychotherapist Fulvio Scaparro, in his forum on the website of the national daily newspaper Corriere della Sera, praises the author of a post for having used degli suoceri, resting indeed upon the above-mentioned statement by Beccaria:

Dopo tante e giuste rimproveri per i troppi errori nei nostri post, posso una volta tanto complimentarmi per il corretto uso dell’italiano? Lei ha scritto “degli suoceri” e non “dei suoceri” come molti avrebbero scritto. La sua è la forma corretta, come ben spiega Gian Luigi Beccaria a pag. 4 di un libro che consiglia a tutti: Il mare in un imbuto. Dove va la lingua italiana, Torino, Einaudi, 2010 (http://forum.corriere.it/genitori_e_figli/27-09-2010/suocere-1622145.html, 27.09.2010).
['After many justified complaints concerning the numerous errors in our posts, please allow me to congratulate you on your correct use of Italian. You have written ‘degli suoceri’ instead of ‘dei suoceri’, as many would have instead written. Yours is the correct form, as Gian Luigi Beccaria clearly explains on p. 4 of a book that I highly recommend to anyone: *Il mare in un imbuto. Dove va la lingua italiana*, Turin, Einaudi, 2010']

The endorsement of a linguist, his very authority, may thus accelerate the spread and the acceptance of a feature which in this case nevertheless reveals an inner asymmetry: *il suocero / gli suoceri* in place of *lo suocero / gli suoceri*.

### 3.2 Solo più

The focus particle *solo più* ‘lit. only more’ is typical of PI, being a loan translation of the Piedmontese *mac pi* ‘lit. only more’. *Solo più* may refer (a) to the moment from which a given event is observed, but also (b) to the preceding phase which has determined that event (Cerruti 2013: 142); it displays two possible SI equivalents, the adverbial locutions *ancora soltanto* ‘lit. still only’ and *ormai soltanto* ‘lit. already only’, which are not, however, mutually synonymic. *Ancora soltanto* is the same as *solo più* in the sense of (a), whereas *ormai soltanto* corresponds to *solo più* in the sense of (b). Let us consider the following examples (taken from Cerruti 2013: 141), conveying the meanings (a) and (b) respectively:

(10) *Le chiedo solo più una cosa che ho dimenticato prima.*

‘I have only one more thing to ask you that I forgot before’ (SI: *Le chiedo ancora soltanto una cosa che ho dimenticato prima*)


(11) *A questo punto il Boavista molla. Gioca solo più per onor di firma.*

‘At this point Boavista gives in. *Now* it plays only out of a sense of duty’

(SI: [...] gioca *ormai soltanto* per onor di firma)


Unlike *solo più*, which is a unique focus particle, the possible Italian equivalents *ancora soltanto* and *ormai soltanto* derive from the union of two elements – *soltanto* and respectively *ancora* and *ormai* – operating on two different foci. The focus of *soltanto* is the noun phrase in (10) (*una cosa che ho dimenticato prima*) and the prepositional phrase in (11) (*per onor di forma*), while the focus of *ancora* and *ormai* are respectively the verbal phrase in (10) (*Le chiedo*) and the whole sentence in (11) (*Gioca soltanto per onor di firma*) (see again Cerruti 2013: 142).
It may thus be argued that Italian does not display a unique construction as an alternative to solo più, but just two surrogate locutions (ancora soltanto, ormai soltanto) or a complete sentence reworking: Mi resta soltanto una cosa da chiedere ‘I have only one thing left to ask you’ and Non gioca più che per onor di firma ‘It plays for no other reason than out of a sense of duty’ (cf. Regis 2006: 281; Cerruti 2013: 142). Note that both the surrogate locutions and the sentence reworking show a higher formal degree than the focus particle solo più. The more informal status of the latter, however, does not prevent it from occurring in model texts: solo più in the sense of (a) occurs in (14) below, while solo più in the sense of (b) is found in (12), (13), (15) and (16).

(12) Oggi la sua tesi [...] è accettata dal governo e solo più gli illusi, gli imbecilli e gli austriaci la combattono
‘Today his [Salvemini’s, RR] theories [...] are accepted by the government and **now only** dreamers, idiots and Austrians fight against them’

(13) il cosiddetto “diritto di signoraggio” [...] fu a suo tempo della sterlina e del franco francese e ora è solo più appannaggio del dollaro degli Stati Uniti
‘the so-called “right of seignorage” was once attached to the British pound and to the French Franc, but it is **now only** a prerogative of the US dollar’
(Mario Deaglio, *La Stampa*, 04.05.1998, quoted in Cerruti 2013: 146)

(14) la primavera [...] vi cadrà solo più una volta, nel 2007
‘the [astronomical] spring will **only** occur once **more** [on March 21th], in 2007’
(Luca Mercalli, *La Repubblica*, 21.03.2005)

(15) al fabbricato sarà solo più possibile effettuare interventi di manutenzione ordinaria
‘It will **now only** be possible to carry out routine maintenance on the building’
(request to downgrade a building, addressed to the land registry, 2003, quoted in Regis 2006: 278)

(16) I piccoli prati antistanti le case erano solo più terra spaccata dall’arsura da cui si sfaldavano anche i cespugli di erba secca
‘The little lawns before the houses were **now only** baked earth from which even the dried grass had flaked away’

This is a varied list of occurrences involving an essay on politics by Piero Gobetti (1901–1926), an important Turinese intellectual in the early 1900s; a daily
newspaper article on economics by Mario Deaglio (born in Pinerolo, Turin), profes-
sor of Political Economics at the University of Turin; a daily newspaper article
on meteorology by Luca Mercalli (born in Turin), one of the most celebrated
Italian climatologists; a bureaucratic document drawn up by a respected Pied-
montese professional; and the Italian version of McEwan’s *The Child in Time*
by Susanna Basso (born in Turin), who has also translated into Italian such authors
as Alice Munro, Paul Auster and Julian Barnes. In the case of (16), it may be useful
to refer to the original passage of McEwan’s novel:

(17) The little squares of lawn were baked earth from which even the dried grass
had flaked away


From a Piedmontese reader’s perspective, Basso’s translation is very incisive,
since it makes it clear that a comparison with a preceding phase is required, one
in which the little squares of lawn were not baked.

As already pointed out, the origin of the focus particle *solo più* in PI can be
traced back to the Piedmontese focus particle *mac pi*; we would thus not expect
to find this focus particle in other regional contexts unless they showed compa-
rable substratum influence. Outside of Piedmont, some occurrences of *solo più*
have been observed in Trentino-Alto Adige RI (see Cerruti and Pandolfi 2015: 469),
as a result of the influence of a unique focus particle in German, *nur mehr* (lit.
‘only more’). Just as PI has calqued the Piedmontese focus particle, so too has
Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol RI calqued the German focus particle, and thus we
are faced with contact-induced polygenesis of *solo più* coming from different sub-
strata. Further research is needed to ascertain whether this feature is common
to the provinces of both Bolzano/Bozen and Trento or is restricted to the former,
German/Italian bilingualism being expected only in the areas surrounding
Bolzano/Bozen. Apart from the case of Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol, the use of
*solo più* in RIs other than PI seem to be quite rare. Some of these sporadic occur-
cences may be explained by resorting to the biography of the user of the focus par-
ticle. For example, Regis (2006: 277–278) mentions occurrences of *solo più* in the
writings of both Giampaolo Dossena (1930–2009), an expert in word puzzles who
was born in Cremona, and Italo Calvino (1923–1985), an outstanding novelist and
intellectual whose family was Ligurian. However, investigating the biography of
both authors, one discovers that Dossena’s mother was originally from Piedmont
and that Calvino completed his studies in Turin and worked for an important pub-
lisher, Einaudi, based in the same city. These circumstances may have exposed
both Dossena and Calvino to the PRI *solo più*, leading them to borrow the focus
particle. In this respect, it is worth noting that the PRI *solo più* seems to be often
acquired by speakers who have come to live in Piedmont from other areas; in fact,
I know many immigrants from Southern Italy who use solo più in their speech (and probably in their writing as well, though I do not have any evidence of this), some of them still preserving strong phonetic traces of their original dialect.

Yet not all occurrences of solo più can be easily explained by a substratum influence. While addressing the use of the focus particle by authors not having any apparent connection with Piedmont or Piedmontese, Cerruti and Pandolfi (2015: 469) suppose that Italian may allow solo più as a structural possibility which is realized in some of its varieties, independently from each other and from any substratum (but should these varieties be termed “RIs” or not?). In such cases, according to Cerruti (2013: 148), the emergence of solo più as a unique focus particle might have been promoted by the adjacency of solo and più as adverbs operating on different foci. Sentences like (18) are in fact perfectly SI (Regis 2006: 286–287):

(18) Il padiglione verde non è solo più ricco, ma è anche al centro del Salone
‘the green pavilion is not just richer, but it is also at the center of the exhibition’

(Roberto Iasoni, Corriere della sera, 21.02.2011)

A similar route – from two adverbs operating on different foci to a unique focus particle – is supposed to have led to the emergence of the Italian anche solo and German auch nur ‘lit. also only’ (Ricca 1999: 161). Nonetheless, in the case of solo più, the gap in meaning between such examples as (18) and (10)–(16) is so remarkable that the presence of the unique focus particle in non-Piedmontese users still lacks a convincing explanation.

### 3.3 Negation

While preverbal negation is found in SI, postverbal negation occurs in some Italo-Romance dialects, such as Piedmontese and Lombard. In the latter case, the negative element reflects the grammaticalization of a noun indicating either a small quantity (Piedmontese pas < French pa < Latin PASSUM ‘a step’, Lombard mi(ng)a < Latin MICAM ‘a crumb’) or a generic entity merged with a negative (Piedmontese nen < NEC ENTEM ‘no entity’ or NE GENTEM ‘no people’) (for an overview of negation in Italo-Romance, see Molinelli 1984, 1988; Parry 1996, 2013). From a diachronic perspective, the negation constructions of Piedmontese are a textbook example of the so-called Jespersen’s cycle (Berruto 1990a: 13; Jespersen 1917): a preverbal negation (Neg1) stage (twelfth–nineteenth centuries) was in fact flanked and subsequently overcome by a discontinuous negation (Neg2) stage (sixteenth–nineteenth centuries), while the current postverbal (Neg3) stage
first appeared in the fifteenth century, slowly replacing both the preverbal and the discontinuous negation (Parry 2013: 79; see also Parry 1989, 1997).

An example of Italian negation (type Neg1) is expressed in (19a), while its Piedmontese correspondent (type Neg3) occurs in (19b):

(19a) Carlo non mangia la mela

Carlo NEG eat-PRS.IND.3SG the-F.SG apple

‘Carlo does not eat the apple’

(19b) Carlo a mangia nen/pa’ ël pum

Carlo sbj.3SG.M eat-PRS.IND.3SG NEG the-M.SG apple

‘Carlo does not eat the apple’

Below are some examples of how the two languages behave when a postverbal negative quantifier is present, be it a subject (20 a–b) or an object (21 a–b):

(20a) non c’ era nessuno

NEG there be-IPFV.IND.3SG nobody

‘There was nobody’

(20b) a j’ era gnün

sbj.3SG.M there be-IPFV.IND.3SG nobody

‘there was nobody’

(21a) non mangio niente

NEG eat-PRS.IND.1SG nothing

‘I do not eat anything’

(21b) i mangiu gnente

sbj.1SG eat-PRS.IND.1SG nothing

‘I do not eat anything’

Whereas SI always requires the use of the preverbal non along with the negative quantifier (‘multiple negation’: see 20a and 21a above), Piedmontese generally conveys the negative value of the whole sentence only through the negative postverbal quantifier (see 20b and 21b).

Italian may also allow “discontinuous constructions with emphatic value alternating with the ‘regular’ non-emphatic preverbal constructions” (Bernini and Ramat 1990: 30), as in (22a):

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7 Piedmontese negation may be expressed by either nen or pa. Some grammars underline, however, that pa has a stronger pragmatic force than nen (see e.g. Villata 1997: 228).
(22a) non sono mica stanco
   NEG be-PRS.IND.1SG NEG tired
   ‘I am not at all tired’

There is no perfect Piedmontese equivalent to (22a), unless we consider the possibility of a pragmatically marked construction, with the negative particles pa and nen co-occurring (cf. Berruto 1990a: 14):

(22b) i sun pa nen stanc
   SBJ.1SG be-PRS.IND.1SG NEG NEG tired
   ‘I am not at all tired’

As a matter of fact, popular (and colloquial) RIs act differently from SI, tolerating the omission of the preverbal negation when a postverbal negative quantifier (e.g. nessuno or niente above) or a postverbal negative reinforcer (e.g. mica above) is used (see Berruto 1983: 52):

(20c) c’ era nessuno
    there be-IPFV.IND.3SG nobody
    ‘there was nobody’

(21c) mangio niente
    eat-PRS.IND.1SG nothing
    ‘I eat nothing’

(22c) sono mica stanco
    be-PRS.IND.1SG NEG tired
    ‘I am not at all tired’

A Neg3 strategy occurs in the above examples, making them similar to their Piedmontese counterparts (see 20b, 21b and 22b respectively). The substandard nature of this feature has recently been underlined by Cerruti (2009: 169), whose survey shows that Neg3 constructions are linked to the age and schooling of the informants: the older and less educated the informants, the more the preverbal negation is omitted. At any rate, some evidence of the spread of Neg3 constructions was already pinpointed by Molinelli (1984), who documented its progressive diffusion among educated speakers of RI.

Certainly, it is not surprising that the omission of preverbal negation can also be found in literary texts that attempt to imitate dialect structures:

(23) Si vede il mondo arrabattarsi e
    one see-PRS.IND.3SG DET.SG.M world strive and
si fa niente
one do-PRS.IND.3SG nothing
‘One sees the world strive and does nothing’
(Cesare Pavese, *Ciau Masino*, Einaudi, Turin, 1969 [1932], p. 46)

(24) A me, è rimasto niente
to me, leave-PRS.PRF.3SG nothing
‘There is nothing left for me’

The Piedmontese writer Cesare Pavese (1908–1950) used to transfer dialect features
to his prose, as in the case of example (23). Natalia (Levi) Ginsburg (1916–1991) was
born in Palermo to parents from Trieste and Milan and spent her youth in Turin,
where her father taught at the local university; not unlike Pavese, Ginzburg enjoyed
giving a regional nuance to her texts, as in (24). Far more interesting, however, is
the fact that Ginzburg employed similar constructions when addressing the writer
Italo Calvino (see 2.2.), who was also a supervisor for the Einaudi publishing house:

(25) Importa niente se poi è andato male
matter-PRS.IND.3SG nothing if then go-PRS.PRF.3SG bad
‘It does not matter if it then went badly’
(letter sent to Italo Calvino, Summer 1961, *Appendix to Le voci della sera*,
Einaudi, Torino, 2013 [1961], p. 118)

Examples (24) and (25) show that non-Piedmontese speakers/writers may acquire
and use a Neg3 structure, even though we cannot exclude that Ginzburg had been
influenced by her Lombard relatives. However, no influence other than that of the
Piedmontese milieu seems to have played a role in (26):

(26) Ma son niente le randellate e
but be-PRS.IND.3PL nothing the-F.PL blows and
le botte da orbi
the-F.PL free-for-alls
‘But blows and free-for-alls are nothing’
(Mimmo Càndito, *La Stampa*, 16.10.2014)

Mimmo Càndito is a journalist who was born in Reggio Calabria (Southern Italy)
and lives in Turin, where he is an adjunct lecturer at the University; it should
also be mentioned that Calabrese varieties do not allow Neg3 structures. In this
respect, another interesting case is the following:

(27) è come se avesse preso niente
be-PRS.IND.3SG like if take-PST.PRF.SBJV.3SG nothing
‘It is as if one had not taken anything’
(Giovanna Zincone, La Stampa, 02.06.2014)

We are faced once again with a highly-educated speaker/writer, Giovanna Zincone, a full professor of Sociology at the University of Turin (since 1990). I have not managed to find any information about Zincone’s birthplace, but her surname is clearly of southern origin, and she graduated in Rome, making it likely that the Neg3 structure had been acquired by Zincone during her prolonged stay in Piedmont.

As already demonstrated by (26) and (27), Neg3 constructions are not unusual in model texts, such as newspaper articles. Some examples from the Turinese newspaper La Stampa are again found in (28) and (29), while examples (30)–(32) come from the local weekly magazine Gazzetta d’Alba (notably, a far less prestigious periodical than La Stampa):

(28) Piombato da 8000 metri dice: è andata
fall-PREF.PTCP from 8000 meters say-PRS.IND.3SG go-PRS.PRF.3SG mica male
NEG bad
‘After plunging from 8000 meters he says: it didn’t go badly at all’
(headline of La Stampa Sera, Local news, 12.10.1967)

(29) Il cibo è mica male
the-M.SG food be-PRS.IND.3SG NEG bad
‘The food is not at all bad’
(headline of La Stampa, Local news, 10.04.1981)

(30) A Roma si parla di turismo, ma
in Rome one talk-PRS.IND.3SG about tourism but
si fa nulla
one do-PRS.IND.3SG nothing
‘In Rome they talk about tourism, but they do not do anything about it’
(headline of Gazzetta d’Alba, 01.10.2013)

(31) c’è nulla da fare
there be-PRS.IND.3SG nothing to do-PRS-INF
‘it seems there is nothing to do’
(Maurizio Bongioanni, Gazzetta d’Alba, 15.10.2013)

(32) da un grande romanzo è quasi mai possibile trarre un grande film
from a-M.SG great novel be-PRS.IND.3SG almost never possible take-PRS-INF a-M.SG great movie
‘from a great novel it is almost impossible to make a great movie’
(Roberto Manassero, Gazzetta d’Alba, 22.07.2014)

Examples (28) and (29) involve the postverbal negative element *mica*, while examples (30) and (31) display a postverbal negative quantifier (*nulla* or *niente*), as in (26) and (27) above; the negative adverb *mai* appears in (32). As we have seen, the omission of preverbal negation occurs in local news stories (see examples 28–30), as well as in editorials (see examples 26 and 27) and in “cultural” articles (see example 32).

It is not surprising at all that when a substratum action similar to that of Piedmontese is present, Neg3 structures may arise:

(33) *c’ è niente da fare*

there be-prs.ind.3sg nothing to do-prs.inf
‘there is nothing to do’
(Mattia Feltri, La Stampa, 25.04.2014)

(34) *Far niente avrebbe esacerbato la recessione*

do-prs.inf nothing aggravate-prf.cond.3sg the-f.sg recession
‘Doing nothing would have aggravated the recession’
(Francesco Guerrera, La Stampa, 02.11.2014)

(35) *suo padre c’ entra niente*

his.m.sg father there enter-prs.ind.3sg nothing
‘his father has nothing to do with it’
(Fabio Poletti, La Stampa, 29.05.2014)

Feltri, Guerrera and Poletti are Lombardy-born journalists and, as already underlined, Lombard also displays Neg3 constructions (*Verb + mi(ng)a or no*). Examples (33)–(35) are thus comparable to examples (23)–(32), resulting from a similar substratum influence.

Leaving aside the presumed contact-induced nature of examples (23)–(32), it is worth noting, with Molinelli (1988), that Neg3 structures are experiencing horizontal expansion as well, occurring in RIIs where no substratum influence seems to play a role. The omission of preverbal negation is found, for example, in texts of the early 1900s from the Bologna area (Emilia-Romagna), the dialect of which presents a Neg2 structure; at the same time, Neg3 strategies are sometimes used by speakers and writers of Southern Italy who have never been exposed to Piedmontese or Lombard dialects (see Molinelli 1988: 72, 74–75). This is a solid indication that language contact makes Neg3 constructions easier to occur but is far from being the one and only condition for them to appear.
4 Simplification and other causes

Let us now see how the three features behave in terms of the opposition between external and internal factors. From an external perspective, there is no doubt that the focus particle solo più and Neg3 constructions are the result of substrate interference; on the contrary, the use of lo / gli / uno before suocero / suoceri shows no obvious model in Piedmontese. The dialect, in fact, has no reflexes of Lat. SOCER (> It. suocero), the word for ‘father-in-law’ being mëssé (< MEUS SENIOR; cf. It. messere, Fr. Monsieur, Occ. meser), and the same holds true for the other areas touched by lo suocero etc.: in Lombard and Venetan the predominant forms are messée and misière, which are co-etymological with the Piedmontese mëssé, whereas in Emilian-Romagnolo the most common form is non (< Late Latin nonnus ‘monk, tutor, old man’) (see AIS, map 31). No dialect model seems to be available in any of the northern RIs mentioned above. We may, however, suppose that a more general Piedmontese phonotactic rule has been adopted here by PI. It is worth noting that Piedmontese grammars prescribe the use of the articles lë and jë, corresponding to It. lo and gli respectively, before “[s] + Consonant” and “[s] + diphthong”, the latter sequence nevertheless being quite rare in Piedmontese (see Villata 1997: 25): lë sior ‘the mower’ / jë sior ‘the mowers’, lë siolòt ‘the baby onion’ / jë siolòt ‘the baby onions’, lë soastr ‘the hawser’ / jë soastr ‘the hawser’, lë soat ‘the leather leash’ / jë soat ‘the leather leashes’, etc. Thus, even though there is no Piedmontese word comparable to suocero, there is a phonotactic rule of Piedmontese that may have supplied a model to PI (albeit far less evident a substratum influence than that exerted on solo più and Neg3 structures). Yet this hypothesis still leaves an important question unanswered: why is lo suocero so commonly used by educated speakers/writers, whereas such examples as lo suono or lo siero are now restricted to popular RIs? This may have something to do with the highly diffused nature of the term, probably more widespread than that of suono or siero, and thus those who were accustomed to hearing lo suocero in everyday speech felt it natural to transfer this feature to their (even formal) written texts. It should be added that, unlike suono and siero, suocero may rely upon the reinforcement of its feminine counterpart, suocera, and that the feminine definite article la (< (IL)LA(M)), though the only one allowed in Italian, is formally closer to lo (< (IL)LU(M)) than to il (< IL(LUM)).

These last remarks introduce us to the other line of interpretation, i.e. the internal perspective. In this regard, part of the success of lo suocero is due to the

8 Brero and Bertodatti (1988: 25) instead restrict the rule to “[s] + ià, iè, io” sequences.
fact that it adheres more closely than SI to the rule “use lo / gli and uno before “[s] + Consonant” clusters: [w] and [j] are approximant consonants, hence [sw] and [sj] sequences should act as normal “[s] + Consonant” clusters. The language system now seems more coherent and the phonotactic rule simpler, all consonants being considered alike.

The focus particle solo più fills a structural gap in SI in that it supplies something that SI lacks. In order to convey the same meaning conveyed by solo più, SI needs to turn either to more complex adverbial locutions (ancora soltanto, ormai soltanto) or to an even more complex sentence restructuring (restare soltanto, non V più che). Moreover, solo più is consistent with developments in contemporary Italian, since it follows a “Modified + Modifier” order, always appearing after the verb (Cerruti 2009: 265), and it adheres to a basic principle of naturalness: “first the nucleus, then the periphery” (Berruto 1990b: 29; Cerruti 2009: 259). Solo più does not make Italian simpler in the usual sense, since it entails the addition of a new structure to the language system. Nevertheless, we have to consider that whoever uses solo più will use neither its surrogate locutions nor the strategy of sentence restructuring; hence, on the part of its user, solo più is the most straightforward (i.e. the simplest) way to express a certain meaning, as well as the most effective functional strategy available to the speaker/writer.

It is widely accepted that the Neg3 strategies simplify the double negative structure required by SI. Postverbal negation may be regarded as an operator modifying the whole preceding sentence; this is in line with developments in contemporary Italian, giving rise to a “Modified (sentence) + Modifier (negation)” structure. But what about the naturalness of Neg3 constructions? If “‘natural syntax’ calls for a negative element in preverbal position” (Bernini and Ramat 1996: 39), it is inevitable to argue that postverbal negation does not satisfy the naturalness requirement. However, “[w]hat turns out to be marked from a ‘natural morphology’ point of view may be an excellent functional strategy from a pragmatic, discourse point of view” (Bernini and Ramat 1996: 41). Simplification (an internal factor) goes hand in hand with pragmatic efficacy (an external factor based, however, on an internal property: the “Modified + Modifier” structure). Though Neg3 is less natural than Neg1, the former seems to meet the deep-rooted folk belief that “two negative are illogical” (Cheshire 1998; Horn 2001: 296–308), finding even support in the well-known Latin presupposition duplex negatio

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9 Ramat, Bernini and Molinelli (1986: 265) do not agree with this line of interpretation, maintaining that the reduction from double negation to Neg3 is due to typological factors rather than to simplification processes. Typological factors and simplification processes cannot, however, exclude one another, the latter being potentially favoured by the former.
affirmat (Horn 2001: 22). To the laymen’s ear, this may sound as yet another good reason for using Neg3 strategies.

Table 2 summarizes the discussion above. The presence of a feature (1.–5.) is marked by a “+” sign and its absence by a “−” sign; the cell is left blank when a given property is not considered relevant to the feature at hand.

All of the three phenomena examined in this chapter show a tendency toward both vertical (i.e. social) and horizontal (i.e. geographical) expansion. Vertical expansion is a clue that the phenomenon is becoming socially unmarked, while horizontal expansion indicates that the phenomenon is taking part in the restandardization tendencies of contemporary Italian. More generally, both expansions are indicators of standardness, though different features may be standard to different degrees. When a phenomenon displays a “+” sign with regard to all or most of the internal properties above (1.–3.), it has a very good chance of being a standard feature, consistent with developments in contemporary Italian. External properties (4.–5.) may reinforce internal tendencies, but the former alone are never a guarantee of standardness. Of the features above, solo più is the most widespread, being used by educated speakers and writers, as well as in both informal and formal styles, whereas lo suocero and Neg3 are used by some educated speakers and writers in some (even formal) contexts. It is worth underlining that those who use lo suocero do not use il suocero (just as those using solo più do not use ormai soltanto or ancora soltanto), but users of Neg3 structures may alternate them with multiple negation (non V niente, non V nessuno etc.) or discontinuous negation (non V mica). Solo più is a standard feature pleno sensu, whereas lo suocero and Neg3 are standard to a lesser degree, but they may all be placed under the common heading of standard PI.

**Table 2: Internal and external properties**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>lo suocero etc.</th>
<th>solo più</th>
<th>Neg3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. It fills a structural gap</td>
<td>−</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>−</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. It simplifies the language system</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. It follows principles of morphological/syntactic naturalness</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>−</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. It results from substratum interference</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. It conveys a pragmatic/functional strategy</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Trudgill (2011: 40), simplification “in language contact does not result from non-native language learning as such, but from post-critical threshold – or if one prefers, simply adult – non-native language learning”. It cannot be argued that all standard regional features lead to a simplification of the language
system, but nor can it be denied that the three phenomena discussed here all involve a simplification process. The “language learning” hypothesis fits in well with the socio-historical process which is supposed to be the basis for the rise of popular RIs (or regiolects), i.e. the learning of Italian on the part of a mainly dialect-speaking population. For example, Neg3 structures became more and more frequent in Italian as of the beginning of the twentieth century, whereas in the early texts of Italo-Romance vernaculars preverbal negation was never omitted, irrespective of their geographical origin (Molinelli 1988: 44–55; see also Zanuttini 2010). This is not surprising, since the grammaticalization of such intensifying negative elements as gutta (< GUTTA), negota (< NEC GUTTA), mica, etc. was yet to come; only after the grammaticalization process had started did an increase in Neg3 structures begin to occur. But these occurrences remained quite low until a large part of the population started to acquire Italian as its L2, in the decades following the Unification of Italy.

It is very likely that more recent standard regional features entered Italian in a period when, in Piedmont, the national language was socially dominant but not yet linguistically dominant; this hypothesis has been suggested by Cerruti (2014b: 303–304) and applied to a specific structure of PI (essere lì che + V ‘to be V-ing’, lit. ‘to be there that V’). Social dominance refers “to the political or social status of one of the languages” of the repertoire (Winford 2008: 126), which is considered more prestigious that the others, whereas linguistic dominance refers to “the fact that the speaker is more proficient in one of the languages in contact” (Winford 2008: 126). Until the end of the nineteenth century, most people living in Piedmont were still linguistically dominant in Piedmontese, with Italian exerting a far-away social dominance on the dialect. However, the driving force of linguistic changes is the individual speaker, while the diffusion (or conventionalization) of these changes depends on social factors (Winford 2008: 127). Using Van Coetsem’s (1988, 2000) terminology, it can be argued that in the beginning such features as lo suocero, solo più and Neg3 resulted from an adaptation of Piemontese structures to Italian, i.e. speakers who were linguistically dominant in Piedmontese transferred some Piedmontese features to their learner variety of Italian. This is called source language agentyvity, since “the agent speaker performs a push transfer that affects a language other than his own, linguistically dominant language” (Van Coetsem 2000: 54; italics in the original). The “adapted” features above were imitated by speakers of subsequent generations, who had become linguistically dominant in Italian; this is a matter of recipient language agentyvity, the agent speaker performing “a pull transfer that affects his own, linguistically dominant language” (Van Coetsem 2000: 53; italics in the original). The passage from source language agentyvity to recipient language agentyvity explains not only why regional features do not require any bilingual
background on the part of the speaker/writer (as is the case with “classic” borrowing phenomena) but also how their diffusion took place; and the more widespread a standard regional feature is within the community of speakers/writers, the higher its degree of standardness.

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