

*Trilingual Talk in Sicilian-Australian Migrant Families:  
Playing out Identities Through Language Alternation.*

By Nina Rubino.

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312 pages.

Relatively little has been done to examine the experiences of migration, settlement, and acculturation of migrants to Australia from Sicily and its minor islands, particularly the Aeolian archipelago, although they have been going to Australia since the mid-nineteenth century and, with their descendants, comprise what is arguably the country's oldest and most numerous community of Italian Australians. Studies such as Stephen Castles et al. (1992), Gerardo Papalia (2014), Gaetano Rando (2014), and Ellie Vasta (2014) have concentrated on a number of aspects of migration and settlement—Castles et al. on Italian Australians in general, Papalia, Rando, and Vasta on the Australian Aeolian community. Nina Rubino's volume *Trilingual Talk in Sicilian-Australian Migrant Families* is thus a welcome addition detailing at an idiolect level the language practices that have accompanied such processes.

Rubino analyzes in detail the linguistic practices of two families with specific socioeconomic and language characteristics, although her study might have profited from additional definitions: for example, naming the actual place of origin since local language practices in Sicily can be highly variable. Despite the absence of this and other potentially relevant details, the families can be taken as indicative, although not completely representative, of the Sicilian Australian community. These qualitative data are complemented by quantitative data taken from a sample of about one hundred respondents—hardly as large a sample as the author would lead us to expect—that can again be taken as indicative but not necessarily representative. The conclusions that Sicilian Australians communicate by using a mix of three languages (Sicilian, Italian, and English) could thus have profited from appropriate qualification and discussion of possible bias.

The book presents an initial chapter dealing with Italian and, particularly, Sicilian migration to Australia. It then proceeds to discuss bilingualism in Sicily and trilingualism in Australia (chapter 2) and then to focus on approaches to multilingual talk (chapter 3). The data obtained through fieldwork undertaken with two Sicilian Australian families are analyzed and discussed in chapters 4 and 5, while chapter 6 presents the results of a quantitative study, and the final chapter provides a summary and conclusions.

The literature review is quite good on the linguistic situation in Sicily, previous studies on bilingualism and trilingualism, and other linguistically related matters as well as the theoretical and methodological framework; it is, however, somewhat light on studies on language use among Italians in Australia. Admittedly, very little has been done specifically on Sicilian Australians, but Luisa Baldassari's work on language use and related identity aspects with a sample of second-generation respondents that included some Sicilian Australians would have been worth a mention (Baldassari 1999).

The qualitative data presentation and analysis chapters give detailed and interesting examples and analyses meticulously cross-referenced to relevant theoretical and empirical studies. The commentary, however, could have benefited from a discussion

of possible bias in the different approaches to data collection in the two families. The transcription of the excerpts is accurate, and generally good English translations are provided, although in some cases fine-tuning would be needed—for example, *fare di più* (90) really means *do any more* (rather than *do much more* as the book has it); *mègliu accussì* (101) should be rendered *better like this* (instead of *even better like this*); *è chiù chiù di menu* (171) is much better translated as *it's much less* (rather than just *it's less*). The quantitative survey data provide interesting information on linguistic patterns and sociolinguistic parameters observable in the sample, even if it is unfortunate that questions on reading and writing skills in Sicilian were not included (240), given that written Sicilian can claim a centuries-long existence and is practiced by some Sicilian Australians. Additionally, the data relating to marital status in the quantitative sample would have been worth cross-referencing to Vasta's (2014) detailed analysis on the same topic.

There are a number of issues in the sections discussing sociocultural factors that result in claims that are at times simplistic and occasionally not quite as up to date as possible. It is puzzling to note that Rubino did not consider any of the material presented at the "Emigrazione Eoliana in Australia" (Aeolian migration to Australia) conferences organized by Marcello Saija (University of Palermo), held in Sydney and Melbourne in November 2011. The conference presentations on the sociocultural and historical perspectives on the Sydney and Melbourne communities from the Aeolian islands, arguably the largest Sicilian grouping in Australia, could have usefully augmented Rubino's survey, particularly as it appears that one of the families in the study could be from the Aeolian Islands since in one of the conversation excerpts analyzed mention is made of a locality on the island of Lipari. In this respect it is unfortunate that the survey of the dialects of Sicily (34–41) does not include any mention of the distinctive features of the dialects of the Aeolian Islands, such as the existence of diphthongization, not present in other Sicilian dialects.

Rubino refers to "the prominent role played by Sicilians in . . . migration . . . to Australia" without specifying what that role is and without at least noting that other regional groups can also claim "prominent roles." She provides an outline of post-World War II migration without considering that the prewar Sicilian Australian (in particular Aeolian) communities were relatively sizable, probably more numerous than Northern Italian groupings by the end of the 1920s, and had already formed distinctive community networks that promoted linguistic and cultural practices. The claim that Sicilian Australians have a "strong sense of regional identity" (3) is somewhat problematic since community practices suggest a Sicilian Australian sense of identity that is more local than regional—for example, the Aeolian Islands Association (initially constituted in 1903), the Poggiorealese St. Anthony Association, the Sortino Club, and many other local groups. This tendency to oversimplify sociohistorical factors can also be noted in the discussion on Sicily, for example, the claim that Sicily participated in Italy's transformation from a mostly "agricultural country to a modern industrialised society" (166) is highly misleading given the current dependency of the Sicilian economy on tourism and construction and Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) data indicating that Sicily has the highest proportion of poor families with respect to the rest of Italy (Italian National Institute of Statistics 2014).

The conclusions that Sicilian Australians communicate by using a mix of three languages would thus have been better explicated using stronger contexts. Rubino's study clearly proves that two Sicilian Australian families engage in this practice and that a small sample of Sicilian Australians uses all three languages in clearly designated domains, although the presence and extent of mixing do not emerge from the analysis. Despite the risks of so much concentration at the microlevel, the findings can be taken as indicative of the linguistic practices of part of the Sicilian Australian population, although the extent to which these practices occur remains unknown. It would have been worthwhile discussing the larger picture of Sicilian Australian linguistic and cultural practices—among others, the fact that some families keep English/Italian/Sicilian or English/Sicilian relatively distinct; possible switching from one Sicilian dialect to another by specific speakers (as in the case of a family in Perth from the Aeolian island of Filicudi, who switched from their dialect to that of Capo d'Orlando because their neighbors were from Capo d'Orlando); the written dimension of Sicilian; and the production of oral and written literary texts in Sicilian by Sicilian Australians—in relation to the findings. Nevertheless, the volume can be considered a valuable contribution to the study of patterns of language use among Sicilian Australians and does suggest themes for further investigation that could perhaps lead to a richer analysis of the topic.

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