

# Linguistic opinions and attitudes in Tuscany: verbal guise experiments on the varieties of Arezzo and Florence

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## Abstract

The present work is aimed at investigating the perception of the variety spoken in Arezzo in terms of overt opinions and covert attitudes, as well as at proving that such variety enjoys covert prestige among youngsters in Arezzo. Accordingly, the research method employed includes both direct questions and the verbal guise test, carried out comparing a voice from Arezzo and a voice from Florence. Results show that the variety of Arezzo is judged more positively than that of Florence for the traits concerning the so-called 'solidarity dimension', and more negatively for those related to the socio-economic condition.

## 1. Introduction

Despite the scarcity of studies concerning the perception of Tuscan dialects, it is known that, even in the region which is regarded as the 'cradle' of the Italian language, the different local varieties are not on the same level with respect to their subjective evaluation. In fact, it can reasonably be presumed that the different dialects provoke different judgements and attitudes, and that some varieties are considered better than others, although careful quantitative sociolinguistic studies are still lacking. Some traits are clearly expanding over the Tuscan territory: for example the so-called *gorgia toscana*, consisting in the spirantisation of intervocalic stop consonants, is becoming more and more present in varieties of peripheral Tuscany which were not affected by it in the past. On the other hand, other local traits, like the particular vowel system of Leghorn and that of Arezzo, do not seem to affect the varieties of central Tuscany [1].

These are the premises of the present work, which combines methodologies borrowed from Perceptual Dialectology [2] with techniques taken from the Social Psychology of Language [3]. While the first aims at discovering and analyzing beliefs about language by collecting and examining overt comments given by non-linguists, the latter aims at investigating the attitudes provoked by a language or variety by means of indirect methods, which do not reveal the object of analysis to the informants. The main methodology employed in this research is the verbal guise test, a variation of the matched-guise technique developed in the sixties by Wallace Lambert in order to elicit the covert attitudes related to the Francophone and the Anglophone groups in Canada. With this method, a single bilingual speaker is recorded reading a passage once in each language, the recorded passages are then arranged on a tape as if they were spoken by different speakers, and a sample of bilingual subjects from the same community is asked to listen to the tape and rate the speakers on a number of traits. Thus the subjects believe they are listening to different people speaking in their 'normal

voices' and are not aware of the fact that they are actually rating different varieties instead of different speakers.

Since Lambert's first experiment, new versions of the matched-guise technique have been developed in order to face some of the shortcomings of the method. In the so-called verbal guise technique, the different voices can be given by different native speakers, in order to avoid the problem of finding perfect bilingual speakers; the speakers can be recorded talking freely about the same topic instead of reading the same passage, so that the reading style will not affect the judgments; the experiment can be done in natural context, in a way as to avoid the influence of artificial contexts on the subjects [4]. To our knowledge, only few scholars in Italy have made use of these methodologies, namely Ramón Volkart-Rey in his research in Catania and Rome, carried out by means of the verbal guise technique [5], and Maria Rosa Baroni in her investigation in Padova, Milan, Bologna and Catania, which was actually a verbal guise test where the speakers were recorded speaking spontaneously [6].

## 2. Materials and methods

The empirical research involved 43 students aged between 18 and 19, living in Arezzo or in the surroundings and studying in the city. They were asked to complete a questionnaire made of three parts:

(i) Part I employs direct and indirect questions in order to elicit linguistic opinions concerning the variety of Arezzo. Some are questions about 'naïve' dialectology (e.g. "Do you think that the variety of Arezzo is similar to other Italian varieties? Which ones?"), others ask the subjects to choose, between two alternatives (phonological, lexical, morphological and syntactic alternatives), the one that is supposed to be typical of the variety. The questions which will be discussed in this paper are given in Figure 1.

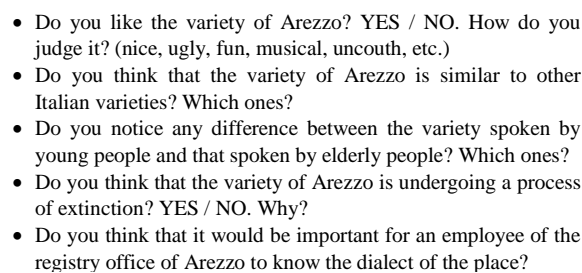
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- Do you like the variety of Arezzo? YES / NO. How do you judge it? (nice, ugly, fun, musical, uncouth, etc.)
  - Do you think that the variety of Arezzo is similar to other Italian varieties? Which ones?
  - Do you notice any difference between the variety spoken by young people and that spoken by elderly people? Which ones?
  - Do you think that the variety of Arezzo is undergoing a process of extinction? YES / NO. Why?
  - Do you think that it would be important for an employee of the registry office of Arezzo to know the dialect of the place?

Figure 1: Part I Linguistic opinions (translated into English).

(ii) Part II presents a map of Tuscany and requires subjects to indicate the areas where people talk in a similar way.

(iii) Part III is specifically dedicated to the elicitation of the attitudes related to the varieties of Arezzo and Florence, carried out by means of the verbal guise technique. The choice

of the dialect of Florence is motivated by the hypothesis that the variety of the regional capital might enjoy some sort of prestige and might, therefore, serve as a model for the other Tuscan dialects. This holds true not only in the case of the nearest linguistic areas (e.g. Pistoia, Prato), but also, we suppose, in the case of a variety which shares some important features with the dialects of the so-called *area mediana* [7], [8], [9]. During the verbal guise test, the subjects listen to two very short recorded passages (about 8 seconds each) taken from map-task dialogues, in which a boy from Arezzo and a boy from Florence, respectively, are giving directions (Figure 2). The two voices have been judged very similar as for age and have been considered representative of the two varieties for the presence of certain peculiar traits (e.g. for the voice from Arezzo, the vowel raising in [du'n:i:ne] and the presence of *-e* pronouns like [te]; for the voice from Florence, the spirantisation of stop consonants as in ['muziha] and the sandhi phenomenon commonly called *raddoppiamento sintattico* (syntactic doubling) as in [e t:i]). The subjects are then asked to rate the two voices on a number of traits [5], [6], [10], concerning socioeconomic condition, personality, and social distance/proximity (Figure 3).

#### Voice from Arezzo

IPA transcription:

[pɔ va 'vertso a si'ni | 'semprɛ a si'nistra te 'tjɛ:ni | 'zi:ri 'vertso 'destra ala disko'tɛka 'tata | dove ʃ e 'kwele du'n:i:ne]

English translation:

Then go left, keep left. Turn right at Tata disco, where there are those little women.

#### Voice from Florence

IPA transcription:

[e 'te fa θre 'k:warti di ro'θonda e ti ri'θrɔ:vi i b:ar mi'mi s:ula si'nistra | e um po'hino pju a'vanti spo'sta:ho s:ula 'destra ʃ ε l:a 'pjats:a del:a 'muziha]

English translation:

Go along three-fourths of the roundabout and you will find Mimì bar on your left, and a little further on the right there is Piazza della Musica.

Figure 2: Verbal guise stimuli.

### 3. Results

The following results concern Part I (§ 3.1) and Part III (§ 3.2) of the questionnaire, those assigned to the elicitation of overt opinions and covert attitudes, since the part dedicated to the mental maps of Tuscany will be presented in a separate paper.

#### 3.1. Linguistic opinions

The data related to Part I of the questionnaire show that, according to the great majority of the subjects (93%), there are differences between the variety spoken by the elderly and the one spoken by the young, largely because the first is perceived as less clear, more archaic and uncouth (58,1%). Most of them (72%) do not believe that the variety of Arezzo is undergoing a process of extinction, mainly because it is spoken not only by the elder but also by young generations (23,2%). Most of the subjects (72%) do not think that it would be important for an employee of the registry office of Arezzo to know the dialect of the place. More than half of the sample (53,4%) claim to like such variety, which is often described as uncouth (60,4%), nice and fun (55,8%). As far as the similarities with other varieties are concerned, 46,2% of the subjects affirm that the dialect of Arezzo is similar to some other Italian dialect

(either Tuscan – 41,6% - or Umbrian – 4,6% -), 34,8% do not see any similarity and 13,9% assert that the variety of Arezzo is similar to Italian.

#### 3.2. Language attitudes

Part III of the questionnaire has been analysed most in detail. In the following description, the questions have been grouped into five major categories, each corresponding to a different aspect of the perception of the variety of Arezzo that has been investigated in the verbal guise test.

You are going to hear two different people giving directions.

1. Where do you think this person comes from?
2. Do you like the way he talks? YES / NO. Why?
3. What kind of educational qualification might he have?

- 'scuola elementare' certificate  
 'scuola media' certificate  
 'scuola superiore' certificate  
 degree

4. What kind of person might he be?

- nice / not nice  
 very intelligent / not very intelligent  
 very trustworthy / not very trustworthy  
 humble / conceited  
 selfconfident / insecure  
 sociable / not very sociable  
 tidy / messy  
 elegant / rude  
 virile / effeminate

5. How successful do you think he is?

- he is always successful  
 he is sometimes successful  
 he is rarely successful

6. How much money do you think he has?

- he is well-off  
 he does not have much money

7. What kind of job do you think he has?

- a manual labour job  
 an intellectual job  
 a clerical or commercial job

Which one in particular?

8. Could he be a manager? YES / NO. Why?

9. How committed to his work do you think he is?

- very committed  
 not very committed

10. What kind of car might he have?

- an economy car  
 a station wagon  
 a SUV

11. If you knew this person, do you think he could be

- a friend of yours?  
 a distant acquaintance?

12. Would you like to have a member of your family talking like this person? YES / NO. Why?

13. Would you like to have a national TV network reporter talking like this person? YES / NO. Why?

Figure 3: Verbal guise questions (translated into English).

##### 3.2.1. Identifying the varieties

The voice from Arezzo has been recognised as belonging to a speaker coming from the area of Arezzo by 97,6% of the subjects. On the contrary, only 46,5% of the subjects has recognised the voice from Florence as belonging to someone coming from the area of Florence, and another 46,5% has

identified the speaker as coming from Siena. The data related to the voice from Florence have been, nevertheless, considered to be valid in relation to a variety of central Tuscany: as it is known, the dialect of Siena is influenced by that of the regional capital and, among all the Tuscan varieties, it is the one that appears to be at the most advanced stage in the process of creation of a koiné [9], [11].

### 3.2.2. *The liking of the varieties*

The voice from Arezzo is disliked by 55,8% of the students, while it is appreciated by 41,8%. The same pattern is detectable in the answers referring to the voice from Florence, but with a lowering of the percentage related to negative answers (46,5%) and a slightly raising of that related to positive answers (44,1%).

### 3.2.3. *The socioeconomic condition*

EDUCATION. The voice from Arezzo is largely thought to belong to someone who has a 'scuola media' certificate (53,4%), often a 'scuola superiore' certificate (37,2%), rarely a degree (4,6%) or a 'scuola elementare' certificate (2,3%). The speaker from Florence, on the contrary, is mostly thought to have a 'scuola superiore' certificate (72%), sometimes a degree (16,2%), rarely a 'scuola media' certificate (4,6%), never a 'scuola elementare' certificate.

SUCCESS. Most of the subjects believe that the speaker from Arezzo is sometimes successful (74,4%), some believe that he is rarely successful (23,2%). The voice from Florence is thought to belong to someone who is sometimes successful by the majority of the subjects (76,7%), some believe that he is always successful (18,6%) and very few think that he is rarely successful (2,3%).

ECONOMIC SITUATION. Many students think that the speaker from Arezzo does not have much money (79%), some suppose that he is a well-off person (20,9%). The speaker from Florence, instead, is well-off according to many subjects (79%) and does not have much money according to a small part of the sample (16,2%).

JOB. Most of the subjects think that the voice from Arezzo belongs to someone who is employed in a manual labour job (83,7%), few believe that he has a clerical or commercial job (11,6%), nobody thinks that he has an intellectual job. The speaker from Florence is mostly thought to be employed in a clerical or commercial job (74,4%), some students believe that he has an intellectual job (18,6%) and very few think that he has a manual labour job (4,6%).

MANAGERIAL JOB. The majority of the subjects cannot imagine the speaker from Arezzo as a manager (72%), mainly because of the way he speaks. (44,1%). The voice from Florence, on the contrary, could have a managerial job according to the most part of the sample (81,3%), mainly because of certain personal characteristics attributed to the speaker (34,8%).

COMMITMENT. More than half of the sample believe that the voice from Arezzo belongs to someone who is not very committed to his work (58,1%), while some subjects believe him to be very committed (34,8%). The speaker from Florence, instead, is very committed according to the great majority of the subjects (86%), only a few think that he is not very committed (6,9%).

CAR. The speaker from Arezzo is thought to own an economy car by most of the subjects (76,7%), some think that he owns a station wagon (16,2%) and few believe he has got a SUV (6,9%). As far as the voice from Florence is concerned, instead, more than half of the subjects believe him to own a

station wagon (55,8%), some think he has a SUV (27,9%) and very few an economy car (13,9%).

TELEVISION REPORTER. The majority of the subjects cannot imagine the speaker from Arezzo as a national TV network reporter (83,7% 'NO', only 4,6% 'YES'), often because of the need for news to be comprehensible for everyone (55,8%). In this case, even the voice from Florence receives a majority of negative answers (86% 'NO', 13,9% 'YES'), often for the same reason (55,8%).

### 3.2.4. *Personality traits*

The voice from Arezzo is thought to belong to someone who is nice (97,6%), sociable (97,6%), virile (90,6%), humble (79%), self-confident (67,4%), but rude (95,3%), messy (86%), not very intelligent (69,7%), nor very trustworthy (60,4%). The voice from Florence is thought to belong to a completely different kind of person: he is believed to be tidy (93%), self-confident (83,7%), very trustworthy (79%), very intelligent (76,7%), elegant (67,4%), nice (67,4%), sociable (58,1%), humble (53,4%), but he is also imagined as an effeminate (51,1%).

### 3.2.5. *Social distance/proximity*

The speaker coming from Arezzo is seen as a friend by 67,4% of the subjects, while 30,2% see him as a distant acquaintance. Nevertheless, when asked whether they would like to have a member of their family talking like the speaker, most of the students answer in a negative way ('NO' 58,1%, 'YES' 32,5%). As far as the speaker from Florence is concerned, the number of subjects who see him as a friend is exactly the same of those who see him as a distant acquaintance (48,8%). In this case too, when asked whether they would like to have a member of their family talking like the speaker, most of the students answer in a negative way ('NO' 53,4%, 'YES' 37,2%).

## 3.3. *The variable of the subjects' origin*

In order to investigate the opposition between city and countryside, which still seems to be present in Tuscany (in most areas it is possible to distinguish between a *rustic* dialect, mainly spoken by old country people, and a *current* dialect, spoken by the urban population and the youngsters [9]), the sample has been further divided into three categories: (i) subjects from the city (14 members); (ii) subjects from the province (9 members); (iii) subjects from other areas (20 members).

The analysis of the data in relation to the variable of the subjects' origin has shown some interesting patterns regarding the stereotype attached to the variety of Arezzo and the perception of the variety of Florence.

As far as the voice from Arezzo is concerned, the subjects from the city score higher than the other two groups in three traits (*humble, self-confident, messy*), the subjects from the province score higher in four traits (*rarely successful, manual labour job, not very committed, no possibility of being a national TV network reporter*), and those from other areas score higher in seven traits (*virile, rude, not very intelligent, 'scuola media', not much money, economy car, no possibility of a managerial job*).

Both the group of the students coming from the province and that of the students coming from other areas score 100% for the *nice* and *sociable* traits. Therefore, the stereotype attached to the dialect [12] appears to be more evident among the

subjects coming from other areas, and less manifest among the subjects from the city.

With respect to the perception of the variety of Florence, data show that the voice is judged less positively by the subjects coming from the city both for the personality traits (they judge it less favourably than the other two groups for six traits: *nice, intelligent, humble, sociable, tidy and effeminate*) and for the social distance/proximity. Those who seem to appreciate more the voice from Florence are the subjects coming from other areas, who judge it more favourably both for the traits concerning the socioeconomic condition (they judge it more positively for six traits: *successful, well-off, intellectual job, very committed, SUV, possibility of being a national TV network reporter*) and for the personality traits (for four traits: *very intelligent, very trustworthy, self-confident, tidy*). Therefore, the perception of the variety of Florence seems to be more positive among the subjects coming from outside Arezzo and less favourable among the subjects from the city.

## 4. Conclusions

### 4.1. The portraits of the two voices

According to our data, the voice from Arezzo is thought to belong to someone who is nice, sociable, virile, humble, self-confident, friendly, but rude, messy, not very clever nor trustworthy. In addition to this, the speaker from Arezzo is supposed to have a low educational qualification and to be employed in a manual labour job which does not pay much, in which he does not apply himself as he should and only sometimes is successful.

The voice from Florence, on the contrary, is believed to belong to someone who is tidy, self-confident, trustworthy, extremely intelligent, elegant, nice, sociable, humble, with an intermediate educational qualification, with a well-paid clerical or commercial job to which he devotes himself, being often successful. Nevertheless, he is thought to be an effeminate and is less frequently seen as a friend compared to the speaker from Arezzo.

### 4.2. The prestige of the two varieties

The results of the verbal guise test show that the voice from Arezzo is judged in a negative way for all of the traits except those related to friendliness, sociability, humility, self-confidence and social distance/proximity. On the contrary, the voice from Florence is always judged favourably, except for the traits concerning virility and social distance/proximity. Consequently, it can be affirmed that the variety of Arezzo is judged more positively than that of Florence for the traits concerning the so-called 'solidarity dimension', more negatively for those related to the socio-economic condition (and vice versa).

The data also suggest that, unlike the variety of Florence, which is associated to attributes like elegance and tidiness, the variety spoken in Arezzo is associated to some typically masculine attributes, such as rudeness and vulgarity, which seem to exert some sort of attraction on the subjects. Therefore, this study puts forward the idea that, on the one hand, the dialect of Florence enjoys overt prestige because it is considered to be the origin of the Italian language and bears an important literary tradition, as well as being the variety of the regional capital and owning some features that are expanding over the Tuscan territory (e.g. the *gorgia toscana*). On the other hand, the dialect of Arezzo enjoys covert prestige because it carries with it certain values which, despite not

being overtly recognised by the members of the community, are desirable and desired [13]. A similar contrast has emerged from a study on the linguistic opinions related to the varieties of Pisa and Leghorn: the first appears to be considered elegant, but a little aloof; the second is described as uncouth, but nice and spontaneous [14].

### 4.3. Future Developments

The present study can be further developed in a way as to give inner insights into the perception of the two varieties and into the mechanisms which govern dialect evaluation and categorisation. Among the goals to be reached in the future, the first would be to repeat the empirical research in Florence in order to be able to discover and analyse the perception of the varieties of Arezzo and Florence in the regional capital. In addition to this, it would be important to use acoustic synthesis because, by studying and identifying the acoustic cues used in dialect categorization, we can better determine what kinds of information about dialect variation are encoded, stored, and represented by the naïve listeners based on his or her everyday experiences with linguistic variation in the environment.

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