

**Marta Lupica Spagnolo:**  
**Negotiating ‘authenticity’ in Italian in Transit practices  
in Berlin**

**Abstract:**

In this presentation, I address the notion of *authenticity* through the lens of Italian-based multilingual practices, for which I introduced the label “*Italian in Transit*” (liT; Lupica Spagnolo 2023). liT skills are acquired in informal settings by multilingual migrants and refugees during their migration or escape routes in Italy and are occasionally reactivated, particularly for “phatic” purposes, after resettlement in other countries (Lupica Spagnolo 2025b). In this sense, the notion of Italian in Transit raises the question of what it means to speak “authentic” Italian language and to be an “authentic” Italian speaker abroad (see, i.a., Coupland 2003 for a general debate).

In the first part, I will draw evidence from the GörliPark corpus (Lupica Spagnolo 2023), which consists of 25 interviews with liT speakers from sub-Saharan West Africa working as street vendors in a Berlin park. Their liT practices display several acquisitional, contact-induced, and refunctionalized features. However, a focused study on the use of the intensifiers *molto* and *tanto* (both meaning ‘very/much/many’ in Italian) shows that their distribution closely mirrors the predominantly spoken input participants were exposed to in Italy (Lupica Spagnolo 2025a). This invites us to reconsider what counts as “authentic” competence in Italian (MacDonald et al. 2009; Creese et al. 2014).

The second case study relies on the RestIta corpus (Lupica Spagnolo & Gorla forthcoming), which includes narrative video interviews and linguistic landscape data collected in Italian restaurants in Berlin managed by people of non-Italian origin, particularly from the Balkans and Maghreb. By triangulating linguistic landscape practices with the stances expressed by staff in interviews, this analysis (Lupica Spagnolo & Gorla forthcoming) reveals how participants engage with ideologies of “linguistic authenticity” (Woolard 2016), at times strategically mobilizing them to market products. Some participants are “*doing languages*” (Auer 2022), implicitly or explicitly endorsing an additive view of multilingualism and a “pure” Italian linguistic identity. Others, by contrast, are “*undoing languages*” through translingual practices (García & Li 2014), thereby constructing both linguistically and semiotically hybrid Italian identities.

## References

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