

# The Use of Standard Croatian, Standard Italian and the Fiuman Dialect: A Cas Study

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UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA  
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**THE USE OF STANDARD CROATIAN, STANDARD ITALIAN AND THE FIUMAN  
DIALECT: A CASE STUDY**

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the B.A. in English Language and  
Literature and Philosophy at the University of Rijeka

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## Abstract

Alongside with the traditional Chakavian (Čakavian or Čakavski) dialect, the Fiuman dialect is one of the autochthonous idioms spoken in the city of Rijeka. Since it is a minority language, it could be argued that it is at risk of extinction. Following recent works in the field, which aim at researching the usage and the status of the dialect nowadays, this particular case study aims to observe the everyday speech of multilingual speakers who consider *il Fiumano* as their mother tongue. The analysis of their dialogues permitted not only to comment on the current usage of this minority language, spoken alongside standard Croatian and standard Italian, but also gave insight into the current state, vitality and possibly the future of this local dialect. The results presented in this thesis contribute to previous research in the field.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The Fiuman dialect has been present on the territory of the city of Rijeka for hundreds of years. Its history is closely related to the Italianization of the region, but there are uncertainties whether it developed from vulgar Latin or its development was due to the Venetian colonization and linguistic expansion.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, not enough has been written about *el dialeto fiuman*. In 1896 the historian Giovanni Kobler wrote about the origin of the Fiuman dialect. Several authors (e.g. Lukežić 1993; Rošić 2002) wrote about the history and development of the dialect as well as about its grammar and phonology.<sup>2</sup> More recently, authors like Crnić-Novosel and Spicijarić-Paškvan (2014) conducted a research from a sociolinguistic perspective in order to collect data regarding the current status and vitality of the Fiuman dialect. By means of distributing a questionnaire to different generations of *Fiumani*, the authors tried to answer the questions of how, why and when autochthonous speakers used the dialect to communicate. Moreover, one of the aims of the questionnaire was to investigate the opinions of the *Fiumani* regarding the protection of the dialect from external influences and languages that are considered more prestigious. According to the UNESCO document regarding language vitality and endangerment submitted in 2003 by the ad hoc expert group on endangered languages, there is an urgent need to evaluate the status of minority languages and raise the awareness of

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<sup>1</sup> In their work about the Fiuman dialect (2010: 410), Crnić-Novosel and Spicijarić-Paškvan state that Giovanni Kobler, one of the most important historians of the region, was the first to mention the problem of the origin of the Fiuman dialect in his work *Memorie per la storia della liburnica citta' di Fiume*. The authors, nonetheless, agree that it is more probable that the dialect has Venetian origin. Furthermore, Rošić (2002) demonstrated the kinship between the Italian dialect spoken in the city of Rijeka/Fiume and the Venetian and neo-Venetian dialects. Today, the local Fiuman dialect is listed as one of the Venetian dialects.

<sup>2</sup> For more information consult Salvatore Samani's dictionary *Il Dialetto fiumano* or Nicola Pafundi's *Dizionario Fiumano-Italiano, Italiano-Fiumano*. In addition, on the official website of the city of Rijeka <<http://www.rijeka.hr/Default.aspx?art=8245&sec=949>> Bruno Bontempo selected from Samani's dictionary words and phrases that no longer are in everyday use. This abridged list also presents more common expressions that can be used instead of outdated terms and provides examples in which context they should be used.

language loss and the importance of language diversity. This is the case of the Fiuman dialect, which coexists on the territory of Rijeka with the standard, predominant languages.

The speakers that identify themselves as *Fiumani* are a minority.<sup>3</sup> Since they are bilingual, they use the local Fiuman dialect mostly at home in everyday situations. Even in this restricted context, the dialect is usually mixed with standard Croatian and standard Italian words and phrases. Therefore, the Fiuman dialect can be categorized as a sociolect important for the heterogeneous linguistic identity of Rijeka.

This research will focus on the issue of the vitality and the usage of the Fiuman dialect between active speakers who use it in everyday speech. More precisely, the case study aims at showing if there is relevant intergenerational transmission of the language. The study could also identify the defining features of the dialect. Moreover, the analyzed data could show to what degree the language of the older generation differs from the way younger generations interact in a familiar environment. The results, qualitative in their nature, could also be relevant on a larger scale, contributing to previous research in the field.

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<sup>3</sup> The Italian minority is one of the 22 registered ethnic minorities in the city of Rijeka. The minority is recognized as an autochthonous ethnic community and its members form 1.90% of the total population, according to the 2011 census. The members use the standard Italian, as well as the Fiuman dialect to communicate.

More detailed information regarding the fostering of this minority culture can be found on the website < <http://www.bilingualism-matters-rijeka.ffri.hr/en/our-context/minority-languages.html> > .

## 2. THE PRESENT STUDY

### 2.1. Research questions

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. The main question regards the way autochthonous speakers interact among themselves. The question is how speakers that recognize *el dialeto Fiuman* as their mother tongue use this particular dialect in their home, alongside other languages. In other words, the defining characteristics of their everyday communication are to be examined.

2. Secondly, as Fiuman speakers are multilingual, it would be interesting to see if they code-switch, which languages are used and to what extent.

3. Thirdly, this thesis could provide an insight into the vitality of the Fiuman dialect, primarily assessed on the basis of transgenerational language transmission, one of the major assessment criteria of the level of the vitality of a language according to the UNESCO ad hoc expert group (2003).<sup>4</sup> In other words, it might be possible to deduce if older generations are successfully transmitting the dialect to younger generations and to what extent their speech differs.

4. Rošić (2002) thinks that the Fiuman dialect is slowly but inevitably dying. On the other hand, the results of Crnić-Novosel and Spicijarić-Paškvan (2014) show that the older generations of *Fiumani* proudly and successfully transmit the dialect to younger generations. The intent of this work is to contribute the existing discussion.

More generally, the research questions regard the usage, the status and the vitality of this particular local dialect spoken on a daily basis by members of the Italian community in Rijeka.

### 2.2 Aims

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<sup>4</sup> Other major criteria for evaluating language vitality are: the absolute number of speakers, the proportion of speakers within the total population, the trends in the existing language domains, response to new domains and the media, and materials for language education and literacy.

The main aim of the study is to analyze the communicative tendencies of autochthonous speakers of the Fiuman dialect. More specifically, the aim is to analyze how autochthonous speakers who are multilingual use their mother tongue, the Fiuman dialect, alongside the standard Italian language and the standard Croatian language.

A related aim is to analyze to what extent the language of older generations differs from the language of younger generations. Another aim is to investigate if younger generations of speakers use the dialect in their everyday communication just as much as the older speakers. Finally, one of the aims is to try to predict, on the basis of the obtained results, if the dialect is able to survive and in which form.

Even though the sample observed in this study is way too small to draw definite conclusions, the results could, nonetheless, present valuable insight into the topic. The results might help to understand how the dialect is used nowadays. Also, they might be useful when discussing the extent of its transmission.

In order to contextualize our findings, they are compared with the results obtained from other studies.

### 2.3 Participants

Three participants (P1, P2, and P3) were involved in this particular case study. The three participants are adult females from the same family, from different generations. P1 is 23 years old, P2 is 46 years old, and P3 is 73 years old and they live together and interact on a daily basis. They were all born in Rijeka, identify themselves as part of the Italian minority in Rijeka, and consider the Fiuman dialect to be their mother tongue. They use it to communicate among themselves, usually in a domestic environment. The participants are fluent in more than one language. The youngest participant claims to be fluent in standard Croatian, standard Italian and the Fiuman dialect. The second participant claims to fluently speak the standard Croatian



language and the Fiuman dialect and understands the standard Italian language but does not actively use it. The third participant reports to communicate in the Fiuman dialect, but also speaks standard Croatian and standard Italian.

Alongside these three main participants, other participants were involved in the study, but to a lesser extent, namely P3's friend, P3's sister, P2's cousin and P1's colleague. P3's friend has the same age as P3 and speaks Fiuman as well as standard Italian and standard Croatian. P3's sister is only few years older than P3 and fluently speaks the Fiuman dialect, reports to occasionally use the standard Italian language, but mostly interacts using the standard Croatian language, even at home. P2's cousin, who has the same age as P2, claims to communicate using the Fiuman dialect and the standard Croatian language. P1's colleague reports to speak mostly the standard Croatian language, even though was educated in Italian schools, and as a child spoke the Fiuman dialect with her grandmother. P1's colleague is 23 years old.

## 2.4. Research method

The method chosen for this particular study was of qualitative type<sup>5</sup>, since the aim was to investigate how the *Fiumani* interact among themselves in a specific environment, i.e. a domestic setting. The interaction was recorded for five days, few hours a day. Afterwards, the audio recordings were analyzed and a transcript was made.

Even though different authors (e.g. Brown 2001) suggest that qualitative and quantitative methodologies should be combined when possible, the researcher was more inclined to opt for a qualitative research method because of the restricted sample and the nature of the study which

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<sup>5</sup> Many are the ways to gather qualitative data (interviews, questionnaires, observation of the participants, case studies, etc...). Dorney (2007) analyzes both qualitative, quantitative and mixed methodologies. His work was consulted before starting this study in order to find the best way to gather data.

aims to obtain specific information about the communicative tendencies of autochthonous speakers of the Fiuman dialect.

The researcher was not only the observer that recorded the interaction, but also one of the participants. The other participants were orally informed of the scope and purpose of the study and willingly agreed to participate.

The data obtained from the audio tapes, i.e. the transcript of the interaction, was carefully analyzed. The results of the study are presented in the following section.

### 3. RESULTS

The results show that there is a high degree of code-switching in the speech of all three generations, occurring on a daily basis. The alternation occurs between the Fiuman dialect and words and phrases from standard Croatian, i.e. words from standard Croatian are incorporated in interaction in the Fiuman dialect. This is clearly indicated in the following examples:

#### Extract 1

P2: Ti me ga visto el upaljač?

P1: El te xe sopra el frižider

#### Extract 2

P3: Te prego (.) Ti me misuri el tlak.

P2: Adesso (.) Solo che bevo caffe'

#### Extract 3

P1: Vado farme tuš

P2: Ciudi el bojler

These examples also show that the Fiuman dialect spoken by younger and older participants does not significantly differ, that is, they code-switch to a similar extent, and use similar sentence constructions and vocabulary.

Unfortunately, the analysis of the transcript cannot give any results regarding the use of the dialect in its written form. This study focused only on the analysis of speech samples. But the researcher is able to presume that the participants do not use the dialect in its written form, at least not frequently, and do not read in the Fiuman dialect.

During the recording, the participants were visited by relatives and friends. Those interactions permitted to analyze how autochthonous speakers of the Fiuman dialect adjust their language when having a conversation with other speakers. Some of the speakers consider themselves to be Fiumani.

When interacting with their relatives, who visit them occasionally, the participants of all three generations use the Fiuman dialect. This fact is not surprising since they were, at least in part, raised together.

#### Extract 4

P3: Ti la ga ciama' ieri?

Sister of P3: Si la go ciama' (..) Pa te go deto

P3: Non ti me ga deto (..) No stame inscempiar.

P1: Ande' parlar in cucina (..) Guardo la television

#### Extract 5

P2: Cosa ti son vegnu' in pauza de lavor?

Cousin of P2: Si (..) Go meza ora

P1: Ti vol caffe' Doli?

The extracts show that P1, P2, and P3 do not adjust their language when interacting with their relatives (e.g. sister, cousin) with whom they share cultural background and linguistic identity.

They also code-switch as shown in the following extract:

#### Extract 6

P3: Cosa ti ga compra novi auto?

Cousin of P2: Si (.) Ti alzi kredit i riješeno

P1: E in quanti ani? Anche mi me coprerio uno

Interestingly, the analysis of the recorded speech samples show that the participants do not use words from standard Italian in any communicative situation, except when they comment on Italian television programs. They also tend to repeat what they hear on TV. The following extract clarifies this:

Extract 7 (P1, P2, P3 are watching an Italian TV show)

P3: La ga detto "Mi ha fatto soffrire" (.) Adesso vederemo perche'

P1: Joj, daj nona (exhales) Cos ti guardi stupidaggini

Furthermore, P3 tries to speak exclusively in standard Italian when calling relatives who live abroad. The following dialogue shows how P3 adjusts her language to the other speaker:

Extract 8 (on the phone)

P3: Ciao Adriana (.) Come stai carissima?

(...)

P3: Da noi tutto bene (.) Tutto sempre stesso

(...)

P3: Dimmi (.) come stanno i figli

A related example regards P3 who is trying to write a postcard in Italian for her relatives abroad.

She asks P1 for advice, since P1 was educated in Italian schools:

Extract 9

P3: Come se scrive abbracci? Con una c?

P1: Con due b e due c (.) Abbracci

An interesting example of code-switching between standard Croatian, standard Italian and the Fiuman dialect occurred during a conversation that involved P3, P1 and a university colleague and friend of P1 that came in visit.

#### Extract 10

P3: Dorotea (.) Ti ne son vegnu' trovar

Dorotea: Si son vegnu' (.) Molto tempo non ero

P1: Dodo, hoćeš kavu?

Dorotea: Da može (.) Hvala

P3: Si daghe caffè' e biscotti.

(..)

P3: Che bella scura ti son Dorotea (.) Ti va far bagno (.) No come la Luana

Dorotea: Si si vado (..) Vado anche domani

P3: Cosa noi ga deto che doman piovera'?

Dorotea: No (.) Sa come si dice (.)Rosso di sera (.) bel tempo si spera (laughs discreetly)

P1: Ma piovera' (.) mi credo (..) Ma sai Dodo (.) si dice anche la speranza e' l'ultima a morire (laughs ironically)

P1: E idemo u sobu (.) Moram ti nešto pokazati

Dorotea: Ajmo

From this example we can see that all three speakers are multilingual and have knowledge of standard Italian, standard Croatian and the Fiuman dialect. Interestingly, P1 and her colleague speak standard Croatian between themselves, but in interaction with P3 they switch to the

Fiuman dialect and also integrate standard Italian words (in this particular case they used Italian proverbs). We can assume that this is due to the fact that P1 and her colleague are not accustomed to use the dialect when they interact between themselves, but only when interacting with older people.

As the following dialogue will show, between P1 and her colleague there is also code-switching between the standard Croatian and the standard Italian. This may be attributed to the fact they were both educated in Italian schools in Rijeka.

#### Extract 11

Dorotea: E tako sam morala učiti i Manzonija (.) Alessandro Manzoni naque nel 1785 a Milano. E' stato uno scrittore [...]

P1: Joj (laughs) sve znaš napamet (smiles)

On the other hand, P3 interacts with her friends using the Fiuman dialect.

#### Extract 12

P3: Anice mia (.) Cosa ti eri dal dottor?

Friend of P3: Si (.) Go fatto rendgen

The interaction between P3 and her friend is characterized by the usage of a number of words from the standard Croatian while speaking the Fiuman dialect. This might be due to the restricted Fiuman vocabulary. Extract 12 resembles previous extracts where P1, P2, and P3 speak with their relatives.

The data indicate that younger participants do not use the Fiuman dialect to interact between themselves, whereas the participants from the older generation do. Younger generations of speakers, P1 and P2, use the dialect in interaction with their relatives, but not in interaction with

their friends. P2 uses only the standard Croatian language to interact with her friends because they have no knowledge of the Fiuman dialect. P1 has the possibility to use the Fiuman dialect with her friend and colleague since both learnt it as children, but chooses to speak standard Croatian. They use the standard Croatian language, but integrate words and phrases from the standard Italian, as a result of their education.

The results indicate that the transmission of the language is successful in the sense that all participants from different generations speak the Fiuman dialect. However, a high degree of code-switching is present in communication, and only speakers of the older generation are accustomed to speaking the Fiuman dialect with their friends.

Furthermore, it seems that the standard Italian language has no substantial influence on the Fiuman dialect, at least not directly in the sense that the speakers are prone to use Italian words instead of words from the Fiuman dialect or from the standard Croatian language.



## 4. DISCUSSION

As stated at the beginning of the thesis, the Fiuman dialect developed on the territory of the city of Rijeka as an autochthonous language spoken by a minority of people. It changed through time influenced by Venetian speech forms and idioms spoken in its surrounding. Surely, it was not the only autochthonous dialect present in Rijeka, a city known for the presence of ethnic and linguistic diversity. The Čakavian dialect is also an autochthonous dialect that coexisted and sometimes interacted with the dialect analyzed in this study. Lukežić (1993; 2008) writes about the development of these dialects and their morphological and phonetic features.<sup>6</sup> What is relevant for the present research is the author's analysis of the linguistic status of these dialects nowadays saying that not only have they undergone numerous changes but also are in unenviable positions. Specifically, the speakers of the Fiuman dialect "are marginalized in peripheral linguistic enclaves" (Lukežić 2008:36). Moreover, Lukežić (2008) expresses her fear that languages like Italian and Croatian will progressively substitute the dialect, and Rošić (2002: 11-12) supports that idea:

In contrast to the Italian language, the Fiuman dialect has a very small chance of continuing beyond the survival of its older speakers. There is no practical way to estimate the present number of Fiuman speakers in the city. Those who still use it in their daily contacts and who speak it fluently are now well into their seventies and eighties, but their number is becoming smaller with each passing day. The speech of the younger generation of Fiumans, however, has been greatly influenced by the standard Italian language.

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<sup>6</sup> Lukežić (2008) also describes their mutual relationship. They coexisted on the same territory, but were never in conflict in the sense that the usage of one dialect could be blamed for the dissolution of the other. Also, the author describes the unfavorable sociopolitical factors which caused the marginalization of their usage.

Even though the results presented in this thesis cannot be generalized, they show that the Italian standard language has no substantial influence on the Fiuman vocabulary. Interestingly, even P1, P2, and P3 who are of Italian nationality do not use the Italian standard language in everyday communication. This might be attributed to the fact that the participants use the dialect from birth and do not perceive the standard Italian language as more prestigious.

The results of the study show that there are few situations in which Italian words, phrases and proverbs are used. This also indicates that not all speakers have learned the standard Italian language. P3 has learned standard Italian in elementary school and uses it when speaking with relatives that live abroad. P2 was formally educated in Croatian, understands the standard Italian but does not use it, and P1 adjusts her language according to the interlocutor, and uses the Fiuman dialect at home, even though she is very fluent in standard Italian.

Even though the sample was limited, the results collected indicate that older speakers successfully transmit the dialect to the younger generation in their family, and speech extracts show that the language of younger generations minimally differs from the language of older generations. There is a high-degree of code-switching between the Fiuman dialect and the standard Croatian language. This might be attributed, as Rošić (2002:12) also confirms, to the fact that the Fiuman vocabulary is restricted:

In fact, the Fiuman vocabulary contains only a small number of words that are not related to basic, everyday human needs. Such limited vocabulary is the main reason for the presence of a large number of compensatory loanwords, which can be categorized as being of necessity.

The question that raises concern is if this restricted vocabulary, even though complemented with words from standard Croatian, will be satisfactory to future generations of speakers. As Rošić (2002:12) notes, the Fiuman dialect has its limits:

The Fiuman dialect was adequate in earlier, "simpler" times when life and work was not affected by outside influences, when information from the world of progress was not available or slow to filter through to the wider audience.

Furthermore, the findings show that P1, P2 and P3 use the Fiuman dialect to speak to their relatives. However, when interacting with their friends the younger generation is keen to communicate using the standard Croatian rather than the dialect, even if the interlocutor also has knowledge of the dialect. This might be due to the fact that the speakers are accustomed to using the dialect in a very restricted and private environment, at home with other family members. This is confirmed also by Crnić-Novosel and Spicijarić-Paškavan (2014). According to their results, the speakers use the dialect in everyday communication between family members, among friends or within specific groups of speakers. This thesis indicates that the dialect is successfully used to communicate mostly between family members who transmit the language to younger generations.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The thesis presents the results obtained from a case study whose aim was to observe everyday communication among speakers of the Fiuman dialect. The participants were recorded in their home in order to collect data regarding their communicative tendencies.

The results indicate that all three generations of participants use the Fiuman dialect on a daily basis. However, there is a high degree of code-switching noticeable in their speech. From the analysis of the results it is clear that many words and expressions from standard Croatian are mixed with the dialect and form a heterogeneous sociolect. Words and expressions from the standard Italian language are usually used when communicating with relatives that live abroad, or when commenting on Italian TV shows. Other than these few examples, there is no significant code-switching between the Fiuman dialect and the standard Italian language.

Interestingly, younger and older speakers code-switch to a similar extent, using similar sentence construction and vocabulary, that is, their language does not significantly differ.

The data also show that this minority language is successfully transmitted and used in intergenerational communication (cf. Crnić Novosel and Spicijarić Paškvan 2014). However, only grandparents use the dialect to communicate with their friends. The standard Croatian language is predominant in the communication of the younger generation. Speakers of the younger generation will, however, use the Fiuman dialect when interacting with older speakers. This could be attributed to the fact that the younger generation is not accustomed to using the Fiuman dialect outside a family setting.

Even though the sample of the study was limited, we could deduce that the problems the Fiuman dialect has to fight regard mostly its stagnated and limited vocabulary. As Rošić (2008:12) confirms: "Today, its limited use, combined with inadequate vocabulary can only be considered a hindrance, not an attribute to its continuity." Even though the Fiuman dialect is successfully

transmitted to the younger generation of *Fiumani*, it is still a minority language spoken mostly in a private family environment. Even then, there is a high degree of code-switching.

A preoccupying prospect is that with time more and more words from standard languages will be used, which might lead to a slow but inevitable death of this dialect.

In order to prevent that, more research is needed. In addition, there should be educative programmes that promote the Fiuman dialect in its spoken as well as written form.<sup>7</sup>

However small the contribution, this thesis not only gives an insight into the communicative tendencies of the speakers of the Fiuman dialect, but is also one of the most recent studies in the field and can help in the overall assessment of the usage, the status and the vitality of the Fiuman dialect. According to the UNESCO document on language vitality and endangerment (2003), gathering information on endangered languages is the first steps to undertake before developing projects and activities that will help to preserve a minority language like the Fiuman dialect.

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<sup>7</sup> Rošić (2008: 23) points out that the Italian community in Rijeka, through their publishing house Edit, publishes a number of reviews and books as well as a daily newspaper "La voce del popolo". The annual review "La Tore" is the only publication that contains material written in Fiuman. This might be related to the fact that there are not many members of the Fiuman community who can speak it well, let alone write in it.

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