



Language Contact in a Multilingual Metropolis: Portuguese and Italian in Montreal

This presentation explores the complex linguistic landscape of Montreal, focusing on the contact and maintenance of Portuguese and Italian heritage languages among migrant communities. We will examine historical context, linguistic practices, and the influence of language ideologies on integration and identity formation across generations.

Source: <https://hal.science/hal-03231323/file/languages-06-00091-v2.pdf>

Montreal: A Multilingual Crucible



Complex Linguistic Context

Montreal (Quebec) is a highly multilingual urban environment. While French and English dominate, the city hosts a vast array of other languages due to significant historical migration patterns, defining its unique "double-majority" bilingual reality.



Ideological Division

The city is linguistically and politically "divided" between Quebec's francophone interculturalism and Canada's federal multiculturalism. Allophone languages (neither French nor English) constantly redefine shared urban spaces.



Research Focus

The study specifically compares the language practices, behaviors, and in-group ideologies of Portuguese and Italian heritage speakers across multiple generations in Montreal.

Research Objectives and Methodology

Key Research Objectives

1

Examine the role of **identifying places** (private and public) in the in-group integration process.

2

Analyze the value and assessment of competence and legitimacy attributed to **Standard Languages** (e.g., in schools).

3

Highlight the institutionalization and/or contestation of the central ideology of **linguistic purism**.

4

Analyze how internal group ideologies and stereotypical attitudes influence the **linguistic integration** of newer generations.

Methodology

This study adopts a **Linguistic Ethnography** approach, focusing on heritage speakers (second generation onwards), with fieldwork conducted between 2011 and 2019.

- Data Collection: Written questionnaires, participant and non-participant observations, and approximately 100 semi-structured interviews.
- Generations: First (1G), Second (2G), Third (3G), and Fourth (4G).

The Portuguese Community: History and Linguistic Geopolitics

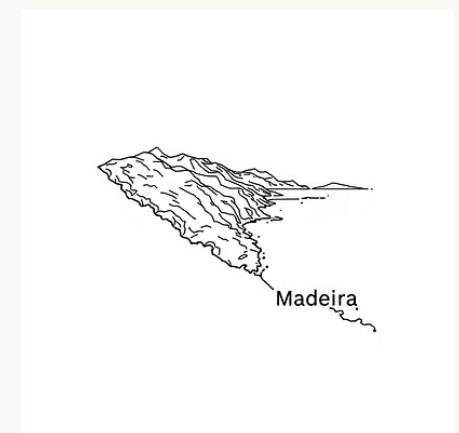
Historical Background and Demographics

- Immigration started in the 1950s (pioneers in 1953), primarily from the Azores, Madeira, and Northern/Central Portugal.
- Montreal hosts the second-largest Portuguese community in Canada, with approximately 60,000 individuals in the metropolitan area.
- **Little Portugal:** The Saint-Louis neighborhood (Plateau Mont-Royal) remains the identifiable community center where Portuguese is actively used in public spaces.

Language & Identity

European Portuguese (EP) is the standard taught and used in community institutions (e.g., Missão Santa Cruz). EP maintains clear dominance and serves as a **lingua franca** for the community, including Brazilian immigrants.

Only "one flag flies" in this neighborhood, making it easier to identify compared to other contexts.



The Italian Community: Dispersion and Symbolic Centers



The Italian community, established since the early 20th century, is notably larger but more geographically dispersed than the Portuguese community.



Historical and Geographical Origins

- Immigration began much earlier, in the early 20th century.
- Origins are diverse, primarily from Southern, Central, and North-Eastern regions of Italy (e.g., Sicily, Calabria, Abruzzo, Friuli).

Demographics and Localization

- Montreal has the second-largest Italian community in Canada, with **147,015** people of Italian descent.
- Unlike the Portuguese, Italians settled in multiple areas, establishing multiple "Little Italies."
- **Petite-Italie:** The historical Mile-End district is now primarily symbolic and commercial, supplemented by key parish and social centers (e.g., Casa d'Italia, Centro Leonardo da Vinci).

Language Status

Standard Italian (SI) is promoted by institutions (PICAL, CESDA). While SI is taught, the co-existence of numerous regional dialects (e.g., Neapolitan, Sicilian) at home adds complexity to language transmission.

Chapter 3: Linguistic Practices and Multilingual Repertoires

The Complexity of Multilingual Repertoires

Children from the second generation (2G) onwards grow up immersed in multilingual environments, leading to intricate language practices.

Portuguese Community

- Repertoire includes English, French, Standard Portuguese (EP), and various regional varieties (e.g., Northern Minho, Azorean/Madeiran dialects).

Italian Community

- More complex: Coexistence of Standard Italian (SI), regional Italian varieties, and various local languages (often called "dialects," e.g., Arbëresh, Neapolitan).

ITALIAN COMMUNITY

The Arbëreshë are an ethno-linguistic community of Albanian-Greek origin who have preserved their language, culture, and traditions in Calabria, arriving in Italy between the 15th and 18th centuries to escape the Ottoman advance. They are mainly concentrated in the province of Cosenza, with 27 communities out of a total of 33 present in Calabria, which include towns such as Civita, Spezzano Albanese, Cervicati, and Lungro. Their heritage is manifested through language, religious rite (often Byzantine-Greek), and customs such as traditional songs and dances, like the "Vallje."







PORTUGUESE COMMUNITY

Regional Accents and Linguistic Purism in Portugal

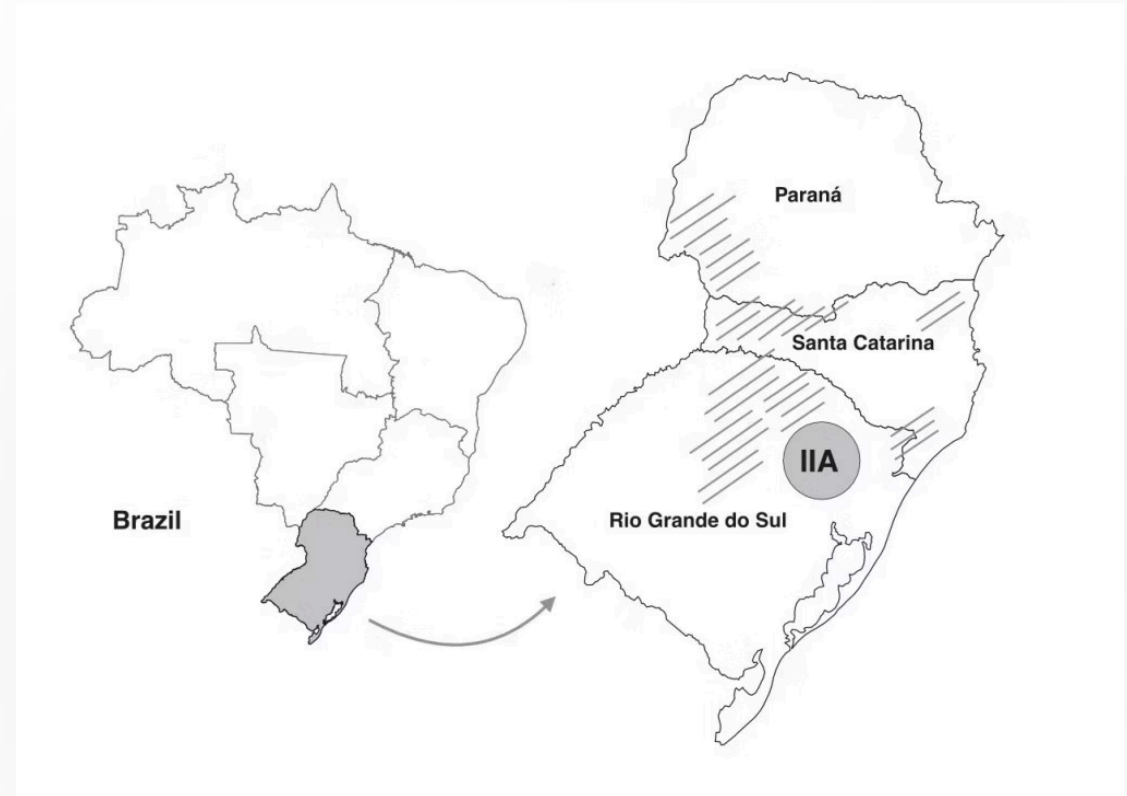
- Portuguese speakers maintain regional accents even in multilingual settings.
- Inside Portugal, regional variation reflects identity and social background.
- "Disappearance of the opposition between the voiced labiodental fricative /v/ and the voiced bilabial occlusive /b/" Scetti, F. (2021) → Example: vinho → binho
- Coimbra — academic city with a neutral accent, shaped by mixed origins.
- Lisbon — capital and diplomatic center; accent tends to be standardized.
- Accents express community pride and belonging, echoing Fábio Scetti's (2021) idea of linguistic purism in multilingual settings.

ITALIAN COMMUNITY

Talian, also known as Brazilian Veneto, is a Venetian-origin language officially recognized as a minority dialect in four Brazilian states. It developed under the strong influence of the Italian dialect spoken in Veneto, as well as local varieties of Portuguese.

This linguistic blend emerged when Italian immigrants - mostly from Veneto, but also from Lombardy, Friuli - Venezia Giulia, and Trentino-Alto Adige - migrated to southern Brazil beginning in 1875.

The migration, which particularly affected the states of Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, Paraná, and Espírito Santo, led to the formation of a new Venetian-based koine, which later incorporated Portuguese loanwords and phonetic features.



Today, Talian is spoken by around 500,000 people, mainly in domestic and community contexts, while Portuguese remains the dominant and official language. Nevertheless, various revitalization initiatives have been launched to preserve the dialect, which has been officially recognized by Brazil's National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN) as an element of the country's intangible cultural heritage.

Linguistic Features of Talian

- Venetian base, influenced by Brazilian Portuguese
- No geminate consonants and rhotic alternation [r]/[ʀ]
- Seven-vowel system and vowel reduction in unstressed syllables
- Metaphony (/e, o/ ³ /i, u/ before final -i)
- Portuguese loanwords (churrasco, festa, moço) and code-switching
- Simplified morphology and flexible stress
- Strong bilingualism used mainly in family contexts

Multilingualism in Action: Code-Mixing and Generational Shift

Contact Phenomena

Linguistic practices reveal a "multiple multilingualism" reality. Code-switching, code-mixing, lexical borrowing, and interference are common, particularly among 2G and subsequent generations.

Hybridization

The integration of the host languages with the heritage languages leads to unique, localized language forms.



Family Dynamics

In families, 1G parents often speak Portuguese or an Italian dialect, while children respond in English, French, or a mix of both.

Occasional Use

From the 2G onwards, the heritage language is frequently restricted to use during family gatherings and special occasions.

The Persistent Ideology of Linguistic Purism

Despite the daily reality of mixed practices, the representations of these hybrid languages are often negative, reinforcing a prescriptive, purist ideology centered on the standard norm.

Negative Perception

Terms like *italianese* (a mix of Italian, French, and English) or *Franglais* illustrate negative self-assessment of non-standard practices.



Nationalist Paradigm

This ideology promotes the prescriptive notion of "one language, one nation (or community), and one norm," where authenticity is linked only to the institutional standard.



Institutional Power

In Portuguese schools, European Portuguese (EP) is strictly promoted, sometimes reinforced by the notion of Portuguese as an important global language ("language market" ranking).

1G Italian speakers often lament that "when we die, the language dies," underscoring the vital, yet undervalued, role of dialects in the family sphere.

Purism's Impact on Language Transmission

Italian Dialects at Home

Transmission of language is complicated as regional dialects, rather than Standard Italian, are often spoken at home.

The Standard Barrier

Children struggle to reconcile the non-standard language spoken at home with the formal Standard Italian taught in community schools.

Family Language Policy

Purist ideologies directly influence family decisions regarding language transmission and enrollment in community language education programs.

Conclusion: From Essentialized Roots to Dynamic Identities



The Shift in Identity

In highly multilingual Montreal, defining oneself by a single language or practice is difficult. Multilingualism and mixed practices of 2G+ speakers represent a form of resistance against 1G norms.



A Bridge Between Generations

Despite dynamic shifts, the heritage languages are essential tools for building and maintaining a connection between generations, helping to construct a sense of belonging.



Defining Belonging

For descendants, the core definition of identity requires being both an integral part of Montreal society AND Portuguese/Italian **in Montreal**, balancing heritage with local reality.