CHAPTER 18

DIALECT CHRONOTOPES

Politics, Nation and Re-Imaginings

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INTRODUCTION

Dialects in Italy – *dialetti* in Italian – always look simultaneously to the past and towards the future. They provide a model for how things were done in the past and an opportunity for building on this past, either in contrast to it or in continuity. For many Italians, dialects are seen as the practices of the peasant, the subaltern, 'our' ancestors, the campanilistic other, or sometimes, as just what we do. They exist in contradistinction to Standard Italian, its Other in terms of their nature and use, their sounds and nuances. And they scale to Italian geographies and histories, pointing to moments of division as well as unification, as they resonate with Dante's judgements and Manzoni's voices, Gramsci's predictions and Bossi's declamations.

Dialects are also vernaculars – that is, everyday language varieties – that millions of Italians use in the course of their daily lives. According to ISTAT (2017), 32.2 per cent of Italians speak both Italian and a regional dialect, and 14 per cent predominantly use dialect. From my own linguistic anthropological and ethnographic research in the town and province of Bergamo in Lombardy, it is clear that these statistics are complicated on the ground, as patterns of language choice and code-switching are complex and shaped by numerous language ideologies, social contexts of use and individual aspirations, as well as patterns of residence, educational background and class status (Cavanaugh 2008, 2009). Many Italians, including Bergamaschi (the plural of Bergamasco, or those who live in the town and province of Bergamo), use their dialects in everyday life, and value them for a range of reasons.

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This chapter, however, will have little to say about contemporary everyday practices of speaking dialect(s), important as they are. Instead, it focuses on the language ideologies of dialect, 'the beliefs and attitudes that shape speakers' relationships to their own and others' languages, mediating between the social practice of language and the socioeconomic and political structures within which it occurs' (Cavanaugh 2020: 52; see also Schieffelin et al. 1998; Woolard 2020). As representations of collective order, language ideologies do not just describe what language is or means; language ideologies take form through how people use language, and the ends towards which they put it. To attend to the language ideologies of dialect(s) is to focus on what people use them to accomplish, both in speaking them, but also in speaking about them. Dialect language ideologies marry ideas about what dialects are and should be, how their speakers sound and what their appropriate use should be, always within particular historical moments and anchored in particular regional or local places.

Due to their embeddedness in particular places, dialects have long been useful in various ways, from the *commedia dell'arte*'s reliance on local and regional stereotypes to the Northern League championing them as evidence of a specifically northern Italian way of life that should be politically and economically protected. Moments when dialect or dialects become the focus of scholarly, media or popular attention, as well as whenever there have been movements to save or keep or discriminate against the dialects, can signal deep political wranglings about the meanings of the nation state, its relationship to particular histories, and the nature of political and cultural belonging.

To illuminate the shifting scales of time and place animated in dialect language ideologies, I consider dialect to be a chronotope, or a meaningful fusion of space and time. According to Mikhail Bakhtin (1981: 258), 'every entry into the sphere of meanings is accomplished through the gates of the chronotope', which he defined as 'the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships' (ibid.: 84). Bakhtin focused on literary chronotopes within the novel, contrasting, for example, the time space of the epic with that of the romance, charting how scales of time and place aligned with how characters moved within and across them. For example, the first line of Alessandro Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi* (*The Betrothed*), which begins '*Quel ramo del lago di Como . . .*' (that branch of the lake of Como), indexes, or points to, and begins to establish a chronotope that encompasses the world of Manzoni's novel (in the north of Italy, during a time of war and plague in the early seventeenth century), as well as the time and space of the Italian nation state and its construction, as it became a model of and for standard Italian, read by generations of Italian school children. It also indexes both the space of the classroom, where each line of the novel is scrutinized and often memorized, and the role of such classes as forging an Italian-speaking

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and nationally oriented citizenry. The chronotope of this novel thus scales across the intimate and the national, the personal experience and the shared. One element of this chronotope is the well-circulated anecdote that while writing it, Manzoni went to Florence to '*lavare i panni in Arno*' (wash his laundry in the Arno river), that is, to make sure all the language in it sounded as close to Florentine – the dialect that became Italian – as possible, washing away any trace of his own dialectal roots in Milanese. Dialect and standard, then, exist in tension even in the text held up as the most representative of standard Italian.

Dialect language ideologies take various forms in different moments at different times, from the conversational to the entextualized, the most casual to the floor of parliament, but they are always formatted chronotopically. To talk about dialect in Italy sometimes points to all dialects, from Sicilian to Venetian, and at other times to particular dialects, and their embeddedness in specific histories of use, communities of practice, and ideological associations, like the expansiveness of southern dialects seen in both speakers' practices and their doubled consonants, or the social conservativeness of northerners as reflected in their dialects' clipped dropping of word-final vowels. Like *I Promessi Sposi*, dialect language ideology chronotopes scale variously, encompassing at times a specific yet broad notion of 'not-national', that is, the local, and at other times pointing to particular locales and the histories, geographies and ways of living peculiar to each.

In the rest of this chapter, I focus on three historical moments when dialect language ideology chronotopes took particular shape, drawing on my own research in Bergamo to centre and ground this discussion in the ethnographic and historical particularities of one dialect and place. These moments are inherently iterative, drawing on previous formations, but also extending them and shaping them to serve contemporary needs. Dialects remain anchored to local places, but how they relate to the nation state, citizenship, and inclusions and exclusions shifts over time. All three examples focus on moments that involved the entextualization of Bergamasco, when writing in or about the dialect occurred. The tensions between Standard Italian – born a literary, written language that slowly became a spoken language with much effort – and dialects, some with literary traditions, but most largely spoken languages, come to the fore in these moments of transformation. I start with a discussion of a prominent dictionary of Bergamasco published in the 1870s, which continues to serve as a point of reference in the century and a half since.

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DIALECTS, DICTIONARIES AND IMAGINING THE NATION

Dictionaries are prime instruments of linguistic representation, tools for standardization and textual assemblages that imply the completeness of the language forms they represent. They are prime mediating mechanisms of language ideologies, representing languages as if they were complete, discrete sets of words, inevitably drawing boundaries around what a language is and is not. They may also create or maintain equivalences across languages, constructing particular relationships among them in the process. Although they contain examples of words in use, they are not – could not be – representations of all possible ways in which language is used, given how much variation characterizes everyday language use across speakers and contexts. But as objects, materialized concrete things in the world, they may take up space on desks or bookshelves (or websites), and thus have a presence that reaches far beyond their individual components. The language ideologies they embody are thus concretized into physical objects in the world, taking on weight and authority in the process.

Such is the case with the Bergamasco dictionary written by Antonio Tiraboschi, a scholar of local language and culture in Bergamo. *Il Vocabolario dei Dialetti Bergamaschi Antichi e Moderni* (The Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Bergamasco Dialects), published in 1873, was based on Tiraboschi's fieldwork with Bergamaschi in rural areas across the province, and offers two volumes of Bergamasco words with Italian definitions. Through its definitions, the ways in which it is organized and the implicit and explicit comparisons and connections it makes between Bergamasco and other linguistic varieties, the *Vocabolario* is a complex chronotope that has had multiple lives.

The original text was assembled and written during the Risorgimento, as the *questione della lingua*[1] or 'language question' about what language would be the official language of the nascent nation state of Italy was being debated and settled. What Italians would speak was an essential dimension of building Italians, a citizenry that would, or should, evidence their shared orientation towards the state through the language they shared. Linguist Tullio De Mauro (1972) has estimated that at the time of unification of the nation state of Italy in the 1860s and 1870s, only 2 per cent of Italians spoke Italian. No one spoke it as a first language. While the story of how what is now Italian (a variety of Florentine, as mentioned above) was selected to be the national standard has its own complex history beyond the scope of this chapter (but see Cavanaugh 2008; Kramer 1983; Perrino 2018), what can be said here is that the issue of what Italians did and should speak is also always an issue of belonging to and orientation towards the nation state. Italian was held up as the linguistic means through which Italians would be

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brought together as citizens of the emerging nation state, while dialects, through their multiplicity and the variation they represented, were threats to this unity.

Tiraboschi's efforts seem to have offered an alternative view of this, for while Italian figured prominently in his work in many ways, he, and the many scholars with whom he communicated about their work on other dialects, portrayed their efforts as dovetailing with and not counter to this national unifying project. Invited to be a member of the nascent Italian Society of Dialectology, Tiraboschi presented the materials he collected as part of a rich Italian inheritance, with no contradiction between the local and the national. Hence this work was produced in a particular moment towards particular scholarly and potentially political ends, and represented Bergamasco as an Italian language, to be approached via Italian, and valued as one of Italy's many linguistic varieties, not as something qualitatively different or dangerous.

The *Vocabolario* itself was rather encyclopaedic and a closer look at some of its pages reveals the comparative viewpoints that Tiraboschi assembled. On its pages, extensive linguistic variation is normalized and even celebrated. Bergamasco is translated into Italian, but also compared to other languages. The work presents variation within Bergamasco, sometimes locating it geographically, sometimes not. Phonological variation is indicated through spelling variation as well as the use of diacritics (accent marks of various sorts) – for example, '**Mèz** *Vedi* **Mès**', where the word for 'half' is shown with two different pronunciations of the word-final consonant ('z' versus 's'), a geographical variation that still occurs today across the province. In other definitions, abbreviations are used to indicate that the term is particular to a specific location in the province, such as the use of 'V.S.M.', which stands for *Valle Seriana Media*, or the Mid-Seriana Valley.

There are also comparisons to other language varieties, such as Tuscan, as in the definition for **Moeì** (Bergamasco for cigarette or cigar butt), which reads:

> Comunemente si dice della Parte del sigaro che si getta per essere troppo corta. In Toscana dicono *Mozzetto*, *Cicca*; e *Ciccajuoli* chiamono coloro, che vanno per la via ricogliendo [sic] *cicche*.
> (Commonly said for the part of the cigar that is thrown away for being too short. In Tuscany, they say 'Mozzetto', 'Cicca', and 'Ciccajuoli' is what they call those who run to collect 'cicche'.)

Other dialects, such as Venetian, are also points of comparison, but so are French, Greek, Provençal and Latin, where similarities are drawn between words, common usages or sayings. For instance:

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> **Molagua** V.S.M. Lenza, Filaccione. Strumento da pesca che consiste in un filo ben lungo armato di ami inescati. Questo strumento è chiamato *Togna* dai Veneziani e *Dirlindana* o *Molegna* dai pescatori del Lario.
> (**Molagua** V.S.M. [Mid-Seriana Valley] Line, troll line. Fishing tool that consists of a long line armed with baited hooks. This tool is called 'Tonga' by the Venetians and 'Dirlindana' or 'Molegna' by the fishers of the Lario [Lake Como].)

The definition here is brief, descriptive and to the point. But in making comparisons to what Venetians and fishermen from Como call the same item, this definition makes them equivalent, an equivalence that is commonplace, unremarkable. In doing so, it naturalizes the assumption that there will be different words found – and used – across the peninsula, without necessarily ranking some as better or more correct than others. Similarly, the definition above for **Moeì** gives the equivalent in Tuscan, distinguishing Tuscan from Italian itself, but also highlighting how the particulars of Tuscan itself are worthy of attention and interest.

More local variations are also presented as interesting and worthy in various ways. There are references to the appearance of particular terms in poetry, as in the definition for the word for 'best', which gives variants of everyday terms '**Migliùr, Mïùr**' but also an example from poetry – '*e nell'Assonica* **Mejùr**' ('and in Assonica['s poetry]') – before giving the Italian definition, '*Migliore*'. Repeated references like this to the use of particular Bergamasco words in poetry also portray the value of the dialect as not just spoken but as capable of literary expression, tapping into long-standing Italian tendencies to rank writing above speaking, and poetry above virtually all other written forms (Brevini 1999; Cavanaugh 2017). Similarly, the entry for 'to die' (**Mör**) has both a long list of euphemisms for 'die' and also a longer list of sayings that include death or dying in them, as well as information on how the word is used in non-human realms (for plants or about fire or embers). All in Standard Italian, this list demonstrates the metaphorical richness of how death is used to talk about life in Bergamasco.

Bergamasco is also an intimate, homely language, in the words it includes, but also in the uses that are alluded to and represented here. In the definition for '**Miao**' (meow), Tiraboschi offers the Italian equivalent – *Miao* – and then the following definition in Italian: '*Parola colla quale imitiamo la voce che manda fuori il gatto quando miagola*' (Word with which we imitate the voice that the cat sends out when it meows). Note the use of the first-person plural, or 'we' conjugation of the verb, that 'we' (Bergamaschi) imitate this voice. This voicing is echoed as well in the calque, or layering of one language's syntactic patterns into another's, represented in the phrase '*manda fuori*' or 'throw out'. In Bergamasco, phrasal verbs like this one (that is, verb phrases that include adverbs or prepositions) are extremely common; while they are not technically incorrect in Italian, a more common and standard

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way to put this would be '*emettere*' (to emit, utter, issue). In definitions such as this, a community of speakers – to which the author belongs – is conjured and represented, again, as equivalent to other language communities, Italian included.

So Bergamasco, as represented in this dictionary, is interesting, translatable and equivalent to other languages. It is capable of poetry itself, but also comparable to poetry in other languages, examples of which are occasionally included in the ample definitions. It is alive, in use and portrayed as being used. It is specific, representing foods, tools, places, ways of doing things specific to it, but also capable of abstraction, able to, for instance, talk about death and use death as a way to talk about other things, as other languages are. It has geographical variation within it, with no hierarchy among these variants, but there is also a variety that is simply 'Bergamasco', unmarked and presumably shared by all speakers.

At the same time, the dictionary implicitly addresses a literate audience, one that reads (and presumably writes) Italian, but also Latin, French and other European languages, as well as potentially other dialects. This is an audience who wants to know and would appreciate the text's extensive comparisons. Given the long entries, multiple pronunciations and sheer size of the work, the *Vocabolario* is clearly a text for reading, not for using during interaction, and in its unidirectional translations (Bergamasco into Italian, and not vice-versa), it renders invisible the possibility that someone might want to translate an Italian term into a Bergamasco one. Bergamasco, in this text, becomes something to be documented and deciphered through Italian and comparisons to other languages. As a chronotope, it captures a dialectal world that is alive and well, with its own particularities of place and history, but these particularities are translatable into or equivalent to words and experiences in other places. It is different from Italian, but not antithetical to it, nor threatening in how it represents the world of Bergamasco. The Italy it represents is one that contains much language variation, but that variation is comparable to French, Provençal, even Greek, as examples from each are offered on the same pages as examples from within Bergamo and across other Italian dialects. At the same time, Bergamasco is objectified and contained as it is transformed into the written word, located on the page.

These elements of the dictionary and how it was constructed express and embody language ideologies that portray what Bergamasco is and what it means vis-à-vis the languages that surround it. These ideologies in turn construct a chronotope, bringing together a particular scope of time and expression of place. As a chronotope, Bergamasco in this dictionary is anchored in the province, but also variable across its landscape. It is relatively timeless: its examples and sayings were gathered from contemporaries, representing how 'we' speak. This moment is connected to a continuous past, with no

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comparisons between the past and present, and in this is it similar to other languages of the moment, which represent their own particular worlds but in recognizable ways.

CHANGE AND RESISTANCE: DIALECT IN THE 1970S

Roughly a century after the publication of *Il Tiraboschi*, dialect language ideologies had undergone a number of shifts, and in the 1970s another chronotope of the dialect emerged.[2] The so-called economic miracle of the 1950s and 1960s had initiated a widespread shift in language practices, as more and more Italians had impetus and occasion to learn the standard, through school, mass media and various moments of civil service and engagement, such as serving in the two World Wars together. In the late 1960s and the 1970s, there was a boom in popular music in various dialects across the peninsula, with pop singers such as Ornella Vanoni (with songs in Milanese) and Fabrizio De André (Genoese) demonstrating that dialects could perhaps be safely embraced after these broader shifts towards Italian and away from the stains of dialect (see, for example, Cavanaugh 2009 on the punishments that Bergamasco school children endured for speaking any dialect in school).

In the late 1970s, a series of scholarly books entitled *Mondo Popolare in Lombardia* (Popular World in Lombardy) was published in Lombardy, with volumes focusing on the dialect and folklore of various towns and provinces across the region. Books in the series had titles such as *Brescia e il suo Territorio* (Brescia and Its Territory), *Cultura di un Paese: Ricerca a Parre* (Culture of a Village: Research in Parre) and *Le Parole dei Contadini: Ricerca a Casalpusterlegno* (The Words of the Peasants: Research in Casalpusterlegno). They were based on field research in these communities, and authored by a range of scholars, including sociologists, linguists and folklorists. All focused on what the series editor and author of various pieces across the volumes, Roberto Leydi, referred to as '*il mondo popolare e proletario*' (the popular and proletarian world) (Leydi 1977: 7) in the preface shared across the volumes. In Leydi's preface, '*il mondo popolare e proletario'* was not something of the past (as contemporary stereotypes about Lombardy often depicted it as industrialized and dominated by consumerism) but '*un'altra civiltà, cultura*' (another civilization, culture), '*con una sua visione del mondo*' (with its own view of the world') as well as its own '*voce*' (voice), which could be a model for resisting '*alla deculturazione e all'alienazione*' (the deculturization and alienation) of the contemporary moment (ibid.: 9). As Leydi argued, only through a modification of the relations of production that included the voices of the base could real change be made. And these voices were necessarily dialectal and grounded in specific smaller communities. The point of

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these volumes was not to hasten the integration of this 'other culture' into the world of industry, or to update its variations or document them as they disappeared, but to present them as a way to resist and change the relations of production.[3] Funded and supported by the Department of Culture of the region of Lombardy, their publication, Leydi proclaimed, would result in concrete interventions, effected through libraries across the region.

The series' focus on the '*mondo popolare e proletario*' imagines Italy as a nation built on struggle, but casts the current struggle as one for a just political-economic structure. It portrays a nation state that treats peasants and the proletariat not as holdovers from the past to be dispensed with, but as containing the promise for a contemporary collectivism, a space of resistance and a model of contrast against the ills of industrialization and consumerism that the authors – or at least the editors – saw as characterizing Lombardy.[4] The chronotope recuperates the past as an aid to building a just political-economic future, one with more equal distribution of resources and less hierarchical modes of production. Local ways of doing things – from agriculture and animal husbandry to modes of socializing and the sharing of local stories and songs – in the north, but potentially across the peninsula as well, could be joined together to provide an alternative to the unequal way in which the nation state was currently structured. In this chronotope, the future and the past could be joined to avoid the problems of the present, but only through re-imagining the space of the nation state as one filled with and oriented towards valuing peasant, subaltern and proletarian voices. While the series is much more explicitly oriented towards political-economic structures and social equality, the inclusion of local ways of life and dialects as part of the nation state, and not antithetical to it, echoes Tiraboschi's depiction of a nation built of variation and equivalence.

So perhaps it is not surprising that although the books explicitly focused on the communities they examined, in practice there was much reaching back towards past moments of scholarship, and to Tiraboschi in particular. This is most striking in the volume *Bergamo e il suo Territorio* (Bergamo and Its Territory), which contains multiple pieces dedicated to his life and works aside from the *Vocabolario*. The volume offers material collected by Tiraboschi recuperated from local archives, including songs, stories and an overview of Tiraboschi's life and correspondence with other scholars of dialects across the peninsula, from Florence to Sicily. In the text, the recuperation of Tiraboschi's work and biography emphasizes that Bergamo can boast a history of scholarly endeavour, and creates a continuity between Tiraboschi's efforts and the authors' own. In both, the relationship between the local and the national – as mediated through the presence of dialect – is imagined as vital, and central to a nation state that includes all voices. Rather than the historical disruption that dispensing with dialects represents – for some Italians a

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desirable disruption; for others, one to lament – and that aligns with other social, economic and cultural transformations that occurred during the Economic Miracle decades, dialects and their speakers are brought to the fore as historical constants, which, in the 1970s and 1980s, can be drawn upon to recreate the conditions of everyday life. Dialect language ideologies thus construct a chronotope of an Italian nation full of welcome, useful variation, both linguistic and political-economic, one built on newly excavated evidence of continuity and contiguity with a past before the alienation of industrialization.

RISK AND THREAT: THE LINGUISTIC CONSTRUCTION OF PADANIA AT THE TURN OF THE MILLENNIUM

In late 1999, a group that called itself the ALP – Associazione Linguistica Padana (Padanian Linguistic Association) – began meeting. Padania is the name with which the Northern League, at the time a separatist, pro-northern political party that married its political and economic arguments to championing northern cultural traditions and ways of life, had christened the northern regions of Italy (after the Po river) (Cachafeiro 2002; Levy 1996). The group's name, then, immediately signalled that it was aligned with the League (as it is known at the time of writing). As an instance of what Douglas Holmes (2000) has called an 'integralist' party, the League brought together what were essentially xenophobic stances towards southern Italians and immigrants to critique the Italian state, pointing to the impending loss of local dialects as one example of how the state's effort to unite Italians had produced discrimination against local ways of life, traditions and histories (Cento Bull 1996; Mainardi 1998). This was a moment in which signs with town names written in dialects were popping up all over the north – including across the province of Bergamo – a product of the League's recently achieved positions of power in town councils and other local government. In the province of Bergamo, where a number of small towns had recently elected Northern League majorities, local government entities were supporting and circulating various cookbooks, primers and calendars, as well as offering dialect language classes. Promoting dialect – and railing against the insidious presence of Standard Italian – was a common Northern League stance.

It was certainly through Northern Leaguers that I found my way to the group, whose bimonthly meetings I attended from its inception in the autumn of 1999 through the end of 2000. Francesco and Vittorio, two acquaintances of mine who were staunch Northern Leaguers, urged me to join the group, as they knew I was doing research on Bergamasco. They told

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me the group would be a great place to learn about the value of northern dialects, depicting it as a context for promoting northern dialects, but also for showing how different they were from the standard and other, more southern varieties. They claimed that the group was founded to build connections across dialect communities and find similarities and commonalities across the north. Their portrayal of the group resonated with the dialect language ideologies commonly espoused by the Northern League at that time: that (northern) dialects were inherently valuable, that they were being persecuted and lost as Standard Italian was imposed across communities and that this loss was something that could – and should – be battled through promoting initiatives that focused on writing and recording dialects. Rarely was speaking dialects at the centre of these efforts; much more common was the production or promotion of texts in dialects.

The group was much more varied than I, or I think they, anticipated, however. The head of the group (chosen before I joined, through means that were never explained to me) was a well-respected amateur linguist who had written the definitive Milanese-Italian grammar *Grammatica del Milanese Contemporaneo* (1998), Claudio Beretta. Other group members varied across the meetings, but included people from across Lombardy, and occasionally beyond; some also amateur linguists, like Francesco and Vittorio, others poets, or simply interested parties. Some were vocal in their Northern Leaguist views, but not all. Beretta, for instance, insisted that the group and its undertakings were explicitly not political, but scholarly. This was reflected in the location of the group's meeting, the building that was the seat of the Circolo Filologico Milanese (Milanese Philological Circle), in central Milan, a cultural organization founded in the 1870s to promote foreign language learning.

At the first meeting I attended, in December 1999, about twenty people were present, and we gathered in a large classroom, seated at desks, while Beretta claimed a large desk on a raised platform at the front. Under Beretta's direction, the group agreed to a first step: everyone would produce a list of the hundred most common words in their dialect, with Italian glosses, and send them to Beretta to compile. At our next meeting, set for February 2000, we would discuss these lists and look for points of comparison and similarity across them. But that was about all the group agreed on. More than two more hours were spent discussing what the overall goal of the group and its work would be. Some proponents, like Beretta, argued for the intrinsic value of simply recording northern dialectal variation, which is ample; most saw word lists as the first step in this endeavour, though others wondered how to include grammatical or phonological information as well. A couple of people were very concerned with the issue of orthography, or writing systems, as few dialects had established orthographies, and those that did differed

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greatly among themselves about how they represented the same vowel and consonant sounds. Others, like Francesco and Vittorio, thought that the place to start was to author a political manifesto about the importance of all northern dialects, which would frame their efforts as political. The idea of producing a koiné, or mixed common language, composed from all the northern dialects, which could be embraced and used instead of Italian, was suggested and generally supported, though there was little shared sense of how to proceed with it. The paradox of potentially producing a different hegemonic language to replace the hegemony of Standard Italian, in the face of sliding geographic scales of affiliation and difference (northern, Lombardian, Bergamasco, etc.), resonates with the geographical tensions discussed in Michael Blim's chapter in this volume, where actors constantly have to position themselves within varying geographical, political and social hierarchies. At last, Beretta brought the meeting to a close and exhorted everyone to remember to send him their lists soon.

The early February 2000 meeting included Beretta, and again, about twenty others, including a poet from the town of Crema, a few people from Como and a man in his seventies who informed the group that he was from Sicily but had lived in Milan for forty years and whose home village had a dialect that resembled northern dialects. Francesco, Vittorio and some of their Northern League acquaintances from other places in Lombardy were there. Beretta began the meeting by berating us: only he and one other participant had composed and shared their lists of one hundred most basic words in their dialects before the meeting. Two other people, he informed us, had sent political statements about how Italian and the Italian nation state were killing their dialects and ways of life. Beretta said this wasn't the point, but Francesco and Vittorio, who predictably had sent the statements, argued that it was, and was a necessary step for the group. Otherwise, they pressed, why do all this work? What would it all be in service of?

This question came up frequently in conversations I had with lots of people across the province of Bergamo in 1999 and the early 2000s about the League's efforts to promote the dialect: why now? Why campaign to post the sign for '**Zógn**' next to the one in Italian stating that you were entering the town of '*Zogno*'? Or '**Berghém**' in addition to '*Bergamo*'? Why have the province publish a calendar with events listed in Bergamasco? People who adamantly supported the League argued that posting these signs in dialect and publishing dialect texts were essential moves towards taking their local places back from what they saw as the tyranny of the state of Italy. Those who objected to the League's positions often dismissed these acts as symbolic, nonsensical gestures, which had little practical meaning or effect. But even some people who were sceptical of the League's politics found these efforts appealing, and indeed, they fit into a broader local cultural landscape that

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included dialect poetry readings and dialect theatre performances, many sponsored by a cultural organization founded in the 1920s to support just such local activities. The League and its supporters were not the only voices speaking in support of the dialect at that time, but their efforts often overshadowed others, even those belonging to long-standing organizations.

Multiple language ideologies animated Bergamaschi's relationships with their dialect during that moment. Some people worried about it, some worked to 'save' it, others moved themselves and their children away from it, while others lived their lives in Italian and rarely considered it at all. Bergamasco at this time was a chronotope with various, sometimes conflicting, facets. For those who did not support the Northern League but wrote poetry or attended play performances in dialect, or who participated in the various other long-standing events that featured, or simply took place in, Bergamasco, it existed as a chronotope of 'our place', nested in homes and local theatres, bars and hiking trails, linking the now of speaking and use to a continuous past. Change had come in the 1950s and 1960s, and fewer young people spoke it now, but it was still the ambient flavour of intimacy and home for many. But it was also and at the same time a slightly different chronotope for the Northern League and its supporters and sympathizers, one that looked towards a future in which Italian receded and Bergamasco and all (northern) dialects emerged from the home and family to become public languages, languages of political discourse, public representation and institutional recognition. Both situated the province in relation to the nation, though while for Northern Leaguers this was an inherently political relation, for others it was simply the cultural landscape of the de facto united state of Italy. Once again, we see underlying, recursively repeating tensions between singularities and pluralities (language versus dialects, Italy versus regions, etc.).

A few years later, another acquaintance of mine, long a vocal supporter of the Northern League, gifted me a *frasario* or book of common phrases translated into Bergamasco, Genoese and Milanese that he had compiled. The author shared with me that he had done the work as part of his membership of the ALP, which he joined after I had stopped attending when my dissertation field research ended at the end of 2000. The introduction to the short book stated:

> Questo piccolo frasario padano è dedicato a tutti quelli che vogliono tenere vive le lingue regionali dell'Italia Settentrionale. Speriamo che questo libretto possa aiutare tutti a comprendere meglio la ricchezza, la varietà e l'interesse delle parlate dei nostri luoghi.
> (This small Padanian phrasebook is dedicated to all those who want to keep the northern Italian regional languages alive. We hope that this little book may help everyone better understand the richness, the variety and the interest of the parlances of our places.)

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The book is a list of common words and phrases in the three varieties, offering an Italian word or phrase, followed by the same phrase in each language. For example, here is the entry for the phrase 'what do you do (as a profession, for work)':

> 11. Che lavoro fai? (Italian)
> GE Cös'ti fæ de lòu? [Genoese]
> MI S'te fee de lavorà? [Milanese]
> BG Cosél tò mestér? [Bergamasco]

It is Italian, then, that is given equivalence, flipping Tiraboschi's focus on the dialect as requiring of definition and comparison. Note also the extensive use of representational or orthographic methods to emphasize the differences between these dialects and Italian, as well as between each other, such as diacritics (accents of various sorts, like 'ö' and 'é') and letters (such as 'æ') to represent sounds, word variation (e.g. '**mestér**', the Bergamasco word for work) and contractions ('**S'te**' in Milanese for 'what'). Such orthographic choices foreground linguistic difference, indexing cultural and potentially political distinctions as well. The inclusion of these three varieties may also implicitly elevate them as the most important northern dialects in the north, leaving Venetian and varieties in the north-west as separate, perhaps worthy of their own phrasebooks.

This is a book for those who already know Italian (as indeed is true for nearly all Italians now), to instruct them in how to write and say these words in these three dialects – but only if they know the orthography, whose very differences may hamper as much as enable comprehension for the uninitiated. These three dialects are not historical remnants or folkloric objects of interest here. The explicit references to the dialects' 'richness' and 'interest', coupled with the phrases themselves, which outline a mundane, contemporary existence of work, small talk and everyday tasks and errands like buying gas, finding the right subway stop or asking for an aspirin, depict dialects as the languages of the here and now, as well as languages to be used in public, not just domestic, spheres of interaction. The answering phrases to the question about work above include office worker ('*impiegato*'), store owner ('*negoziante*') and student ('*studente*'), as well as worker ('*operaio*') and farmer ('*contadino*', the same word usually translated as 'peasant'). These are dialects in use, to be used, not treasured or saved. They exist now, utterly equivalent to each other and Italian.

In many ways, this phrasebook distils the ALP's ambitions into their clearest form, producing a chronotope that fuses a modern, unremarkable, everyday now of dialect with a space of variation and equivalence. Italian, in this chronotope, still exists in counterpoint to dialects, but not within a hierarchy – it is just one of many possible varieties that people in

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northern places may speak, or want to speak. An embodiment of the Northern League's efforts to protect and promote local (northern) ways of living and speaking, this phrasebook indexes those efforts and political goals – in this way, it is a moment of dialect becoming useful and visible, though the efficacy of this chronotopic representation, like the others I have outlined here, may perhaps be fleeting.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Dialect language ideologies congeal into particular chronotopes in historical moments when dialects become, again, useful – useful to define political belonging or threat, to renegotiate the structures of the nation state, to reconcile notions of community that span the local and the national. These chronotopes change over time, and in doing so, may transform dialects' historical trajectories and scales of place, though their relation to, and tension with, Standard Italian remain constant.

As a last example, let us return to Tiraboschi's dictionary, which, after its reissue in the 1980s, became a markedly different chronotope than it was when first published. It became an authoritative text, seen to contain the real Bergamasco. The current edition of *Il Tiraboschi* is a grand two-volume set, bound in green and embossed with gold lettering, an object that adorns the bookshelf of anyone in Bergamo even peripherally interested in the dialect and local culture, even those who profess to speak not a word of it. It is securely anchored in Bergamo and its province through this pattern of ownership and the continual references to it by language activists across the province, and its use connects the historical moment captured by the text to the present of its use. 'But is it in *Il Tiraboschi*?' was a question I heard posed on radio programmes about the dialect, in dialect language classes, among poets and playwrights, as people evaluated a word's authenticity at a time when Italian and Bergamasco were commonly mixed in much everyday use.

But the Bergamasco on those pages was one that often no longer existed, given the usual linguistic changes and innovations that had occurred in Bergamasco over time in the interim. The time it represents is both historical and in certain ways imaginary, and the place it indexes is both simple – Bergamo and its province – and diverse in the variation across this area that is depicted. It is imaginary in that it seems to represent a time before, a time when Bergamasco was simply and unproblematically spoken by all, a time sometimes talked about as '*di una volta*', or '**D'öna olta**', in Bergamasco: once upon a time. Valuable but inert and contained, Bergamasco as embodied by *Il Tiraboschi* at the end of the twentieth century was no threat to the

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nation state, but also not the vibrant addition to the national assemblage of languages and dialects depicted in its pages in the 1870s.

Unlike the ALP phrasebook, *Il Tiraboschi* pushes the dialect out of the contemporary realm, into a non-political, explicitly cultural or folkloric space, where embracing it can be achieved as easily and safely as putting it on a shelf. The competing dialect language ideologies linked to each of these texts are evident in these differences, and indicate as well that dialects remain available as useful resources to negotiate ongoing tensions around national belonging, the nature of Italian citizenship and the relation of local places to the nation state.

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NOTES

1. Text in italics = Italian; text in bold = Bergamasco. In quotations, italicization follows the original text.
2. It should be noted that there were several other historical moments in which dialect language ideologies congealed into other chronotopes over the century between these two moments.
3. By the time I was gifted a number of volumes and bought others in the early 2000s, however, it appeared to me that they had become and were treated as evidence of a particular Bergamasco past.
4. This perhaps echoes the anthropology of Ernesto De Martino, particularly his *Rapporto Etnografico sul Lamento Funebre Lucano* (Ethnographic Report on Lucanian Funeral Lament), which appeared in *Mondo Popolare e Magia in Lucania* (Popular World and Magic in Lucania) (Rome: Basilicata) in 1975.

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