

INTENSIFIERS IN ITALIAN IN TRANSIT: TRACING BIOGRAPHICAL EXPERIENCES THROUGH LANGUAGE PRACTICES

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper investigates the use of intensifiers at the morphological/lexical level, particularly focusing on the adverbs/adjectives/pronouns *molto* and *tanto*, both meaning ‘very/much/many’, and *troppo*, ‘too much/many’ (also: ‘very/much/many’ in colloquial Italian), in multilingual practices based on the Italian language, for which I propose the label ‘Italian in Transit’ (hereafter: IiT; Lupica Spagnolo, 2023). IiT skills are acquired by migrants and refugees of non-Italian origin during their migratory or escape routes in Italy and are occasionally reactivated after their onward migration to other countries. Given Italy’s geographical position, (fragments of) Italian – alongside other (trans)language resources learned in transit (countries), like Spanish or Arabic – are increasingly incorporated into the repertoires of highly multilingual mobile speakers with complex biographical trajectories and linguistic backgrounds. Thus, their analysis offers valuable insights into the ‘superdiversity’ (Blommaert & Dong, 2010) of language acquisition and contact scenarios in contemporary societies.

The dataset for this research, the GörliPark corpus, serves as a case study to provide a basis for the analysis of IiT. It comprises 23 interviews with IiT speakers from sub-Saharan West Africa working as street vendors in a park in Berlin, Germany. The GörliPark data reveal that IiT practices, which are acquired and (re)used in extremely precarious communicative situations, exhibit distinct linguistic features compared to previously analyzed Italian learner varieties acquired in unsupervised settings in Italy (Giacalone Ramat, 2003), and to Italian-based contact varieties independently developed outside the peninsula (Berruto, 1991). These traits include, for instance, specific code-switching patterns that highlight the language relationships within the participants’ superdiverse repertoires (Lupica Spagnolo, in press^a), the generalization of present infinitives to convey background information especially in narratives (Lupica Spagnolo, 2023), and innovative sentence negation constructions, such as *(non) più* ‘(not) more’ and *non mai* ‘(not) never’ (Lupica Spagnolo, in press^b). Furthermore, as they primarily serve phatic functions after remigration (Lupica Spagnolo, in press^a), IiT practices are usually reactivated in different language domains compared to Italian heritage languages (Di Salvo & Moreno, 2017), as well as to parallelly studied Italian varieties of onward migrants in the UK (Goglia, 2023).

The present study is grounded in a sociolinguistic approach to language acquisition and contact research (Geeslin, 2022). Studies in this field explore how macro- and micro-sociolinguistic factors – such as diatopic, diaphasic, and diastratic variation, as well as social networks or prestige – affect learners’ production and comprehension of second, third, or further languages (henceforth: L2, L3, etc.) in both formal and informal settings.

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In particular, recent works (Davydova, 2022) emphasize the interplay between frequency, salience, and usage norm complexity, in determining the success or challenges experienced by L2 learners in the acquisition of variants of specific sociolinguistic variables. In doing so, they underscore the centrality of the input received (see already Schuchardt, 1909), and the role of individual biographical-migratory experiences and language contact ecologies in language learning processes.

Intensification strategies are a heterogeneous, open class of linguistic devices that increase (or decrease) the (scalar) value and/or the assertive or epistemic strength of the items they modify, either qualitatively or quantitatively (Dressel & Merlini Barbaresi, 1994; § 3 for more details). Due to their inherent salience in the input and their variation across registers and age groups (Ito & Tagliamonte, 2003), they provide an ideal playground for analyzing the impact of sociolinguistic factors on language acquisition and contact.

In this paper, I first present an overview of the types of intensifiers used in the GörliPark corpus, thereby highlighting similarities and differences both across IiT speakers and in comparison to Italian as the target language (henceforth: TL).

Thereafter, I focus on the distribution of two intensifiers/quantifiers, i.e. *molto* and *tanto* ‘very/much/many’, that are largely interchangeable in Italian (Mazzaggio & Stateva, 2023), but whose distribution is highly unbalanced in the GörliPark corpus. The aim is to identify the linguistic and sociolinguistic factors that may influence their usage patterns in the collected interviews, such as their syntactic function as adjectives (ADJs), adverbs (ADVs), or pronouns (PRONs), the duration of participants’ stay in Italy or Germany, and knowledge of other languages.

Furthermore, I examine the occasional use of *troppo* ‘too much/many’ to convey high intensity rather than excess, as in the utterance from the GörliPark corpus *G11: io parlo italiano da un po’ non è de troppo* ‘I [have been] speak[ing] Italian for a while, it’s not for too much [=much]’. IiT partially shares this feature with youth and informal varieties of Italian, as well as colloquial French: e.g., *troppo bello* and *trop beau*, both meaning ‘very beautiful’ in marked contexts (Napoli, 2015). Furthermore, general overextensions of *troppo* to mean ‘very/much/many’ also occur in contact varieties based on Italian or other codes that have arisen independently in highly multilingual environments abroad (Berruto, 1991). By qualitatively examining the discourse-pragmatic and prosodic properties of *troppo* in the GörliPark corpus, I show how its overextension may be interpreted as a linguistic trace of the unsupervised modes of acquisition and use of IiT in Italy, and thus indirectly shed light on the interviewees’ biographical-migratory experiences.

This paper addresses the following research questions:

1. What types of intensifiers do IiT speakers in the GörliPark corpus use, and with what frequency? What are the similarities and differences in their distribution in IiT compared to Italian as TL?
2. What linguistic (e.g., part of speech of the intensifier and/or modified elements) and sociolinguistic factors (e.g., length of time spent in Italy or Germany, contact with other known languages) influence variations in the intensifier usage patterns in the interviews?
3. What is the relationship (if any) between the linguistic and distributional features of the intensifiers and the mainly unsupervised modes of acquisition and use of IiT in Italy and, consequently, the interviewees’ biographical-migratory experiences?

This paper is structured as follows. After summarizing the participants’ superdiverse language biographies and itinerant acquisition of IiT in Italy (§ 2), I define the concept of intensification used in this study, providing examples of its morphological/lexical realizations and variation across different Italian varieties (§ 3). § 4 outlines the annotation criteria and introduces the reference corpora for spoken Italian, which serve as a baseline

to assess potential variation in IiT. § 5 presents the analysis and discusses the results, while § 6 draws some conclusions and suggests directions for future research.

2. A CASE STUDY OF CONTEMPORARY SUPERDIVERSITY

2.1. *The GörliPark corpus*

The GörliPark corpus comprises 23 recordings ranging from short conversations to biographical interviews totaling about 270 minutes (around 20,900 transcribed tokens), supplemented by approximately 50 unrecorded conversations. The participants – all male and mostly from sub-Saharan West Africa – are street vendors in a park in Berlin’s multilingual district Kreuzberg at the time of the interview.

The interviewees’ highly superdiverse language repertoires may be defined as ‘truncated’ (Blommaert & Dong, 2010), comprising (fragments of) codes acquired more or less extemporaneously in various settings and biographical moments, and for different purposes. For relevant metadata on the GörliPark corpus participants included in this study – covering languages spoken, length of stay in Italy and Germany, and Italian regions of residence – see Table 1 in § 5.1.1.

Specifically, most interviewees were born in Gambia, Senegal, Guinea, Mali, or Ivory Coast, areas characterized by extensive individual and community multilingualism. Some participants reported attending school in their home countries, while others had no experience with formal language instruction. After leaving their birthplaces, they often traveled through several African countries, coming into contact and sometimes learning on the move numerous language varieties, such as English and Arabic, before reaching Italy, mainly by crossing the Mediterranean.

All but three of the participants lived in various Italian regions for periods ranging from 9 months to 11 years and acquired Italian in informal settings (§ 2.2 for more details). While this led to great variability across speakers, an analysis based on the form and position of sentence negation showed that all interviewees, except one², have likely progressed beyond a pre-basic stage and speak Italian learner varieties ranging from basic to post-basic (Lupica Spagnolo, in press^b).

In the Berlin park, the participants report primarily communicating with each other in Mandinka, while using English and, less often, German in interactions with potential customers. They also occasionally reactivate Italian-based multilingual practices, mainly for ‘phatic’ purposes, such as to attract passersby’s attention. Additionally, IiT sometimes serves as a kind of ‘(anti-)shibboleth’ code, strategically used (or deliberately avoided) to index shared biographical-migratory experiences within the group (Lupica Spagnolo, in press^a).

Finally, it is important to note that data collection began in 2018 and has continued intermittently to the present. Thus, despite sharing the same social space, not all participants belong to the same social network. The possible emergence of innovative linguistic features in their interlanguages is therefore not always directly influenced by one another, suggesting parallel but independent developments.

² This participant (G03) also does not use any intensifiers in his interview and is thus excluded from the present analysis (§ 5).

2.2. Itinerant acquisition modalities of Italian in Transit

A qualitative analysis of participants' self-reports in their language biographies reveals that they acquired Italian in three main ways:

1. Informal acquisition: Most participants acquired Italian informally in Italy through unsupervised interactions in a limited number of highly multilingual settings, such as migrant and asylum seeker reception centers, workplaces, and on the street. These informal and often asymmetrical learning modalities reported by the GörliPark corpus participants align with recent sociolinguistic studies on similar groups of forced migrants and refugees from sub-Saharan West Africa still living in Italy (Mocciaro, 2020; D'Agostino, 2021).
2. Formal learning: Some interviewees occasionally attended language courses for migrants and refugees in Italy, though drop-out rates were high. According to self-reports, the main reasons for leaving school were time constraints and the need to earn money to remit to families. However, most participants express positive attitudes towards formal language learning during our conversations.
3. Acquisition outside Italy: Three participants (G10, G17, and G32) never lived in Italy or stayed for only one week, but acquired (fragmentary) Italian skills in Germany, facilitated by their prior knowledge of Spanish and/or Catalan. Since their acquisition trajectories differ significantly from those of the majority of participants, these three interviewees are excluded from the present analysis. No participants report contact with Italian in their birth countries, although this cannot be ruled out for all IiT speakers, especially from the Horn of Africa or the Maghreb.

Examples (1) and (2) from the GörliPark corpus illustrate IiT's primarily unsupervised language acquisition modes in multilingual work environments in Italy. Below each example, relevant metadata are provided, i.e., birth country, number of months spent in Italy and Germany, Italian regions of residence, and number of known languages, if available (see also Table 1 in § 5.1.1). English translations are literal, and non-target IiT features (e.g., lack of verbal or nominal agreement) not studied in this paper are standardized for readability. Transcription conventions are listed in Appendix 1.

(1)

- 1 G22: c'è grosso mercato – TAnto mercato <<non-target word> itaianis>
there is big market – MUch market <<non-target word> Italians>
- 2 – senegalesi africani [...] al mercato io fatto vende la (pausa)
– Senegaleses - Africans [...] at the market I made sell the (pause)
- 3 <<German> klamotten> – scarpa si – per quello capisce italiano
<<German> cloths> – shoe[s] yes – for that [I] understand Italian
(Senegal; 30 m. ITA (Apulia, Lombardy); 108 m. GER; languages: 13)

(2)

- 1 G19: io lavoro:: ehm mercato mercato [...] parlo italiano poco [...]
I work uhm market market [...] [I] speak Italian a little [...]
- 2 <<German> meine:r> – CApo capo <<English> I talked with my>
<<German> my:> – boss boss <<English> I talked with my

- 3 capo – amici ci~HÀ (pausa) amici poco poco amici
boss – friends there~[I]~have (pause) friends few few friends
(Senegal; 48 m. ITA (Molise); 16 m. GER; languages: 9)

In (1), G22 explains that he understands Italian because he worked selling clothes and shoes in a large (literally *grosso* ‘big’ and *tanto* ‘very/much/many’; line 1) market frequented by people from Italy, Senegal, and other African countries. Similarly, in (2), G19 states that he speaks some Italian from interacting with his boss while working in a market, though he had very few (lit. *poco poco* ‘few few’; line 3) friends.

Examples (1) and (2) are noteworthy not only for their content – that is, their illustration of Italian learning modalities and settings – but also for their linguistic features. In addition to inserting lexical and functional words from other languages (in this case, German and English), the participants employ Italian intensifiers in distinctive ways. For instance, G22 in (1) employs the ADJ *tanto* ‘very/much/many’ in an innovative, non-target way to modify the singular countable noun *mercato* ‘market’, as well as uses the ADJ *grosso* ‘big’ for the same referent in a target-like manner (line 1).

Moreover, G19 in (2) employs a syntactic reduplication, *poco poco* ‘few few’, at line 3. Unlike repetitions caused, for instance, by disfluencies (e.g., *mercato mercato* or *capo capo* in lines 1 and 2), syntactic reduplications, where two or more repeated constituents work like complex words, are typical and potentially highly productive intensification strategies in Italian (Grandi, 2017 and § 3). This is also true for several other varieties spoken by the GörliPark corpus participants, such as Mandinka and Guinea-Bissau Creole, where reduplications are both common intensification devices and productive strategies for word formation (Holm, 1988: 88-89). The use of these and other morphological/lexical means to express intensification by the interviewees is the focus of this study.

3. INTENSIFICATION STRATEGIES

3.1. *Forms, meanings, and functions*

Intensification can be defined as an open semantic-functional class of linguistic devices whose primary function is to modulate upward or downward the meaning and/or the assertive or epistemic strength of the items they modify, either qualitatively or quantitatively (Dressel & Merlini Barbaresi, 1994). This study focuses specifically on intensification strategies at the morphological/lexical level, excluding other types of intensification, like prosodic (e.g., vowel lengthening, emphatic stress), semantic-syntactic (e.g., exclamatives, hyperboles), or pragmatic-textual (e.g., left-dislocations, negation; Anscombe & Tamba, 2013 for an overview). Moreover, I concentrate only on intensifiers that reinforce upwardly the elements they combine with (§3.2 for more details).

Morphosyntactically, intensifiers can belong to different parts of speech (henceforth: POS), such as ADVs, ADJs, or PRONs, as illustrated by ex. (3), (4), (5) from the GörliPark corpus on Italian language uses in Berlin. They can also modify elements across various POS, including ADJs, ADVs, verbs (ex. 3), nouns (ex. 4), and utterances/speech acts, or also not apply to specific items when working as PRONs (ex. 5) (Napoli & Ravetto, 2017: 4).

- (3) G24: parliamo TANTissimo – italiano io parla: di più italiano qua
che:: tedesco
we speak very much – Italian I speak more Italian here than German
(Ivory Coast; 108 m. ITA (Lombardy); 108 m. GER; languages: 8)

- (4) G16: tanta gente tanta gente parla italiano
many people many people speak Italian
(Guinea; 60 m. ITA (Sicily, Lazio, Sardinia, Campania); 3 m. GER;
languages: 7)
- (5) G26: sono tante che parlano l'italiano anche se non lo sanno
benissimo
[there] are many that speak Italian even if [they] don't know it very well
(Gambia; 60 m. ITA (Friuli-Venezia-Giulia); 60 m. GER; languages: 5)

Semantically, intensifiers enhance (or diminish) the intensity with which a property holds or an action/state occurs (Rainer, 1983: 2). This modulation can be qualitative, such as increasing in assertive or epistemic strength, e.g. *X is absolutely/really Y*, or quantitative, e.g. *X is very/too much Y* (Dressler & Merlini Barbaresi, 1994: 416-420; see § 3.2 for more details). Though they typically modify inherently gradable elements, intensifiers can also apply to non-gradable items, as in *è molto sposato* 'he is very married' (= 'he is deeply committed to his marriage') (Quirk *et al.*, 1985: 469). In these cases, interpretation relies heavily on context and/or shared knowledge (Beltrama, 2016: 4-12).

Apart from the complex interaction with 'gradability', another area of blurred distinction involves the functional categories of 'intensification' and 'quantification' (Labov, 1984: 48-49; Athanasiadou, 2007: 559-561). Many indefinite and universal quantifiers can carry intensive values without requiring additional intensifying markers. Examples include *tanto* 'very/much/many' in ex. (3) – (5), or *tutto* 'all', as seen in the GörliPark corpus extracts *tutti buio* 'all [=completely] dark' and *ti dico tutto* 'I tell you everything [lit. all]'. In this paper, I therefore treat intensification as an umbrella term that encompasses readings between intensification and quantification, which often overlap in conversational examples (see § 4 for the annotation criteria).

Pragmatically, intensifiers often act as 'markers of subjectivity' (Athanasiadou, 2007: 554). They index the speaker's stance toward what is being said and therefore often work as implicit evaluative devices, for instance, in narratives (Labov, 1984: 48). Beyond enhancing involvement and tellability, they may also serve as politeness strategies aimed at softening requests and refusals (Fiorentini & Sansò, 2017: 175) or exaggerating interest in interlocutor's statements (Dressler & Merlini Barbaresi, 1994: 420).

Furthermore, intensifiers often perform 're-elaborative' functions (Sobrero, 1993: 437-438). This means that they are used to refer to and, simultaneously, align, disalign, or renegotiate previous statements, whether from the interlocutor(s) or the speaker themselves (Cimaglia, 2010). Consider, for instance, the phrase *é bello, anzi bellissimo* 'it's beautiful, actually, it's absolutely beautiful', where the speaker overstates an initial positive assessment using the Italian intensifying suffix *-issimo* (Dressler & Merlini Barbaresi, 1994: 421-425). In connection with their multiple functions, intensifiers' interpretation is often highly co(n)text-dependent, conveying positive, negative, or ironic stances (Napoli & Ravetto, 2017: 3) and indexing interactional moves from agreement to rejection or correction (Sobrero, 1993: 437-438), depending on the co(n)text.

Finally, intensifiers can also perform crucial textual functions. For instance, they are particularly effective in foregrounding specific statements or marking climaxes within speech sequences (Dressler & Merlini Barbaresi, 1994: 426-428). As discussed in § 5, these pragmatic properties may enhance the salience of some intensifiers in discourse, making them more learnable in informal settings.

3.2. Types of intensifiers and their variation in Italian

As mentioned in § 3.1, this study only focuses on intensifiers that express a general reinforcing effect or a shift toward the positive end of a scale, categorized as EMPHASIZERS and AMPLIFIERS by Quirk *et al.* (1985: 583-597)³. Conversely, DOWNTONERS – which scale the intensity downwards, such as the approximator *almost* or the minimizer *scarcely*, among others (Quirk *et al.*, 1985: 597-602) – are not examined here. In the Italian literature, Quirk *et al.*'s (1985) functional taxonomy is often overlaid by a classification into at least four types of intensifiers based on their morphological/lexical properties (Grandi, 2017; Cimaglia, 2010). The latter differentiation also informs the definition of types of intensifiers in this paper.

Specifically, according to Quirk *et al.* (1985: 583-589), EMPHASIZERS comprise forms like modal and speech-act ADVs, such as *really*, *definitely* and *frankly*, *simply*. Following Athanasiadou (2007), I also include in this category some focusing scalar ADVs when used with intensifying value. In Italian, this class comprises, among others, the ADVs (*per davvero* and *veramente* ‘really/very’, as well as *proprio* ‘really/evenly’, the emphatic reflexive *stesso/a* ‘x-self’, and other ADVs ending in *-mente*, like *notevolmente* ‘considerably/widely’, *particolarmente* ‘particularly’. Overall, these ADVs reinforce the speaker’s commitment to the truth value of (part of) an utterance without necessarily modifying gradable items, like in *he really may have injured innocent people* (Quirk *et al.*, 1985: 583).

In contrast, AMPLIFIERS scale the modified element upward and fall into two open classes: MAXIMIZERS, like *completely* and *totally*, denote the highest extreme of the scale, while BOOSTERS, like *highly* and *much*, refer to high, but not extreme values. Especially BOOSTERS tend to be constantly expanded with new items replacing semantically bleached ones (Quirk *et al.*, 1985: 589-597).

In Italian, AMPLIFIERS are composed of ADVs, ADJs, PRONs of degree or quantity, such as the BOOSTERS *molto*, *tanto*, *parecchio*, *assai*, all meaning ‘very/much/many’, and the MAXIMIZERS *tutto* ‘all/completely’ or *troppo* ‘too much/many’. Furthermore, Italian AMPLIFIERS may also be formed using affixes, such as *-issimo*, *arci-*, *bis-*, *extra-*, *iper-*, *maxi-*, *mega-*, *stra-*, *super-*, and *ultra-*, which yield forms like *simpaticissimo* or *arci/iper/ultrasimpatico*, all derived from *simpatico* ‘nice’ (Grandi, 2017 for an overview). Notably, the superlative and relative suffix *-issimo* is currently very productive, combining with both gradable and non-gradable ADJs and nouns, especially in colloquial speech and advertising, e.g., *primissimo* ‘the very first’ or *partitissima* ‘big match’ (Beltrama, 2016). Analogously, the prefix *stra-* is very frequent in colloquial Italian and can apply to several bases (Grandi, 2017: 58).

As mentioned in § 2.2, another typical intensification strategy in Italian is syntactic (also: expressive) reduplication. This strategy can be applied to almost all POS, with partially different meanings depending on the word class: ADJ or ADV reduplications, like *poco poco* ‘little little’ and *piano piano* ‘slowly slowly’, convey high/low intensity, while noun reduplications, such as *caffè caffè* ‘real coffee’, suggest a prototypical instance of the reduplicated element (De Santis, 2011; Grandi, 2017). Therefore, reduplication is potentially very versatile in Italian, while it tends to be diffuse especially in baby talk (De Santis, 2011).

Finally, previous studies have shown that intensifiers are subject to sociolinguistic variation. For instance, intensifiers – and the tendency to create new expressions or extend

³ In Quirk *et al.* (1985), EMPHASIZERS, which are ‘subjuncts’, are not, strictly speaking, intensifiers like AMPLIFIERS and DOWNTONERS, which are ‘modifiers’. However, since they serve analogous functions in discourse and are often grouped together in the Italian literature (e.g., Grandi, 2017), I use ‘intensifiers’ as the overarching term in this paper.

the meaning of existing ones to convey intensification – are more common in spoken language and among younger speakers (Ito & Tagliamonte, 2003). Moreover, certain intensifiers may be associated with socially construed gender, social class (Labov, 1984), group membership, style, or emotivity, like *totally* and *so* in American English (Beltrama, 2016). Studies on Italian revealed regional variations (Grandi, 2017) and difference in borrowing rates depending, for instance, on intensifier functions and contact-language dominance relationships (Fiorentini & Sansò, 2017).

As for Italian learner varieties, Spina *et al.* (2023) found that young German speakers learning Italian as L2 at school in South Tyrol tend to intensify ADJs in written tests more often than Italian L1 speakers. One possible reason lies in compensating for the lack of more precise vocabulary: compare *un dolore molto grande* vs. *straziante* ‘a very big’ vs. ‘unbearable pain’ (Spina *et al.*, 2023; Lorenz, 2013). However, these same learners usually employ fewer intensifier types than their Italian L1 peers, with MAXIMIZERS realized as ADVs (e.g., *completamente, del tutto* ‘totally’) being rare and syntactic reduplications avoided altogether. Instead, they rely heavily on *molto* (47%) and the suffix *-issimo* (24%) for ADJ intensification (Spina *et al.*, 2023: 10-11).

3.3. *Molto and tanto: similarities and differences*

The same lexical entries, *molto* and *tanto*, are used as both high-intensity BOOSTERS and indefinite quantifiers in contemporary Italian. Specifically, as noted by Rainer (1983: 38), *molto* and its near-synonym *tanto* perform at least four distinct functions between intensification and quantification. They can express: 1) the intensity or force applied in doing or being something (*essere molto/tanto innamorata* ‘to be much in love’), 2) the frequency or duration of an action/state (*viaggiare molto/tanto* ‘to travel a lot [=often]’ or *aspettare molto/tanto* ‘to wait a lot [=a long time]’), 3) the magnitude of the result achieved by an action (*leggere molto/tanto* ‘to read a lot’), or 4) the number of agents involved (*un libro molto/tanto citato* ‘a book much quoted [=by many people]’).

Molto and *tanto* can also have both cardinal or proportional readings, depending on context, indicating either a large number or a significant proportion of a whole (Mazzaggio & Stateva, 2023: 118). Additionally, they can both express excess especially in stressed contexts, as in *oh, ma questo appartamento è MOLTO/TANTO caro* ‘oh, but this apartment is VERY [=excessively] expensive’ (Napoli, 2015: 54).

Syntactically, *molto* and *tanto* also share several properties. Both can function as ADVs, ADJs, and PRONs, and can modify various POS, including ADJs, ADVs, plural countable nouns, mass nouns (though usually not singular countable nouns; see ex. 1 in §2.2), prepositional phrases, and verbs. Furthermore, *molto* and *tanto* can themselves be intensified, for instance, by reduplication (*molto molto/tanto tanto buono* ‘very very good’), intensifying affixes (*moltissimo/tantissimo, stra-molto/stra-tanto* ‘very much’), or modal and focusing ADVs (*davvero/proprio molto/tanto* ‘really much’)⁴.

Compared, for instance, to other BOOSTERS, like the suffix *-issimo*, or the MAXIMIZER *troppo*, *molto* and *tanto* generally convey weaker intensification, as shown by the fact that only the first of the following utterances is well-formed: *molto/tanto ricco, anzi ricchissimo/troppo ricco* vs. *ricchissimo/troppo ricco, anzi molto/tanto ricco* ‘very rich, in fact really rich’ (Grandi, 2017: 71-72)⁵. In line with this, recent perceptual experiments by Mazzaggio and Stateva (2023: 127-131) found that *molto* and *tanto* do not significantly differ in their

⁴ Mazzaggio & Stateva (2023: 125) consider only *davvero/proprio tanto* well-formed.

⁵ Nevertheless, Grandi (2017: 77) found some online instances of serial intensification, where the suffixation with *-issimo* takes place before an intensification with a degree/quantity ADV.

intensification strength or referred numerical quantity in the perception of Italian L1 speakers.

Despite these similarities, there are a few contexts where *molto* and *tanto* are not equivalent. For example, *molto* is preferred before certain ADVs like *bene* ‘well’, as in the frequent adjacency pair: *come stai?* ‘how are you?’ *molto/tanto bene* ‘very well’. Conversely, *tanto* is the only option before some plural or collective nouns meaning ‘so many’, as in *perché (così) *molta/tanta gente al cinema?* ‘why (so) many people in the theater?’ (Mazzaggio & Stateva, 2023: 125-127)⁶. *Molto* also appears to be more common across all spoken registers in contemporary Italian and is mainly used as an ADV, while *tanto* functions more often as an ADJ and especially occurs in informal speech (Mazzaggio & Stateva, 2023: 123; see § 5.2 for additional data collected for this research). Possibly related to this distribution, *tanto* is typically acquired earlier than *molto* by Italian L1 children (Cardinaletti & Giusti, 2010: 80).

Thus, the two forms exhibit traces of complementary distribution and semantic specialization in present-day Italian. However, since their variation operates largely below conscious awareness (see Mazzaggio & Stateva’s [2023] experiment), the two variants likely function as ‘indicators’ in Labov’s (1984) sense. This contrasts with other languages spoken by the interviewees, where the distribution of equivalent intensifiers/quantifiers more strictly depends on the POS of the modified items, thereby limiting the possible impact of language transfer. Examples include: English *very* vs. *much/many*, French *très* vs. *beaucoup*, German *sehr* vs. *viel* (Anscombe & Tamba, 2013), and Mandinka *baake* vs. *jámáa/fo*, among others (Peace Corps The Gambia, 1995).

3.4. Usages of *troppo*

In contemporary Italian, *troppo* ‘too much/many’ primarily functions as a marker of excess, conveying a sense of surpassing a maximum or expected standard (Dressler & Merlini Barbaresi, 1994: 418). Consequently, *troppo* often collocates with negatively connoted items and/or precedes purposive clauses introduced by *per* ‘to’ or *perché* ‘because’, emphasizing potential consequences of the (perceived) excessive degree, such as in *è troppo vecchio per andare a scuola* ‘he is too old to go to school’ (Napoli, 2015: 55-58).

However, *troppo* is also used in colloquial Italian to express strong, but not extreme intensification, particularly with ADJs that convey positive qualities (Rainer, 1983: 38-40). Specifically, the construction *troppo* + ADJ, meaning *molto/tanto* ‘very’, became a transregional hallmark of youth Italian varieties in the 1990s, possibly spreading from the Milan area to the whole peninsula via mass media (Banfi, 1992). Today, *troppo* as a BOOSTER is widespread in colloquial Italian, regardless of speakers’ age or region, often adding stylistic flair or enhancing emotional involvement in contexts diaphasically marked as informal (Napoli, 2015). Similarly, in colloquial French – a language spoken by some GörliPark corpus participants – *trop* ‘too much/many’ is often used instead of *très* ‘very’, especially to intensify ADJs (Grevisse, 2009). The same holds true for youth varieties of Spanish, especially those spoken in the Americas (e.g., Venezuela and Mexico), where *demasiado* ‘too much’ may be used with a superlative value: see *María es demasiado bonita* ‘Maria is very pretty’ (Pato, 2023: 371). The semantic contrast between ‘too much’ and ‘very much’ also appears to be blurred in some English varieties, such as Black South African English (Louw, 2005).

⁶ Further contexts where *molto* and *tanto* are not interchangeable fall outside the scope of this study, as they do not function as intensifiers/quantifiers (§ 4.1 for more details).

Regardless of their POS, *troppo* and its variants are also overextended to indicate high intensity in all linguistic contexts in several Italian-based contact varieties independently developed in multilingual settings outside Italy. These include Italian contact varieties in Somalia (*trobbo*; Banti, 1990: 17), Ethiopia, and southern Egypt (*tirobbo* or *troppo*; Habte-Maryam, 1976: 176-177), as well as occasionally the Mediterranean Lingua Franca (see *qouesto star tropo véro* ‘this is too much [=very] true’ in Anonymous, 1930: 93). This usage is also documented in *Fremdarbeiteritalienisch* ‘foreign worker Italian’, spoken by guest workers with different L1s in German-speaking Switzerland in the 1970s-80s, as in *seno troppa lingua* ‘[I] hear too much language [=I hear speaking much (Italian)]’ (Berruto, 1991: 351). Eventually, similar overextensions occur in geographically distant English-based contact varieties, such as pidgins in Hawaii (*tumach*; Bickerton, 1981: 11) and New Guinea (*tumas*; Laycock, 1970).

In § 5.3, I discuss both usages of *troppo* as they appear in some GörliPark corpus interviews. The extension of *troppo* to express high intensity in diaphasically marked or emotionally charged utterances is indicated as [MOLTO¹] in the following sections. This usage is also a common and widely recognized phenomenon – a ‘marker’ of speech style in Labov’s (1984) terminology – in youth and informal Italian varieties spoken across the peninsula. Conversely, the broader employment of *troppo* instead of *molto/tanto* in all contexts is labeled as [MOLTO²]. This usage is defined as innovative, since it does not appear in the input participants received in Italy.

4. METHODS

4.1. Automatic search and annotation criteria

After compiling a list of Italian intensifiers based on the literature (§ 3.2), I used the regular expression search function in the transcription software ELAN to automatically identify their occurrences in the GörliPark corpus. Two regular expressions were applied: one to locate specific intensifier lemmas (i.e., *assai*, *parecchi**, *molt**, *tant**, *tropp**, *tutt**, *davvero*, *proprio*, *stess**), affixes (i.e., *arci-*, *bis-*, *extra-*, *iper-*, *-issimo*, *maxi-*, *mega-*, *stra-*, *super-*, *ultra-*), and all ADVs ending in *-mente*; the other to detect all segment repetitions in the interviews⁷.

It is important to note that certain types of Italian intensifiers at the morphological/lexical level are excluded from this analysis. Apart from practical reasons (some forms are multiword expressions difficult to be retrieved automatically), they are not considered in this paper, as they have already been the focus of previous studies I conducted on the GörliPark corpus and/or appear, upon initial examination, to be scarcely used in my dataset. These excluded forms are:

- 1) intensifiers of the negation and temporal quantifiers (e.g., *mica* ‘at all’, *mai* ‘never’, *più* ‘more’; Lupica Spagnolo, in press^b);
- 2) intensifiers in languages other than Italian (e.g., German *viel*, English *many*; Lupica Spagnolo, in press^a);
- 3) qualifying ADJs preceding the modified noun (e.g., *grosso mercato* ‘big market’ in ex. (2) in § 2.2);

⁷ The two regular expressions used for the automatic query are:

i) \bassai\b|\bparecchi.*\b|\bmolt.*\b|\btant.*\b|\btrop.*\b|\btutt.*\b|\bdavvero\b|\bproprio\b|\bstess.*\b|\b.*issim.*\b|\barci.+ \b|\bbis.+ \b|\biper.+ \b|\bstra.+ \b|\bultra.+ \b|\+mente\b
and ii) \b(\w+)\b\s+\b\1\b.

- 4) fixed idiomatic expressions (e.g., *innamorato cotto* ‘madly in love’ [lit. ‘cooked in love’]);
- 5) polirematic expressions of quantity (e.g., *un sacco/una valanga di ...* ‘a ton of ...’ [lit. ‘a bag/an avalanche of’]);
- 6) augmentative or diminutive suffixes (e.g., *grandone* ‘very big’ or *grandino* ‘not so big’; Dressler & Merlini Barbaresi, 1994).

After the automatic query, I manually annotated the occurrences, excluding forms without intensifying value. These comprise, for instance, modal, speech-act, focusing, and other *-mente* ADVs with epistemic meaning, like in *speriamo che tutto andrà bene (pausa) sicuramente* ‘hopefully everything will go well (pause) surely’ from the GörliPark corpus. Furthermore, I exclude repetitions due to disfluencies, false starts, word search, or other conversational reasons: see, e.g., *io lavoro ehm mercato mercato* ‘I work ehm market market’ in ex. (2) in § 2.2 or the frequent repetitions of affirmative or negative ADVs in answering the interviewer’s questions (e.g., *si si si* ‘yes yes yes’). I also do not include repetitions of verbs as they express progressive/durative aspect and not intensification (De Santis, 2011), as in *mi dice aspettare aspettare aspettare* ‘[(s)he] tells me to wait to wait to wait’ (1 occ.).

By contrast, occurrences with ambiguous meanings between intensification and quantification are considered if they carry some intensifying values, such as in *gira tutta di germania* ‘[I] travel all of [= partitive/article] Germany’⁸, where *tutto* emphasizes the length of the speaker’s journey (Labov, 1984 for an analogous approach). Contextual clues and/or dictionaries (TRECCANI, 2022) helped to clarify ambiguous cases. For instance, *tutto* in *tutti i giorni paga albergo* ‘every day [I] pay hotel’ is seen as an intensifier to increase the speaker’s own reliability, based on other sequences where the interviewee says that he actually pays his hostel every two days.

Conversely, forms that are clearly not used for intensifying purposes are excluded. Consider, for instance, the employment of *tanto* in temporal or frequentative adverbial phrases, as in *qua parlo italiano ogni tanto* ‘here [I] speak Italian sometimes [lit. each much]’ (13 occ.), as a discourse marker *tanto io sto qua* ‘anyway I stay here’ (2 occ.), or in comparative constructions *ho mangiato tanto quanto ieri* ‘I ate as much as yesterday’ (no occurrence in my corpus)⁹. Instances of *tutto* in semi-lexicalized expressions like *tutto a posto?* ‘all right?’ are also omitted (4 occ.).

The intensifiers in the GörliPark corpus were then annotated in ELAN, among others, for the following categorical variables:

- 1) morphological/lexical type, i.e., a) modal, speech act, and focusing ADVs, b) ADVs/ADJs/PRONs of degree/quantity, c) affixes, d) reduplications);
- 2) POS of the intensifier;
- 3) POS of the modified element(s);
- 4) the intensifier’s meaning.

Intensifiers fitting several types were annotated separately as multiple occurrences. For example, *tante tantissime volte* ‘many, really many times’ was annotated three times as a degree/quantity ADV, affix, and reduplication. By contrast, repetitions of intensifiers due to disfluencies are counted only once. The statistical analysis detailed in § 5 is conducted in R Studio (RCoreTeam2021), using, among others, the *tidyverse* package (Wickham *et al.*, 2019) for data visualization and manipulation, and the *vcd* package (Meyer *et al.*, 2023) for association plots and data analysis.

⁸ The peculiar use of prepositions by IiT speakers in the GörliPark corpus warrants separate research.

⁹ In all these contexts *molto* cannot be used instead of *tanto*.

4.2. *The comparable corpora*

Another key methodological decision was selecting a comparable corpus to serve as a baseline for assessing the similarities vs. differences in intensifier usage in IiT compared to Italian as TL. For this, I chose the VoLIP corpus (*The Voice of LIP*; Voghera *et al.*, 2014), a freely available online, text-to-speech aligned version of the LIP corpus (*Lessico Italiano Parlato* ‘Lexicon of Spoken Italian’). Comparisons were also made with the KiParla corpus, which is currently being expanded (Mauri *et al.*, 2019). In contrast, despite the fact that a comparison with such data would be highly promising, I could not find any available online spoken corpora of supervised Italian L2 learners.

The LIP and VoLIP corpora are diatopically and diaphasically stratified and balanced collections of around 60 hours of spoken Italian (about 500,000 word tokens), gathered in the early 1990s in Milan, Florence, Rome, and Naples, and therefore covering North, Central, and South Italian varieties. The data also span five spoken text typologies, ranging from informal registers, i.e., face-to-face and telephone conversations, to more formal oral data, i.e., structured dialogues (e.g., interviews, oral exams), monologues (e.g., lectures, sermons), and radio/TV broadcasts (Voghera *et al.*, 2014: 630).

Crucially, the VoLIP corpus allows searching, filtering, and visualizing occurrences by register, as well as lemma and POS, an option not (yet) available in more recent corpora for spoken Italian at the time of my research (March/September 2024). Furthermore, previous studies on the distribution of Italian intensifiers/quantifiers, in particular *tanto* vs. *molto* (Mazzaggio & Stateva, 2023), are based on the VoLIP corpus or its earlier version LIP, and can therefore be used as material for further comparison.

Finally, I also consulted the KiParla corpus available online, which, as of March/September 2024, contains more than 150 hours of recordings (over 1,380,000 words) collected between 2017 and 2024 (Mauri *et al.*, 2019). Though not yet POS-annotated, the KiParla corpus is diatopically and diaphasically stratified, featuring oral data from various Italian regions and with different degrees of formality, such as informal conversations and kitchen table chats, as well as semi-structured interviews, university lectures, and oral exams. The 63 informal table conversations that make up the KIPasti subcorpus, over 404,000 words collected in 13 Italian regions in 2020-2024, are consultable separately.

5. INTENSIFIERS IN ITALIAN IN TRANSIT

5.1. *Overview*

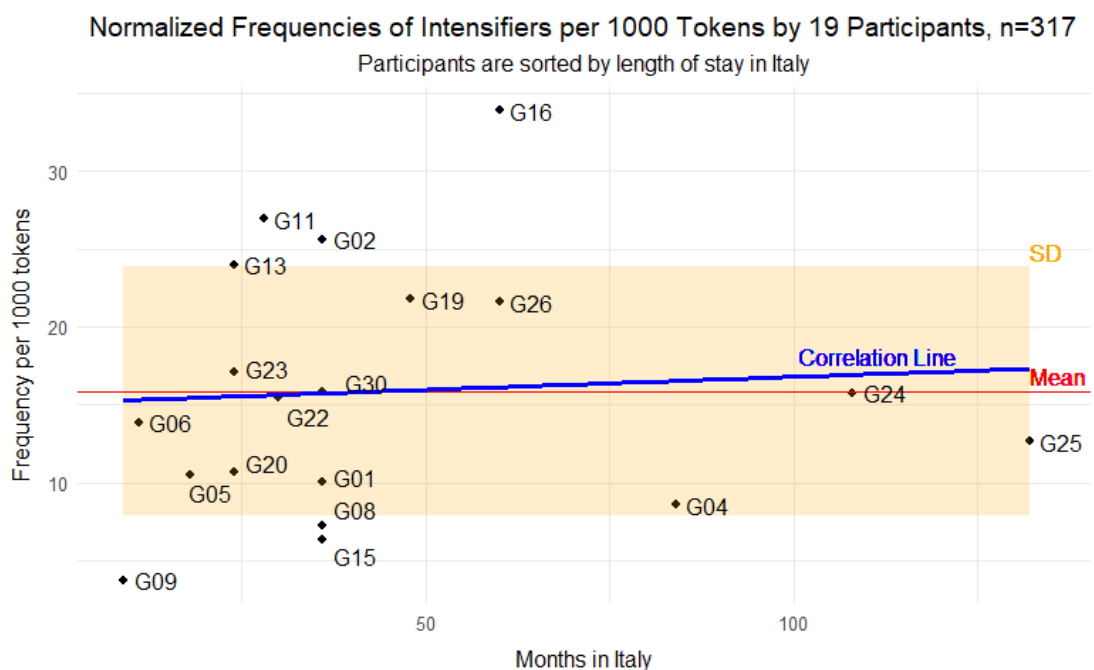
5.1.1. *Overall frequencies and individual variation*

Intensifiers are quite common in the collected interviews, with 19 out of 20 participants using at least one intensifier during our conversations. Table 1 presents the absolute frequencies (Freq) and normalized frequencies of intensifiers per 1,000 tokens (FreqNorm), alongside the number of months the participants spent in Italy and Germany, Italian regions of residence, languages spoken (in alphabetical order), and total transcribed tokens per interview (N.A. indicates unavailable data). In addition, Figure 1 visualizes the distribution of intensifier-normalized frequencies, with participants arranged on the X-axis according to the number of months they spent in Italy.

Table 1. *Absolute and normalized frequencies of intensifiers per participant, ordered by length of stay in Italy*

Absolute and normalized frequencies of intensifiers per participants							
Speaker	Months in Italy	Months in Germany	Italian regions	Repertoires	Tokens	Freq	FreqNorm
G09	9	36	Lazio, Lombardy	English, German, Italian, Mandinka	266	1	3.76
G06	11	NA	Sicily, Lazio	N.A.	72	1	13.89
G05	18	36	N.A.	N.A.	190	2	10.53
G13	24	1	Toscany	English, Fula, Italian, Mandinka, Wolof	250	6	24.00
G20	24	78	Apulia, Umbria	English, German, Italian, Mandinka, Wolof	749	8	10.68
G23	24	84	Apulia	English, German, Italian, Mandinka, Wolof	1405	24	17.08
G11	28	20	Piedmont	English, French, Fula, Italian, Jola, Mandinka, Serakhulle, Wolof	260	7	26.92
G22	30	108	Apulia, Lombardy	Arabic, Balant/Bissau, English, French, German, Italian, Jola, Apulian dialect, Mandinka, Serakhulle, Serer, Spanish, Wolof	1231	19	15.43
G01	36	24	Apulia, Lombardy	English, Fula, German, Italian, Jola, Mandinka, Serakhulle, Spanish, Wolof	1095	11	10.05
G02	36	NA	Sicily	N.A.	156	4	25.64
G08	36	36	Campania	Arabic, English, French, Fula, German, Italian,	830	6	7.23
G15	36	12	Sicily	English, French, German, Italian, Mandinka	315	2	6.35
G30	36	96	Liguria	Bambara, English, Fula, French, German, Italian, Mandinka, Sonrhai/Songhay	1010	16	15.84
G19	48	16	Molise	English, Fula, German, Italian, Molise dialect, Jola, Mandinka, Portuguese, Serakhulle	734	16	21.80
G16	60	3	Sicily, Lazio, Sardinia, Campania	Bambara, English, Fula, German, Italian, Mandinka, Wolof	3100	105	33.87
G26	60	60	Friuli-Venezia-Giulia	English, Friulan, German, Italian, Mandinka	324	7	21.60
G04	84	NA	N.A.	German, Italian, Mandinka	233	2	8.58
G24	108	108	Lombardy	Balant/Bissau, English, French, Fula, German, Italian, Mandinka, Spanish	1964	31	15.78
G25	132	1	Sicily, Lazio	Bambara, English, French, German, Italian, Italo-Romance varieties, Mandinka, Portuguese Creole, Wolof	3870	49	12.66

Figure 1. *Frequencies of intensifiers normalized per 1,000 tokens by 19 participants, ordered by length of stay in Italy*



As summarized in Table 1, intensifier frequency varies greatly in the GörliPark corpus, ranging from a minimum of 1 to a maximum of 105 intensifiers per speaker. This is reflected in the high standard deviation¹⁰ of absolute frequencies (SD=24.64), compared to their mean (16.7). This gap possibly arises from differing interview lengths. Indeed, it decreases when normalized frequencies are considered (mean=15.9; SD=7.98), with all but six participants falling within the standard deviation range (see orange area in Figure 1).

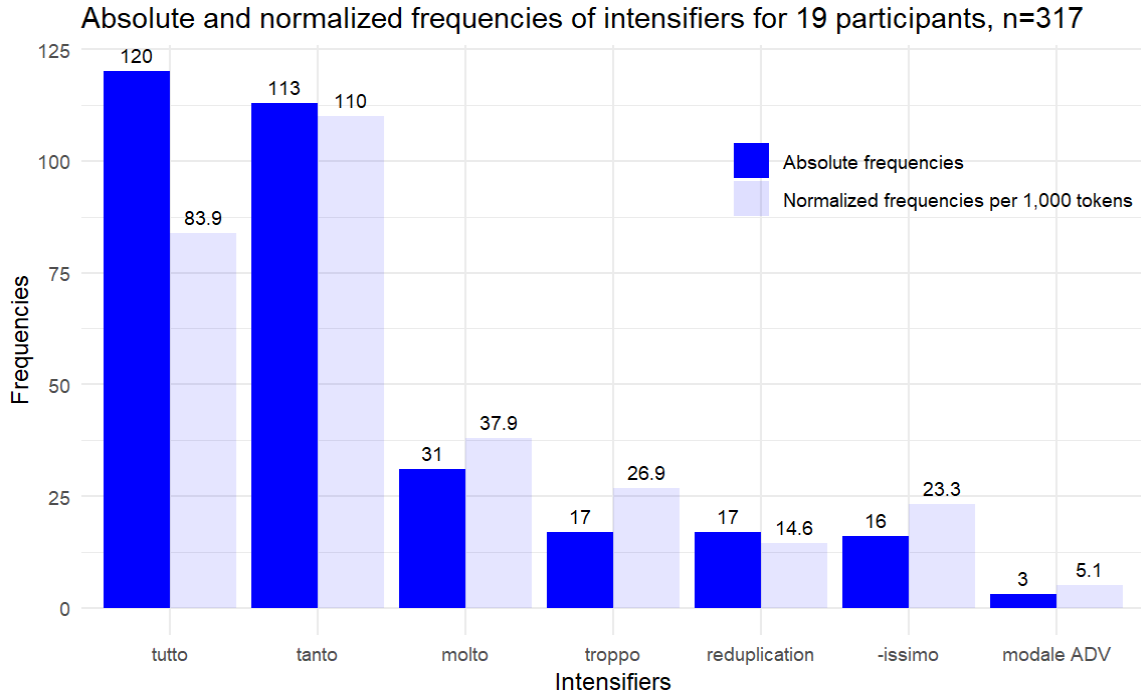
Furthermore, I calculated the Pearson’s product-moment coefficient r to assess the degree of correlation between the intensifier-normalized frequencies and the number of months the participants spent in Italy or Germany. The Pearson’s coefficients indicate that there is no correlation between the normalized intensifier rate and the length of stay in Italy ($r=0.07$; see also the blue correlation line in Figure 1) or Germany ($r=-0.17$)¹¹.

Thus, despite the high interspeaker variation, these findings suggest some consistent patterns in intensifier usage across speakers. To facilitate comparison, I primarily examine normalized frequencies in the following sections.

5.1.2. Types and lexical variety

Figure 2 provides an overview of the types of intensifiers used in the GörliPark corpus. Due to their low occurrence rates, modal, speech act, and focusing ADVs are grouped together.

Figure 2. *Absolute and normalized frequencies (per 1,000 tokens) of intensifier types by 19 participants*



¹⁰ SD indicates how much single values deviate from the dataset average.

¹¹ Pearson’s product-moment coefficient r measures the degree of correlation or association between two numerical variables, ranging from -1 to +1: the closer r is to 0, the weaker the correlation is. More specifically, positive or negative correlations are considered weak when r is between 0 and +/- 0.3, respectively (Levshina, 2015: 115-130).

Comparing the forms listed in §3.2 with Figure 2 reveals that certain types of intensifiers are absent from the GörliPark corpus. Participants do not use the intensifiers/quantifiers *parecchio* and *assai* ‘very/much/many’, or intensifying prefixes like *arci-*, *iper-*, *stra-*, or *ultra-* (both classified as AMPLIFIERS by Quirk *et al.*, 1985). Their absence may be due to the lower frequency of *parecchio* in spoken language (Mazzaggio & Stateva, 2023: 123, footnote 1) or the diatopic markedness of *assai* as southern variants, especially when postposed or used as ADVs (Cimaglia, 2010). However, the lack of *stra-* is surprising, given its high productivity in contemporary Italian (Grandi, 2017).

Among the occurring intensifiers, modal, speech-act, and focusing ADVs – functioning as EMPHASIZERS for Quirk *et al.* (1985) – are rare in my corpus, with just 3 occurrences (0.9%): *davvero*, *veramente* ‘really/very’, and *proprio* ‘really/evenly’, as in *G30: veramente mi piace molto (e) stare qui in berlino* ‘really I like very much (and) to be here in Berlin’. Syntactic reduplications and intensifications via the suffix *-issimo* – classifiable as non-quantifying AMPLIFIERS, expanding on Quirk *et al.* (1985) and Labov (1984) – are more common, with 33 occurrences (10%) spread across several participants (8 and 7 interviewees, respectively). However, as Table 2 shows, these tokens exhibit limited lexical variety, resulting in a low types-to-tokens ratio.

Table 2. Tokens and types of syntactic reduplications and *-issimo* superlatives in the GörliPark corpus by frequency

	Syntactic reduplications	Superlatives with <i>-issimo</i>
	5 x <i>piano piano</i> ‘slow slow’	8 x <i>bellissimo</i> ‘very beautiful’
	4 x <i>tanto tanto</i> ‘much much’	4 x <i>pochissimo</i> ‘very few’
	2 x <i>molto molto</i> ‘much much’, <i>poco poco</i> ‘few few’	2 x <i>buonissimo</i> ‘very good’
	1 x <i>dura dura</i> ‘hard hard’, <i>grande grande</i> ‘big big’, <i>niente niente</i> ‘nothing nothing’, <i>piccola piccola</i> ‘small small’	1 x <i>tantissimo</i> ‘very much’, <i>benissimo</i> ‘very well’
types/tokens ratio	8 out of 17 0.47	5 out of 16 0.31

Thus, syntactic reduplications and the suffix *-issimo* show lower productivity in my data compared to Italian as TL, where they are typical intensification strategies applicable to all POS (Grandi, 2017: 58–60). Specifically, in the GörliPark corpus, *-issimo* modifies only gradable ADJs and ADVs (10 and 6 occ., respectively), while it never occurs with non-gradable nouns or predicates, contrary to recent trends in spoken Italian (Beltrama, 2016: 179). Syntactic reduplication appears with 10 ADJs, 6 ADVs, and 1 PRON, but no nouns.

Finally, ADVs, ADJs, and PRONs of degree/quantity – classified as AMPLIFIERS/QUANTIFIERS according to Quirk *et al.* (1985) and Labov (1984) – dominate in the GörliPark corpus, accounting for 281 occurrences (89%). Among these, the AMPLIFIER MAXIMIZER *tutto* ‘all/completely’ is the most frequent, mainly used with the TL meaning of [MAXIMUM INTENSITY/QUANTITY], as in *G30: anche il mio cellulare è tutto nell’italiano* ‘even my phone is all in Italian’. However, in three utterances *tutto* is used ambiguously, possibly meaning ‘high’ rather than ‘maximum intensity’ (a value it can also have in target Italian), as in *G02: tutte persone (qua) parlano Italiano* ‘all [=many] people (here) speak Italian’ or *G16: mi parla tutte lingue* ‘I [lit. me] speak all [=many] languages’.

In contrast, the intensifiers/quantifiers *tanto* and *molto* ‘very, many/much’, and sometimes *troppo* lit. ‘too much/many’, are used interchangeably in the GörliPark corpus to convey [GREAT INTENSITY/QUANTITY], i.e., working as AMPLIFIER BOOSTERS (Quirk *et al.*, 1985). As discussed in §3.3, *molto* and *tanto* share this meaning in Italian, where they

are mostly equivalents except for a few contexts (Mazzaggio & Stateva, 2023). Nevertheless, *tanto* clearly outnumbers *molto* in my corpus (113 vs. 31 occ.; see Figure 2). By contrast, *troppo* originally serves as a MAXIMIZER in Standard Italian (§ 3.4). However, it is underrepresented with this meaning in my dataset, where it mainly works as a BOOSTER to denote a high, but not excessive degree (15 out of 17 occ., 88%).

Since *tanto*, *molto*, and sometimes *troppo* apparently function as free variants at least in certain contexts in the GörliPark corpus, I focus on their distribution and properties in the next sections. On the contrary, *tutto* generally does not compete with these three forms, so its use is not further explored in this paper.

5.2. *Molto versus tanto*

5.2.1. *Distribution across (socio)linguistic variables*

Figure 3 displays the normalized frequencies of *molto* and *tanto* by speaker, with participants sorted by their length of stay in Italy.

As illustrated in Figure 3, ten of the 19 participants (G06, G05, G13, G20, G01, G15, G16, G26, G04, G24) use only *tanto* and never *molto* in our conversations, while another two (G11 and G09) employ neither *molto* nor *tanto* (§ 5.3 for more details). Furthermore, *tanto* clearly outnumbers *molto* in two more conversations (G19 and G30), while G23, G22, and G25 use both items with similar frequencies. Exceptions to this trend are only G23's and G02's interviews, where *molto* clearly exceeds *tanto* or is the sole intensifier used.

According to a two-tailed Wilcoxon signed-rank test for dependent samples¹², the normalized frequencies of *tanto* (mean=5.79; median=5.09; SD=4.96) are significantly greater than those of *molto* (mean=2; median=0; SD=4.59) across speakers (V=18, $p < 0.05^*$). This result confirms that *tanto* consistently exceeds *molto*, not only considering its overall frequency in the entire corpus (§5.1.2), but also its distribution for single speakers. By contrast, as Figure 3 also suggests, the Pearson's product-moment coefficients indicate that there is no correlation between the normalized intensifiers/quantifiers rate and the amount of time participants spent in Italy ($r_{molto} = -0.08$; $r_{tanto} = -0.04$)¹³.

In Italian as TL, the usage of *molto* and *tanto* can also depend on their POS and/or the POS of modified elements (§ 3.3). Thus, I examined their distribution in relation to these two variables in my dataset. The resulting patterns are shown in the association plots in Figures 4 and 5, with corresponding numerical data – normalized frequencies and standardized Pearson's residuals (henceforth: stRes) – provided in the tables. When used as PRONs (2 and 21 occ., respectively), *molto* and *tanto* do not modify any item, so the POS of the modified elements is marked as 'not applicable' (N.A.).

In Figures 4 and 5, the height of the columns above or below the baseline (black dashed lines) indicates how much the observed frequency of a specific intensifier-POS combination deviates from the expected frequency. Color intensity (blue or pink vs. gray) reflects the strength of positive or negative associations, respectively. The stRes values in the tables aid interpretation: stRes over 1.96 indicate significant overrepresentation, while values below -1.96 suggest significant underrepresentation (Levshina, 2015: 220–221).

¹² I conducted a test for dependent samples because the normalized frequencies of *molto* and *tanto* are related measurements taken from interviews with the same speakers.

¹³ Due to the low occurrence of *molto* and some missing data, it was not possible in this case to reliably calculate the correlation between the two intensifiers/quantifiers and the time spent in Germany.

Figure 3. *Normalized frequencies (per 1,000 tokens) of molto vs. tanto by speaker, sorted by length of stay in Italy*

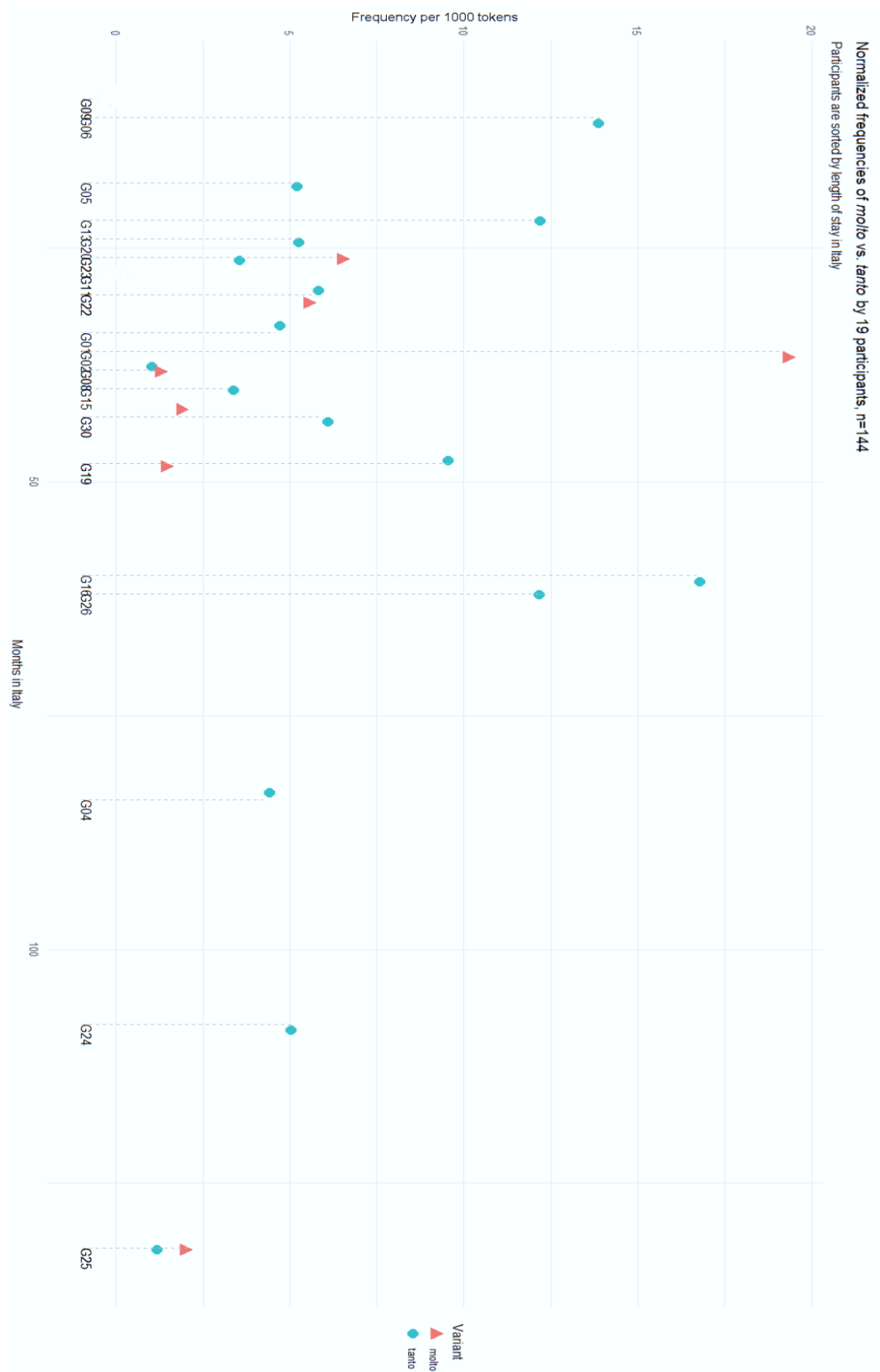


Figure 4. Association plot and standardized Pearson's residuals for the normalized frequencies of *molto* vs. *tanto* across their POS

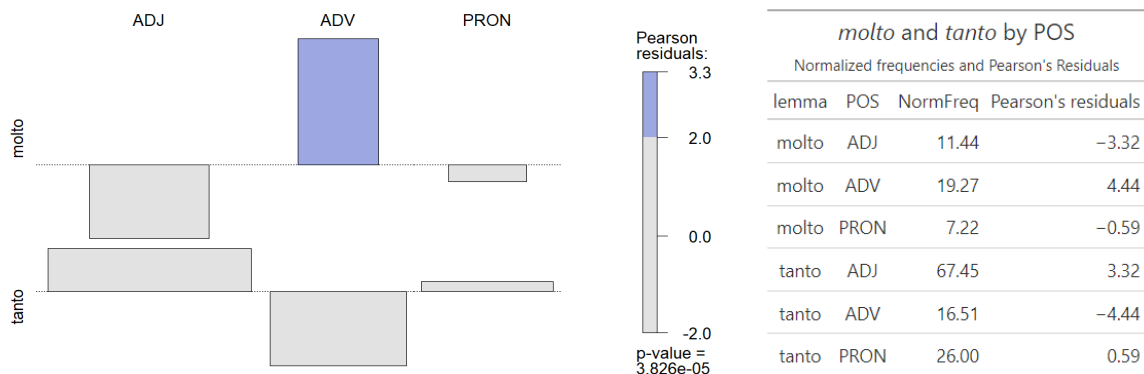
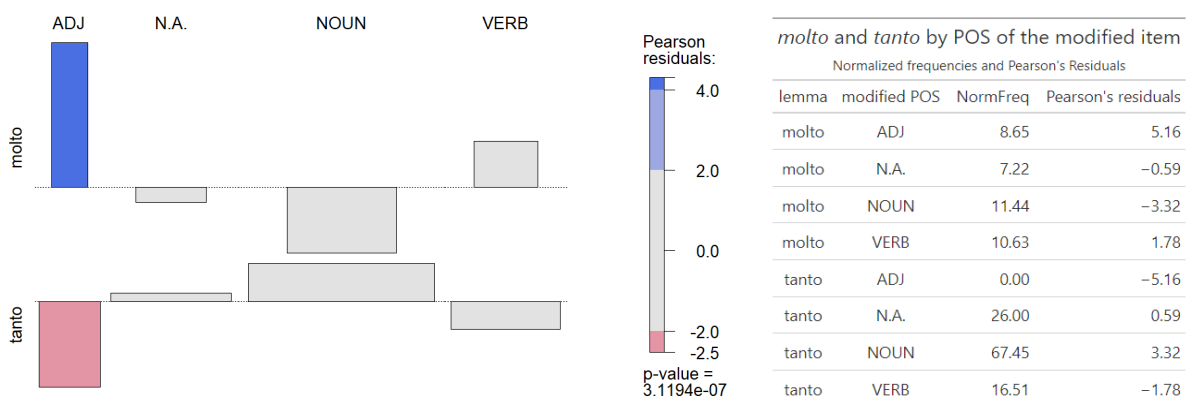


Figure 5. Association plot and standardized Pearson's residuals for the normalized frequencies of *molto* vs. *tanto* across the POS of their modified items



As for Figure 4, a chi-squared test of independence reveals a highly significant association between the normalized frequencies of *molto* and *tanto* and their POS ($\chi^2=20.342$, $df=2$, $p<0.001^{***}$), while the effect size of this association is moderate (Cramér's $V=0.37$). Specifically, *molto* is overrepresented as an ADV (stRes=4.44), while *tanto* is overused as an ADJ (stRes=3.32) in the GörliPark corpus. Correspondingly, their association with the modified elements' POS is also highly significant (Figure 5), with a moderate but stronger effect size ($\chi^2=33.066$, $df=3$, $p<0.001^{***}$; Cramér's $V=0.47$). *Molto* usually modifies ADJs (stRes=5.16) and *tanto* tends to apply to nouns (stRes=3.32)¹⁴.

These association patterns are also reflected in instances of possible self-corrections, as in (6), where G23 initiates *molto*, but self-corrects mid-word, opting instead for *tanto*, which is more often used as an ADJ:

¹⁴ The chi-squared test for independence typically examines whether the distribution of variants of one categorical variable, e.g. *molto* vs. *tanto*, depends on those of another categorical variable, e.g. POS. The resulting p-value shows whether or not the association between the variants of the two variables is likely to have occurred by chance. In contrast, the effect size – commonly measured by Cramér's V for contingency tables larger than 2x2 – indicates how strong this association is, regardless of its statistical significance. Cramér's V ranges from 0 to 1, with values closer to 1 ($V\geq 0.5$ or ≥ 0.3) indicating strong or moderate associations, respectively (Levshina, 2015: 203–210).

(6) INT: [conosci] Fula?

[do you know] Fula?

G23: Fula sì però [...] non è molt- tanti: persona parla questa qua

Fula yes but [...] [there] is not muc- many person[s] speak that here'

(Gambia; 24 m. ITA (Apulia); 84 m. GER; languages: 5)

5.2.2. A comparison with Italian as the target language

To assess the variation of IiT with respect to Italian as TL, I examine the distribution of *molto* and *tanto* in some reference corpora for spoken Italian (§ 4.2 for an overview). Specifically, Table 3 presents the raw occurrences of the two intensifiers/quantifiers by POS in the VoLIP corpus (Voghera *et al.*, 2014). For this analysis, I exclude *tanto* used as a conjunction or a diminutive (*tantino* 'a little bit'), but no further distinction is made between *molto* and *tanto* functioning as intensifiers or otherwise. This decision was primarily practical, given the limited access to keywords-in-context in VoLIP. Still, this way the distribution better mirrors unanalyzed spoken input, with *tanto* likely slightly overestimated due to its wide range of functions in contemporary Italian (§ 3.3).

Table 3. Frequency of *molto* and *tanto* by POS in the VoLIP corpus (last access: 24.09.2024)

Distribution of <i>molto</i> and <i>tanto</i> by POS in the VoLIP corpus				
	ADJ	ADV	PRON	Total
<i>molto</i>	254 (23.1%)	826 (75.1%)	20 (1.8%)	1100 (100%)
<i>tanto</i>	330 (50.8%)	242 (37.2%)	78 (12%)	650 (100%)

Across all formal and informal spoken registers of the VoLIP corpus, *molto* (1,100 occ.) is used highly significantly more often than *tanto* (650 occ.), as revealed by a two-tailed chi-squared test for goodness of fit ($\chi^2=115.71$, $df=1$, $p<0.001^{***}$)¹⁵. This aligns with findings from the LIP corpus (Mazzaggio & Stateva, 2023: 123), where *molto* (5,322 occ.) highly significantly exceeds *tanto* (2,165 occ.; $\chi^2=1331.2$, $df=1$, $p<0.001^{***}$). Furthermore, it is consistent with the significant predominance of *molto* (3,891 occ.) over *tanto* (3,148 occ.) I observed across all spoken registers in the KIParla corpus ($\chi^2=78.427$, $df=1$, $p<0.001^{***}$; last access: 24.09.2024). However, these trends contrast with the IiT data, where *tanto* significantly outnumbers *molto*, both in the entire GörliPark corpus (§ 5.1.2) and across individual participants (§ 5.2.1).

Despite frequency differences, the distribution by POS is remarkably similar across datasets. Like in GörliPark corpus, *molto* mainly works as an ADV (stRes=15.68), while *tanto* usually appears as an ADJ or PRON (stRes=11.86 and 8.95, respectively) in the VoLIP corpus. These associations are highly significant for a chi-squared test of independence, though with a moderate effect size ($\chi^2=265.39$, $df=2$, $p<0.001^{***}$; Cramer's V=0.389). An analogous distribution by POS is found in the LIP corpus

¹⁵ Unlike the chi-squared test for independence (§ 5.2.1), the chi-squared test for goodness of fit is used to determine whether or not the differences in the frequencies of two or more variants of a single categorical variable are determined by random variation.

(Mazzaggio & Stateva, 2023: 123), where *molto* is mostly used as an ADV (4,272 occ.) and *tanto* as an ADJ (1,190 occ.).

Interestingly, the frequency gap between *molto* and *tanto* (316 vs. 244 total occ.) narrows – though still statistically significant ($\chi^2=9.2571$, $df=1$, $p<0.01^{**}$) – when considering only informal registers of the VoLIP, i.e., face-to-face and telephone conversations (Table 4). In contrast, the distribution by POS remains constant and highly significant (chi-squared test of independence: $\chi^2=98.382$, $df=2$, $p<0.001^{***}$; Cramer’s $V=0.419$ [moderate effect size]). As in the GörliPark corpus, *molto* is significantly overrepresented as an ADV (stRes=9.84), while *tanto*, despite its lower overall frequencies, proportionally occurs more often as an ADJ or PRON (stRes=7.31 and 5.53) and is underused as an ADV (stRes=-9.84).

Table 4. Frequency of *molto* and *tanto* by POS in the informal registers of the VoLIP corpus (last access: 24.09.2024)

Distribution of <i>molto</i> and <i>tanto</i> by POS in informal registers of the VoLIP corpus				
	ADJ	ADV	PRON	Total
<i>molto</i>	33 (10.4%)	276 (87.3%)	7 (2.2%)	316 (100%)
<i>tanto</i>	88 (36.1%)	120 (49.2%)	36 (14.8%)	244 (100%)

Reverse patterns are even more evident in the present-day KIPasti subcorpus, which only includes the informal spoken registers of the KIParla corpus (Mauri *et al.*, 2019). Similar to the GörliPark corpus, and unlike the whole KIParla corpus, *tanto* (912 occ.) exceeds *molto* (638 occ.) in this subsample, and this prevalence is highly statistically significant ($\chi^2= 48.436$, $df = 1$, $p<0.001^{***}$; last access: 24.09.2024). Consistent with this, *tanto* is reported to be the unique form used in a children’s speech corpus and the most frequent one in the informal registers of the LIP corpus only (*tanto*: 122 vs. *molto*: 40 occ.; Cardinaletti & Giusti, 2010: 80)¹⁶. Likewise, *tanto* also surpasses *molto* in *Fremdarbeiteritalienisch*, possibly due to its higher frequency in colloquial speech, as observed by Berruto (1991: 351).

In summary, comparisons with spoken Italian corpora suggest that the higher frequency of *tanto* compared to *molto* in the GörliPark corpus likely reflects the type of linguistic input participants were mainly exposed to in Italy, namely informal, colloquial speech (see also the self-reports in § 2.2)¹⁷. Specifically, the usage patterns of *molto* and *tanto* can be interpreted as traces at the linguistic level of the largely unsupervised, yet effective, acquisition of IiT in naturalistic settings. Indeed, these patterns accurately reflect the informal input received by the interviewees in Italy, in terms of both quantitative imbalance of *tanto* vs. *molto* and their distribution across parts of speech. In this sense, the distribution of these variants indirectly echoes the participants’ biographical-migratory experiences. This interpretation holds even if other factors, such as the salience of *tanto* in the input, may also contribute to its overuse in IiT (see the discussion on *troppo* in § 5.3).

¹⁶ Unfortunately, I could not replicate these results because the corpora are not accessible online.

¹⁷ This holds although the GörliPark data collection methods, based on sociolinguistic interviews, more closely resembles the contexts where the formal registers of the reference corpora were gathered.

5.3. *Troppo*

5.3.1. *Troppo to express high intensity*

In the GörliPark corpus, only one participant uses *troppo* with its Standard Italian meaning of ‘too much/many’ (2 occ.): see G25: *è difficile difficile – troppo* ‘[it] is difficult difficult – too much’ and G25: *pressione è troppo da lui perché tre giorni tu stai con la barca* ‘pressure is too much from [=for] him because three days you stay with the boat’. As expected, *troppo* in these examples co-occurs with negatively connoted items and/or precedes purposive clauses (Napoli, 2015).

In the remaining 15 out of 17 occurrences (88%), *troppo* acts as a high-intensity BOOSTER, meaning ‘very/much/many’, often used as an ADV (9 occ.), but sometimes also as an ADJ or PRON (4 and 2 occ.). As discussed in § 3.4, this overextension of *troppo* to express high intensity rather than excess is not entirely new in IiT, while two main meanings and usage contexts can be distinguished.

First, three interviewees (G24, G25, G16) use *troppo* with the value of [MOLTO¹] in diaphasically marked or emotionally charged contexts only (9 occ.). This employment is also common in youth and colloquial Italian varieties, with which participants may have come into contact in the peninsula. See, for instance:

- (7) G16: tuo paese mi piace troppo
I like your country too much [=much]
(Guinea; 60 m. ITA (Sicily, Lazio, Sardinia, Campania); 3 m. GER; languages: 7)

Second, *troppo* is broadly used as a high-intensity BOOSTER in all contexts, not necessarily in marked ones, by three participants, i.e. G09, G11, and G13 (6 occ.), as well as in at least two unrecorded conversations. Notably, G09 and G11 never use *molto* or *tanto* during our conversations (see Figure 3 in §5.2.1), relying exclusively on *troppo* as their sole high-intensity marker. Examples of *troppo* in this sense, here labeled as [MOLTO²], are given in (8) and (9):

- (8) INT: [che] altre lingue [sai]?
[what] other languages [do you know]?
G13: si eh: (pausa) troppo (pausa) troppo lingua io lingua
Mandinka [...] anche wolof - fulda (pausa) tanto
yes eh (pause) too much [=many] (pause) too much [=many] languages
I [speak] Mandinka language [...] also Wolof – Fulda (pause) many
(Gambia; 24 m. ITA (Tuscany); 1 m. GER; languages: 5)
- (9) INT: lo usi l'italiano a Berlino?
do you use Italian in Berlin?
G11: (pausa) berlino si (da) troppo l'italiano de stare qua
(pause) Berlin yes [I] (give) [=use] too much [=much] Italian from [when
I] stay here
(Senegal; 28 m. ITA (Piedmont); 20 m. GER; languages: 8)

As mentioned in § 3.4, this overextension of *troppo* is similarly found in other independently developed contact varieties based on Italian and other languages. Still, I characterize this use as innovative, since it is not present in either the formal or informal input participants were exposed to in Italy.

Furthermore, although the influence of other known languages cannot be entirely dismissed, overextensions of *troppo* as in (8) and (9) are not limited to speakers who speak French, such as G11. Rather, they also appear in interviews with participants without French proficiency, like G09 and G13, and independently of their regions of residence in Italy (see Table 1 in § 5.1.1)¹⁸. Thus, French contact or exposure to specific regional Italian varieties alone cannot explain the use of *troppo* meaning [MOLTO²] in the GörliPark corpus. Instead, as will be discussed in § 5.3.2, this usage may have developed autonomously, partially driven by the salience of this intensifier/quantifier and, therefore, reflecting broader language acquisition or contact processes.

5.3.2. *Properties of troppo in context*

The overextension of *troppo* with the non-target, innovative meaning of [MOLTO²] can be better understood by examining its properties in larger interactional segments, as in (10):

- (10)
- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | INT: voi due sapete l'italiano - non lo parlate mai l'italiano?
you both know Italian - do you never speak Italian? |
| 2 | G09: °no° (pausa)
no (pause) |
| 3 | G11: no - lui non è parla italiano (pausa)
no - he is doesn't speak Italian (pause) |
| 4 | INT: un poco (pausa)
a little (pause) |
| 5 | G09: <<German> ja> io parlare poco <<English> no(t)> (0.472) troppo
<<German> yes> I to speak a little <<English> not> (0.472)
<u>too much [=much]</u> |
- (G09: Gambia; 9 m. ITA (Lazio, Lombardy); 36 m. GER; languages: 4)

In (10), the interviewer (INT) asks two participants if they ever speak Italian with each other, since both know this code. They respond negatively, with G11 also questioning G09's Italian proficiency (line 3). After an accommodating move from INT (line 4), G09 replies that he speaks a little Italian, but not 'too much' [=much] (lines 5).

A key aspect in (10) is the prominence (or salience) of *troppo* at the discourse-pragmatic level. G09 uses this ADV with a re-elaborative, mitigating function to negotiate alignment with what the other two interlocutors have explicitly or implicitly stated in previous speech turns (also Sobrero, 1993). Specifically, G09 mediates G11's negative assessment of his language skills in line 3 with INT's more accommodating stance in line 4. Similarly, in ex. (8) and (9) in §5.3.1, *troppo* serves analogous re-elaborative functions. It appears in responses to INT's questions where participants are discursively renegotiating – in particular reinforcing – statements about their language skills and use.

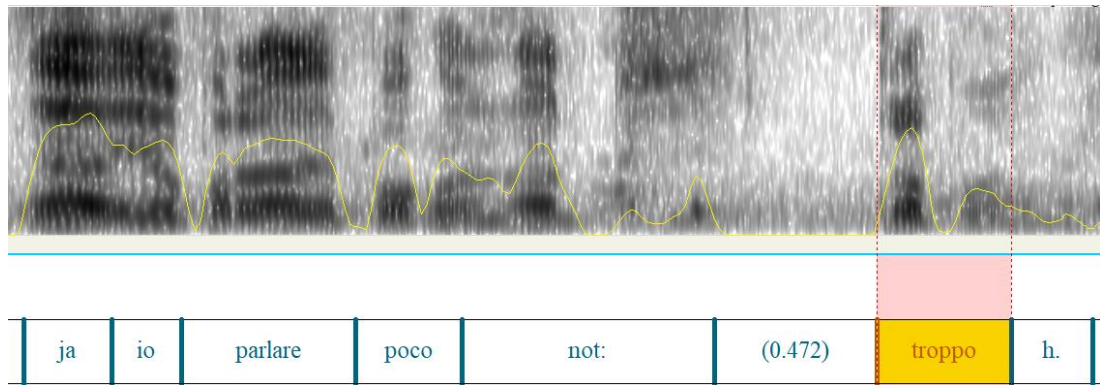
In addition to its discourse-pragmatic salience, *troppo* is also morphosyntactically and phonetically prominent and, therefore, possibly highly recognizable in the input. On the one hand, it is a free disyllabic morpheme that often occurs as an invariable ADV (e.g., 118 out of 140 occ., i.e., 84% in the VoLIP corpus; last access: 24.09.2024). On the other

¹⁸ Neither G09, G11, nor G13 speaks Spanish, but all three are proficient in English.

hand, it features an initial consonantal cluster /tr/ – consisting of a voiceless dental plosive and a voiced alveolar trill – followed by a geminate voiceless bilabial plosive /p:/.

Finally, *troppo* often also stands out at the prosodic level, as seen in the spectrogram in Figure 6, which represents the utterance containing *troppo* in ex. (10), lines 5.

Figure 6. *Spectrogram of G09’s utterance containing troppo (ex. 10, lines 5)*



As illustrated by Figure 6, in ex. (10), *troppo* is preceded by a strategic pause (0.472 seconds), which enhances its perceptual salience. Furthermore, as shown by the yellow line in Figure 6 – representing the utterance’s intensity contour – *troppo* displays a peak intensity (73.93 decibels) that exceeds the average intensity (66.63 dB) of the surrounding utterance, measured from *ja* to *troppo* (see Calamai, 2015: 93-103 on pauses and intensity as potential indicators of emphasis in Italian). Similar patterns of inter-pausal use and increased intensity also characterize other instances of *troppo* in the GörliPark corpus, whether used with the meanings of [MOLTO²], [MOLTO¹], or in its target-like sense of ‘too much/many’. However, since the interviews were conducted outdoors using an open microphone, the intensity measurements should be interpreted with caution, as they may have been affected by environmental noise and the speakers’ positioning.

5.3.3. *The salience of troppo*

In Table 5, the salience of the Italian intensifier/quantifier *troppo* is rated as high (+), middle (+/-), or low (-) across different linguistic levels. The criteria are based on Davydova (2022: 140–141), who evaluates the prominence of variants of various linguistic variables in English to predict their successful acquisition and distribution in adult L2 learners’ interlanguages.

Table 5. *Salience of troppo at different linguistic levels (criteria adapted from Davydova, 2022)*

Linguistic levels	Salience of <i>troppo</i>	Features of <i>troppo</i>
phonetic/phonological	+	initial consonantal cluster /tr/ followed by geminate /p:/
prosodic	+	often preceded by strategic pauses
morphosyntactic	+/-	autonomous disyllabic morpheme, often used as an invariable ADV in the input

semantic	+/-	intensifier with at least two meanings for one form: standard (=excess) vs. age-specific/colloquial (=booster)
discourse-pragmatic	+	often used in interactionally prominent contexts, e.g., introducing contrasts or emotional content
Explicit meta-discourse and novelty	+/-	hallmark of Italian youth varieties since the 1990s

As summarized in Table 5, *troppo* is highly salient (+) at the discourse-pragmatic, prosodic and phonetic/phonological levels in Italian. By contrast, its salience is intermediate (+/-) morphosyntactically and semantically, due to the lack of a unique form-meaning correspondence: the ADV/ADJ/PRON *troppo* is both a marker of excess in Standard Italian and a high-intensity BOOSTER in youth/colloquial varieties. This morphosyntactic variability and semantic ambiguity may challenge Italian L2 learners, especially in unsupervised settings. Finally, while *troppo* was once a distinctive and metalinguistically criticized feature of 1990s youth slangs (Banfi, 1992) – functioning as a style ‘marker’ in Labov’s (1984) terms – it has since become less marked in contemporary Italian (salience: +/-). However, this latter level is probably less relevant to the present study, given the informal acquisition contexts of IiT in Italy and, therefore, the participants’ limited exposure to standard language norms.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The GörliPark corpus comprises 23 biographical interviews with IiT speakers from sub-Saharan West Africa who work as street vendors in a park in Berlin, Germany. IiT practices show distinctive traits shaped by IiT speakers’ highly superdiverse repertoires, itinerant biographies, and the extremely precarious contexts of acquisition and (re)use of IiT. This paper focused on one specific linguistic feature: the morphological/lexical means used to express intensification in the collected interviews.

Returning to the research questions in § 1, this study found that, despite high interspeaker variation, participants tend to favor certain types of intensifiers/quantifiers (§ 5.1). Specifically, AMPLIFIERS – especially ADVs/ADJs/PRONs of degree or quantity, like *molto*, *tanto*, *troppo*, and *tutto* – are preferred over EMPHASIZERS including modal, speech-act, and focusing scalar ADVs, such as (*per*) *davvero/veramente* ‘really/very’ and *proprio* ‘really/evenly’. Syntactic reduplications, though common in Italian and highly productive in languages like Mandinka and Atlantic creoles spoken by the participants (Holm, 1988), are also rare in my corpus. These findings partially align with preliminary results of Spina *et al.* (2023) on written Italian interlanguages, mainly acquired in supervised school settings by L1 German-speakers in South Tyrol. In the latter, focusing ADVs and MAXIMIZERS, realized as ADVs, are also seldom used, while syntactic reduplications are entirely avoided.

In contrast, the tendency in the GörliPark corpus to overuse *tanto* instead of *molto* (§ 5.2) differs from Spina *et al.* (2023)’s written corpus, where *molto* is the dominant form at least for ADJ intensification. The predominance of *tanto* over *molto* in my data also does not match with reference corpora of spoken Italian, although it reflects their typical specialization per POS and the POS of the modified elements. Rather, it more closely – though not entirely – mirrors patterns in informal spoken registers only. Other sociolinguistic factors, such as the length of stay in Italy or Germany and other known

languages, particularly French (see research question two in § 1), do not appear to be decisive in explaining the distributional patterns observed in my corpus. Further research is, however, needed to explore the extent and nature of their influence more thoroughly.

Beyond identifying quantitative differences in the distribution of intensifiers between IiT and Italian as TL, a qualitative analysis reveals the occasional emergence of innovative traits, namely, the use of *troppo* with the meaning [MOLTO²], which is absent from the input (§ 5.3). A similar use of *troppo* has independently developed in contact varieties intertwined with Italian or other languages in highly multilingual settings (Berruto, 1991). In the GörliPark corpus, this new meaning emerges in interviews with three speakers who lived in Italy for shorter periods (between nine and 30 months) and speak Italian learner varieties oscillating between the basic and post-basic stages, independently of their Italian regions of residence or other languages known. This contrasts with the three interviewees who use *troppo* to mean [MOLTO¹], which is common in youth/colloquial Italian varieties across the peninsula. The latter lived in Italy for longer time spans (5, 9, and 11 years) and mainly speak post-basic Italian interlanguages (Lupica Spagnolo, in press^b for further details).

Besides the duration of exposure to Italian, I suggest that the occasional overextension of *troppo* in IiT may stem from its salience at various linguistic levels (§ 5.3.3). Claiming that the intensifier *troppo* is overextended due to its use in emphatic contexts may seem circular. Nevertheless, this analysis demonstrates that its prominence extends beyond its semantic role as an intensifier to include pragmatic, phonetic, and prosodic dimensions. This combination of features makes *troppo* a strong candidate for overextension. In particular, following Davydova (2022), more salient linguistic variants are more likely to be acquired early by adult L2 learners. Similarly, my data suggest that more salient variants tend to be used more often (*tanto*) and may even develop new meanings (*troppo*) in informally acquired IiT practices. In some interlanguages, this can lead to a reorganization of intensification strategies, where *molto* is often replaced by the more salient variant *troppo*, especially when used as an ADV, while *tanto*, whose variation is below consciousness level in present-day Italian, specializes to work as an ADJ (see also Berruto, 1991). However, given the low occurrence rates, more data are needed to confirm these hypotheses.

Overall, the results highlight the importance of the received input and acquisition contexts (already noted by Schuchardt, 1909) and, thus, the role of participants' biographical-migratory experiences in shaping their interlanguages (see the third research question in § 1). Moreover, they point to the creativity of IiT practices and speakers, particularly after onward migration in new alloglot environments. Beyond the distribution of intensifiers, these dynamics are also evident in other refunctionalized traits in IiT. I refer to these traits as innovative because they are absent from the input, though they may accelerate tendencies already present in non-standard Italian varieties or partially overlap with features found in other informally acquired learner, contact or heritage varieties (Giacalone Ramat, 2003; Berruto, 1991; Di Salvo & Moreno, 2017 for an overview).

Among these traits are generalizations of present infinitives instead of other verb forms. These generalizations are likely due to IiT speakers' exposure primarily to informal spoken input, which was often reduced, if not deliberately simplified, in foreigner talk in Italy. However, in the collected interviews, participants exploit this fossilized trait in innovative ways, for example, by alternating present infinitives with other verb forms to structure information flow, particularly in narratives (Lupica Spagnolo, 2023). Another example is the use of non-canonical negative constructions as standard negation, as in *non mai parla bene l'italiano* '[I] not never [=don't] speak well Italian' (Lupica Spagnolo, in press^b). The emergence of these latter constructions is possibly rooted in similar underlying mechanisms as is the overextension of *troppo* analyzed in this paper. Both involve extending meanings and usage contexts of items that are salient in the input at

different levels, as well as typically appear in ambiguous contexts in colloquial Italian (and therefore are more prone to reanalysis). Analogous processes may also explain the overuse of temporal ADVs and subject PRONs to analytically express tense, aspect, or person and number in IiT, which warrants further analysis.

Crucially, these features may be seen as embodying a dual temporality: they reflect the past – anchored in the speakers’ biographical experiences – while simultaneously projecting into the future, as they are actively reorganized through speaker agency to navigate and communicate effectively within new (socio)linguistic ecologies abroad. They invite us to view IiT as a continuum of multilingual practices that are fluid and highly variable, but nevertheless marked by emerging shared features worthy of further investigation. This is particularly significant given that the language biographies of IiT speakers and other language learners on the move are not a marginal phenomenon. Rather, they are increasingly gaining relevance in our globalized and superdiverse societies. Understanding these patterns of language acquisition and biographical trajectories is therefore crucial to define language education policies that do not reproduce one-nation-one-language ideologies and instead foster mobile speakers’ (trans)language resources. From a theoretical standpoint, their study is also essential to better comprehend the interrelations between language-internal, contact-driven, acquisitional/communicative, and sociolinguistic factors in shaping the emergence of common patterns of innovative linguistic features, despite considerable individual variation.

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APPENDIX

Transcription conventions

– , (pause)	Micro-pause, longer pause
: , :: , :::	Prolongation of the preceding sound

f- false	False starts
CAPITALS, °quiet°	Louder or quieter speech
~	Merged segments
<<German> >	Segment in other languages than Italian
[...], [added information]	Omissions or information added to transcriptions or translations to facilitate understanding
no(n), x	Unintelligible sound(s)
<u>tanto</u>	Analyzed segment(s)
INT, GXX	Interviewer's and participant's initials

