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# The Narrative Motif of the Ghost in Classical Chinese Literature

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## Abstract:

The first part of this paper presents a brief history of the ghost narrative motif in classical Chinese literature, arguing that this motif first appears in Chinese culture during the Shang Dynasty (16 c. - 1066 BC), and it is a recurring concept defined in the *Book of Liezi* and it is also present in the Daoist principle yin - yang. Despite the Confucian tradition of rejecting the belief in ghosts and any other metaphysical elements, ever since the Tang Dynasty (618 – 907) the literary motif of the ghost appears in the so-called fantastic stories *chuanqi* which will later influence the strange stories *zhiguai* written by Pu Songling (1640 - 1715), and will serve as inspiration for Guan Hanqing (1225 - 1302) when he writes the famous *zaju* play *Snow in Midsummer*. This paper is an aesthetic, hermeneutic and anthropological analysis of the concept of the wandering ghost or spirit in classical Chinese literature, starting from the evolution of the character *gui* 鬼 which means ghost in Chinese. I will observe the narrative role of the ghost in classical Chinese literature, using as representative examples literary works such as the *chuanqi* play *The Peony Pavillion* written by Tang Xianzu (1550 –1616), the strange story *zhiguai*, “Gongsun Jiuniang” by Pu Songling, and the *zaju* play, *Snow in Midsummer*, written by Guan Hanqing.

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**Key Words:** Ghost, Narrative Motif, Classical, Chinese Literature.

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## Introduction

In the present paper, I analyze the narrative motif of the ghost found in classical Chinese literature, namely in the fantastic stories *chuanqi*, in the strange stories *zhiguai* and in the *zaju* plays and its role in the works in which the authors integrate them. I will focus on the social significance of ghosts starting with a brief presentation of the concept of ghosts and spirits in Chinese culture and how this concept translates into a literary motif that will be perpetuated throughout the Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties.

## The emergence and evolution of the concept of ghosts and wandering spirits in Chinese culture

In any culture, ghosts, spirits or supernatural appearances are based on myths, rites, folklore, religion and superstitions that are perpetuated over the years in the subconscious of the masses. Chinese culture is no exception to these beliefs about the supernatural, as the concept of the ghost appeared during the first dynasties in the history of ancient China. In his comparative study of ghosts in *zaju* plays and Japanese *noh* plays, Zhao (2015, p. 4-5) presents the evolution of the notion of spirits or ghosts in Chinese culture. Since the Shang dynasty (16 c. - 1066 BC) there is evidence to support the belief in the existence of ghosts, such as the character 𤑔 engraved on the oracular bones of that time. This character is made up of two pictograms, at the top is the pictogram *fu* that represents the ghost's head, and at the base is the pictogram *ren* that means person. Thus it can be deduced that this character designated a supernatural entity that took on the appearance of a person. The original form of the character *gui* 鬼, which is used nowadays for the word ghost, is found on inscriptions on bronze objects from the Zhou dynasty (1066 - 221 BC) and in manuscripts during the Warring States (475 - 221 BC). This character is used with the meaning of ghost more and more often in the first Confucian classics, and until the end of the Warring States period it denotes exclusively “ghost” or “soul of the dead”. Zhao (2015, p. 5) also claims that around the third century BC, the character *gui* 鬼 is defined in the context of earlier Confucian classics, in the section “Shixun” (“Explaining Instructions”) in *Erya* (*Approaching the Correct*), the oldest glossary dictionary, meaning “to return” or “that which returns”, and it is interpreted as “a dead person being a person who returns”, but it is not specified where this person returns.

## The motive of the wandering spirit in the *Book of Liezi* and the *yin-yang* principle

In the *Book of Liezi*, Liezi (ca. 5<sup>th</sup> c. BCE/1990, p. 23) stated that the spirit belongs to heaven and the bones belong to the earth. What belongs to heaven is pure and light, whereas what belongs to the earth is impure, dense. According to this classic, when the spirit leaves the body, it returns to its natural true state and that is why ghosts are called *gui* 鬼. *Gui* 鬼 means to return to one's true home, which means that the one who dies returns to their true spiritual origin, not their house in which they lived during their lifetime. The dualism between body and spirit is also found in the dualistic conception of the soul *hunpo* 魂魄, which is probably based on the influence of the ancient principle *yin - yang*. Zhao (2015, p. 5) describes this view in his article saying that the soul is composed of an ethereal part called *hun* 魂 and an earthly part called *po* 魄. *Hun* 魂 is attributed to the *yang* part of the soul, which is positive, spiritual, masculine, bright, active, heavenly light, while *po* 魄 is allocated to the *yin* part which is negative, material, feminine, dark, passive, earthly and heavy. *Hun* 魂 and *po* 魄 are opposite and complementary and they keep the harmony in the body throughout a person's



life, but at one's death the soul leaves the body and thus *hun* 魂 will separate from *po* 魄, the *yang* part of the soul rising to the sky and the *yin* part staying on earth. In Chinese ghost stories, the concept of *po* 魄 is rarely used, with ghosts being referred to as *hun* 魂 when they appear. And yet, as Zeitlin (2007, p. 5) argues in her book, *The Phantom Heroine: Ghosts and Gender in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Literature*, this dual notion persists in the literary imagination, given that in some works ghosts are represented as earthly and bound to their grave, and sometimes as weightless, wandering the world. The character *hun* 魂 appears in many terms that refer to ghosts: *youhun* 游魂 ghosts from beyond the grave, *youhun* 游魂 wandering ghosts, *yuanhun* 冤魂 wronged ghosts, *guhun* 孤魂 lonely ghosts, *huanhun* 还魂 ghosts who returned to avenge their death.

A ghost is thus defined as leaving the world of the living and never returning. At the heart of this definition are the superstitions of Chinese people who want to keep ghosts at bay, making sure that the souls of those who are no longer alive have a place to return to so that they do not become wandering spirits to haunt those left behind. As proof since ancient times, there are the rites of the ancestors to take care of the soul after death.

### **The narrative motif of the ghost in the fantastic stories *chuanqi***

The supernatural has been found in various forms in Chinese literature over the centuries. During the Tang (618 - 907) and Song (960 - 1127) Dynasties, the fantastic stories *chuanqi* were initially in the form of short prose transmitted orally, and later took on a dramatic form. In these stories, real, historical and fantastic facts intertwine, and the literary motives were limited to the motive of love and the motive of the miraculous. As Chiang (2005, p. 21) argues in her work, *Collecting the Self: Body and Identity in Strange Tale Collections of Late Imperial China*, the narrative structure of the short fantastic stories *chuanqi* consists of anecdotes, tales of the fantastic that have supernatural elements and fantastic characters, such as foxes, monkeys, spirits, gods, which offer alternatives for the personal fulfilment of the authors, thus being considered a fantastic discourse of the self in which desires and anxieties are projected onto a symbolic alter ego. Most *chuanqi* stories have complicated plots with complex descriptions and finish with a revealing moral.

Love stories in the form of *chuanqi* are usually based on the model of the girl with supernatural features and the rebellious, brave romantic man. Their biographical value consists in the fact that the authors project their own personalities, fantasies in the work. According to Confucian values, men play an important role in society, so the need for the fantastic could not be transposed into the male character. The men in these stories were consequently outlined in a social context. The theme of the dream is often encountered in these *chuanqi* fantastic stories, thus exposing the consequences of the dream on reality; the lack of a delimitation between dream and reality expresses the idea that the dream is not inferior to reality. *Chuanqi* authors shape their narrative discourse according to historical notes and biographies but give importance to the art of narration,

which is much more visible in their stories than in biographies.

As a dramatic literary genre *chuanqi* developed in the Ming Dynasty (1368 - 1644). It has strong narrative tendencies and the authors prefer love stories, miraculous and fantastic elements just like in *chuanqi* prose. In the introduction to the book *Censored by Confucius: Ghost Stories by Yuan Me, Kam & Edwards* (2015, p. xxiii) present the recurring themes of *chuanqi* plays as contradictions between individual and social constraints, public and private, reason *li* and love *qing*, the representation of love ties being based on individual choice despite social constraints.

A representative work of a *chuanqi* play is *The Peony Pavillion* written by Tang Xianzu (1550 -1616). This play tells the story of a young girl, Bridal Du who makes love to a young scholar, Liu Mengmei in a dream and then falls sick because she longs for him. After her death, she returns as a ghost to find her lover. In the following fragment is presented the monologue of the girl who returns to the world of the living as a ghost hearing the call of her lover:

BRIDAL DU (*enters*):

(...) I am the ghost of Bridal Du, who died of pining after a garden dream. Before my death I painted my own portrait and buried it among the Taihu rocks. I inscribed the portrait with the lines,

“Union in some year to come  
with the 'courtier of the moon'  
will be beneath the branches  
either of willow or apricot.”

After several nights of spirit roaming in the grounds of this shrine, I was surprised to hear a young scholar call out from the guest room, “Gracious mistress! Lovely lady!” So plaintive was the cry, it touched my heart. Secretly I slipped into the room, to find a painted scroll hung high on the wall. Looking more closely I recognized my own portrait, and a poem in matching meter had been added. It bore the signature “Liu Mengmei of Lingnan.” “Liu” for “willow,” “mei” for “apricot”—surely this was predestined! Now with the consent of my infernal judges I come on this fair night to fulfill the dream I once dreamed. Ah, bitter suffering! (Tang, 1598/1980, p. 159)

Finding him, she then convinces him to exhume her body to revive her. The two then run away together and after passing various attempts, Liu Mengmei manages to pass the imperial examination. In the end, Bridal Du's return to life and the union of the two lovers are legitimized even by the emperor himself. In this play the interaction between reason *li* and love *qing* challenges notions such as the dream, reality of dreams and supernatural events. In the play, love triumphs over reason, and the dream is presented as an inner reality and the supernatural is perceived as real. In the introduction of his Chinese to English translation of the play, translator Birch (1980, p. x) argues that this story lacks any refinement beyond the fantastic nature of the theme of a girl resurrected by her lover after whom she suffered, then dying for his sake. And yet Bridal Du becomes one of the most beloved heroines of Chinese literature. Birch (1980) also observes how throughout the play the reader is asked, usually by Bridal Du himself, to consider the dichotomy between what is real and what is unreal in the

light of Buddhist-Taoist concepts of the illusory nature of all phenomena.

### **The narrative motif of the ghost in the strange stories *zhiguai***

*Chuanqi* will influence the *caizijiaren* within the Ming (1368 - 1644) and Qing (1644 - 1911) Dynasties and the strange stories *zhiguai* written by Pu Songling (1640 –1715) who writes during the Qing Dynasty. The blooming period of these strange stories *zhiguai* is found during the Ming Dynasty (1368 - 1644), but their origin goes back to the Tang Dynasty (618 - 907) when the fantastic stories *chuanqi* were also popular. But Pu Songling emphasizes the fantastic element more in his stories. He collects stories from the countryside and gives them the shape of strange stories *zhiguai* in a collection called *Strange Tales from the Liaozhai Studio*. The supernatural element in these strange stories *zhiguai* is always embodied by female characters. This can be explained by the desire of Pu Songling to try to create a counter-discourse to the rigidity of Confucianism, as he was marginalized in society because he did not pass the imperial examination, but at the same time, he could not escape the cultural paradigm of Confucianism. Thus, Pu Songling expresses his frustration of being marginalized through female characters, who are his alter egos. Also, the pattern of the ghosts in his stories that return to the world of mortals and marry ordinary people hoping that through them they can also be mortals again, can lead to a number of psychological and cultural speculations about the fear of being different, the superiority of the intelligence of everything that is different, but also the zeal for such a hypostasis rejected by the model of the Chinese sage, frustrated by the Confucian psychological schematism. The fear of otherness, but also the desire for liberation by projecting the self in an unconventional model, paradoxically coexist within the narrative structures of Pu Songling's strange stories *zhiguai*.

Stories of spirits, ghosts, fairies, women foxes and wandering spirits returning for revenge represent the most popular stories written by Pu Songling. However, some of his stories address extremely realistic topics, which explore with humor and a serious moralizing dose, the corruption of the imperial courts, the dirty world of governors, with interesting intrigues and abuses of power. These types of stories often have a moralizing ending that concretely marks the violated ethical principles and corrects them. One such work is “Gongsun Jiuniang” in which Pu Songling tells the tragic story of a woman, conveying the idea that individual suffering must never be forgotten. The protagonist arrives in the underworld where his encounter with the ghosts does not have a cathartic function but instead constitutes a reliving of their traumas. From the beginning, the narrator presents the tragic historical context of the story: the mass execution ordered by the Qing government (1636-1911) to punish those involved in the Yu Qi uprising in 1662 that resulted in the massacre of hundreds of people who were later buried together on the outskirts of Ji'nan city. The main character who visits Ji'nan arrives accompanied by the ghost of his friend killed in this massacre, on the other side which is represented by a village full of the wandering spirits of those killed in the same massacre. Here he sees his niece, who was also a ghost. The episode of their reunion is an emotional one:

He saw a desolate courtyard half a mou wide, with two small rooms set side by side. In tears, his niece came to the door to greet him, and he too wept. A lamp glimmered in the room. The girl's face was as lovely and fresh as during her lifetime. Staring at him and blinking back the tears, she asked him about each of her aunts and cousins in turn. "They're all in fine health," he said, "except for my wife, who has passed away." The girl then sobbed again. "Aunt brought me up as child, and I have still never repaid her one bit. I never expected I'd be buried first. I feel such pangs of regret and remorse. Last year, my cousin took my father away, leaving me without a thought.<sup>131</sup> Hundreds of miles away from home, I'm lonely as a swallow in autumn. You, uncle, have not forsaken me even though I'm a dead soul. I have already received the gifts of money you sent." (Pu, 1740/2007, p. 123)

In this realm, the main character falls in love with Gongsun Jiuniang, a young woman who was also a ghost in this village of the underworld. The two get married and on the night of their wedding, Jiuniang tells him the tragedy of her death. She and her mother had been arrested after the Yu Qi uprising, and when her mother died of grief, the girl committed suicide as could not bear the burden of losing her mother. Before returning to the world of the living, the protagonist is asked by his wife to dig up her remains on the outskirts of Ji'n'an and bury them near the cemetery of his family so that she can find peace and not be forgotten. When he returns to the world of the living the husband realizes too late that he forgot to ask her what was written on her tombstone. Arriving at the cemetery on the outskirts of Ji'n'an, he discovers thousands of tombstones and realizes that it is impossible to find his wife's remains. He returns home, but he cannot forget Jiuniang, and after half a year he returns to the Ji'n'an cemetery where he sees her again, but she does not seem to recognize him.

The moral of the story could be to not forget the sufferings of those who have left the world of the living and to always keep their memory alive. The only thing people can do to honour the death of those who have crossed the threshold in the afterlife is to not forget their existence and what they have endured during their lives. This morality is, moreover, a deeply Confucian one based on the rites that imposed on the living the duty to take care of the spirits of their relatives who died. Thus appears a paradox between the presence of ghosts as a symbol of revolt against Confucian strictness and the strong moralizing message of ghost stories, which nevertheless perpetuates ideas typical of this doctrine, deeply rooted in cynical social structures.

### **The narrative motif of the ghost in the *zaju* theatre**

The tradition of the ghost motif in Chinese literary works is also found during the Yuan Dynasty (1279 - 1368) when the Yuan theatre reached its peak. One of the reasons for the development of the dramatic genre during this period could be the elimination of the imperial examination during the Mongol governance that led to ignoring the scholars and consequently, literary constraints were loosened.

Another cultural factor, (n. which led to the development of the Yuan theatre) (...), is the fact that during the Yuan Dynasty its rulers overthrew the

“scholars” of the Han people. In the Yuan bureaucracy, the Han people were classified as inferior to the Mongols, the Semu caste, and other ethnic groups, so “the injustice done to scholars during the Yuan dynasty” emerged, and the result was a shift to mainstream theatre based on the scholars' feelings. This is the main reason for the popularity of Yuan theatre. (Chen, 2016, p. 94) (n. personal translation from Chinese)

另一种文化因素(...), 元统治者对汉人的”士”很是排挤, 元代官僚中汉人一直被排在蒙古人、色目人等民族之后, 于是产生了”元代士人不平之气”, 其结果是转向民间戏剧以寄托自己的情志, 这是元曲流行的主要原因(...).

Also, the frustration of the scholars who lose their importance in the empire may have led to the birth of Yuan theatre. Thus, in most *zaju* plays, the action takes place during the previous dynasties, the authors projecting deficiencies of the judicial and political system of the Yuan Dynasty in other dynasties. Many of the stories in these plays have their origins in the *chuanqi* stories of the Tang Dynasty (618 - 907). Ghosts appear in these plays to expose an injustice or an error of justice, the law is presented as a form of natural order according to Confucian doctrine, identical with the idea of morality. Often, in these works, appearances before magistrates sometimes lead to unexpected and unjust outcomes, false confessions and torture are preferred by writers to enhance the dramatic effect of the play.

The ghosts in *zaju* plays are divided by Zhao (2015, p. 17) in his comparative study between the ghosts in *zaju* plays and Japanese *noh*, in four general categories: vengeful ghosts, love-seeking ghosts, undead and spirits. Ghosts that return to avenge their death are most common in *zaju* plays. They have either suffered an unjust death or a violent death and are appearing in the dreams of a living person or making their presence felt in the world of the living in search of revenge and justice. In most *zaju* plays the ending is a positive one, the ghosts revealing the crimes committed and obtaining justice even beyond the grave. An example of such a play is *Snow in Midsummer*, written by Guan Hanqing (1225 - 1302), in which the spirit of a girl is shown to her father to reveal to him the injustice that was committed at her death. The girl, Dou'E, was falsely accused of poisoning a man. The accuser was the man's son who wanted to marry Dou'E but she refused him so he threatened her that if she does not marry him he will accuse her of killing his father. Dou'E still refused him and firmly believed that the court will prove her innocence. However, the court did not bring her any justice and instead she was found guilty for a crime she did not commit. She was sentenced to death and later she comes back as a ghost the ask her father to bring her justice. At the end of the play, all the guilty are punished and justice brings peace to the girl's spirit. Guan Hanqing is thus inspired by *zhiguai*, borrowing the motive of the ghost who returns to the world of the living to avenge her unjust death.

## Conclusion

This paper showed the origin of the cultural concept of the ghost and how it was transposed throughout the Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties into a literary narrative motif, taking various forms and indirectly presenting various social, political or moral problems. Despite the fact that the Confucian tradition rejects the belief in ghosts because they are considered metaphysical elements, Chinese authors such as Tang Xianzu, Pu Songling, Guan Hanqing intentionally choose this controversial subject to create a speech against the rigidity of Confucian concepts that were based only on tangible things such as social hierarchy or the real world of the living. Ghosts thus become a symbol of the revolt against social constructs and thus, from one dynasty to another, from one literary species to another, they have “haunted” for thousands of years both Chinese culture and classical Chinese literature, further influencing even contemporary literature, Mo Yan, and Yu Hua giving new connotations to ghosts in their works. And yet, it can be seen that despite the symbolism of ghosts in the literary genres discussed in this paper, *chuanqi*, *zhiguai* and *zaju*, the moralizing note behind literary works persists, with the authors still seeing literature as a moralizing tool, an idea typical of Confucian doctrine against which they paradoxically tried to rebel. “Ghost literature” thus creates a complex literary paradox from which Chinese authors seem unable to escape.

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# The Italian immigrants and the American Dream in Pascal D'Angelo's "*Son of Italy*"

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## **Abstract**

After the Italian Unification in 1861, farmers, masons, artisans – mostly from southern Italy – decided to leave their villages and their families to emigrate to America. At the time, America was a country that was the subject of travelers' legends that recounted how people there could achieve economic stability and settle the foundations to support their families. Pascal D'Angelo and his father were migrants from Abruzzi who decided to pursue the American dream: his autobiography, "*Son of Italy*," tells of the magic of Abruzzi and the dream, which then became a nightmare, that he found himself living once he arrived in America. According to his autobiography, daily life in America was a nightmare based on survival and strenuous work on the construction sites where Italian immigrants earned little more than a dollar an hour. On those construction sites, Pascal D'Angelo discovered that his talents were not building houses, working with concrete and shovel, but in poetry and writing. However, before being able to show these qualities, he recounted in his autobiography the illusion of the American dream and the misery that Italians in America, known at the time by the derogatory names such as wop and dago, were forced to endure. Pascal D'Angelo, after quitting his job on the construction sites, had to accept many rejections from editors before being allowed to publish his poems and, in this article, it will be investigated how he managed to fulfill his dream and how he experienced the Italian migration in the U.S.A.

The methodology of this text is based on comparative literature within the field of Italian American critical studies: Pascal D'Angelo's autobiography is analyzed in relation to the studies of Durante, Fontanella and Luconi. Moreover, Pascal D'Angelo's autobiography is compared with the novels' content of John Fante and Pietro Di Donato, who were two writers still representing the pillars of Italian American literature.

The objective of this study is to focus on Pascal D'Angelo peculiar immigrant experience because the literary criticism on him is scarce, despite the



fact that he is a unique example of a “colonial writer” and deserves to be studied for his innovative content: it is shown how, through his writing, he was able to become the voice of the Italian immigrants by narrating his daily life without filters and letting the reader experience the tragedy of the daily work of Italian immigrants in America.

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**Key Words: Italian immigration, America, American Dream and identity**

### **Introduction**

In this article focusing on Italian immigration in America and the American dream, Pascal D’Angelo’s autobiography “Son in Italy” will be analyzed. Even with his poor condition similar to the millions of Italian immigrants in America, the relevance of Pascal D’Angelo is due to the fact that he was able to distinguish himself and used his immigrant experience as a literature content, which have been published in his autobiography and poetry. Pascal D’Angelo, whose birth name was Pasquale D’Angelo, was born in a village of the municipality of Introdacqua in Abruzzi in 1894 and emigrated to America with his father in 1910 in order to earn money as a construction worker. The first part of the article deals with the Italian migration in America and the reasons that caused it. Specifically, the Italian Unification, which took place in 1861, had the objective of uniting all the States of the Kingdom of Italy under one language, economy and tradition. However, the previously mentioned goal was not achievable only through the unification of the territory, because the overpopulation generated after the improvement of the conditions of southern Italy contrasted with the brigandage and the lack of land to cultivate because of the latifundia. Such a difficult situation led to the migration of many inhabitants mostly from the south, who did not see any hope of improvement of their status in their future.

Subsequently, the focus will be on Pascal D’Angelo’s writing, which recounted the miserable socio-economic conditions and racism that Italians experienced at the beginning of the twentieth century in America. Pascal D’Angelo’s autobiography “Son of Italy,” which was written in 1924, proves to be not only a social testimony of the life of the Italian community in America but also – thanks to the author’s commitment to writing – a praise for the liberal arts, which in Pascal D’Angelo’s case enabled him to overcome the tragic daily situation he was experiencing after his arrival in New York. As he wrote in his autobiography, he first came close to the liberal arts thanks to the music of Aida and, second, by spending time at the Public Library of New York, reading the romantic writing style of two British poets, specifically Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats.

Pascal D’Angelo’s youth in Abruzzi, his journey related to the migration to the United States, his work on the construction sites, the life with his fellow co-workers, the American dream and the love for the poetry are the elements that made “Son of Italy” an immortal autobiography that reached the goal of being published, therefore giving Pascal D’Angelo a place of honor in the Italian American literature.

## **Main Text**

Before the Unification of Italy, the Italian peninsula was formed by seven States with their own economy, culture, language and traditions: The Kingdom of Sardinia, The Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia, the Duchy of Parma, Duchy of Modena, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, The Papal State and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. It was March 17, 1861 that Vittorio Emanuele II, with an act of the House of Savoy Kingdom of Sardinia, would hold for himself and his successors the title of King of Italy. However, the celebration of the Italian unification takes place on the first Sunday of June and not in March. Indeed, the reason for this cadence had been issued by the decree of May 5, 1861.

Although the main objective of the Unification was to unite all the States of the Italian peninsula to strengthen the economy and defense, the Kingdom of Italy was culturally divided because the inhabitants did not yet possess the mentality of belonging to a common country after the Unification. In this context of lack of national identity, the first problem to be overcome was that of “regionalism”, which was the feeling that each individual person considered as priority only his/her own region, or village, without feeling empathy or the need to get to know Italians from another province or region. Furthermore, there was also still an economic gap between north and south, accentuated by the “Southern Issue” (Questione Meridionale). Even though the Unification had led to an improvement of the economic conditions of southern Italy, the overpopulation resulting from that improvement, the still present brigandage and the latifundia penalizing small landowners not leaving them land to cultivate, led many farmers and masons to emigrate to America. As for Abruzzi, region of Pascal D’Angelo, but also of Pietro Di Donato’s father and of John Fante’s father, the cities of L’Aquila, Sulmona, Vasto and Lanciano were the ones to be interested by those migrations leaving whole villages without workers and therefore without the cultivation of the fields. Between 1880 and 1915, four million Italians arrived in the United States out of about nine million who chose to cross the ocean to the Americas (F.S. Alessio, 2013: 1).

Considering the poor welfare conditions that southern citizens were experiencing in Italy and seeing the numbers of Italians immigrating, it would seem that for many the enrichment operation in America was proving to be a success. However, this was not the truth, because many were the legends that were told by travelers or those who had economic interests in filling those ships of hope and bringing cheap labor to the American metropolises. Most of the time, the poor illiterate Italian peasants, ready to do anything to redeem themselves socially, were deceived by the Italian migrant procurers and left for America investing their life savings. In fact, the hope of a better life was a sufficient reason to leave the country and the personal acquaintances.

Pascal D’Angelo was a migrant from Abruzzi, born in the municipality of Introdacqua in 1984, who decided to commit himself in writing about his immigrant experience and published his poetry and his autobiography “Son of Italy”. As a matter of facts, the Italian American migration critic Luigi Fontanella

dedicated a book to Pascal D'Angelo: "Il Dio di New York," in which he reconstructed Pascal D'Angelo's life and the American society at the time the young "Abruzzese" lived. According to the interpretation of Luigi Fontanella's book, Pascal D'Angelo represents a fundamental example which brings the reader back to the reality of the Twenties without any filter, letting the reader perceive the sufferings of the Italian immigrants in New York.

Pascal D'Angelo's narration and themes present in his autobiography had placed him among the other two pillars of Italian American literature, specifically Pietro Di Donato and John Fante. One can debate Fante's claim as an author of emigration, but his Italian background and the narrative on Arturo Bandini's life make him *de facto* an author who dealt with his identity, family's background and the matter of migration. Coming back to Pascal D'Angelo, his literary success has a peculiarity compared to the two writers mentioned earlier: on one hand, Di Donato and Fante were born in America and had to struggle first with the conflict between Italian and American identity and, second, with the negative consequences dictated by their status as children of migrants. On the other hand, Pascal D'Angelo was born in Abruzzi and emigrated with his father to America, becoming, as observable also in the writing style of "Christ in Concrete" by Di Donato, a direct witness of the miserable working conditions that Italians had to endure in America after the forty-day journey in very minimal sanitary conditions and, if they were lucky to pass the controls in Ellis Island, after their arrival in New York. Compared to Fante and Di Donato who did not experience growing up in Italy, Pascal D'Angelo had the privilege of having known and lived in his country as a child: in "Son of Italy", he talked about the magic of the Abruzzi mountains (D'Angelo, 1924:17) and people who, according to him, possessed supernatural powers. He evoked the Latin "*superstitio*" referring to divinatory practices. The specific episode involving supernatural powers relates to the witch who cast curses and condemned a young child to death because she had not received any charity from his father (D'Angelo, 1924:32-33).

Introdacqua, Pascal D'Angelo's municipality, assumed the connotations of a bucolic place where time did not seem to pass. Furthermore, the Abruzzi he focused on in his autobiography, specifically the mountains and their inhabitants, are caught up in a spell that makes them different from the American society that he has known firsthand while working with a shovel on construction sites. According to the critic, those descriptions of nature referred to Virgil's pastoral elegies (Viscusi, 2003:44), while the modality of writing about the people who lived there was a representation of the "Old World" and how Italy was not formed by illiterates and peasants, but by "seers and poets" (Simonini, 2015:152). Pascal D'Angelo's narration shows how the arrival of Italian immigrants in America generated a cultural clash between Italian and American identities because the "paesani", as Italians called their fellow villagers, arrived and maintained in the United States their culture based on a rural and village vision, which differed from the idea that American intellectuals had about the Italian culture seen as "high culture" (Ceramella & Massara, 2004: 43).

Maintaining the connections to their culture and traditions was important to overcome the difficulties faced in finding proper paid jobs and the exclusion

they suffered from the American society. Therefore, when it was clear that they could not fit into the society, they decided to keep their backgrounds thus reinforcing the change of destiny as top of their priorities. Indeed, in the autobiography of Pascal D'Angelo, we can apply the hypothesis of Ceramella and Massara about the presence of ambivalent signs of the painful awareness of an ineluctable destiny, almost impossible to redeem, but also the proudness of a realistic hope for immigrants and for the most part, towards their children (Ceramella & Massara, 2004:50). Therefore, we can observe the three steps of the Italian migration in the U.S.A already in the previous hypothesis: it goes from a temporal migration for enrichment, passing through an exhausting struggle to reach the American dream and then inviting their beloved ones to join them in the States to help them and strengthen all together. This thesis is supported by the historian Luconi, who affirms that those who had arrived in America and had settled down had begun an action of persuasion towards friends and family so much so that they would follow the same path to America (Luconi, 2003: 90). It is no coincidence that all of the construction sites in Donato's "Christ in Concrete" and Pascal D'Angelo's "Son of Italy" were staffed by Italian masculine workers who risked their life on the docks and, as in the case of Donato's father, lost it there. However, when their relatives from Italy joined them in New York, the Italian immigrants who worked on the construction sites were not alone, because in the tenements there were their wives waiting for them, trying to support them and taking care of their children. Given the working conditions one can read about in Pascal D'Angelo and Di Donato, the lives of Italian immigrants on the construction sites were not considered worthy of value by American society: indeed, they were constantly fired, reviled and victims of discrimination.

However, Pascal D'Angelo had a particular dream for a construction worker: his goal, in addition to social improvement for himself and his family, was to become a poet, much like John Fante's dream of becoming a famous writer. Pascal D'Angelo, unlike Fante who underwent a rediscovery thanks to Bukowski, has remained hidden and has never received full critical attention, despite the fact that his autobiography is unique in the literature of Italian American emigration because it begins in Abruzzi and not in America. In fact, if we consider what Di Biagi says about the types of Italian American writers, Pascal D'Angelo is certainly one of the few "colonial writers" to have achieved success in America through his publications. It should be noted that colonial writers were those who were born in Italy and emigrated to America without returning and found themselves living in the Italian community or colonies publishing in America (Di Biagi, 1987: 144).

The first part of the autobiography of "Son of Italy", set in Abruzzi, elevates the local population of peasants and masons who have not yet been corrupted by the progress of society because the mountains of Abruzzi defended the Italian shepherds and prevented them from getting in touch with the "New World". In this case, it is observable how Tamburri's thesis on the re-evaluation and rediscovery of Italianness can be applied to the first Italian part of Pascal D'Angelo's autobiography. Tamburri talks about mythical and real images of the

motherland, the way of life, the cultural trappings of ancestors, food, family and religion (Carosone, 2007: 5). These are all elements of Italianness reported and narrated by Pascal D'Angelo in the first part of his autobiography and which instead disappear in Italians as they started experiencing their daily lives among the dirtiness of the Italian tenements. In that cultural shock, it is possible to observe how Italian immigrants perceived the clash between the "New World" described by the travelers and the poverty they were forced to endure now being in America. Exactly after the before mentioned clash, the memories of their previous village life and traditions became a psychological instrument to mitigate the disappointment and the illusion. Therefore, the first element to recreate once they understood their real new American life was to rebuild their regional community, what we now call "Little Italy".

The time in which Pascal D'Angelo's childhood in Abruzzi came to an end is touching. It happened one evening when the family was reunited: the word *America* is preceded by Pascal D'Angelo's father's sentence summarizing the family's collapsing situation: «I cannot help it. Otherwise, we will never get out of this quicksand» (D'Angelo, 1924:47). On one hand, the reaction of the mother is to embrace her son, holding him tight, because she knew that could be the last quality time together. On the other hand, she murmured a phrase that demonstrated the suppressed anger of the Abruzzi farmers' families: «I cannot blame him. He works so hard. And we never seem to get any better. I must bend myself to what has to be» (D'Angelo 1924:47). The mother knew that the migration was the only way to escape from Abruzzi life with no prospects for the future. Indeed, Abruzzi cultivable fields and peasants were under the control of the landowners, who rented the fields with clauses that did not allow any kind of social improvement for the farmers. In such a negative context, the concept of "America" arrived in Abruzzi thanks to the legends recounted by travelers and it turned out to become a representation of the Italian immigrant's hope of justice and social revenge in that period. It is the very same concept we can observe in our time with the tragic deaths on the Mediterranean Sea, when people try to come to Europe looking for a new life. Indeed, like Italians at the end of the nineteenth century, the aspiration to change a negative destiny moves the human soul so much to put one's life at risk with a dangerous journey on the sea: the previous sentence applies to Pascal D'Angelo's father because the hope and aspiration were enough to close the cycle with the reality of Abruzzi and emigrate together with his son. Furthermore, what we deduced from the moment of "Son of Italy", in which Pascal D'Angelo's father announced the decision to leave Introdacqua, is what would come once being in America could not have been worse than Abruzzi. Therefore, what the Italians call "paese" (village), containing in itself tradition, dialect and "campanillismo"<sup>1</sup>, could and should be abandoned for a greater good: the potential welfare of one's own family.

After arriving in the States and trying to settle down, Pascal D'Angelo showed the reader how the Italians had formed their own community to rebuild

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<sup>1</sup> Italian term referring to a high level of attachment to one's own village and its traditions which leads to a preconception towards diversity and what does not belong to the local community.

the “paese” (village). First of all, this is evident in the working environment of the construction sites, in which the reader came across the following people: Matteo Rossi, Giovanni Ferraro, Giorgio Vanno, Giacomo Gallina, Antonio Lancia, Filippo and Andrea (D’Angelo, 1924:62-63). They were all Italian names. Each mentioned villager had a story behind him: a story he had brought to America and made him bond with his Abruzzi fellows so much so that they tried to support each other. The Italian community can also be recognized by the friends of the protagonist, who, besides being work colleagues, are also his roommates with whom he shared a bed and the goal of overcoming those immense difficulties that America had placed in front of them: hunger, underpaid jobs, cold and survival (especially when winter came).

Compared to his father who decided to return to Italy, Pascal D’Angelo had the merit of not giving up and, although he had arrived in America as an uneducated person, he learned to write and read by himself. He had decided to be educated because he understood that being illiterate was the main element that did not allow the Italian community to gain its rights within American society. However, learning English was not well received by his Italian colleagues and workers: in fact, he had to reassure them that he remained one of them (Barone, 2015: 68). This reassurance was necessary in that context because – in the minds of Italian immigrants – learning English meant being able to have contact with the WASP that oppressed them and thus dissociate from their Italian brothers who, in addition to not knowing the language, worked hard and suffered. Indeed, knowing how to speak English could be seen as a betrayal of the Italian identity and the class fight that the Italian immigrants hoped to undertake in order to obtain better wages and diminish the discrimination against them: it is not by chance that Pietro Di Donato joined the Communist Party in favor of the Italians after the death of his father and the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti. Pascal D’Angelo was the first Italian immigrant in America able to rehabilitate the role of the liberal arts within the Italian community: in fact, the vast majority of Italian immigrants in America were illiterate and without any educational base. Indeed, the term “paesants” referring to Italians was filled over time with a pejorative value that served to describe the lack of ability to learn the language, to read and write it.

Pascal D’Angelo expressed to the audience that American progress founded in construction sites was the economic basis for America’s success, but that poetry and reading, which resumed the concept of liberal arts, were the moral foundation of the human being. Interpreting Pascal D’Angelo’s thoughts on literature and music, “Son of Italy” intended to prove that the human being existence has no meaning without them: without communication and without being able to write our emotions, people are only seen as machines useful for work, like it happened with the vast majority of Italian immigrants in the first half of the twentieth century on the construction sites. Pascal D’angelo would like his colleagues to appreciate his literary aspiration and not to denigrate it as happened when he decided to devote himself to writing. In that specific case, his colleague Felice told him that writing has not taken Pascal D’Angelo so far because he ate the same as him, lived together with him and their welfare

conditions were identical (D'Angelo, 1924:146): «You live in the same box car. You eat the same food. And if you stay here long enough you will become the same as I. Look at me and you are looking into the mirror of your future» (D'Angelo, 1924:146). Writing, according to Felice, was a hindrance that slowed Pascal D'Angelo down in improving his economic status. In fact, according to his colleague, Pascal D'Angelo should work in an American administration in order to use his polished vocabulary and thus earn money with it. However, Pascal D'Angelo thought of writing and poetry as part of his own personality and potential talent he could express. He did not want to work thanks to his elegant language knowledge, but to write so that his readers could feel the emotions he wanted to communicate, just like when he was explaining new words at the construction site and was the center of his colleagues' attention. Not understood by many of his colleagues for abandoning the construction sites and attempting to become a writer, Pascal D'Angelo managed to break through into the literary magazines, publishing poetry after many rejections that he recounted in his autobiography. The context of derision over his decision to devote himself to the liberal arts and the lack of support from his Italian brothers was very similar to the situation of John Fante's protagonist Arturo Bandini who, in the novel "Road to Los Angeles", wanted to become a writer and after writing his first novel is derided by his mother and sister. In Fante's protagonist, that moment had a profound impact so much so that Bandini left home and went to Bunker Hill looking to metaphorically fight for his dream to become a writer. As time went by, John Fante's saga on Bandini and Pascal D'Angelo's autobiography no longer had anything to do with economic security or enrichment, but rather a personal challenge that both authors were sure to overcome because they were confident in possessing the qualities necessary to enter the American literary market. In "Son of Italy", the key word to overcome the challenge of Pascal D'Angelo's American dream is mentioned: *Perseverance* (D'Angelo, 1924:120). Thanks to his attitude, he did not give up despite the many rejection letters from the editors who responded to him to look somewhere else to publish his poetry. As a matter of fact, Pascal D'Angelo persevered and keep the promise he made to himself on a November morning in 1921. On that day, he woke up and convinced himself that his life had to change: «I would give my future a chance» (D'Angelo, 1924:147). His perseverance was rewarded and he succeeded in obtaining the interest of Carl Van Doren, who was editor of the "Nation". Indeed, Carl Van Doren published some verses of Pascal D'Angelo poetry in his magazine in 1922. He reached such an important goal through the education he decided to undertake, especially by reading Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats, as he stated in his autobiography (D'Angelo, 1924:149) and by listening to Verdi's Aida. Music was to him an inspiration, so much so as to call the Aida «supreme melody» (D'Angelo, 1924:149). According to Viscusi, D'Angelo chose the adjective "supreme" with reference to the opening scene of Aida: the high priest Ramphis announced that the Ethiopians were planning another invasion of Egypt. Radames, the Egyptian general, asked if the high priest had consulted with the goddess Isis. Ramphis stated that «she has named the army's supreme commander» (Viscusi, 2003: 46). In Viscusi's hypothesis, an educated

Italian immigrant such as Pascal D'Angelo who attended the opera was faced with the concept of nationalism becoming true (Viscusi, 2003:46). The hypothesis made about Pascal D'Angelo and nationalism makes sense for two reasons: first, because of the still fragmented and parochial situation of the Italian post-Unification, and second, because Verdi – through both Nabucco and Aida – personified the musical nationalism and the union that Italians themselves should have built in America. Therefore, in the autobiography of Pascal D'Angelo, literature and music are equally fundamental to free the human beings from the chains of slavery on the construction sites and build a society based on respect for the immigrants. Indeed, for a short period he tried to learn how to play the mandolin by himself (D'Angelo, 1924:141) because he was transported by the harmonic sound of Aida.

### **Conclusion**

The case study of Pascal D'Angelo's "Son of Italy" is unique in immigration literature for three reasons: the author's narrative of the American dream, the discrimination on the construction sites where Italian immigrants worked, and the fact that Pascal D'Angelo was a self-educated writer who managed to publish. Compared to the other two most famous Italian American authors John Fante and Pietro Di Donato, Pascal D'Angelo – with his autobiography – turned out to be a socio-literary source that has no equal in the Italian American literature and in the autobiographical experience related to the American dream and the daily life with the Italian fellows. Indeed, John Fante – through the Bandini Saga – was an author who became famous as a "mediator writer" because he dealt with the Italian American identity conflict of his character Arturo Bandini. While Pietro di Donato – through "Christ in Concrete" – was an author who instead reduced that historical gap that allows us to understand the economic and social situation of the Italian working class on the New York construction sites.

When Pascal D'Angelo came to America, the American institutions were using the Italian immigrants to complete the process of progressing the country, letting them be discriminated against because of their religion and lack of education. Discrimination and racism were the two feelings that would arise the sense of revenge within the Italian immigrants in Little Italy in the thirties, leading them to admire and support the figure of Benito Mussolini (not fascism as a political party) who was imposing himself internationally. "Son of Italy" is not the typical historical autobiographical document, as Di Donato's case aiming at outlining the Italian situation in the United States, but it is an autobiography in which the author opened his psyche and emotions to the readers hoping to meet their compassion for the vicissitudes that made him suffer and be hungry in America, but above all to support him in his dream of becoming a poet. Unlike Di Donato's pure and objective pessimism, Pascal D'Angelo always left a glimpse that there may be hope for the Italian immigrants in America. Exactly this hope is another element that distinguished him from many other migration writers: Pascal D'Angelo's hope goes hand in hand with the passion and the smile that the reader is able to imagine on his face during his passionate speeches



at the construction site and during evenings with his colleagues. In spite of his harsh daily life, there is not a moment in the autobiography when the reader could get the impression that the protagonist was about to fail; even in his darkest moments, such as the injury to his hand that prohibited him from working, he pulled through and looked for alternative work on the construction sites by fraternizing and admiring his Italian colleagues.

However, Pascal D'Angelo felt he needed to write to fulfil his personality completely. The construction sites and the manual labor did not fully satisfy him, hence the decision in November 1921 to change his life by committing himself body and soul to writing, at the cost of suffering hunger and asking for charity. His positive attitude of perseverance and conviction to possess the qualities of being a writer allowed him to publish for "The Bookman", "Century", "Current Opinion", "Literary Digest", "The Literary Review", "The Nation", "The New York Times", "The New York Tribune", "The Saturday Review of Literature" and "The Springfield Republican". His autobiography "Son of Italy" was published by the Macmillan publishing house in New York in 1924. Pascal D'Angelo remains in the memory of critics as "the pick and shovel poet" (Viscusi, 2003: 44), precisely because his poems that are contained in his autobiography could transport the reader into a new dimension of the American (as a worker with the pick and shovel) and Italian (as a poet) reality. As it can be seen in his text, poetry was the tool to get out of the American rejection and anonymity of the immigrant life, what Fante called "The Dust of Los Angeles", and to remember his Italian past and the nice moments he experienced there. His autobiography fits without a shadow of a doubt among the greats of Italian American literature, increasing the literary and intellectual prestige of Italian writers in America, specifically those from Abruzzi. In fact, it should be kept in mind that both John Fante's and Pietro di Donato's families both had Abruzzian backgrounds.

In conclusion, Pascal D'Angelo did not aim to denounce the precarious situation in which the immigrants lived, but presented it to the reader in an autobiographical form, almost like a realist chronicler recounting himself, but with the particularity of poetry he inserted because he considered it necessary to create an indissoluble bond with the reader, who, precisely through the poems scattered in the text, felt part of his suffering and desires him to reach his American dream. In Pascal D'Angelo's autobiography, writing is an element which could reconcile the fragmented soul of the writer: if at first the work on the construction sites allowed him to survive, poetry set him free to express himself. By 1921, it was clear to Pascal D'Angelo how being able to publish a few verses could be summed up with the concept of the American dream in order to distinguish himself from all the other Italian immigrants.

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# Multilingualism and the management of small and medium-sized enterprises: the case of Sicilian firm websites and related localisation strategies

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## **Abstract:**

According to the ELAN<sup>2</sup> report, European firms lose a significant amount of revenue due to unsuccessful transactions, as a result of inadequate linguistic skills and intercultural competence, reinforcing the idea that multilingualism is still perceived as a communication barrier. In Italy, small and medium firms show a marked preference for website translations, even if, as pointed out by PIMLICO research in 2011, it is not possible to define these products as multilingual websites or localised ones. Firms show a tendency to reduce investments in foreign languages and to simplify the hiring processes of employees, since they prefer to rely on external services rather than providing training courses or hire specialists. Referring to this background of references and the evidence that emerged from an online questionnaire submitted to Sicilian small and medium firms (Di Gregorio and Benzo, 2016), the aim of this paper is to investigate the choices of firms to localise websites as part of a comprehensive linguistic policy.

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**Key Words:** multilingualism; localisation; websites; SMEs; language policy.

## **Introduction - Foreign languages and small and medium enterprises in Italy:**

According to Pierini (2016, 50), “it cannot be denied that a multilingual

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<sup>2</sup> «ELAN: Effects on the European Economy of Shortages of Foreign Language Skills in Enterprise was commissioned by the Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission in December 2005 and undertaken by CILT, the UK National Centre for Languages in collaboration with InterAct International and an international team of researchers. Its objective was to provide the Commission and decision-takers in Member States with practical information and analysis of the use of language skills by SMEs and the impact on business performance». Retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/languages/policy/strategic-framework/documents/elan\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/languages/policy/strategic-framework/documents/elan_en.pdf)

approach could increase a company's chances of finding new markets" and, at the same time, it can represent a "competitive advantage when selling its products and services". These claims lead to some implications from both the point of view of typologies of companies that are involved in business interactions and languages (and cultures) that are used to communicate. In fact, if multinational companies are analysed, it emerges that MNCs refer to a corporate language to manage operations across linguistic borders, since they are characterised by multilingual workplaces (Feely and Harzing 2003; Harzing et al. 2011; Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999). Furthermore, as argued by Kankaanranta et al. (2018), "although these policies describe or define – more or less explicitly – which language is used for which business purpose, English is typically the language chosen for the task due to its dominance and hegemonic position as the language of international business". Moreover, it should be considered that some discrepancies can be identified between official documents (and the production that refers in general to the reputation of companies) and everyday practice (Angouri 2014; Lønsmann 2015; Ehrenreich 2010; Louhiala et al. 2012). For this reason, as claimed by Kankaanranta et al. (2018), "the notion of English as corporate language produces a highly complex arena with internal vs. external and one-way vs. two-way communication intertwining, and those in power make decisions about language regarding the entire workforce".

On the contrary, when policies of small and medium enterprises (SME) are examined, there are no comprehensive studies that focus on this aspect. This difference could be explained by referring to the needs of companies in terms of internationalisation processes and strategies to cope with linguistic diversity (Di Gregorio, 2017). For this reason, the present study was undertaken in order to investigate SMEs choices in terms of language policies, since an in-depth analysis of different European national backgrounds would be challenging due to the number of variables to be considered. Moreover, this paper seeks to explore the Italian context, with specific reference to Sicily, since it represents an interesting case from the point of view of small and medium enterprises, and, in particular, of Family Business (D'Allura & Faraci, 2018).

In order to investigate the behaviour of firms from the point of view of linguistic strategies, the European Union has financed several studies, such as the *ELAN report - Effects on the European Economy of Shortages of Foreign Language Skills in Enterprise* (2007), whose data represent the Cartesian coordinates of the present analysis. This research identifies five elements of 'language management' in terms of strategies that are adopted by firms to manage multilingual relationships with their customers and suppliers: 1) employees with foreign language skills; 2) native speakers; 3) local agents and/or distributors; 4) external translators/interpreters; and 5) adaptation of websites. A SME that decides to invest in all five of these fields, thus developing a proper language policy, achieves an export sales proportion that is 44.5% higher than one without these investments.

Unfortunately, as the ELAN report shows, Italian firms seem to be aware of the necessity to support the development of multilingualism and to differentiate their offer to various international markets from a linguistic and

cultural viewpoint, but the related investments are inadequate. In particular, when the Italian framework is compared to that of other countries, it emerges that 55% of Italian firms - more than the European average (48%) but less than Portugal (93%) - claim that they have designed a ‘formal language strategy’. This first datum is crucial, as it should represent a form of awareness that would allow to foster effective strategies according to the needs of the market, but it seems to be more a formal declaration of intent than a real approach. The following annexes provide insightful information to interpret the preferences of firms about measures that should be activated.

Table 1 - ANNEX 3 “Country Comparisons”, ELAN 2007

	France	Germany	Greece	Hungary	Iceland	Ireland	Italy
In order to deal with customers abroad does your company have a formal language strategy?	40%	63%	68%	68%	13%	1%	55%
Has the language competence of your staff ever influenced your company's choice of export markets?	13%	7%	14%	24%	6%	5%	7%
Have you acquired staff with specific language skills due to export needs?	61%	59%	10%	72%	17%	22%	28%
Have you ever employed native speakers full time in your company who support your foreign trade?	15%	44%	19%	34%	17%	3%	19%
Have you ever used local agents and/or distributors who speak your own native language in your foreign markets?	66%	56%	24%	24%	25%	9%	32%
Have you ever employed external translators/interpreters for foreign trade?	23%	74%	48%	46%	53%	4%	39%
Do you ever adapt your website for foreign markets?	49%	74%	62%	70%	55%	5%	61%
Is there any possibility that your company ever missed an opportunity of winning an export contract due to lack of foreign language skills?	13%	8%	0%	5%	22%	1%	8%
Does your company have plans to begin trading in any new foreign countries?	37%	22%	91%	57%	48%	14%	39%
Is your decision of investing based on knowledge of the relevant language/culture?	4%	19%	9%	22%	23%	1%	15%

Table 2 - ANNEX 3 “Country Comparisons”, ELAN 2007

	France	Germany	Greece	Hungary	Iceland	Ireland	Italy
Has your company ever experienced difficulties with foreign customers due to cultural differences?	15%	15%	23%	22%	39%	4%	6%
Has your company ever missed an opportunity of winning an export contract due to lack of cultural competence in any particular country?	5%	4%	5%	1%	9%	0%	2%
Do you keep a record of staff language skills?	92%	38%	64%	91%	14%	62%	17%
Have you ever offered language training to your staff?	47%	54%	32%	49%	52%	19%	32%
Has your company undertaken foreign language training in the last 3 years?	46%	46%	5%	20%	14%	15%	27%
Do you think your company will need to acquire additional expertise in languages in the next 3 years?	41%	50%	23%	56%	50%	9%	52%
Do you think your company will need to acquire additional expertise in country-cultures in the next 3 years?	19%	25%	5%	11%	53%	0%	31%

According to these data, it is possible to state that linguistic management of firms rely on the translation of websites into English and other languages, with a European average of 62%. Italy has equivalent results (61%), while countries such as Norway and Finland reach extraordinary percentages, 92% and 91%, respectively. In contrast, English-speaking countries like the UK and Ireland do not seem interested in this aspect (5%), having English-based websites. The other entries listed by ELAN researchers refer to external translator/interpreter services (used by 39% of Italian firms), local agents (32%), native speakers (19%) and staff with foreign language skills (28%). The latter figure is extremely enlightening because it could explain the unwillingness of firms to offer linguistic training (32%).

Consequently, it could be argued that the majority of businesses, especially in Italy, decide to use other services to reduce investments and to avoid problems pertaining to the hiring processes, as this system would imply an assessment method and related costs. Moreover, considering future projects, despite the fact that 52% of Italian firms are willing to acquire additional expertise in foreign languages<sup>3</sup>, only 39% of them plan to trade in new foreign countries, suggesting two different interpretations. These firms either do not have tools to access international markets or language investments are perceived as lacking consistent returns.

Focusing on language preferences, data obtained by the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy with the LET IT FLY survey (2006) are no less controversial than the previous ones. Half of the firms interviewed have

<sup>3</sup> Even if ELAN report does not provide additional data about Italian firms plans to hire multilingual staff or to train employees in foreign languages.

employed staff with linguistic knowledge, whereas the other half have not. At the same time, 76% of the SMEs claim that it is necessary to know foreign languages, despite the sector of industry, but 51% believe it is not profitable to organise language courses. Similarly, 85.9% of firms consider it is necessary to understand cultures to foster good trade relations, but, for 65.9% of them, low linguistic competence is sufficient (enough to be able to check websites). This is particularly true for English, which is regarded as the most useful language by 99.9% of firms, followed by other options such as German (31.9%), French (25.5%) and Spanish (24.2%) - although several industry sectors and geographic areas may influence these preferences. However, despite the predominance of English, those few firms that decide to organise internal training courses refer mainly to grammar (57%) and not to languages for specific purposes (16.4%), which should represent the proper choice.

The data discussed in this paper define an extremely complex framework, even questionable, in which, notwithstanding the compromise between costs and profits, there are deeply rooted stereotypes that lead to confused/confusing business choices that affect revenue growth negatively.

The above-mentioned data refers to surveys promoted by the European Union and the Italian government to investigate the choices operated by SMEs in terms of policies. Focusing on the peculiarities of multilingualism, it is also worth to refer to the ‘economics of multilingualism’. In fact, it is an indisputable fact that a strict relationship between languages and stereotypes exists, especially regarding the labour market (Grin et al., 2010). Therefore, despite clear signs of emerging production fields and the demand for different employee skills, as argued by different researchers (Bloom & Grenier 1993; Grin & Vaillancourt 2009), language learning and training are still deeply influenced by ‘traditional approaches’. This occurs at both university and business levels for what concerns choices and strategies, as for example grammar contents in syllabi and grammar-translation approach in classes. The question thus arises: is an investigation of the supposed economic value of languages feasible? Attempts to provide an answer have been made by REAL (Research Group “Economics and Language”) at Humboldt University in Berlin. As Gazzola (2016) points out, the vast majority of people do not recognise the existence of an ‘economic value’ for varied reasons. It would be impossible to define this, due to language’s pivotal influence on collective identity and cultural heritage. Moreover, it has also been proved that a multilingual context is still perceived as a further complication, as English is regarded as the most effective choice, representing the language of economics.

In order to investigate this acknowledged predominance, as well as its effects on economic systems, the principles of efficiency and equity lay the foundations for a potential ‘objective’ analysis (Gazzola 2016). Indeed, equity has to be assessed from a technical rather than an ethical point of view, and refers to the distribution of languages, for example, within education systems or government bodies. On the other hand, efficiency represents the economic



efficiency<sup>4</sup> of an investment pertaining to foreign languages and strategies to be adopted for training, as shown in the ELAN (2007) report. Consequently, this choice implies both material and immaterial advantages for the involved companies, considering that human capital and wage differentials represent the most significant economic indicators. Grin and Vaillancourt (2009) report a specific interdependence between economic and linguistic variables, which affects wage differentials and, at the same time, also the GDP of a country, since linguistic knowledge can be regarded as a productive factor. However, focusing on the obtained data, researchers claim that there are no absolute values, but, rather, the economic value of a language depends on the reference context. As further proof of what has been written, Ginsburgh and Weber (2014) identify the following values for the Italian context: an income premium of approximately 18% for knowledge of English, 21% for French and 28% for German. These are data that should be considered to define education policies, especially for those degree courses that deal with economics and politics. Moreover, Gazzola (2016) stresses the importance of deconstructing stereotypes, such as those about the high costs of multilingualism or the presumed equalitarian power of the English language, because, on the contrary, it inevitably empowers native speakers, granting them the best career options.

To refer to this background of references, paying specific attention to the Italian context portrayed by LET IT FLY survey (2006) and the preferences for linguistic strategies that were analysed by ELAN (2007) research group, it emerges that there are remarkable differences between choices operated by small and medium enterprises in the Northern regions and those located in the Southern ones. For this reason, the focus of the present analysis will be narrowed in order to analyse the peculiarities of the Sicilian context, paying specific attention to the complex reality of Family Business, in order to investigate the choices made by firms to localise websites as part of a comprehensive linguistic policy.

### **Methods:**

As claimed above, to the best of my knowledge, this is the first study to consider Sicilian SMEs linguistic policies and related choices to manage linguistic diversity and multilingual communication. For this reason, the present analysis moves from a questionnaire submitted to Sicilian small and medium firms (Benzo & Di Gregorio 2016), whose data were presented at the IFERA – RDW 2016, “Family, Firms and Institutional Context: Analysing the role of the context in the development of the family unit for Family Business Research”, which was held in Catania in 2016. In light of the obtained data, some interviews were conducted with CEOs, in order to understand if linguistic choices were operated consciously, as a part of a linguistic policy, or if they were the result of available tools. Finally, an analysis of websites was performed, and relevant cases are discussed in the last section of this paper.

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<sup>4</sup> Efficiency is the extent to which an investment is expected to convert (or has converted) its resources, or inputs (such as funds, expertise, time, etc.), into economic results in order to achieve the maximum possible outputs with the minimum possible inputs.

### **The economics of languages - an analysis of the Sicilian SMEs context and Family Business:**

As maintained by R. J. Fernandes Coutinho and R. Meneses Moutinho (2012), “for many individuals the two most important dimensions in their lives are family and work and, as such, it is understandable the potential of such firms”. These businesses are characterized by shared traditions, values and language, and their main concern is the local market of the territory where they live. However, currently, there are several examples of firms that have freely decided to invest in foreign markets, in order to export products and ‘identity’ at the same time, and internationalisation has become a necessity. As T. Kontinen and A. Ojala (2010) point out, and as AUB Observatory highlights in its 2014 report, family businesses are forced to internationalise in order to survive in an increasingly competitive market.

Family small and medium enterprises can access global market in different ways, and their development can be described according to several paradigms, as for example, the Uppsala Model by Johanson and Vahlne (2003), the Network model by Johanson and Mattsson (1988), the eclectic paradigm by Dunning<sup>5</sup> or the concept of Born-again global companies, as theorized by J. Bell et al. (2001). The first model describes the gradual approach to a foreign market, both in terms of actions to be performed, as export via either independent representatives or establishment of a foreign sale subsidiary, and in terms of geographic distance, since families start expanding in markets of close countries. The Network model highlights international development related to the networks that firms create with other foreign firms, as a system of competence, shared values and trust. While the paradigm of Dunning, on the other hand, describes advantages in terms of ownership, location, and internationalisation. These approaches imply several phases and gradual developments, but it is possible to detect some cases where internationalization is the result of different decisions. If firms decide to evaluate new opportunities because of unexpected events (as, for example, the substitution of a manager), this process may generate Born-again global companies.

Moving from these observations, one question arises: putting aside the differences among these models of development, what are the crucial factors that influence the results of the internationalisation process? In order to provide an answer, it is necessary to examine the nature of Family Businesses, to assess main characteristics in terms of facilitating factors and constrainers. In fact, internationalisation implies opportunities and challenges. There are numerous strengths, such as “management continuity, the longevity of family values, the persistence of the entrepreneurial spirit of the founder over the generations” (Faraci, 2011), a long-term vision, a high level of trust and an efficient decision-making process. However, these factors can become constrainers if, for example, the fear of losing control or the will to undertake risk-adverse strategies prevent entrepreneurs from taking advantage of opportunities.

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<sup>5</sup> Introduced in 1976 and re-edited in 2015.

Considering facilitating factors, in addition to those mentioned above, it is possible to list strategic alliances. In their article published in the *Family Business Review* in 1993, R. L. Svinth and K. L. Vinton write that “a likelihood of success for an international joint venture increases when both partners are family-owned businesses. These firms have shared values and goals that enable them to bridge cultural barriers more effectively than publicly held corporates”. Furthermore, several researchers (especially, Fernández and Nieto 2005, 2006) have found that incoming generations can positively affect internationalisation, since new generations are better prepared to encourage new processes from the point of view of education, even if the problem of experience may arise. Finally, there are five unique characteristics of a Family SME that can determine a successful policy, as human capital, social capital, survivability capital, patient capital and characteristic governance structures (Kontinen and Ojala, 2010).

On the other hand, concerning constrainers that can affect internationalisation, it is possible to refer to the reviews by T. Kontinen and A. Ojala (2010) and R. J. Fernandes Coutinho and R. Meneses Moutinho (2012), where some of the restricting factors are described as managerial. They argue that family members are reluctant to accept external knowledge, or to hire external managers because they fear to lose control of their firms, they lack commitment to internationalisation or they do not trust international capabilities of managers in general.

The most commonly accepted explanation for an unsuccessful process is the lack of financial resources, even if an irregular monitoring of the international environment plays a pivotal role. Indeed, specific attention paid to the knowledge of the foreign markets in terms of customers and competitors, as well as regular attending of international occasions (such as fairs, etc.), would provide additional possibilities for the creation of effective networks to approach different markets.

As it is possible to infer from the previous paragraphs, there are several factors that have to be considered in order to have a clear overview of a SME internationalisation, but successions deserve an in-depth analysis. In fact, according to Fernandes Coutinho and Meneses Moutinho (2012), “the connection between the two spheres ‘succession’ and ‘internationalization’ is based largely on the skills and orientation to management that the subsequent generation features. The orientation to management of the successor may be composed of four variables – management skills, international experience, work experience outside the family sphere and professionalization of the successor”. In their research, aimed at defining the relationship between internationalisation and generational turnover, they identified new variables that were not listed in previous literature, especially concerning Portuguese firms, as significant involvement with the company before the succession, external factors not attributable to the company, motivations for entry into the company, internal path followed and other languages speaker. This last variable “refers to the importance of being skilled and fluent in other languages, as facilitator of the internationalization process” (Fernandes Coutinho and Meneses Moutinho, 2012). It is arguable that linguistic competence is crucial for monitoring foreign markets to find new possibilities to invest, to know new potential customers and

to create stable links with other foreign Family Businesses. For this reason, as Kontinen and Ojala point out, further research is needed concerning international opportunity recognition, as a part of the topic area of managerial strategic issue, where current knowledge is focused on the domestic perspective of managers, risk-avoiding strategies and unstructured management of internationalisation.

Even though some studies (Fernandes and Nieto 2005; Fernandes Coutinho and Meneses Moutinho 2012) have attempted to analyse the impact of key factors on Family SME internationalisation, as for example managerial skills, generational conflicts or economic commitments, and, on the other hand, other studies have focused on linguistic knowledge of firms (Ginsburgh and Weber 2014) without investigating the family dimension and its potentialities, the aim of the present research is to cover this gap. An analysis of Family Business strategies for internationalisation is proposed, paying specific attention to language knowledge, and taking into account the determinants defined by T. Kontinen and A. Ojala: commitment towards internationalisation, financial resources and the use of financial resources to develop necessary capabilities.

The present study focuses on commitment towards internationalisation, in terms of human and financial resources, because they are linked from the point of view of foreign languages. In fact, financial resources are not enough if there is a lack of a “right” approach, characterised by flexibility and willingness to undertake the risks of a foreign market. Moreover, in order to promote a successful linguistic policy, as the basis for a successful internationalisation approach, several resources are needed to invest in training.

Referring to the Italian background, even though the percentages related to SMEs that rely on export and strategies to find new customers are almost the same (31.3% of Italian SME, 29.7% of southern firms), only 8.4% of southern businesses are present abroad (the Italian percentage is 16.7%) and 10.3% attend trade fairs regularly (the Italian percentage is 18.8%). It could be argued that these results derive from the difficulties experienced by southern Italian businesses in dealing with foreign markets, as declared by 78.9% of the interviewed firms, even though only 1.7% of them invested in language learning (LET IF FLY 2006).

In order to fill a data gap related to Sicilian firms, which present peculiar characteristics, such as family management structure, especially in those fields that are more linked to culture, such as agricultural and food businesses, Benzo and Di Gregorio (2016) carried out an analysis of the context, the results of which were discussed during the IFERA – RDW in Catania<sup>6</sup>. According to the replies, 47.4% of the firms interviewed do not import, with a slightly lower percentage exporting (31.6%). Answers given to explain this shortcoming of an international approach range from a lack of interest in foreign markets (7.7%) to a lack of opportunities. Specifically, 23% claimed opportunities never occurred; 15.4% did not know how to create opportunities; and 15.4% never sought opportunities. The most perplexing datum is that 30.8% of firms assert to be unable to identify

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<sup>6</sup> Presenting a paper entitled “The Internationalization of Family Businesses: the Role of Linguistic Competences in Sicily”.

the reason for their difficulties, thus demonstrating a lack of any awareness about the internationalisation process as well as the role played by languages and cultures, and contrasting the data proposed by the ELAN report.

Despite the fact that several different countries are engaged in trading relationships, for example Australia, China, Japan, Romania, Turkey and Pakistan, communication is fostered thanks to English, while other secondary options are respectively French, Spanish, German and Russian. This choice is due to the fact that 66.7% of firms believe that English is adequate to their business, even if 22.2% admit it is the only language they know, representing their working language. As regards the role played by culture, the choice of one language implies consequences. ELAN results show that 6% of Italian firms have experienced challenges with foreign customers as a result of cultural differences, with 2% of them missing the opportunity of winning an exportation contract. Regarding Sicily, this percentage increases, since 36.8% of firms have encountered difficulties linked to the habits/customs of foreign interlocutors. Moreover, 26.3% of them have claimed that their customers, who are not native English speakers, often do not like using this language as a *lingua franca*, preferring to use their native language.

In terms of preferred solutions, referring to those described by ELAN researchers, the firms that were interviewed have websites with English sections, while 84.2% of them have employed staff with language skills, 15.8% rely on freelance interpreters, translators or agencies. Language courses are organised by 52.6% of the sample firms, even though these courses are managed by external experts. The other half state it is not possible to organise courses owing to lack of financial resources. An interpretation that is supported by the fact that only 7.1% of firms consider training useless. Choosing these strategies as part of coherent linguistic policies, firms have seen an increase in sales up to 100% thanks to language investments, although further investigation is needed to compare the money invested and returns to wage differentials.

Referring to the data discussed in this section, it is arguable that, even if English is accepted as the language of economics by the vast majority of employers and employees, without questioning the main assumptions of this interpretation, it represents a solution to reduce costs and, in some cases, it is the only foreign language available. The adoption of this perspective could explain a marked preference for the translation of websites with international contents, as will be discussed in the following section.

### **Web translation and localisation process:**

In 2011, the CELAN project results were published for the first time, and, although its researchers recommended considering it a living report, due to the ever-changing nature of the subject matter, nevertheless, there are some findings that continue to be valid:

- Multilingualism has become a necessity for the growth of businesses, and it is strictly connected with customer care and customer relationship management; its related multiculturalism is regarded as a determinant element to ensure trust in partnerships.

- Small and medium firms are strongly interested in web-based language needs, more than larger companies.
- Businesses in the Agro and Manufacturing industry seek the development of language management strategies and emphasise foreign languages as tools to promote their activities and present their products.

These findings form the premises of this analysis, which is focused on the choices that firms make about website translations, as well as localisation, referring to the Agro industry, a field in which products and culture are consistently linked.<sup>7</sup>

As was argued above, the surveyed businesses (Benzo & Di Gregorio 2016) relied on the translation of their websites, which was seen as the best compromise between language flexibility and profitability. Although language capability and multilingual functionality have been considered key components of the firm internationalisation process, investments are still not prioritised. For this reason, it is worth going a step further. Although the ELAN report enlisted website translation among those successful strategies that should form language management policies, PIMLICO - *Report on Language Management Strategies and Best Practice in European SMEs* (2011) - provides new evidence. Researchers argue that it is necessary to create culturally adapted websites in various languages and to design e-commerce platforms that are underpinned by localised contents.

Unlike previous research projects, PIMLICO focused on forty companies<sup>8</sup> defined successful according to a set of criteria. Among these criteria, website translation plays a pivotal role, especially in regard to cultural adaptations. The companies interviewed recognise the importance of English to manage international relationships, but they find that this language works better if it is combined with other languages. For this reason, some of them use English as *lingua franca* for written communication and the local language for socialising or face-to-face contact, because, as the former German chancellor Willy Brandt stated, “if you sell something, speak your language, but if you want to sell something to me, you have to speak in German” (PIMLICO 2011). These companies have real multilingual websites, in which more than three foreign languages are used and contents are culturally adapted, thus linking general information about the company to specific elements that characterise local contexts.

The majority of the websites<sup>9</sup> considered for the present analysis are not multilingual as all of them are structured using two main languages, Italian, as the mother tongue, and English for translations (exceptions are represented by a few firms that have chosen French as a third language). English is used as *lingua*

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<sup>7</sup> As the global market is deeply affected by this type of demand, it is fundamental to carry out different researches according to the different industry sectors because, as has been previously pointed out by several scholars, such as Noguera and Siscart, language and cultural barriers vary across sectors.

<sup>8</sup> Small and medium-sized international companies across 27 EU Member States.

<sup>9</sup> The analysed cases refer to 30 Family firms that operate in the East side of Sicily, in the provinces of Catania, Messina, Enna and Siracusa, in the agricultural sector and food industry.

*franca* for international texts without specific cultural references, especially in those websites that do not have a section dedicated to e-commerce. In fact, some e-commerce sections present traces of localised contents, for example, currency or the description of some typical products (such as almond pastries, etc.), while other firms which address national dealers or wholesalers seem to be interested in providing general descriptions of the businesses. This structure recalls what Jimenez-Crespo (2013: 9) described as follows: “the emergence of the WWW localizations started to flow in the opposite direction, with a constant stream of websites being localized into English around the world. Nowadays, it is commonplace across the planet to find websites localized into that international *lingua franca* in order to address global audiences”.

According to the results of this research, it is possible to detect crucial differences among the products that belong to the Agro industry. For this reason, four different brands were considered, as these companies produce four pillars of Sicilian exports: pastries (*Condorelli*), chocolate (*Antica Dolceria Bonajuto*), fruits (*Oranfrizer*) and wine (*Cantine Nicosia*).

The first brand, *Condorelli*<sup>10</sup> (I.D.B. S.p.A), has become one of the most important producers on the island, turning a family business on the eastern side of Sicily into an international excellence. Their production deals with typical Sicilian pastries and nougats and their marketing campaigns are based on the concept of ‘uniqueness’. The father of the present owner, who founded the firm in 1933, worked on a recipe to make nougat softer, thus creating special products, *torroncini*, which are now famous all around the world, with different chocolate flavours. Analysing its website, there are some key elements that deserve attention, such as the main language in which changes and updates are made. In this case, Italian texts are translated into English and they can be defined as international from the point of view of contents, without specific cultural elements. The e-commerce section provides a few localised components, such as currency, for example.

When website translations are under scrutiny, one of the first things to bear in mind is that, due to the most recent technology, translators have to work on decontextualised strings extracted from the main page, as described by Pym (2011). In fact, web editors create a website with several pages, each of them composed of various elements. Consequently, in the vast majority of cases, texts are not translated simultaneously by the same person. Several translators are involved, thus implying that they can work on a single part, not on the whole page, and the risk is that they fail to recognise the nature and purpose of given texts. The same has happened to this website. Since small nougats are typical Sicilian sweets, translators could have adopted two approaches, domestication or foreignization (Venuti 1995), using the term nougat and additional explanations or the term *torroncini* with other information. Here, instead, the translators used both, without clarifying the reason for such a choice. It is important to clarify that, even though this firm had an exclusive relationship with foreign distributors (B2B), currently, it has an online platform to sell its sweets to private customers

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<sup>10</sup> [www.condorelli.it](http://www.condorelli.it)

(B2C), leading to some changes to its website, without the creation of localised contents. Referring to the currency for example, it is worth noting that, despite the use of English as *lingua franca*, currency refers to a specific English-speaking country, Great Britain. Furthermore, the fact that the translated section has not yet been completed suggests that its creation has not occurred simultaneously, thus implying content asymmetries.

Moving from this premise, it is possible to state that, according to the categories of Schewe (2001), *Condorelli* website could be defined as a standardised text (one website for all countries), even though there is an alternative to euro as currency, or a mode of standardisation, as suggested by Pym. It could also be defined as monarchist, referring to Lockwood's typologies, because the main aim of this promotional strategy is to maintain a global image for the brand. In the past, as sustained before, the image of the brand has been associated with the uniqueness of its products, while, currently, it has moved to the concept of 'variety',<sup>11</sup> because the firm produces nougats as well as almond pastries, chocolates, etc.

During an interview<sup>12</sup> with the owner and CEO, Giuseppe Condorelli, it was possible to fill the information gap about their choices. Despite the difficulties related to the description of these products to foreign customers, due to the high number of cultural-bound elements, English is used during trade fairs and meetings, without the support of freelance interpreters. The reason for this choice is simple: the owner believes that English is suitable to manage his international relationships and his products speak for themselves. Furthermore, as regards approaches to enter new markets or to win over cultural resistance, he states that his firm has considered countries where these Sicilian sweets are well accepted, for example Mediterranean countries, which share the same passion for nougats and dried fruits.

"The oldest chocolate factory in Sicily" is the slogan used by *Antica Dolceria Bonajuto*<sup>13</sup>, which is one of the leading chocolate producers in Modica. Like the first case, *Bonajuto* has also undergone several changes and, currently, it operates at various levels: as a brick-and-mortar shop in Modica, as a supplier in a B2B relationship and using an e-commerce channel for customers. Moreover, it offers several other products connected with tourism, such as guided tours and tastings inside their premises.

Comparing this website to the previous one, it could be argued that they share the same characteristics in terms of content standardisation, and they also

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<sup>11</sup> "TORRONCINI AND MUCH MORE! Condorelli is goodness for all tastes": this is the new slogan that promotes the variety of products and it is the first screen users see. The following refers to the old slogan, "ALWAYS A PLEASURE", with a specific reference to the possibilities that are offered by the new e-commerce channel: "Condorelli's sweets, where and when you want".

<sup>12</sup> This interview took place during IFERA-RDW Catania, in February 2016. Mr Condorelli was one of those entrepreneurs who were invited to discuss Family Business in Sicily. After his presentation, he agreed to answer questions about the role played by foreign languages in the development of his business.

<sup>13</sup> [www.bonajuto.it](http://www.bonajuto.it)



partake in the same monarchist approach, but the e-commerce section has different degrees of localisation. The products are described using a foreignizing approach (for example the term “*Mpanatigghi* biscuits” to describe typical biscuits made in Modica and Ragusa), but there are no alternatives concerning currency (euro is the only one).

It is interesting to notice that, in the past, this website has used three languages, Italian, English and Japanese, but it was completely restructured in 2016, eliminating the Japanese section. Unfortunately, it was not possible to interview the CEO; therefore, further investigation is needed to explain the reasons for this change. The old website had international texts, without cultural elements, even related to the use of colours, because the main aim was to promote the same image of the brand in all countries. A policy that has been affected by existing links with tour operators, which could be regarded as a tool to access new markets.

The last two cases<sup>14</sup> studied refer to *Oranfrizer* and *Cantine Nicosia*. The former supplies oranges and other citrus fruits, as well as juices, while the latter is a famous winery. These two cases show striking similarities: for example, they share the same ‘volcanic’ origin, thus creating a strong link between their products and one of the best-known Sicilian treasures, Mount Etna.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, also in these cases, contents are standardised using English as *lingua franca*, even if *Cantine Nicosia* website is not completed, and there are no traces of localisation, due to the fact that they supply international distributors. Both of them use promotional strategies that are culturally embedded. *Cantine Nicosia*, a well-established family firm with several generations working together, has decided to hire an external manager who speaks Italian, English, French, German and Flemish. In contrast, relying only on English, *Oranfrizer* has won a place in the Japanese market<sup>16</sup> through a system of marketing strategies based on the quality of their products (stating that they are “The nature experience of all senses”) and Sicilian culture. For example, in Japan, in seeking to tempt customers, they sell oranges that are cut in half to show the ruby red colour of Sicilian oranges (the famous *Arancia rossa*), to mark the difference between these oranges and those produced in other countries. In several trade fairs, as demonstrated by the pictures of the website, they are presented with an old three-wheeled van produced by Piaggio (which can be considered as a Sicilian symbol of agriculture), which resembles the old Sicilian carriage, painted by a Sicilian artist Venera Chiarenza.

All of these cases exemplify different approaches to international relationships, where, even if English is the *lingua franca* in websites, specific attention is paid to the promotion of Sicilian culture and, in the cases of *Oranfrizer* and *Cantine Nicosia*, a specific interest in foreign cultures, especially in linking different cultures. Furthermore, in line with the analysis performed by Jimenez-Crespo (2013:62), it is possible to argue that the analysed websites

<sup>14</sup> [www.oranfrizer.it](http://www.oranfrizer.it); [www.cantinenicosia.it](http://www.cantinenicosia.it)

<sup>15</sup> “We are the result of a Volcanic experience” is the slogan of *Oranfrizer*.

<sup>16</sup> Even if they have removed Japanese translation from their website.

attempt at promoting hypertextual global coherence, which can be defined as “the overall linkage of hypertext constituents as mediated by the general theme addressed in the text, as well as by its rhetorical function in a wider context”. In fact, this typology of coherence is achieved thank to “distinct coherence cues that increase the global coherence in self-selected reading paths, such as navigation menus, breadcrumb navigation maps, headings, titles or topic indicators” (Jimenez-Crespo 2013: 62).

### **Conclusion:**

As identified by the ELAN report, there is an evident relationship between internationalisation and language knowledge. Furthermore, since international opportunity recognition is the pivotal element of a successful internationalisation strategy, it is possible to argue that the best strategy among those adopted by SMEs is to provide linguistic courses for managers and employers, in order to link professional competence to linguistic skills. Concerning Family small and medium enterprises, the best choice would be to invest in linguistic knowledge for future generations, in order to avoid the syndrome of losing control with an ‘external’ manager. It is also true that this choice could be wrong if new generations do not show enough experience to recognize good opportunities, as Kontinen and Ojala (2010) argue. The solution could be that of a transition period with an international manager to support incoming generation takeover.

Has the presence of the family an impact, positive or negative, on the acquisition and exploitation of linguistic competence? Is the linguistic competence something that family firms manage through specialising family members? These are some questions that could arise when dealing with this topic. Considering the data that are discussed in this paper, it is possible to answer that the presence of family can have a positive impact on the acquisition and exploitation of linguistic competence, in terms of both opportunities and financial support. In fact, thanks to family support, incoming generations can have the possibility to study abroad and to foster language knowledge or to do internships in several sectors of industry, without the pressure of finding a job. Even if, to have positive results, two conditions are required: incoming generation ambitions have to be fulfilled by Family Businesses, or belong to a close field, and the dialogue between generations is fundamental, in order to preserve the ‘spirit’ of the firm, and at the same time, to take advantage of new opportunities in terms of technology and foreign markets.

According to the results discussed in this paper, it is arguable that several Sicilian small and medium enterprises base their language policies on English as *lingua franca*, but it is not possible to ascertain whether this is due to a lack of knowledge of other foreign languages or a precise choice in terms of optimisation and cost reduction. The cases discussed above may be used as an extreme exemplification of the kind of compromise that firms strive to achieve. Although in the past, some firms have attempted to provide alternative website translations, currently, a shared approach is detected to create standardised contents to promote a single image of a brand. An approach that is partially subverted when

dealing with other marketing strategies or face-to-face meetings, especially concerning the Agro industry, where the goal is to promote Sicilian culture and, at the same time, establish contact with foreign cultures.

Concerning specific sectors of industries and languages, it is possible to consider some interesting results. Fernandez Coutinho and Meneses Moutinho (2012) identify specific languages related to specific products, as for example Garment sector, and in Sicily, each sector is characterised by several languages. This could be related to the history of the Island, characterised by multilingualism, or to tourism and hospitality, as for example the choice of Bonajuto family, who produces chocolate in Modica: their website is translated in English, French, German and Japanese. Furthermore, although the language chosen is English, Sicilian firms try to overcome cultural barriers, in order to create commercial relationships based on trust, differentiating products using advertising and labels, as for example *Oranfrezzer*. In order to sell oranges in Japan, they produced boxes with two halves of an orange, to allow people to see the inner part of the fruit. Sicilian Family Businesses do not sell simple products; they sell pieces of Sicily.

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