Italian Mothers and Italian-Canadian Daughters: Using Language to Negotiate the Politics of Gender

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Abstract: This paper examines how migration redefines family narratives and dynamics. Through a parallel between the mother and the mother tongue, I unravel the emotional, linguistic, social, and ideological connotations of the mother–daughter relationship, which I define as a 'condensed narrative about origin and identity'. This definition refers to the fact that the daughter's biological, affective, linguistic, and socio-cultural identity grounds in the mother. The mother–daughter tie also has a gendered dimension, which opens up interesting gateways into the female condition. Taking this assumption as a starting point, I examine how migration, impacting on the mother–daughter relationship, can redefine gender roles and challenge models of femininity, which are culturally, socially, geographically, and linguistically embedded. I investigate this aspect from a linguistic perspective, through a reading of a corpus of narratives written by four Italian-Canadian writers. The movement from Italy to Canada enacts 'the emergence of alternative family romances' and draws new routes to femininity. This paper seeks to illustrate how, in the narratives I examine, these new routes are explored through linguistic means. The authors in my corpus use code-switching to highlight contrasting views of femininity and reposition themselves with respect to politics of gender.

Keywords: migration; mother tongue; femininity; patriarchy; identity

1. Introduction

This paper examines how migration, impacting on the mother–daughter relationship, reframes traditional notions of femininity, which are connected to, and preserved by, this specific familial structure. It therefore follows previous scholarship on the topic. As a matter of fact, research on Italian migration to Canada and Italian-Canadian literature has extensively focused on the condition of immigrant women, the parents–sons relationship, and second generations' upbringing in-between Italy and Canada (Perry 1978; Iacovetta 1991, 1992, 1993; Scarpaci 1991). However, the present paper looks at the topic from a linguistic perspective, seeking to investigate how the politics of gender, which is also established through language, can be undermined through language itself. This focus on linguistic performance is my primary intervention into debates in the field. I demonstrate how language can be used to negotiate contrasting views of femininity and challenge chauvinist discourses. I do so through a reading of a corpus of migrant narratives written by four female Italian-Canadian authors: Gianna Patriarca, Dôre Michelut, Caterina Edwards, and Licia Canton. These second generation Italian-Canadian women narrate migration from a female perspective, highlighting the contrast between Italian and Canadian societies, especially with respect to gender discourses. Indeed, migration to Canada brings about a diversity in lingual and cultural identity, which also impacts on the model of femininity they have been passed on to by their Italian mothers. In their narratives, the tension and contrast between different worlds is recreated and expressed linguistically, through the practice of code-switching (CS). They use the latter as an instrument to negotiate between two cultures which offer

diverse models of femininity, thus reflecting on Italian and Canadian societies from their perspective as women.

My analysis will start with an introduction to the mother–daughter relationship, specifically addressing the parallelism between the mother and mother tongue. A brief overview of Italian-Canadian literature will follow, in order to create the socio-cultural background where the authors in my corpus operate, and better understand the thematic and linguistic features of their narratives. In Section 4, I will examine how migration impacts on the family unit, changing the dynamics and relationships between the authors in my corpus and their parents. I will also highlight the mechanisms which enact the rethinking and rewriting of their female subjectivity. In Section 5, I will illustrate how the authors fictionally represent the female condition in the Italian community, paying particular attention to the tropes and issues which recur in all of their narratives. This analysis will be interspersed with an examination of CS. I will demonstrate that the authors codeswitch between Italian and English to put forward a specific discourse against gender inequalities and discrimination.

2. The Mother–Daughter Relationship: A Play of Mirrors

The present investigation into the mother–daughter relationship is located at the juncture between gender and migration studies, and linguistics. Through a parallelism between the mother and mother tongue, it illustrates how, in the context of Italian migration to Canada, language can be used to criticise and debunk the model of femininity which was dominant in Italian society. In order to do so, I refer to Yildiz's book *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition* (2012). Yildiz defines the monolingual paradigm as not simply a 'quantitative term designating the presence of just one language', but as a 'key structuring principle that organizes the entire range of modern social life, from the construction of individuals and their proper subjectivities to the formation of disciplines and institutions, as well as of imagined collectives such as cultures and nations' (Yildiz 2012, p. 2). According to the monolingual paradigm, individuals possess one single language, their mother tongue. It is the language we learn from our parents, it is believed to be unique and irrepleacable and to establish a series of emotional, cultural and national associations. Essentially, the mother tongue identifies who we are and where we belong. For this reason, Yildiz defines it as a 'condensed *narrative* about origin and identity' (Yildiz 2012, p. 2).

On these grounds, I draw a parallel between Yildiz's concept of the mother tongue and the mother–daughter relationship. Firstly, this is because of the maternal connotation of the mother tongue, which is the language that allegedly emanates from the mother. Secondly, both the mother and the mother tongue refer to a static and unique origin which frames the individual's subjectivity, in virtue of a number of associations and connections (Yildiz 2012, p. 11). In this regard, Yildiz defines the mother tongue as a 'family romance' (Yildiz 2012, p. 12), by which she means that the maternal language signifies a specific mode of belonging and natural kinship (Yildiz 2012, p. 11). I also describe the mother–daughter relationship as a family romance, as it plays an important role in the development of the daughter's identity. On the one hand, the constitutive power of this relation derives from the role of the mother as the one who gives birth. It therefore refers to an organic and biological tie. On the other hand, its overarching connotation derives from its gendered connotation:

> The uniqueness of the mother–daughter tie derives from the fact that the daughter participates not only in the anaclitic (emotionally dependent) relationship of the child with its mother, but also from the fact that both mother and daughter are of the same sex [. . .] In this way social norms of the female role are translated and reproduced, the mother embodying the role with which the daughter identifies primarily and to which she relates emotionally most strongly (Wodak and Schulz 1986, p. 4).

Indeed, the mother is the first model of femininity the daughter refers to. The former transmits to the latter a set of social, cultural, gendered, and affective norms; that is, a specific mode of feeling, thinking, and behaving. From this perspective, it can be argued that the relationship is based on a play of mirrors, in which the mother is the specular image of the daughter, and vice versa. Each one sees her image reflected in the other, like a mirror in which the mother looks at what she was, and the daughter looks at what she might be:

> When a mother looks at her daughter, she sees herself. She is constantly reminded of her mistakes, yearnings, dreams, successes, and failures. When the daughter looks at her mother, she often sees herself and rejects the image in the mirror (Brown-Guillory 1996, p. 2)

Borrowing Yasemin Yildiz's words, it can be argued that both the mother and mother tongue signify a condensed female narrative (Yildiz 2012, p. 12). They contribute to preserving and reiterating a specific model of femininity, which is bound to a precise linguistic, cultural, and physical space. Through the mother tongue, which she receives from the mother, the daughter is also given a mode of thinking and behaving that characterises and shapes her female identity. However, with the movement to a new context, where different socio-cultural rules apply, the model which is proposed by the mother does not work anymore. Migration disrupts the grounding of the daughter in the mother, forcing the former to 'translate' her identity, that is, to redefine her subjectivity, rethinking and rewriting notions and models of femininity which are socially, culturally, geographically, and linguistically embedded.[1] In the specific case of the Italian mothers and Italian-Canadian daughters in the present paper, reframing femininity means to challenge patriarchal and chauvinist discourses. The Italian migrant community in Canada was strongly male-centred. Women's private and public roles were subjected to a chauvinist rhetoric, which trapped them in fixed and subordinate roles, preventing them from expressing their full potential as independent and autonomous individuals. However, as a result of migrating to Canada, a more liberal and tolerant society than Italy in the 1960s, Italian girls started to acknowledge different forms of femininity, other than those represented by their Italian mothers (Perry 1978; Iacovetta 1991, 1992, 1993; Scarpaci 1991).

Redefining their female subjectivity is part of a wider process of translation, which is normally undergone by people who migrate to a different country. The movement between different languages and cultures breaks the constitutive relation between language and identity.[2] Indeed, migrants have been defined as 'translated beings' (Cronin 2006; Polezzi 2012) because, in order to function within the new community, the way they perceive and relate to reality has to be redefined and transferred from one linguistic and cultural dimension to another. In light of this parallelism, I investigate what new forms the relationship with the mother (tongue) assumes in migratory contexts, and what these new forms entail for the reframing of the daughter's identity. That is, how Italian-Canadian daughters' new female identity is reconfigured through a process of detachment from the mother (tongue).[3] If their female identity is also given and shaped through the relationship with a language—Italian—then exposure to a new language—English—must determine and enhance the desire for a new female identity, which develops itself beyond the limits and constraints imposed by the mother (tongue). The use of Italian and English in the narratives I examine has to be understood against this backdrop. On the one hand, writing in English—a language other than the mother's tongue—implies a movement away from the Italian socio-cultural heritage, and from a female identity which is inscribed in that heritage. It thus signals the adherence to a Canadian form of womanhood. On the other hand, codeswitching to Italian is a way to highlight, criticise, and challenge the chauvinist rhetoric at work in Italian society.

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[1] I intentionally use the verb 'to translate' to stress the connection between the mother and mother tongue.
[2] Refer back to the monolingual paradigm.
[3] 'Mothers become the targets of the daughters' process of disidentification from conventional constructions of femininity and the primary negative models for the daughters' (Hirsch 1989, p. 11).

Referring back to the image of the mirror, I contend that the traditional mother–daughter relationship is based on a play of mirrors, which establishes a static relationship between the mother and the daughter. This aspect becomes even stronger in the context of Italian migration, where the necessity of confirming and preserving a specific private and public idea of femininity was a way to counteract the innovative and revolutionary model of femininity incarnated by Canadian women. In order for daughters to realise themselves, then, this static relationship has to become dynamic, thus leaving space for the free expression and realisation of who they are. The reconstruction of their identity can happen only in relation to a process of deconstruction of a gendered identity and of disidentification with the traditional roles expected for Italian women, which are incarnated by their mothers. As Marianne Hirsch claims, 'the bond between mother and daughter, daughter and mother, must be broken so that the daughter can become woman' (Hirsch 1989, p. 43). I seek to investigate how disidentification is achieved and expressed through linguistic means. The authors in my corpus use Italian and English to negotiate and mediate their female identity, across Italian and English spaces. They exploit the activist potential of language, using the latter as an instrument to promote new understandings of gender inequalities. CS constitutes the instrument through which they sustain and support new forms and models of womanhood. The switch from one linguistic system to the other represents the ideological and cultural route undertaken by these authors in the process of redefinition of their female identity. Writing in both Italian and English is therefore a way to inscribe in the text their bilingual and bicultural perspective on the female condition, and to construct and deconstruct patterns of femininity, which are preserved and reiterated through the relationship with the mother (tongue).

3. Italian-Canadian Literature

The authors in my corpus are recognised as important and well-known representatives of Italian-Canadian literature. In order to understand the socio-cultural context where they operate, as well as the thematic and linguistic features of their works, it is therefore necessary to provide a brief, but accurate background to Italian-Canadian literature.

Canada became one of the main destinations for Italians from the late 1940s to the 1970s, during what the sociologist, Clifford J. Jansen, has defined as the 'postwar boom' (Jansen 1988, p. 15). In 1947, Prime Minister Mackenzie King signed a peace treaty with Italy and lifted the ban on immigration from Italy. Thousands of Italians arrived in Canada, thus making Italy 'the second only to Great Britain as the source of Canadian immigration' (Ramirez 1989, p. 7). The cities which saw the greatest Italian settlement were Toronto and Montréal, where Italian communities constituted up to 2% of the population (Ramirez 1989; Perin and Sturino 1989; Iacovetta 1992).

The term, Italian-Canadian literature, encompasses the literary works produced by over 100 authors of Italian background living in Canada. Some of them were actually born in Canada, while others were brought there by their families at an early age. This specific condition, which Di Cicco describes as 'the fortunate and tragic position of having to live with two cultures' (Di Cicco 1978, p. 9), marks both their life and their literary production. Italian-Canadian authors write following an ontological need, using writing as a way to regain and express their voice, and to negotiate and mediate between Italy and Canada; to create 'a personal bridge which can join and unite the two shores of his or her experience, thus relieving angst and coherently merging old and new worlds, past and present, Italian background and Canadian experience' (Stellin 2006, p. iii).

Italian-Canadian literature presents two main thematic and linguistic features. On a thematic level, it extensively deals with the theme of migration. These authors tell their own story of displacement. However, their personal narrations also take on a collective level. This happens not only because, beyond the uniqueness of each migrant experience, every person moving to a different country has to deal with specific issues and conditions. It also happens because Italian-Canadian authors talk about the other migrants in the Italian community they grew up in, thus giving a voice to those whose stories were mostly unheard:

> We make sense of ourselves in the process of creating our story. And paradoxically this self-filled project connects us to others. By making the private public the writer is less alone. We speak to a community and as part of a community (Edwards 1996, p. 323)

This collective value highlights the political and ideological importance of their literary productions, which are priceless sources to comprehend the phenomenon of Italian migration to Canada. The authors themselves recognised the relevance and importance of their works and their social role as writers. As the writer and academic, Joseph Pivato, claimed, 'we had discovered a literature about ourselves, and the great responsibility which this entailed' (Pivato 1998, p. 13).

On a linguistic level, Italian-Canadian literature is characterised by an extensive multilingualism, with texts written in Italian, French, English, and dialect. The beginning of the literary movement dates back to 1978. Pier Giorgio Di Cicco, who was editor for the literary magazine, *Books in Canada*, realised the existence of an important literary production that attempted to express itself and be recognised, alongside the official Canadian literature in English and French. To this end, in 1978, he published *Roman Candles*, an anthology of literary works produced by 17 Italian-Canadian writers.[4] Moreover, in 1978, D'Alfonso, one of the most influential figures in the group, founded Guernica Editions, the publishing house that will play a key role in promoting Italian-Canadian literature. Indeed, 1978 can be considered as the date marking the birth of the Italian-Canadian writing as an officially recognised body of literature. Italian-Canadian authors became aware of having created a set of writings that required and deserved the same space of expression and accreditation as the mainstream literary productions written in English and French.[5]

Among the representatives of Italian-Canadian literature, I have selected four female authors: Gianna Patriarca, Dôre Michelut, Caterina Edwards, and Licia Canton. I have selected them for a number of reasons. First, their literary production and life experience allow an in-depth and interesting investigation into the mother–daughter relationship, as well as into Italian women's condition. All of them narrate migration from a strong female perspective, as highlighted by two of Patriarca's collections of poems, which are entitled *Italian Women and Other Tragedies* (Patriarca 1994) and *Daughters for Sale* (Patriarca 1997). Secondly, all of them extensively use bilingualism in their texts, which allows me to examine the activist potential of language within the framework of the mother (tongue) relationship. Thirdly, they all belong to the second generation. As stressed by (Stellin 2006, p. iii), the feeling of living in between two worlds is particularly strong for them. Their special position offers interesting insights into the process of mediation of their female identity across Italy and Canada.

I also wish to specify that the texts in my corpus are both poetry and prose. There is a specific reason behind my decision to include both prose and poetry in my analysis. This is an examination of how language is used to negotiate and mediate the female identity. Therefore, I believe it essential to consider all the forms in which language is displayed. As a matter of fact, some of the authors in my corpus produce both poetry and prose indiscriminately, even in the same collection.

Gianna Patriarca was born in Ceprano, a small town in the province of Frosinone, in Lazio. In 1960, when she was nine years old, she moved to Canada with her sister and her mother, in order to reunite with her father, who had migrated five years earlier. She is considered as one of the major voices in Italian-Canadian literature. Her poetry has appeared in several anthologies, as well as journals and magazines. It has also been adapted for the stage in a production called *Ciao, Baby* (2001), like the eponymous collection (Patriarca 1999). In 2001, this production had a very successful three week run at the Canada Stage Berkeley Street Theatre in Toronto, and received many great critical reviews.

4　The collection includes the following Anglophone authors: Filippo Salvatore, Len Gasparini, Caro Cantasano, Pier Giorgio di Cicco, Antonino Mazza, Antonio Iacovino, Ed Prato, Tony Pignataro, Mike Zizis, John Melfi, Joseph Ranallo, Vincenzo Albanese, Mary di Michele, Mary Melfi, Saro d'Agostino, Alexandre L. Amprimoz, and Joseph Pivato.

5　Pivato defines Italian-Canadian writing as an 'ethnic literature', that is, a literature that 'has traditionally been defined as writing in the unofficial languages of Canada' (Pivato 1985, p. 27).

Her poems have been heard on the radio and television in Canada, and she has held several lectures at universities, such as Yale and Calumet in the U.S., and Udine and Milan in Italy. Her books appear on the course lists of many Canadian and American universities.

Dorina Michelutti, better known as Dôre Michelut, was born in 1952 in Sella di Rivignano, a town near Udine, in the region of Friuli. Her family migrated to Canada in 1958 and settled down in Toronto. After graduating from high school in 1972, she spent five years in Florence, studying Italian at the local university. She returned to Canada in 1981, where she continued to study at the University of Toronto. Meanwhile, she began to write and publish in literary magazines. Her first book of poems, *Loyalty to the Hunt*, was published in 1986 by Guernica Editions. In 1994, it also appeared in the French version, entitled *Loyale à la chasse*. In 1990, Michelut published, in cooperation with five writers, *Linked Alive* and the simultaneous French edition, *Liens*. In 1991, together with other Friulian women writers in Canada, she edited the anthology, *A Furlan Harvest* (1993). In 1990, she published *Ouroborous: The Book That Ate Me*, containing poems in English, Italian, and Friulian dialect. After 1996, Michelut started travelling and working around the world. Meanwhile, she received a Master in Applied Communication from Royal Roads University in Victoria, B.C. After that, she began a PhD program at a university in Switzerland. She died of cancer in Oman in March 2009. There, she was teaching Advanced Speech and Multimedia and Technical Communication at the Al Akhawayn University, in Ifrane. Her works have appeared in many literary publications and have been anthologised both in Canada and Italy.

Caterina Edwards was born in England. Her mother, Rosa Pagan, was Italian, from Venice, while her father, Frank Edwards, was English. Her parents met when her father, who was a soldier, stayed in Venice after World War II. After marrying, her parents decided to move to Wellingborough, where Caterina was born in 1948. When she was eight years old, her family migrated to Canada. They settled down in Calgary, which Caterina left to attend the University of Alberta, in Edmonton. Here, she earned a B.A. in English. She then went on to complete an M.A. in Creative Writing. She soon began to publish short stories in literary journals and anthologies. Her first published novel, *The Lion's Mouth*, was a success. It explores the life of an Italian migrant woman in Western Canada. In 1986, her first play, *Terra Straniera*, was a success at the Edmonton Fringe Festival, and in 1990, it was published as *Homeground* by Guernica Editions. During her active writing career, Caterina Edwards has also been teaching Creative Writing and English at the University of Alberta, Grant MacEwan Community College, and Athabasca University. Her literary career is characterised by 'first times'. As Pivato states, Caterina Edwards is 'the first Italian-Canadian woman writer in western Canada' and her novel, *The Lion's Mouth*, was 'the first Canadian novel to combine ethnicity with feminist questions' (Pivato 2000, p. 8). Moreover, *Terra Straniera* was the first play about Italian migrants to be staged (Pivato 2000, p. 8).

Licia Canton was born in Cavarzere, a small town in the province of Venice. In 1967, when she was four years old, she moved to Montréal with her family. Being forced to leave her native land and to start a new life in a new territory was painful. As a matter of fact, the experience of displacement has marked her personal and professional life. Canton shows a great interest in migration and minority literature, with a sharp focus on Italian-Canadian literature. She has explored this theme in both critical and creative writing. Among the critical texts is *Writing Beyond History: An Anthology of Prose and Poetry* (Canton et al. 2006), an anthology collecting the literary creations (both in prose and poetry) of 30 Italian-Canadian authors. Among the literary texts that investigate migration from a less academic perspective is *Almond Wine and Fertility* (Canton 2008), where Canton portrays the encounter between Italian and Canadian culture.

4. Reframing the Mother–Daughter Relationship

In order to understand how and why CS becomes an instrument of feminist activism in the writings I examine, it is first necessary to explain how migration, impacting on the relationship between the Italian-Canadian authors in my corpus and their Italian mothers, determines a rethinking of the model of femininity incarnated by the latter. This aspect is even more important if we consider

that all their writings can be considered as autofictions, that is, a literary genre blending fiction and autobiography. The story which is narrated is fictional, but it draws inspiration on the author's life (Doubrovsky 1977; Gasparini 2008). Given the connection between living and writing, the literary and linguistic choices made by these authors can be comprehended only by taking into account facts and events in their personal sphere.

In her poems, Patriarca talks extensively about the relationship with her parents. The focus of her narration is on their life in Canada, whose difficulties are in contrast to the harmony and happiness of their life in Italy:

> We arrived in Canada the 'promised land'. We came in pursuit of a dream. A dream of a better life, a richer life, a life of freedom. We learned too quickly that dreams often become nightmares ('Espresso, Camaros and Gianni Morandi', *Daughters for Sale*; Patriarca 1997, p. 10)

Once in Canada, Patriarca's parents started working in factories all day, leaving her and her younger sister alone most of the time. On the one hand, her mother and father's absence determines Patriarca's passage into adult life, and the refashioning of her role within the family unit. Despite being only 10 years old, she had to look after herself and her little sister, which made her move from the position of daughter and sister to that of surrogate mother:

> At age ten, I became the surrogate mother to my younger sister. I became an adequate homemaker. [. . .] Childhood became a fading photograph hanging slightly off-center on grandma's kitchen wall ('Espresso, Camaros and Gianni Morandi', *Daughters for Sale*; Patriarca 1997, p. 10)

On the other hand, with her parents being busy working all day, Patriarca perceives a deterioration of the affective ties. This aspect is particularly evident in the relationship with her father. According to what she describes in 'Returning' (*Italian Women and Other Tragedies*; Patriarca 1994, pp. 21–22), the family migrated to Canada to reunite with her father, who had moved there five years earlier. The physical distance between her father and the rest of the family, however, had already determined an affective distance, too. Patriarca narrates her arrival in Canada, remembering the journey and the reunion with what she calls 'a half forgotten man'. In her collections, there are several poems which are dedicated to the controversial and problematic relationship with her father. She defines him as a 'dark stranger' ('May', *Italian Women and Other Tragedies*; Patriarca 1994, p. 15) who was not able to understand his daughter and her desire to write poetry:

> my father is dead/and I have nowhere/to put this anger/I was sure he would live/forever/to continue his battle/with me and my/poems' ('Novembre 16, 1983', *Italian Women and Other Tragedies*; Patriarca 1994, p. 49)

In Patriarca's difficult relationship with her father, it is possible to identify a patriarchal component. Her father's refusal of her literary activity can be seen as a denial of her possibility to express her voice. By becoming a writer, Patriarca realises herself beyond the personal and professional expectations for Italian women.[6] Moreover, she openly uses her writing as an instrument of self-affirmation and self-recognition. By telling her story, as well as other Italian women's story, she attempts to fight off a sense of non-existence and non-agency:

> I write because I can, I write because I choose to do so, because it is an action that I control and it will not abandon me unless I want it to abandon me. Writing allows me the choice I was not granted as a child and it is proof that I exist and that I am here (*Exploring Voice: Italian Canadian Female Writers* Patriarca 2016, p. 243)

6　My statement refers to my analysis of the passage where Patriarca tells that Italian girls were expected to become either mothers and wives, or school teachers.

In reshaping her own subjectivity through the act of writing, Patriarca also writes against patriarchal authority. Her agency in redefining her identity, therefore, is played out also in terms of gender. If traditionally 'women's experiences have been interpreted for them by men and according to male norms' (Pavlenko 2001, p. 226), for Patriarca, the possibility to interpret and tell Italian women's stories according to female rules constitutes a further way to regain and express agency.

After migrating to Canada, Patriarca's relationship with her mother is re-articulated around the binary opposition of presence/absence. As her mother started working all days in factories, the always present and affectionate figure was replaced by a busy and tired woman, whose maternal love seemed to be buried under the burden of migration, work, and issues at home:

> Mamma is crying in her room downstairs. I hear mamma crying every night since we got here in this dark, tall house with all these stairs. [. . .] I hate the darkness of this house, especially at night. The nights when all I hear is mamma crying. [. . .] They're yelling again. [..] The words in Italian that make my mother scream. Nina and I huddle together in the same bed. Confused. Scared. The slaps echo through the house. They don't stop. Mamma's body against the furniture. We start to cry and hold each other tight. Nobody hears us. [. . .] Mamma left for work at six. Papa didn't come home at all. Got to get Nina ready. Get myself ready and go to school. I'm cold. I want mamma, I want nonna. I want somebody ('Painted Windows', *Daughters for Sale*; Patriarca 1997, pp. 20–25)

Patriarca's mother's tears reveal that she did not choose to migrate to Canada. She had to respect her husband's decision and follow him. This pattern, which constituted the rule among women back then, further contributes to describing women's condition as voiceless. The impossibility to decide is a recurrent aspect in these narratives. As Patriarca claims:

> I knew I had no choice. The decision had been made for me. The choices would go on being made for me for a long time to come ('Espresso, Camaros and Gianni Morandi', *Daughters for Sale*; Patriarca 1997, p. 10)

As I stated in Section 2, the daughter's redefinition of identity implies the breaking of the maternal bond, which is the knot at the centre of a specific concept of femininity.

In order to rewrite her identitarian narrative, the daughter has to edit the traditional mother–daughter tie, whose overarching and constitutive power does not allow her to develop and express autonomous and free modes of being. This aspect emerges in Patriarca's poem 'Mother Tells Me Stories' (*Italian Women and Other Tragedies*; Patriarca 1994, p. 42). Here, she recounts how her mother would often tell her stories about Italy and their life over there, in the attempt to interrupt her daughter's memory erasure. Nonetheless, Patriarca does not manage to completely engage with this process of remembering, as the distance in time and space has broken the connection with the mother (tongue, land):

> mother tells me stories/of my white cotton dress/and my long black curls/the days in Ceprano [. . .] do you remember?' she asks/her fingers making ringlets in my hair/I want to scream 'I don't!

Patriarca's mother is trying to arouse her daughter's Italian memories, in the attempt to remind her of their communal past and legacy and restore the connection with her half Canadian daughter. The attempt to restore the dynamics of their mother/daughter relation is further demonstrated by the fact that Patriarca is addressed as 'bimba', which reveals her mother's desire to put her daughter in a more vulnerable position of dependence.

her eyes/are always wet/as she calls me/*bimba*

By code-switching to Italian, Patriarca here signals precisely her mother's attempt to exploit the emotional and formative legacy of the mother tongue, to exercise her authority over her daughter. However, Patriarca tries to escape such a dynamic, which entraps her in the 'there and then', and prevents her from integrating and operating in the 'here and now'. Her attempt emerges in her decision to refer to 'mother', rather than 'my mother', which would sound more natural and correct in English. In doing so, she denies the mother any connotation of specificity and uniqueness, and redefines their relationship as generic and impersonal.

The perception of the mother as an obstacle to the daughter's integration in Canadian society also emerges in *The Lion's Mouth*, by Caterina Edwards (Edwards 1982). The female character and narrator of the novel is Bianca Mazzin. Bianca can be seen as Edwards' alter ego: She is the daughter of a couple of Italians who moved to Edmonton from Venice. Throughout the novel, Bianca continuously attempts to negotiate between Italy and Canada. The contrast between Italian and Canadian systems of values is expressed through her complicated relationship with her parents. Despite physically migrating, they never really moved (Moslund 2010, p. 104). They describe Canada as a 'barbarous place' (Edwards 1982, p. 120) and 'clung to their way, but disconnected from the society it expressed' (p. 159). They chose rejection as a form of rooting. They limited and circumscribed their presence within the host society, instead maintaining a fictitious bond with their country of origin. From this perspective, it emerges clearly why Bianca's disidentification with her Italian mother is essential to her grounding in Canadian society. While her mother wants her 'to remain an Italian child' and forces her to wear a 'camel coat with black velvet collar, smocked woolen dresses, sensible leather shoes', Bianca longs for 'ski jackets, jeans, shiny plastic shoes like everyone else' (Edwards 1982, p. 114).

The relation between Italian mothers and their Italian-Canadian daughters is effectively encapsulated in the movement metaphor. While the former are projected backwards in time and space, the latter are projected forwards. Their incapacity to swap this one-directional trajectory for a multi-directional one makes it impossible for them to communicate. Italian-Canadian daughters feel the tension between their being constantly pushed back to their mothers' distant homelands, and their being pulled towards the new community; between their cultural and social Italian heritage and the Canadian context; between old and new ideas of femininity. While Italian mothers are still trapped in a logic of subjugation and entrapment, their Italian-Canadian daughters attempt to move out of this space, looking for new ways to express their identity, against and beyond gender stereotypes and socio-cultural rules. As the following passage effectively illustrates, this means altering the personal and collective significance of domesticity, by redefining private and public identities that are tied to specific politics of home:

> As girlfriends we spent much of our spare time in each other's homes, usually in the basements drinking espresso, sneaking cigarettes, exploring new feelings and talking about boys and marriage [. . .] We had no role models, no one but ourselves to talk to and this created a lasting bond among us ('Espresso, Camaros and Gianni Morandi', *Daughters for Sale*; Patriarca 1997, p. 13)

Patriarca takes as a starting point the image of home as a concrete physical space and uses it to symbolically refer to home as a set of community values and beliefs. The Italian girls she talks about operate within domestic space, as they meet in each other's houses, specifically, in the basement. The reference to the basement, which constitutes the lowest part of the house, further reinforces their physical and existential confinement. Nonetheless, as we keep reading, we realise that Patriarca rethinks this 'physical enclosure' and reimagines home as a place of tension between tradition and transformation, between fixity and change. Inside the domestic space, Italian girls perform an alternative femininity, by 'drinking espresso, sneaking cigarettes, exploring new feelings'; that is, by performing behaviours that, within the Italian community, were not considered as acceptable for girls. Essentially, they resist dominant discourses and renegotiate their female identity, thus managing to

experience the transformative power of movement even in a traditionally enclosed and confining site. As they oppose the pulling forces of the Italian migrant community, that wants to tie them down to their Italian legacy, they shift from a position of being, to one of becoming, demonstrating that 'being grounded is not necessarily about being fixed; being mobile is not necessarily about being detached' (Ahmed et al. 2003, p. 1).

5. Reframing Femininity through CS

In the section above, I have illustrated how, for Italian-Canadian daughters, stepping out of the mother (tongue) entails a redefinition of their female subjectivity. In this section, I investigate how this movement away from the mother (tongue) is recreated and expressed in the text, through the practice of CS. Before examining the significance and function of CS in these authors' narratives, I will briefly describe the practice of CS and explain the theoretical framework which will sustain the present analysis. CS can be defined as the mixing of two or more languages and codes, as 'the alternative use by bilinguals of two or more languages in the same conversation' (Milroy and Muysken 1995, pp. 7–8). There is a lot of disagreement with respect to the terminology to use when talking about mixed language use, and a lot of confusion and overlaps emerge with terms, such as code-mixing, code-switching, and borrowing. Indeed, as Milroy and Muysken claim, the field 'is replete with a confusing range of terms descriptive of various aspects of the phenomenon' and any attempt to standardise the terminology constitutes 'an impossible task' (Milroy and Muysken 1995, p. 12). In this paper, I use the term, code-switching, as 'an umbrella expression for different phenomena including word insertion and intrasentential and intersentential switching' (De Fina 2007, p. 380); that is, to describe all kinds of language contact, both within and beyond the sentence boundary.

In analyzing CS, I will mainly draw on a sociolinguistic approach. Scholars, such as Blom and Gumperz[7] (1972), and Myers-Scotton[8] (1993), claim that CS is socially motivated. Even Stroud (1998, p. 322) states that it should be looked at from a social perspective and that it 'cannot really be understood apart from an understanding of social phenomena'. Basically, CS is a practice that derives from, and responds to, a social phenomenon, in relation to which it acquires specific meanings and functions, and an ideological connotation. Such a dimension is particularly true in the case of written CS, which Pfaff defines as 'conscious', because every language alternation is intentional and purposeful (Pfaff 1979, p. 295). On these grounds, I analyse and understand the use of CS against the backdrop of the authors' migration to Canada. I contend that they purposefully and intentionally codeswitch to attack and dismantle a type of womanhood, which was shaped and transmitted through and by the daughter's relationship with the mother (tongue).

6. Italian-Canadian Daughters and Other Tragedies[9]

I will now focus on the use of CS as an instrument of feminist activism. As stated above, the authors in my corpus codeswitch to Italian when they want to highlight that what they are narrating is inscribed in the Italian migrant community, but is foreign to the Canadian one. The linguistic estrangement, which is provoked by scattering Italian words in the English text, has precisely the intent to increase the level of alienation of the Canadian reader, thus stressing that he/she is not part of that cultural heritage.

In her collection, *Italian Women and Other Tragedies* (Patriarca 1994), Patriarca blatantly describes Italian women's condition as a tragedy. The term indicates that being a woman constituted a sad event. This was true for the whole family, because having a daughter involved more worries and concerns than having a son. She expresses this point in 'In My Birth' (*Italian Women and Other Tragedies*;

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[7]　Their text *Social meaning in linguistic structures* (1972) is often indicated as the start of CS research in sociocultural linguistics.
[8]　She developed the Markedness Model of CS.
[9]　The title of this section refers to Patriarca's collection, *Italian Women and Other Tragedies* (Patriarca 1994).

Patriarca 1994, p. 10), where a daughter describes her birth like something she has to apologise for, as something which caused disappointment and affliction to her father:

> my father is a great martyr/he has forgiven me everything/even my female birth […] how i disappointed them/my father's first child/was not male/i swear i can still hear the/only welcoming sounds/were from my mother/and she has always been blamed/for the mistake

In Italian families, boys were usually given a preferential treatment. Parents invested all their hopes in their sons, who would attend the best schools and be prepared for a bright future. This aspect is evident in the poem 'Femmina, 2000', by Gianna Patriarca (*Ciao, Baby*; Patriarca 1999, p. 78):

> her older brother calls her/femmina/it is the one world in Italian/he knows perfectly well/her brother is a bright young man/with a promising future/his respected Catholic Boys School/has given him awards and scholarships/he works hard/he studies hard/but his clean white and blue uniform/is often impeccably ironed by the/femmina of the house

The older brother 'is a bright young man with a promising future', while his young sister, the 'femmina of the house', stays home ironing his uniform and doing other house chores. This poem is particularly interesting to examine how Patriarca uses CS against gender inequalities and discrimination. In Italian, the word 'femmina' is sometimes used in a pejorative way; for instance, it occurs in expressions, like 'sei proprio una femmina', where it is used to stress one's weakness and limited abilities.[10] Patriarca uses 'femmina' with this specific connotation to indicate that the young boy belittles his sister's skills and potentialities. Thus, she addresses and foregrounds the patriarchal tradition of Italian society, which permeates and shapes the young boy's vision. Alfonzetti (1998, pp. 193–94) suggests the existence of a link between the plot and CS. CS helps to create the narrative, as it foregrounds all of those elements essential for the reader to understand the plot. Indeed, CS can provide 'information beyond referential content' (Nilep 2006, p. 9) and force readers 'to look beyond the referential meaning for the inferential meaning' (Callahan 2005, p. 17). Here, switching to Italian helps Patriarca to refer to a specific socio-cultural system, against which a correct understanding of the relationship between the two siblings in the poem has to be sketched. The same use of CS appears in 'Her Son' (*Daughters for Sale*; Patriarca 1997, pp. 38–39), where an obedient daughter watches her mother dedicate all her attention to her son:

> I watched her fuss over him/as if he were a prince/an angel/a divine gift from God/[…] i watched her caress his shirts/with her bent fingers/as she ironed out each crease/erasing any evidence of imperfection/[…] and when he allowed her/she would caress his strong cheek/*bello mio*, she would say/[…] i watched her love him/without fatigue/without expectations/then i would go/and iron my own clothes

The mother in the poem shows a different attitude towards her son and her daughter. The former is spoilt and adored, compared to a 'divine gift'. The mother offers him her unconditional love, which he receives as a duty and does not seem totally able to return. In fact, the mother can only enjoy his occasional affection, the few times he lets her caress his cheek. The mother's total love for this son is expressed in the Italian sentence 'bello mio', which conveys all her pride and devotion.[11] The relationship with her daughter is instead encapsulated in the image of the girl ironing her clothes, which indicates that she does not enjoy the same attention and dedication. While the son is treated as a precious thing that should not be ruined, the daughter has to look after herself.[12] Patriarca intentionally codeswitches to Italian to suggest the reader that the mother's attitude towards her son is inscribed

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[10] 'You are such a girl' (my translation).
[11] Literally 'my beautiful' (my translation).
[12] Caterina Edwards, in *Homeground*, highlights the same point when one of the characters in her book pronounces the following sentence: 'When a girl is born, a servant is born; when a boy is born, a lord is born' (Edwards 1990, p. 27).

in the Italian socio-cultural system. She uses a specific linguistic code to address and point out the politics of gender at work in Italian society, both on the micro level of the family unit, as well as on the macro level of the community at large. As a matter of fact, the contrast between the brothers and the sisters in these poems represents, on a broader level, the contrast between Italian men and women. While the former were supposed to have plenty of possibilities and choices, the latter were tied to a static and unchangeable mode of being and behaving:

> Growing into young women we were made to believe we had roughly three choices for our future. The first choice was going to a commercial high school and learning the skills to become a good secretary. The second choice (if we were pretty enough) was to get married before or after graduation, and become good wives and mothers. The third choice (if we were slightly more ambitious) was to become school teachers or bank tellers. We bought into these role models without question. And although there was nothing wrong with these choices we were convinced there were no other options ('Espresso, Camaros and Gianni Morandi', *Daughters for Sale*; Patriarca 1997, pp. 11–12)

As Patriarca narrates, Italian girls believed they had only 'three choices' for their future, were convinced that 'there were no other options', and 'bought into these roles models without question'. By accepting and reiterating specific models of femininity, they contributed to guaranteeing a form of 'rooted belonging' in a context of 'rootless mobility' (Ahmed et al. 2003, p. 3). In order to understand this point, I refer to 'Taking (a) Place: Female Embodiment and the Re-grounding of Community' (Gedalof 2003, pp. 91–112). In this paper, Gedalof claims that women serve the symbolic function of representing 'home', intended as the place where traditions and values are preserved and where continuity and stability are reproduced. This function becomes particularly relevant within migratory contexts, where the connection with the origin home is broken. The movement abroad breaks the sense of community belonging and of collective identity, because migrants find themselves operating in a different context, where old values and practices do not function anymore. In order to provide 'the appearance of sameness and stability in ever-changing contexts' (Ahmed et al. 2003, p. 101), women are 'called upon to be place' (Ahmed et al. 2003, p. 94); more specifically, to be home, in those contexts where home has been torn away. As it emerges in the passage above, the personal and social positioning of women within the migrant Italian community was tied to fixed identities and roles. Women were strategically and symbolically positioned in order to reproduce a specific version of community belonging.

The stories narrated by the authors in my corpus are populated by women who are expected to conform to a stereotyped and fixed idea of femininity. The few characters who seem to divert from conventional roles are perceived negatively, labelled, and isolated. For instance, let us consider the following two poems, by Patriarca. The first poem is entitled 'La Vacandin' (*Daughters for Sale*; Patriarca 1997, p. 31):

> My name is Esterina/but everyone calls me La Vacandin/because my belly is vacant/empty of children/i did not find a man to fill me

Patriarca codeswitches to an Italian dialect and uses a term—vacandin—that the Canadian reader could not understand without the explanation she provides.[13] Switching helps her to refer to Italian culture and to further advance her discourse concerning the female condition in Italian society. She addresses a specific idea of femininity, whose core essence revolves around the concept of motherhood. Esterina's belly is empty, as well as her existence, because she has no children to look after. Code-switching here contributes not only to the depiction of Esterina, but also to the depiction of the social and cultural identity of Italy, especially in contrast to Canada's. This use of CS recurs also

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13   The term identifies a dialect from the north of Italy.

in 'Loreta, la calda' (*Daughters for Sale*; Patriarca 1997, p. 74), where 'calda' is the adjective used to describe a woman with a free sexual behaviour:

> you think i am vulgar/i talk vulgar/an old woman shouldn't/talk so vulgar

In both cases, even if with different effects, Patriarca depicts two women whose life experience does not match traditional views of femininity, at least within the Italian society. CS has rightly the function to index a specific socio-cultural context, against which a correct understanding of these nicknames has to be sketched. The use of language to highlight the gendered structures in Italian society emerges in the following passage as well:

> Fear governed whatever we did. It kept us in line. The fear of getting pregnant, of being defined *puttane*, of thinking thoughts that were sinful, of not meeting the ideals of our parents ('Espresso, Camaros and Morandi, *Daughters for Sale*; Patriarca 1997, p. 13)

Patriarca uses an Italian word to stress the interconnection between these girls' fears and their Italian upbringing. The behaviour, which is considered in such a negative way in the Italian community, was not judged and criticised in Canadian society. CS helps Patriarca to make it clear that, here, she is simply expressing the others' view of the girls. This is not her opinion; rather, it is the voice of the other migrants in the Italian community.

The authors in my corpus use several metaphorical images to convey women's lack of agency. The women in their poems are portrayed as voiceless, in both a literal and a metaphorical sense. For instance, in Patriarca's 'Stealing Persimmons' (*Daughters for Sale*; Patriarca 1997, pp. 41–50), the main character is Rosa, an old Italian woman living in Canada with her daughter, Maria. The woman suffers from an unspecified disease, which has caused her speech impairment. The woman's aphasia is a metaphor that Patriarca uses to express her condition as voiceless. Without a voice of her own, the only solution for Rosa is to live in the past, out of the 'here and now', towards a 'there and then'. The same aspect recurs in Edwards' *Homeground* (Edwards 1990), where Maria's aphasia acquires a symbolical meaning. It indicates that she is unable to express who she really is, because she has to comply with an idea of femininity which is externally imposed.

These authors often play with the double meaning of the word, prostration. For example, in *Prima Vera*, Edwards presents a woman whose overweight forces her to lie on her back, 'forced to lie as if already laid out' (Edwards 1986, p. 128). In the poem 'Marisa', by Gianna Patriarca (*Italian Women and Other Tragedies*; Patriarca 1994, p. 65), the woman's subjugation finds a brilliant figurative representation in the image of her bending over: 'Marisa/si piega/verso i figli/si piega/verso il marito/si piega/verso tutto'.[14] The act of bending over represents the woman's tendency to surrender to the needs of her family members. This poem, which is entirely written in Italian, constitutes another effective example of Patriarca's use of language as a form of feminist struggle. The decision to write it in Italian is related to her intention to address and criticise gender issues that she perceives as typically Italian. Marisa's story can only be told in Italian, because her condition as a woman is the product of Italian culture.

In the following passage, CS fulfils three main functions: It suggests that the setting is in Italy, that the scene is taking place in Italian, and that the content of the scene has to be read against the socio-cultural Italian background. The extract appears in 'Twenty-Four Hour Conversation', one of the short stories in *Almond Wine and Fertility*, by Licia Canton (2008, pp. 55–60):

> 'One day soon', I say, 'I will come here with my four children'.
>
> 'Magari', he says smiling. 'That would please me enormously … and bring your husband, too'. He looks at me intently.

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14 Marisa bends over/towards her sons/bends over/towards her husband/bends over/towards everything (my translation).

'Of course, I say'.

'You should come in the summer. I'll take the kids to the beach and you can spend some time with your husband'. He is searching again. 'I don't think the two of you spend enough time alone'.

I wince, but I don't say anything.

The dialogue occurs between an old man living in a rural town in Italy, and a young Canadian woman with Italian origins. She travels to Italy on a business trip and decides to visit him. The relation between the two is not specified, but they might be relatives, as the tone and the topic of their conversation are private and confidential. The entire narrative is based on an intergenerational conflict, as the two characters represent two contrasting views of family and relationships. The entire conversation between them is articulated around their binary position, with the old man constantly telling off the young woman for the way she is running her family. Their contrasting positions are expressed through the codeswitched term, 'magari'. This word is an exclamation used to refer to something we would like to happen, but which is unlikely to. It expresses both feelings of hope and nostalgia. In the passage above, the old man utters the word 'magari', whose meaning and function (for the man, the woman, and their relationship) can only be completely understood within the context of mobility. As a consequence of the woman's movement to Canada, the distance between the two characters has increased, and it has acquired a double connotation. The man and the woman are not only temporally distant, as they belong to two different generations, but also physically, as they belong to two countries: Italy and Canada. They also represent diverse social and cultural systems. Within this scenario, CS focuses the reader's attention on the Italian system of values, and it builds the cultural and social frame through which he/she should read the story. CS operates like a contextualisation cue (Gumperz 1982): Through it, the reader infers the old man's perspective and evokes the Italian system against which the conversation and understanding (or lack thereof) between the two characters is sketched. It also creates an emotional and cultural gap between the characters, and a conversational gap between the old man and the Canadian reader. Through CS, therefore, Canton voices her Canadian half and implicitly suggests that her perspective diverges from the man's vision, which represents and voices Italian society. The conjunction 'but', which follows the activity of wincing, is indicative of the woman's disagreement with the man and it expresses her will to respond to him. CS, then, conveys the old man's fear that the young woman is not able to run her family, and his desire to teach her how to do it.

Let us now consider the next example, which appears in *Almond Wine and Fertility* (2008, p. 71):

It was my mother—not hers—who took the time to train her in the beginning. My mother taught her how to iron a shirt correctly. First the sleeve, then the other sleeve, then the back, and the front of the shirt LAST because that's what people will see. La bella figura. That's the right way.

This passage appears in one of the short stories in the same collection. The story is called 'Self-Made Man' and is about a Canadian woman, who is married to an Italian man, who psychologically abuses her (2014). The use of CS is related to the plot. It helps Canton to create the Italian setting, which is at the root of the reader's understanding of the narration and of the relation between the two characters. Essentially, Canton uses a different language in order to reflect a different reality. The different reality she is describing is the Italian one; in doing so, she voices her Canadian stance and translates a stereotyped idea of Italian society, as one that gives great importance to appearance, good looks, and public identity. The reference to the *bella figura* (nice appearance) also has a gender-based connotation. The man is complaining about his wife, who does not seem able to accomplish all the duties and tasks of a 'good wife'. Consequently, her incapacity makes the man fail his attempt at achieving a 'bella figura', that is, at perfectly fitting in the society.

Coming to Terms with the Mother Tongue (Michelut 1989) and *The Third Person Polite* (Michelut 1990), by Michelut, are particularly effective in illustrating language as an instrument to break the constitutive power of the mother (tongue). These metalinguistic essays are relevant to the purpose of this paper, because in them Michelut makes extensive use of the metaphor of the mother–daughter relationship to investigate and describe her relation with Friulian, Italian, and English, and to examine how this relation impacts on her identity as an Italian-Canadian woman. As mentioned above, Michelut moved to Toronto in 1958. Once in Canada, her parents stopped speaking Friulian with their children, because they thought it would not be useful to them in the future.[15] For this reason, they started speaking only Italian, relegating Friulian 'to a circumscribed private territory' (Coming to Terms with the Mother Tongue Michelut 1989, pp. 63–65). A few years later, Michelut started speaking only English, the language which could better voice a life that was mainly lived in English and provide her with a gateway into Canadian society:

> It took only a few years for me to reply to both languages exclusively in English. In my teens, I could understand both Italian and Furlan, but I spoke them badly (Coming to Terms with the Mother Tongue Michelut 1989, p. 65)

Furthermore, for Michelut, adopting English as mother tongue, thus openly rejecting the actual mother's tongue (Friulian and Italian), constitutes an instrument of freedom and autonomy, as it allows her to move away from her Italian legacy, shaping her becoming a woman in an independent way. Moving away from the Friulian mother tongue, essentially, means to move away from the mother. Michelut rejects Friulian as 'a unique, irrepleacable, unchangeable biological origin' (Yildiz 2012, p. 9), and adopts English, which offers her a way to escape from the mother's iron grip:

> When my mother speaks, I reply in English […] Mother's iron grip is loosened; she can't reach me in English, I can stop the nos she insists on passing on (*The Third Person Polite* Michelut 1990, p. 113)

Moving beyond Friulian and towards English for Michelut means 'tanto una definitiva frattura con il passato, quanto il ritrovamento di se stessa' (Di Girolamo 2011, p. 303).[16] That is, to abandon the legacy of the mother (tongue, land) and to re-ground in a free space, where she can express her voice; to interrupt the emotional involvement that the use of the mother tongue entails and to overcome its formative influence. Speaking in English allows Michelut to reground in a free space, where she can express her voice, moving beyond the formative influence of the mother (tongue). Her linguistic freedom also determines her existential freedom:

> Such complete re-immersion into an unknown body of sound […] reminds me of my birthright, that I have a choice, that I can be anything, that I am free to feel life surging'
>
> (*The Third Person Polite* Michelut 1990, p. 113)

For this reason, the return to the mother tongue can happen only after Michelut's rethinking of the relationship with the mother:

> A turning point comes when mother finally learns to say the word love in English […] The English word for love is an awareness that the other is another, and responds independently. The moment mother utters the words I love you, the countess within her starts to decay (*The Third Person Polite* Michelut 1990, p. 115)

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[15] Michelut uses the term, Furlan; nevertheless, I will be using Friulian, thus adopting the conventionally accepted English version, which is also used by scholars of Italian-Canadian literature, such as Saidero (2011).

[16] 'breaking up with the past, simultaneously finding herself again'.

Through the metaphor of the mother being able to utter the words 'I love you', Michelut is weakening the identitarian charge of the mother (tongue), which gives up on a dominant role and eventually acknowledges the presence and the autonomy of the other. The mother ceases to exercise her constitutive power and no longer constitutes an obstacle to her daughter's free and independent formation. The bond can now be restored, because it has acquired new and alternative features. Rather than signifying a static and unchangeable mode of being, a 'condensed *narrative* about origin and identity' (Yildiz 2012, p. 12), it now stands for an open and fluid narrative, which is full of possibilities. Michelut presents both the mother and the Italian/Friulian mother tongue as elements which hinder her integration into Canadian society. Her need to master English is related to its perception as the only instrument that can grant her access to, and participation in, the new community. Likewise, the necessity to break the maternal bond is related to the desire to express a different model of femininity. It is the necessary and unavoidable step in her becoming a woman. While clinging on to the mother tongue and the mother implies stasis and alienation, adopting new linguistic and gendered forms promises development and integration. This aspect recurs also in 'The Last Young Man', by Edwards (1973). The dichotomy of mother/daughter and stagnation/evolution is articulated around the language. While Maria's ignorance of English contributes to her entrapment and condemns her to silence, her daughter, Lela, is fluent in English, and mocks her mum by calling her 'funny mummy' (Edwards 1973, p. 27). This passage shows how migration undermines and subverts the power relation between mothers and daughters. Lela masters the new language, while her mother is unable to learn it. The natural relation between the mother as the one who transmits the language, and the daughter as the one who receives it, is overturned. As Lela becomes more and more fluent in English, the latter replaces Italian and ends up representing her mother tongue. Lela finds herself in a paradoxical situation, in which her actual mother tongue is not the mother's tongue, as conventionally accepted. As the mother loses her role as a linguistic and cultural mediator, the constitutive nature of the mother–daughter relationship is undermined. This deterioration and weakening of the mother's traditional role is the starting point for the daughter's redefinition of identity.

7. Conclusions

This article analysed how migration impacts on the family unit, reshaping the relations between its members, and triggering 'the emergence of alternative family romances' (Yildiz 2012, p. 12), which also open up new ways to conceptualise individuals' subjectivity and the private and public roles they play. I narrowed the scope of my investigation to the mother–daughter relationship, which I used as a starting point to explore how migration, reframing the bond between mothers and daughters, also contributes to shaping new models and concepts of femininity. In order to examine this aspect, I focused on the Italian community in Canada. Italian migrants recreated an Italian locus, keeping their traditions, customs, and beliefs. It was a static society, where daily practices, traditions, and values were reproduced, and the life of the collectivity was structured and ordered in a precise way. This fixity was particularly evident with respect to women's condition. As a matter of fact, my analysis of the narratives written by four Italian-Canadian female writers has demonstrated that Italian women's private and public positioning in the community was defined by discourses of patriarchy, which limited their possibility to express themselves and succeed. The mother–daughter relationship was essential to the reiteration of the patriarchal system. This relation was embedded in the system, which dictated its features and assigned it a specific function. Indeed, the mother–daughter relation was simultaneously the product of patriarchy, and the medium through which the latter was preserved. However, the model of femininity the mother–daughter bond proposes was tied to a specific place, Italy. With the movement to the more tolerant Canadian society, Italian daughters acknowledged the existence of alternative models of femininity, other than those represented by their mothers; models they found more interesting and rewarding; models that suited their subjectivity better. This is the case of the authors in my corpus who, besides being wives and mothers, also realise themselves as writers. They manage to express and affirm a new concept of womanhood, beyond specific and fixed notions

of motherhood and daughterhood. The original contribution of this paper lies in the fact that I connect these gender discourses to language. Drawing on the parallel between the mother and mother tongue, I illustrated how the authors in my corpus use language to negotiate their female subjectivity across Italy and Canada. More specifically, I demonstrated how the use of CS in their narratives is connected to the intention to put forward a discourse against the chauvinist rhetoric at work in Italian society. Scattering Italian words in the English text is a way to point out a model of femininity which is the product of Italian society, and which is reiterated through the mother–daughter relationship. Basically, they adopt the mother's tongue to voice the Italian perspective on the female condition. The Italian word in the English text has a twofold effect. On the one hand, the friction experienced by Canadian readers in reading a different and unfamiliar word equals the tension lived by the authors in growing up in-between two diverse cultural systems, their struggle in mediating between two contrasting views of femininity. On the other hand, CS operates like a contextualisation cue. It indicates the background which is essential to readers' understanding of what is narrated. The Italian word in the text immediately recalls the Italian system of values, against which the stories of the Italian women have to be understood.

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