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The linguistic representation of food: locality and sustainability in the digital era

Edited by Marco Bagli and Sara Corrizzato



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**«Ando vai s'aa cipolla nun ce ll'hai?»:
Translating food-related Romanesco items
in chef Max Mariola's social media subtitles**

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1. Introduction: Food Discourse, Social Media, and AVT

Massimiliano Mariola (aka Max Mariola, born 11 April 1969) is a well-known Roman chef, TV presenter and food influencer. He began teaching at both professional and amatorial levels after finishing some specialized courses and is now Executive Chef and Quality Level Supervisor, in Italy and Europe, of catering at hotels in the Boscolo chain, Consulting Chef for AIA food and Gruppo Veronesi and *chef de partie* of two restaurants, Park Royal Hotel and Symposium, in Cartoceto (province of Pesaro-Urbino in the Marche region). He published two recipe books, *Lo chef in tasca. Ricette per l'estate* ('The pocket chef: Summer recipes', Bari, Laterza, 2013) and *I panini li fa Max* ('It is Max that makes panini', Rome, Il Gambero Rosso, 2015), took part in numerous TV shows on the RaiSat Gambero Rosso channel from 1999 to 2021, and starred in a documentary on Amazon Prime (*Max Mare*, 2022), as part of what he himself defines as the «Chef & showman» experience (<https://maxmariola.com/chi-e-max/>). In 2023, he opened his first restaurant, *The Sound of Love*, in Milan.

For a few years now, chef Mariola has been very active on social media: he has a LinkedIn page, a YouTube channel, and Facebook (henceforth FB), Instagram (IG) and TikTok (TT) accounts, where

he very often posts video recipes using his typically strong Roman accent and sometimes dialectal expressions¹. Three of the four accounts, FB, IG and TT, are synchronized, meaning that all video recipes are simultaneously uploaded on all three of them, with the exception of the LinkedIn page and YouTube channel, which are more structured and divided into different sections – much more like webpages – and, more importantly for the purposes of this article, have no English subtitles for the recipes. In terms of AVT strategies, since the end of 2022, Mariola has gradually begun to add English subtitles in his video recipes so that non-Italian speakers may recognize his ingredients and understand his procedures – although, as will be seen below, the multimodal nature of Mariola's products already helps social media users who do not understand Italian. To quote from Dore (2017), «food in audiovisual works 'travels' and is perceived across languages» (p. 26), and in this essay Mariola is considered an exemplar of this cross-linguistic journey.

This article will explore Mariola's video recipes from two different perspectives, that is, they will be analyzed as AVT products, on the one hand, and non-Italian speakers' reception will be investigated, on the other. Therefore, the following research questions will be answered: 1) Is the Roman accent/*dialetto* rendered in subtitles, and if

¹ Definitions abound in the field. First, some scholars distinguish between Roman accent/dialect, Romanesco/Romanesque and Romanaccio (see Leone-Pizzighella, p. 2014). Moreover, other experts, following De Mauro (2011, p. 150), distinguish between dialect and Italian *dialetti*, since «the Italian *dialetti* are substantially different linguistic realities than, for example, the dialects of the anglophone areas, Italian dialects being not properly variants of the national language but completely autonomous linguistic formations and derivations of the various ways in which Latin was superimposed on the non-Latin spoken varieties of ancient Italy» (Bruti and Ranzato, 2019, p. 343. See also Leone-Pizzighella, 2014). In this paper I will use Roman accent or Romanesco (borrowing from Bruti and Ranzato 2019) when referring to the phonological features of Mariola's video recipes and *dialetto* when referring to lexical, morpho-syntactic, pragmatic, and spelling variations.

so, how? 2) Judging from comments to posts, reels, and videos, do the subtitles help non-Italian speakers understanding the ingredients and procedures?

In order to answer these two general research questions, a qualitative lexico-pragmatic analysis will be conducted, considering food appetite and consumption as the common denominator. In fact, on the one hand, the chef's communicative intention is that of appetizing his followers², while his followers' communicative intention is that of confirming (or denying) their eagerness to prepare and consume the dishes Mariola proposes. Although studies on food talk and social media products abound in such fields as anthropology, marketing, sociology, and statistics (see, among others, the market analyses by Barklamb et al., 2020; Zinko et al., 2021), to my knowledge interest by linguists remains very limited³.

As anticipated above, this study will not be quantitative, given the small number of tokens that constitutes the corpus of Mariola's video recipes with English subtitles, and given the multimodal nature of the object of analysis itself, which cannot be accounted for properly using a corpus-based statistical approach. Therefore, a qualitative – «synoptic», to borrow from Bruti and Ranzato (2019, p. 360) – lexico-pragmatic analysis will be carried out on some of the most interesting 2023 video recipes from a linguistic and AVT perspective. Although there is no difference between FB, IG, and TT videos per se, all three social media will be considered when analyzing non-Italian followers' comments. The multimodal nature of the case studies examined will be

²To do this, as seen later in this essay, he 'linguistically tempts' his Italian followers through his strong Roman accent/*dialetto*, which is synonymous with authenticity and veracity, and his non-Italian followers with English subs.

³See, among others, Chiaro (2013) on food talk in some British TV channels, Ciambella (2022) on Gino D'Acampo's Italian phonological and prosodic features in UK food shows, and Molenaar et al. (2023a, 2023b) on sentiment and emotion analysis of food talk on social media.

considered, this aspect being one of the limits of the few contemporary studies about culinary linguistics and audiovisual products, as stated by Raffi (2022): «the research conducted so far is often limited to the analysis of the monomodal and textual dimensions of communication, overlooking the fact that the communication processes of audiovisual products are multi-modal by nature» (p. 1).

2. Framework(s) and Methodology

2.1 Italian Dialects and Romanesco in AV Products

Italian scholars lament the limited number of analyses focused on how to render – or not to render – Italian *dialetti* in AV products – movies and TV series in particular – although they affirm that it has always been an «attractive area of research» (Bruti & Ranzato, 2019, p. 345). As noted by Parini (2022), «the number of studies focusing on the English subtitles of Italian products are rather scant, considering the relatively exiguous number of films or TV series available to analyze. As far as studies investigating the strategies used to subtitle Italian dialects, this could even be considered as a niche within the niche» (p. 387).

Generally speaking, dialect in AV products is used for specific reasons and has specific effects on audiences. Referring to movies, Cordisco and De Meo (2022) state that

[a] dialect can be used as a mimetic tool to shape characters in relation to their social context, to add texture to their interpersonal relations and interactional naturalness [...], to produce a more realistic effect in relation to the situation and place of the story [...]. Nonetheless, most productions aim to reproduce a limited impression of dialects/accents, merely for stereotypical or humorous purposes [...], rather than to accomplish a realistic experience of a non-standard language variety. (p. 127)

In particular, it is worth underlining the reference to the «interactional naturalness» and «more realistic effect» that dialect adds in movies and TV series, something that Pérez-González (2014) calls «spontaneous-sounding interaction» (p. 2), although it is clear that in AV products it is «oralidad prefabricada» ('prefabricated orality'), to use the expression of Chaume (2004, p. 168); in other words, it is a conscious act by directors and screenwriters to create dialogues which sound more natural due to the use of dialect. In the case of Mariola's video recipes, however, the notion of prefabricated orality cannot be applied, since social media products are «form[s] of non-traditional real-time data» (Molenaar et al., 2023b), and thus tend to be more spontaneous, or, at least, less prefabricated. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the use of dialect in AV products contributes to what Agha (2003) calls characterological discourse, that is, the set of peculiarities and features which shape a character – in this case a professional figure and food influencer – from a linguistic perspective. As argued by Ramos Pinto (2017), «the creative use of non-standard varieties in audiovisual products functions as a mimetic resource [...] for the indirect depiction of the characters» (p. 4).

Therefore, these «unorthodox language use[s]» (Leone, 2014, p. 86) also contribute to the creation of certain stereotypes⁴, although it also «lends narratives an undisputed quality of authenticity» (Bruti & Ranzato, 2019, p. 341. Which is why Cordisco and De Meo [2022, p. 126] call this phenomenon «dialect authenticity»). I would argue that it is exactly the notion of dialect authenticity that makes Mariola's video recipes so interesting from a linguistic standpoint. As a matter of fact,

⁴ «Language, in fact, tends to be manipulated in order to convey characters' social, regional or ethnic origins, and to evoke in the audience the expectations related to the stereotypes connected to those specific origins. Such connotations can be conveyed through different linguistic devices, specifically by the use of identifiable accents, lexical variation and marked morphosyntactic constructions» (Parini, 2022, p. 387).

I believe that there is a direct correspondence between the chef's use of Roman dialect and the success of his Roman recipes, in that the dialect reinforces the 'Romanness' of his dishes, or, in general, the authenticity and localness of the ingredients used in his non-Roman recipes. As a matter of fact, Mariola himself underlines the bond between being Roman and being authentic in his own website biography: «[s]ono nato a Roma, una delle città più belle del mondo per la sua storia, la sua cultura e i suoi sapori autentici» ('I was born in Rome, one of the most beautiful cities in the world for its history, its culture, and its authentic flavours') (maxmariola.com). Similar conclusions have been reached, for example, by scholars observing customers' reaction to restaurant menus when the names of the dishes are written in the local language and explained in English, instead of being directly translated (Graziano, 2017; Choi et al., 2017).

So far, I have dealt with the general use of dialect in AV products and only hinted at the Romanesco spoken by Max Mariola, which is the focus of this essay. It goes without saying that, given its name, the Roman variety is diatopically located in the centre of Italy. Its main phonetic and lexical features are summarized by Bruti and Ranzato (2019) as follows:

Phonetic features relative to the centre-Italian Roman variety [...] include the pronunciation of intervocalic /k/ as /g/ (for instance *grego* for *greco*, 'Greek'); the doubling of voiced occlusives in intervocalic position (for instance *mobbile* for *mobile*, 'piece of furniture'); the loss of double /t/ (for instance *tera* for *terra*, 'land, earth'; *fero* for *ferro*, 'iron'); the assimilation of *nd* to *nn* (for instance *monno* for *mondo*, 'world'). Colourful lexical items are also a prerogative of the Roman dialect and can be heard in films of any era as well as in contemporary TV shows: expressions such as *caciara*, 'racket', *pappone*, 'pimp', *pupo*, 'baby', *sbafare*, 'to gobble up and to scrounge', *sganassone*, 'slap in the face', *menare*, 'to hit', *tombarolo*, 'someone who steals from graves', are

examples of lexical items instantly associated with the Roman dialect.
(p. 344. Emphases in the original)

In the last decade, despite struggling with the «constant negotiation of its validity with/against those who claim that it is ‘coarse’, ‘vulgar’, or otherwise illegitimate» (Leone, 2014, p. 101), Romanesco has gained scholarly momentum thanks to the international success of such TV series as *Romanzo criminale* (‘criminal novel’, 2008-2010), *Gomorra* (‘Gomorrhah’, 2015-2021) and *Suburra* (‘Suburra: Blood on Rome’, 2017-2020), among others, or the viral case (Leone, 2014) of the famous interview of two Roman girls, Debora and Romina – later known as ‘Le calippe’ – at Ostia beach in 2010, known to dialectologists as *Bira e calippo* (‘beer and Calippo’, i.e., the famous cylindrical frozen dessert produced by Walls since 1982).

Therefore, Roman dialect has been variously associated with vulgarity, on the one hand, and authenticity, on the other. Mariola uses Romanesco for a few reasons: first of all, if, as the proverb says, «you can remove a Roman from Rome, but you can never remove Rome from a Roman», the chef's accent is also clearly perceivable when he is interviewed by national broadcasting channels and tries to speak standard Italian in a controlled manner. It is obvious that using Romanesco makes him more at ease in different communicative situations, and he deliberately decides not to mask his accent/*dialetto* on social media. Secondly, as noted above, the Roman variety is synonymous with authenticity; hence the chef wants to reinforce the sense of genuineness of his dishes even from a linguistic perspective. Lastly, Romanesco is often associated with masculinity (see, for instance, Guschwan, 2011), something Mariola is quite keen on and makes no effort to hide, and which contributes to the characterization of his mediatic persona.

Nevertheless, what has been said so far contains a series of culture-specific elements which are quite understandable my most Italians, but which are probably unknown to non-Italian speakers. There-

fore, how can a foreigner possibly associate Roman dialect with the authenticity of the recipes Mariola makes if s/he does not perceive/understand Romanesco? The next section illustrates how *dialetti* are translated in AV products via subtitles. Nevertheless, as argued above, the multimodal nature of Mariola's video recipes helps non-Italian speakers appreciate the chef's dishes a great deal.

2.2 Italian Dialects in AVT: A Focus on English Subtitles

Since the end of 2022, chef Mariola has been adding burnt-in English subtitles to his video recipes to attract non-Italian followers, sometimes with interesting results both from the translation and reception viewpoints. If it is true that, generally speaking, subs have time and space constraints due to their being «written to be spoken as if not written» (Taylor, 2006, p. 49), in the case of video recipes time and space are even more reduced. In terms of space, unlike movies or TV series, most of the times the videos Mariola uploads on social media are vertical (format 4:5, 2:3 or 9:16) so they may be easily watched on mobile phone screens. This of course reduces the space for subtitles, which are usually located in the middle of the screen, between the chef's face and his preparation and cooking table. In terms of time, social media stories, reels, etc. must be very short, given the settings of FB, IG and TT, and the users' increasing tendency to watch short-form video contents online. According to GarcíaLeón and Teichert (2023) online food talk is an example of eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth), defined as «web-mediated exchange of information which occurs when one person tells another about their experience with a service or product» (Zinko et al., 2021, p. 526). Specifically, Bartelmeß and Godemann (2022) call it Digital Food Communication (hereafter DFC) with new players or new actors:

Before the digital turn, it was primarily professionalized food communication actors who were attributed interpretative power over

food and nutrition issues. With social media platforms, today it is especially everyday actors who make food-related content and patterns of interpretation publicly accessible and available with their digital food communication and thus achieve a high level of attention. Ordinary people become experts on 'good' nutrition and food-related choices by routinely revealing their experiences with food, expressing their opinions, and sharing them on these platforms. Once they reach a certain level of appeal, they can become so-called 'food influencers', depending on the number of people they reach and who follow them. Consequently, traditional hierarchical instances of food communication are challenged and compete with new actors, and forms of public knowledge transfer that now define 'good food'.

Bearing the above premises in mind, in our case study it must be noted that subtitles do not translate a 'standard' variety into another 'standard' variety – without considering the complex idea of standard language when dealing with Italian and English – but an L1 dialect, i.e., Romanesco, into an L2 standard, i.e., English, with perhaps the inevitable consequence of losing the cozy, authentic flavour of the Italian *dialetto*. Nevertheless, one must consider that if such a loss can be clearly perceived by an Italian speaker who also understands English, a non-Italian speaker might not perceive Mariola's Roman accent and hence will likely understand the English subs as a traditional service translation from Italian into English, judging from their comments to the chef's video recipes on social media.

Translating dialect in AVT is always challenging. Most scholars agree that the general tendency is to neutralize dialectal features in the target text (Bonsignori, 2011, 2012; Bruti & Ranzato, 2019; De Meo, 2010, 2020; Dore, 2017; Hargan, 2006; Parini, 2022; Petillo, 2012; Raffi, 2017, 2021), a process that, according to Cordisco and De Meo, «rais[es] cultural and linguistic neutralization and standardization by levelling out non-mainstream identities» (2022, 126). Some

scholars, however, have noticed that translators sometimes attempt to transform the L1 dialectal features into pragmatically equivalent L2 non-standard or substandard characteristics. According to Parini, for instance, «subtitling can only act on the lexical and grammatical levels, but not on a phonological one (which is something that dubbing can do), leaving out any potential characterization that relies on the characters' accents»; however, she also adds that «code-mixing and substandard markers of orality» (2022, 390) are sometimes used. Similarly, Raffi (2022) affirms that to convey dialectal features from L1 to L2, translators can add «typical features of oral speech [...] such as the absence of subject-verb inversion in questions, ellipses in questions and answers, and discursive cues including interjections». In fact, «thanks to the addition of spoken English and colloquial traits as well as non-standard grammatical forms in subtitles, dialect can be signalled in translation».

In this essay, I adopt Cordisco and De Meo's theoretical framework to translate an L1 dialect to L2 in subtitles, which consists in integrating Pedersen (2005) and his six transfer (macro-) strategies with Perego's (2003) and Díaz Cintas and Remael's (2009) micro-strategies of AVT:

1. Retention (an SL element is used in the TL as a loan word);
2. Explication (Perego, 2003) with the micro-strategy of specification (the SL element remains untranslated but adds information previously absent);
3. Direct translation (possibly in the form of calque or shifted terms);
4. Reduction (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2009) with two micro-strategies: a. generalization (the substitution of an element with a more general one, often as a hypernym) and b. sentence condensation (Perego, 2003);
5. Substitution (the item is substituted by a different item often in the form of paraphrase);
6. Omission (Cordisco & De Meo, 2022, p. 130).

3. Analysis and Discussion of the Results

As previously noted, a qualitative analysis was carried out at two different moments and from two different perspectives. First, Mariola's video recipes are investigated from a translation viewpoint, examining the strategies used in the English subtitles to convey or not to convey the dialectal nuances of the source texts. As most of the videos were uploaded at the same time on FB, IG, and TT, in this phase I will not distinguish among the media used. Next, comments by the chef's followers are considered, with particular emphasis on their reactions to English subs and to the chef's codeswitching, distinguishing between Italian and non-Italian users and focusing especially on IG, which appears to be the most interesting and rich source of information for the type of investigation proposed.

3.1 From Macaronic English... or 'A Close Look at Subs'

Anyone reading the English translation of Mariola's video recipes will notice that the chef's subs are very approximate, or, stated otherwise, they are sometimes so basic and translated so literally – I would say source oriented in a way – that they are far from sounding native-like. This raises the question of who prepares and adds the subtitles to the videos: is it Mariola himself, with the help of an automatic translator? Is it his social media manager? Do they pay a translator? In any case, it is clear that those responsible for the English subtitles have no advanced linguistic competence in English, and that their interlanguage – to borrow from Second Language Acquisition theories – is still in its initial stages, although the use of colloquialisms and markers of orality, as will be seen later, can indicate a better knowledge of the language and a strategic use of a kind of broken English.

The examples below (Table 1), chosen randomly, clearly show the level of English in the subs:

(Dialectal) source text	Explanation	English target text (subs)	Recipe
Co' 'e vongole, ma no c'aa sabbia	With clams, but not with sand	Clams yes, sand no	<i>Pasta with clams, squash blossoms, and bottarga</i>
190 gradi ven- tilato	Bake it in a convection oven at 190°C	190 degrees in a convection oven	<i>Cordon Bleu</i>
E poi lui, il re d'aa fiera: 'l tartufo	Now let's add the main ingredient of this recipe: the truffle	And now for him... the king of the festival...the truffle	<i>Panuzzo with baccalà and black truffle</i>

Table 1. Examples of approximate level of English in the subs of Mariola's video recipes.

Nevertheless, a great deal of vocabulary pertaining to the culinary ESP is present in the target text (e.g., grease, nonstick pan, squash blossoms, to dunk, to rinse, to rub, to sear, to shuck/shell, etc.), underlining that the most evident non-native-like expressions are at a morphosyntactic and phraseological level, rather than at a lexical one. As for pronunciation, obviously subtitles cannot provide any information, although the followers' reactions to Mariola's codeswitching and video recipes in a strong Italian-accented English will be considered in the next section. Two different hypotheses can be advanced about the fact that English subtitles are far from sounding native-like. Firstly, judging from the comments by non-Italian followers, the poor linguistic competence of the translator does not prevent communication, thus showing that, even if linguistic competence is not so advanced, communicative competence is developed enough to let non-Italians understand and appreciate the subtitles. Perhaps the multimodal nature of the video recipes should receive most of the credit: when Mariola's non-Italian followers do not understand subs, i.e., the linguistic/alphabetic mode, to quote from the multimodal theory of the New London Group (1996), they can always resort to other modes, such as the visual and the gestural.

Secondly, although the neutralization of the Romanesco dialectal features is evident in the English subs⁵, the very basic, approximate, sometimes informal translation can be also understood as a strategy to render the non-standard *dialetto* used by the Roman chef in a non-standard way – in the broader sense of «customary, usual, expected, widely used» (*OED*, adj.I.1.b) – although I personally believe that the first hypothesis above is more convincing. This second hypothesis, however, seems to be reinforced by the fact that the English subtitles often resort to informal markers of orality, as observed by scholars in other case studies about AVT and *dialetti* (see Parini, 2022; Raffi, 2022 above). Subtitles abound in contractions, such as questions with no auxiliary verbs (e.g., *'A vòì?* = You want it?, *L'ajo e 'a cipolla te piaciono?* = You like garlic and onion?, *'A vedi tutta sudata?* = See how it's sweaty?) and colloquialisms (e.g., *Lasciaje la pelle che è bbona* = Leave the skin on 'cause it's so good, *Deve fa questo. Deve fa quella cosa che non finisce mai, eterna* = It's gotta do this. It's gotta go on and on, into eternity).

As for the AVT strategies adopted to translate the Roman *dialetto* and some Italian culinary jargon, chef Mariola seems to use them all, albeit in different frequencies. For example:

1. Retention: This happens especially with dish names (e.g., *pasta alla gricia*, *pasta alla pecorara*, *pomodori col/con riso*, etc.)⁶ or with some ingredients which cannot be translated unless explicated (e.g., *baccalà*, *caciocavallo*, *guanciale*, *mortadella*, *panuozzo*, *parmigiano*⁷, etc.), as seen in the next point.

⁵ Here are a few examples: *Adesso 'o devi toje* = Now you can remove it, *Nun c'oo mette tutto sto grasso* = I'm not going to use all this fat, *Te deve veni voja da magnattello* = You can't wait to eat them.

⁶ This strategy is also typical of bilingual menus in Italy, as observed by Graziano (2017, 2019).

⁷ The chef never uses the more common English term 'parmesan (cheese)'.

2. **Explicitation:** In this case some ingredients or preparations typical of Italian cuisine are explained very briefly in the subtitles, due to obvious time and space constraints: (*bottarga* = bottarga (cured fish roe), *fiordilatte* = cow milk mozzarella, *carpaccio di manzo* = carpaccio (raw beef).
3. **Direct translation:** Pedersen affirms that direct translation «may appear exotic [or odd] to the TT audience» (2005, 5), as happens in examples from Mariola's corpus of video recipes: *Co' 'sta callaccia* = With this heat, *Quanno ce vo, ce vo* = When it's right, it's right, *Melanzane alla parmigiana* = Eggplant parmigiana (this example is half direct translation, half retention), *Pomodorosa, mozzarellosa, parmigianosa* = Tomato-ey, mozzarella-ey, parmigiano-ey, *Tanta robbba* = So much stuff.
4. **Reduction:** Sentence reduction in particular (Perego, 2003) is present in the corpus for at least two reasons: 1) when some Italian or dialectal expressions are untranslatable and unnecessary for communicative purposes, and 2) when using other strategies would contravene time and space constraints (e.g., *Belli! Guardate che so belli!* = So beautiful, *E poi t'accucci, te metti da 'na parte e dormi* = And then you take a nap, *Mo fatte 'sta bella passeggiata* = now enjoy, *N'aspettate nemmanco 'n minuto* = don't wait, *Un po' de sale mettilo* = some salt).
5. **Substitution:** Contrary to direct translations, some dialectal or sub-standard idioms in Mariola's videorecipes are paraphrased or substituted by L2 equivalents. Although in this case the neutralization of the *dialetto* is more evident, as in *Ce sta da paura* = It's fantastic, *É 'na bomba* = It's amazing, *Tutta 'a vita proprio* = You bet, at least the target audience does not perceive the translation as exotic or odd as in the examples at point 3 above.
6. **Omission:** This strategy is adopted with most dialectal interjections or exclamations, such as *che tristezza*, *(ed)daje*, *mamma mia*, and *tiè*.

In addition to these strategies, Mariola has very recently begun to record video recipes resorting to frequent codeswitching (e.g., *‘A vogliamo juicy ‘a sarciccia all’ interno, no?; Du’ cucchiaji de riso pe’ tomato; Movi the cream; Now, ‘n po’ d’ ojo bbono*), or directly in English. Moreover, he adds a dual-language recipe presentation and list of ingredients text in the caption/description below the videos, as in the following example (Table 2):

Monolingual recipe of pizza, puntarelle, ricotta and mayonnaise (21 January 2023).	Bilingual recipe of pomodori con il riso (11 August 2023).
chefmaxmariola Oggi voglio mandarvi in estasi, voglio farvi volare su un altro pianeta e scoprire una vera bontà 🍕😋 Pronti per questa pizza bianca con puntarelle, ricotta e maionese di alici? Già dal primo morso verrete travolti dal gusto autentico e avvolgente della cucina romana. Volete prepararlo anche voi? INGREDIENTI 🍴 Pizza bianca Puntarelle Ritagli di Alici sott’olio di @magnoluxuryfood Ricotta di pecora fresca Peperoncino Aceto Olio e.v.o [sic] Aglione Sale	chefmaxmariola Direttamente dalla tradizione culinaria di Casa Mariola vi porto in tavola la ricetta dei pomodori con il riso 🍷 Questi me li faceva sempre Mamma Fiorella, vi assicuro che sono da urlo 😋 Rifateli anche voi e ditemi come sono venuti 🗨️ Directly from the culinary tradition of Casa Mariola I bring to the table the recipe of tomatoes with rice 🍷 Mamma Fiorella always used to make these for me, I assure you that these are dreamy 😋 Do them again and tell me how they came 🗨️ INGREDIENTI 🍴 Spaghetti Polipo – Octopus Menta – Mint Pecorino – Pecorino cheese Olio buono – Good oil Pepe nero – Black pepper

Table 2. An example of dual-language recipe captions the chef has been adding to his most recent videos.

Such decisions divide his followers into supporters and opponents, although it must be noted that the use of codeswitching or L2-only video recipes seems to have shifted the focus of the audience's comments from food to language, as seen in the next section.

3.2 ...to Digital English as a Lingua Franca, or 'Exploring Followers' Comments and Reactions'

Mariola's followers' comments and reactions to English subtitles, codeswitching, and L2-only video recipes add an interesting perspective to the study of Digital Food Communication in English.

3.2.1 Reaction to English Subs

Most of the chef's Italian and non-Italian followers really appreciated the addition of English subtitles, and understood it as Mariola's willingness to obtain more international followers, as examples (1-6) demonstrate⁸:



INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

The comments above are not by native speakers of English, given their typos and mistakes. Followers in fact say that they are from Brazil, Poland, Spain, and other countries worldwide. This is of particular interest because it underlines that social media «allow one to identify and speculate about broad trends and to draw inferences about particular states of affairs» (Christiansen, 2015, p. 137) within the well-known

⁸ As stated above, most of these comments are from IG, as there are far more English comments on IG than on FB or TT.

realm of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)⁹. Although other languages are used online, «English continues to hold a special status as an online *lingua franca*» (Tagg, 2020, p. 573), so much so that such scholars as Taronna (2023) calls it Digital ELF¹⁰, a variety – or multiple varieties – of English characterized by rather informal online interactions among multilingual communities who share expertise or interest in a particular field, as in the case of Mariola's community. Therefore, when Italian followers make fun of the chef's subtitles or his strongly accented pronunciation, it is clear that they completely ignore the potentials of Digital ELF.

3.2.2 Codeswitching and English-only Recipes

Since introducing English subtitles, chef Mariola has gradually increased the presence of English in his video recipes also through other strategies, such as codeswitching and monolingual English communication, in order to increase his worldwide following. It must be noted, however, that English expressions, phrases, and sentences have always been part of his multimedia contents as loanwords. The most famous is certainly Mariola's motto 'The sound of love'¹¹, a synesthetic expression he often repeats, with a strong Italian/Roman accent, when letting his audience listen to, for instance, some particularly creamy and juicy dish, or when he cuts/bites crunchy food. Here are a few reactions to his 'The sound of love' motto:

⁹ Definitions and features of (Digital) ELF are beyond the scope of this essay. See, among others, Mauranen and Ranta, 2009; Jenkins, 2012; Christiansen, 2015; Gotti, 2017; Tagg, 2020; Pineda and Bosso, 2023; Taronna, 2023, on the relationship between ELF and social media.

¹⁰ Pineda and Bosso (2023) propose a very similar definition, that is Virtual ELF.

¹¹ His motto also inspired the name of his first restaurant, as hinted at in the introduction.

INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

Gumperz (1982, pp. 60-1) classifies codeswitching in two different types: situational and metaphorical. Situational codeswitching occurs when speakers change setting, activities, and interlocutors, while metaphorical codeswitching is more typical of bilinguals, and it occurs almost automatically according to communicative intentions. Mariola's codeswitching is situational, and it is due to the chef's willingness to address multilingual international followers, rather than only a monolingual Italian audience.

Reactions to situational codeswitching and English-only recipes are very similar but vary in nature. What is important to notice is that since the chef began using codeswitching and recording monolingual English recipes, the focus of the comments has shifted from food to language, as if the quality of his recipes were undeniable, while the fluency and accuracy of his language were not. In general, Italian speakers are quite conservative and do not appreciate Mariola's love of English; hence, they complain about or make fun of him (Figure 3), as if perceiving English as a kind of threat to the Italian language (see also Gheno, 2019 for further details):

INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE

On the other hand, many followers appear quite aware of the globalized society we live in, and of the advantages to Mariola of having more and more English in his videos:

INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE

In particular, the last comment introduces the non-Italians' perspective, which is absolutely positive, on Mariola's foreign English accent (Figure 5):

INSERT FIGURE 5 HERE

Codeswitching and English-only recipes also led Mariola’s followers to have at least three other reactions: firstly, some Italian followers began to codeswitch in turn (Figure 6):

INSERT FIGURE 6 HERE

Secondly, other followers (mainly Italians) began to correct what they believed to be errors, as in Table 3:

Followers’ comments	OED explanation
That is chilli (peperoncino) not red pepper (che sarebbe peperone) 😊	Actually, according to the <i>OED</i> , red pepper can be «a hot, pungent spice prepared from chili peppers, the red, elongated, ripe fruits of the <i>Capsicum annum</i> Longum group (also <i>figurative</i>); the fruit itself».
Fat – grasso culinare e corporeo; grease per il capelli e i motori!	Even in this case, according to the <i>OED</i> , grease can indicate «the melted or rendered fat of animals» (n.2.a).

Table 3. Some comments by Italians correcting what they believe are Mariola’s English mistakes.

Lastly, non-Italians, perhaps impressed by the chef’s efforts to speak English, switch to Italian – not always with brilliant results – or affirm they are learning some Italian to better understand Mariola’s recipes:

INSERT FIGURE 7 HERE

4. Conclusion

The above qualitative analysis has tried to offer a varied spectrum of linguistic insights into a case study of food talk on social media, i.e.,

chef Max Mariola's video recipes on FB, IG, and TT. First, English subtitles have been analyzed, in order to understand what AVT techniques are used when the chef's Roman *dialetto* or Italian food jargon must be rendered into English. As we have seen, although neutralization appears to be the most common solution when translating dialect, informal markers of orality and a basic, approximate, almost broken English might be seen as conscious strategies adopted by the subtitler(s) to add a 'dialectal flavour' to the AVT. What is important to underline is that even if the translator's linguistic competence is not advanced, Mariola's communicative intent is affected only partially, and the chef's non-Italian followers benefit significantly from English subtitles – also recurring to the multimodal nature of the contents uploaded on social media.

The second part of the essay examined the chef's followers' comments and reactions to understand whether the techniques analyzed earlier were successful or not, and to verify if English subtitles, codeswitching, and monolingual English recipes actually provoke positive reactions in non-Italians, thus increasing the number of followers. The analysis showed that, while Italian followers are sometimes conservative and perceive English as a threat to the Italian language and Romanesco, international social media users appreciate Max Mariola's efforts, especially in terms of codeswitching and monolingual English recipes which also require fluency and phonetic/phonological skills, so much that they declare their intention to learn some Italian in order to better understand how to prepare Roman and non-Roman dishes. Thus, the chef's online community proves to be the perfect example of Digital ELF (Taronna, 2023), an international, multilingual community that shares interest in food and uses English as a medium to communicate and express opinions.

Further research, especially from a quantitative perspective, could inform this field of study. Corpus linguistics, for instance, could systematize the analytic framework and the results obtained, in order to determine if there are recurring translation patterns from Romanesco

to English, or if some comments/reactions by followers are statistically more significant than others. In the latter case, sentiment analysis could implement the results obtained using corpus linguistics tools.

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