

Molise Croatian: quantitative analysis of the diaphasic variation in a bilingual context (Balkan idiom in Italy)

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The work presents the results of quantitative studies so far obtained on the basis of the research and publications of the author relating to the Molise Croatian. It is a minority Slavic language, by its origin Croatian dialect, which still survives in three villages situated in the Appennin's mountains in the Southern Italy. This minority still has about 1500 speakers who live in the villages of Montemitro (Croatian ‘Mundimitar’), San Felice del Molise (Filič) and Acquaviva Collecroce (Kruč).

The corpus for quantitative studies consists of dictionaries, grammar, ethnographic researches, linguistic studies and recordings made since 1999.

In five centuries of isolation from the homeland, the history and evolution of this language from both a diachronic and a synchronic point of view is strongly influenced by Italian. The absolute isolation from the motherland caused the replacement of the “roof language” with Italian and its dialects.

Always maintaining a Croatian base, the Molise dialect has “croatized” everything that has entered its sphere, sometimes even enriching itself in the lexicon. Lexical analysis leads to the slow loss of the Croatian corpus of the Dalmatian dialect spoken in Molise. On the other hand, from the morphological point of view, the Molise Croatian can certainly be considered less permeable, indeed well rooted and ready to receive any linguistic novelty. The inverse therefore happens: every neologism is *croatized* and enters to enrich and evolve the Molise Croat according to the laws that regulate it. It is in this phase of linguistic substitution and enrichment that we note in the Molise Croatian speakers the tendency towards a linguistic economy, influenced above all by the diaphasic situation. The diaphasic variation is articulated along an ideal axis that goes from the maximum formality to the maximum informality: the speaker selects the linguistic register according to the listener to whom it is addressed. In more informal situations there is a greater use of neologisms and lexical overlaps. Therefore it happens that *pisat* (from Croatian) is often replaced by the synonym *skrivit* (from Italian), or *razumit* with *akapit*, *nedilja* with *domenika*, *počinit* with *ripozat*, etc. It is therefore interesting to analyze this phenomenon that involves a Slavic language completely immersed in a Roman context.

The corpus used in the study consists of field research carried out in the period from 1999 to 2004, which was used for the preparation of the “Dictionary of the Molise Croatian dialect of Montemitro” (Fondazione Agostina Piccoli / Matica hrvatska, Montemitro / Zagreb 2000) and of the “Grammar of the Molise Croatian language” (Fondazione Agostina Piccoli / Profil International, Montemitro / Zagreb 2004). The author is a member of the Croatian community of Molise. The research was based, in addition to direct knowledge, on a large number of informants and on specific studies related to the morphosyntactic characteristics of the Molise Croatian (about 50 informants and interviewees in the age groups from 17 to 85 years).

On the one hand, this analysis shows the vulnerability of the Molise Croatian idiom, exposed as it is to an inevitable evolution/modernization and having to suffer the consequences of the multi-secular isolation from its mother tongue; on the other hand, it shows how the linguistic core is not yet saturated and after half a millennium it still marvels at its extraordinary elasticity and adaptability.