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Language and Intentionality: exploring agency in language use as a marker of identity among Senegalese street sellers in Florence

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Abstract

Since the 1980s, Italy has become one of the leading destinations of Senegalese migration and one of the countries with the most numerous Senegalese population in Europe. Along with other African diasporas, Senegalese migrants in Italy are an object of interest of the national media that generally portray them as a monolithic group, uniformed under simplistic images and victim of its circumstances. The presence of this community has also been the interest of many scholars within the social sciences. In their works, these scholars adopted a more nuanced and objective look towards Senegalese migrants' conditions in Italy, taking into account agency and diversity in dealing with the complex situation of this migrant community. Building from the corpus of research laid down by these works, this thesis contributes to the discussion on Senegalese migrants' agency from a different perspective. Drawing from the example of Senegalese street sellers working in Florence, the present work shows how the use they make of language can be seen as a way to recover actors' agency. Specifically, by considering the use they make of language as an identity marker, the present thesis reveals the role that Senegalese street vendors have in dealing with their new (linguistic) circumstances. Within this framework, intentionality in language use works as a concept to understand and investigate agency. In this way, the present work sheds light on language use as an asset for Senegalese street sellers' agency; moreover, it gives a practical solution to understand and analyse agency by pointing to how intentionality may be expressed in language use.

Keywords: Agency; Identity; Intentionality; Italy; Language use; Multilingualism; Senegalese migrants; Street sellers.

1. INTRODUCTION

The present research explores language use among Senegalese migrants in Florence. The relation of language vis-à-vis identity construction in a migration setting will be explored through the life experience of Senegalese street sellers in Florence city centre. Furthermore, the present study researches the conditions that can explain the conscious or agent-driven use of language as a marker of identity. In this way, drawing from three months of participant observation in the field, I explore how Senegalese in Florence define "their identities through multilingual practices" (Smith, 2013, p.1).

The inspiration for this work comes from a long trajectory in my personal life. As a multilingual speaker, who had the chance to live in different European countries, I have always found it interesting to understand the role that language plays in adapting to new settings. However, it was only in 2017, after a long period in Senegal's capital, Dakar, when I related this interest of mine with Africa. In this context, faced with a situation where multilingualism was more the rule than the exception, I started wondering how people could navigate these complex linguistic settings without getting lost, metaphorically speaking. Once I returned to Madrid University, I began working on my graduate thesis on language ideologies in post-colonial contexts, inspired by my personal experience in Senegal. However, many questions remained unanswered.

In the African Studies master's degree at Leiden University, I decided to focus more on Senegal's linguistic reality and the linguistic practices to construct identity, aiming at going beyond the theoretical discussion I dealt with in my graduate dissertation. Therefore, when I first started working on the research design, I had a clear idea to conduct my study in the very place where everything started, Dakar. However, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide made this option impracticable due to security reasons. Thus, in the first moment, I had to deal with disappointment, both because I had planned all my recent life around that goal and because I had to re-adapt my research to a new setting: my home country, Italy. However, I eventually got used to the idea of changing the research field, and I quickly started to realise the advantages that could come out of this new research plan. Researching in Italy allowed me to study Africa beyond the limit of its physical borders, reflecting one of the many faces of Africa in the world. Besides, this new research plan appeared to be much in line with the necessities highlighted by Blommaert (2010) to define "a sociolinguistics of mobile

resources, framed in terms of trans-contextual networks, flows and movements" (p. 1). In the light of all these considerations, the study of language use and identity construction for Senegalese street sellers in Italy appears to be an actual as well as relevant research topic.

Despite its many local dialects, Italy is regarded as a monolingual setting dominated by the Italian language (Smith, 2013). However, some exceptions are to be made within this predominantly homogeneous linguistic context: Florence is one of them. Being the destination of millions of tourists per year (Becheri, 2005) and many migrants looking for better job opportunities (IRPET, 2019), the city of Florence represents a multilingual enclosure in the mono-linguistic reality of Italy. The local population, mostly monolingual, cohabits with an international community and its many linguistic repertoires. However, the lives of local and the international communities unfold independently from one another and the contacts between these two groups are limited. As I mentioned before, this is mainly because the majority of Italians do not speak many other languages than Italian, and most of the tourists do not speak Italian. Nonetheless, Florence offers many opportunities for those who can draw from the possibilities offered by its multilingual environment.

Right at the intersection between the different linguistic realities of the city is where Senegalese street sellers are to be found. Coming from a multilingual society like the Senegalese one, these young men actively exploit the pluralistic linguistic environment of Florence. On the one hand, facilitated by their knowledge of French, they quickly learn the Italian language to get by in the hosting society. On the other hand, they usually get competent in one or more foreign languages to reach more customers and boost their chances of success in 'business'. Besides, they maintain their language practices, mostly in Wolof or French, within the Senegalese community of the city. In this sense, the linguistic activity of these individuals reflects their intermediate position between different communities. However, their linguistic behaviours also point to another important aspect that connects with their condition of migrants in Italy: the use they make of language for marking their identity.

In their position as migrants in Florence, Senegalese street sellers navigate the city as a stage on which they perform identity. On the one hand, they draw from their background and their travel life-histories. On the other hand, they take advantage of the

circumstances offered by the touristic city to break with their past life and, to a certain extent, build new identities through the linguistic choices they make. In other words, language becomes relevant not only as a tool to communicate or get information but also as an asset: a performative element that embodies the speaker's personal experiences.

Surely, the common origins of the participants play a fundamental role in the way they approach and use languages: used to a multilingual society, many Senegalese men have developed a certain 'sense' for the use of multiple languages. This sense could also be relevant in the way they approach a new linguistic environment: they will likely fall back on the behaviour and attitudes familiar to them. Therefore, the way in which Senegalese street sellers navigate the multiple linguistic spaces around them may be influenced by habits developed back at home. However, as authors like Bourdieu (1991) have shown, this process may not be the result of a conscious choice as it may seem, but rather an automatic application of assimilated attitudes when facing a new circumstance.

Yet, in Florence's multilingual environment, Senegalese men have the chance to become more conscious about their linguistic behaviour by comparing with Italians and their different approach to the same linguistic situation. For this reason, they also have the chance to become more conscious of the possibilities they can get from their new linguistic circumstances. In this sense, what may have been very common to many Senegalese men back in their home country - a multilingual behaviour - becomes an exceptional feature in Italy, a feature that sets them apart from the majority of locals on the one hand and a great number of tourists on the other. The intentional use of these multilingual skills is clearly shown in the playful approach that many of these men - especially young ones - reveals towards the different language repertoires that the city has to offer. In their use of mixed slang where Italian words amalgamate with English and Wolof lexemes, these actors not only play with the technical aspects of language, showing their linguistic proficiency, but also with the representations that go associated with them to project a certain image of themselves and their lifestyle.

The way in which these Senegalese men deal with language and identity, far from being an easy phenomenon to analyse, is not as straightforward as it seems. It could be argued that every linguistic practice in itself entails an 'act of identity', whether the speaker is conscious of it or not. To give an example related to the topic at hand, some Senegalese

youngsters may use certain words (intentionally) to project a certain identity, maybe words that, being used mainly in Dakar, are associated with the profile of an urban speaker. However, the way they speak may also reveal (un-intentionally) their origin from a specific region of Senegal.

All these considerations show that the use of language as a marker of identity is way more complex than it seems and that there is still work to do to shed light on some of the fundamental aspects of this phenomenon, such as the actor's agency in the language use. With the present work, I explore how Senegalese street vendors make use of language as a marker of identity. By drawing from the attitudes of Senegalese street sellers in the multilingual space of Florence, I aim at recovering the figure of Senegalese migrants as active agents, in line with previous studies on the topic (Kaag, 2008, 2013; Riccio, 2001, 2004).

The work of Smith (2013; 2015) on language acquisition and identity has already shown the importance of looking at language to understand Senegalese migrants' position in Italy. Drawing from this author's work, which revealed extremely useful to lay down the premises of the present thesis, I aim at making my contribution to the debate over one of the most critical "questions revolving around identity and language" (Smith, 2013, p. 2) nowadays: to what extent do external circumstances dictate the use that speakers make of language as an identity marker, and to what extent it is the result of an individual's internal inclination of the individual.

In order to understand the agent-driven role of Senegalese street sellers in the use they make of language in Florence, the present work develops from the following research question:

> *How may Senegalese street sellers' use of language for marking their identity in Florence reflect intentionality in language use?*

1.2 Structure of the thesis

The rest of the work is divided into five chapters. In chapter 2, I present the methodological approach I adopted concerning the fieldwork and the data analysis. Firstly, I give an overview of the research in the field. In this sense, I introduce the spaces, times of research and the actors involved. Secondly, I describe my role as a

researcher in the field and the evolution of my position throughout the research process. In this account, I also show the most relevant methodological difficulties I faced in the field. In the last part of the chapter, I discuss the methodological approach to the data I gathered during the fieldwork and, finally, my take on language as a social researcher.

In chapter 3, I introduce the main actors of the work: Senegalese street sellers. Firstly, I familiarise the reader with the conditions of the Senegalese diaspora in Italy, pointing to street selling as a very common occupation taken up by many incomers upon their first arrival in Italy. After doing that, I delve more into the street selling conditions in Florence: how Senegalese street sellers organise their work, how their interaction with clients looks like, who are the main customers, and what kinds of goods are sold. In this sense, I present to the reader the 'market conditions' offered by the city of Florence. Then, I show the salience of language within street selling. In this regard, I discuss the importance of language not only as a means to connect with customers but also as a commodity in itself and I point at multilingual proficiency as a skill that can create better job opportunities for street sellers. Finally, I introduce the importance of language use from a symbolic perspective, namely, as a marker of identity.

In chapter 4, I discuss the position of Senegalese street sellers in between two different societies, the Italian and the Senegalese ones, with different linguistic situations and different takes on language and its use. To do so, I specifically consider how language intertwines with identity in these two contexts. Firstly, I look at Senegal' linguistic situation and the main attitudes towards language in this country. In this part, I point to language as a marker of different kinds of identity, including ethnic, religious, and urban identities. Secondly, I introduce Italian identity and link that to Italian attitudes to foreigners, Africans in particular. In this part I also connect the debate on national identity in Italy with the role of language and treat Florence's specific situation. I then ask how the Senegalese approach Florence's linguistic settings and what language use may result from it. Finally, I introduce some theoretical concepts that help us to understand how the environmental circumstances that I just introduced may influence the linguistic behaviour of Senegalese street sellers in Florence. Here, I discuss the concept of *habitus* elaborated by Bourdieu (1991) to take into account how assimilated, transferable linguistic habits may translate to the new situation these Senegalese men find themselves in. In the second place, by referring to the linguistic environment of Florence, I point to the concept of agency of spaces and reveal how multilingual settings

can be understood as social spaces that legitimise, censor, require or deny the use of specific linguistic forms from its user. By doing that, I question to what extent the structural circumstances determine the speaker's use of language as a marker of identity.

Drawing from the question that I introduced at the end of the last section, in chapter 5 I look at the active role of Senegalese street vendors in choices concerning language use. In the first place, I present the concept of agency and how it has been defined. Then, I propose a specific perspective to understand and approach agency in social interaction. To make my point clearer, I consider how this perspective applies to the analysis of linguistic interaction in Florence and I give examples of how social factors may influence Senegalese street sellers' use of language. By doing so, I show that by limiting ourselves to apply the concept of agency to the analysis of linguistic interaction, we can get hints of the actors' agential role, but still, we cannot overcome the problem posed by the influence of structural constraints in language use. For this reason, I point at intentionality in language use as a way to overcome such a methodological *impasse* and point out agency in the way Senegalese street sellers use language. To make my point clear, I show examples of how intentionality can be applied to analyse Senegalese speakers' use of language, drawing from experiences in the field.

In the final part of the work, I present the conclusions drawn from the preceding chapters. I also introduce future research pathways that this work has revealed and that may contribute to the discussion on language and identity.

2. METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The present chapter introduces the methodology that I followed to gather data during the research. However, it also represents a space where I give an account of the research process itself. In this sense, this chapter also describes the evolution of the research and, the thesis itself. In this account, I explain the necessary changes that I had to adopt because of the impediments posed by COVID-19. By doing so, I introduce the implications that these changes had in understanding the data and its use. Hopefully, I will show how this thesis is not the result of a fieldwork-based research alone, neither of a mere theoretical work, but of the combination of these two approaches.

2.1 Spaces/times of the research and actors involved

The research was designed as a 'traditional' fieldwork project on-site. However, this was hardly the context prefigured when we consider the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had worldwide and in Italy. In the first moment, the research settings had to be limited to one city, Florence, instead of two, as was initially foreseen. In a second moment, the circumstances led to a change in the project's methodology that necessarily became more theoretical in nature. All these changes resulted in a hybrid research, which slowly mutated from fieldwork to a theoretically-oriented work that uses the data collected during the research as secondary data to support the main argument of the research, in itself more theoretical. For these very reasons, here I present the full research process and the methodological changes that it has undergone from its very start.

Officially started on August 25, the research in the field has been going on for three months, until December, when, due to restrictions posed by the COVID-19 emergency, it came abruptly to an end. The first problem I had to deal with concerned the limits of my 'field' within the city of Florence: where was I supposed to look and how to choose informants? At first, I thought I had some advantages considering my relative familiarity with the city of Florence. However, when it came to putting this knowledge into practice, I quickly realised that I had only vague ideas of where to start. At this point, considering the profession of my research participants - street selling - I decided to start from the city's tourist areas. Therefore, during the first weeks, I wandered around the city centre, trying to find Senegalese street sellers working on site. During

this time, in the few occasions when I managed to establish interactions with interlocutors, I avoided introducing the research and its aim, and I limited myself to express my interest in the Wolof language. I thought that introducing the research from the start would have had a negative repercussion on the interaction: my interlocutors would have been reluctant to engage in a conversation with me.

After three or four weeks, I decided to delimit the research scope, considering that meandering around the streets of the city only resulted in few conversations. After considering different alternatives, I opted for limiting the research to two zones: on the one hand, the area of the city centre between Piazza della Signoria, Piazza della Repubblica e Ponte Santa Trinita; on the other hand, the city station, where many Senegalese men stationed with their improvised counters selling electronic devices to travellers passing by. In the first part of the research, namely, the first month and a half, fieldwork observations were carried out in the evening, from 3 pm to 8 pm. In a second moment, I anticipated the timeframe: usually from 11 am to 5 pm.

Most of the participants involved in the research were in their thirties, except for some younger (three guys aged respectively 17, 26 and 23) and some older individuals (three men around their fifties). All the people I interacted with came either from Touba, Dakar or Thiès, except for two people: a young guy from Casamance and another young guy from Saint Louis. Almost all of them were involved in street selling activities of various nature: from bookselling and merchandise/gadget/bracelets selling (especially in the touristic spots of the city) to electronic device selling (in the proximity of the city station). All of the people I met were Muslim, the majority of them affiliated with the Mouridiyya brotherhood. Only one of them turned out to be associated with the Tijaniyya brotherhood.

Regarding the ethnic profile of the participants, most of them did not specify it. When this aspect was made explicit during conversations, it was either on my request or on the personal choice of the interlocutor. All the people that voluntarily made this aspect explicit (three of them) happened to be Haalpulaar.

All of the individuals I have interacted with were able to speak Wolof, the most spoken language in Senegal and the de facto *lingua franca* of the country. However, there were also notable exceptions, such as the case of the Senegalese youngster from Casamance who, to his saying, did not know Wolof (nor French). In all interactions where more

than one person was involved, Wolof always functioned as the common language that interlocutors used to speak with each other.

Regarding other language skills, most of the younger people I have met showed a good level of Italian and spoke other European languages such as French (primarily because of their education in Senegalese schools), Spanish, German, and English. Some of them openly acknowledged their multilingualism when speaking to me, almost showing off their linguistic repertoires, like Cheick or Ibrahima, two young men I met close to Santa Trinita bridge.[1] Others, like Ndiaga, talked about this when explaining to me the difficulties of finding a job or the way in which Italian people perceive them. In this sense, he made me notice that most of them were able to speak more languages compared to Italians, who, in general, were only able to speak their own language. However, in the cases when they talked about their linguistic repertoires, I have never had the chance to validate their actual linguistic abilities.

For the aforementioned reasons, most of the young people I have met were linguistically independent. This was not always the case with older men, some of whom had to rely on other people (usually younger) to communicate with me in Italian. Besides, I have also met people who could speak only Wolof, like a street seller around his mid-thirties that I met close to piazza della Signoria and a middle-aged street vendor who was working just outside of the station.

2.2 "Why are you always here with us?" A journey from outsider to friend and helper

Since its conception, the present research has undergone several reshaping and has changed both in its shape and object of interest. At a first stage, the present research was aimed to study the use of the Wolof language within the community of Senegalese street sellers in Florence. Therefore, learning Wolof has been the main strategy to establish conversations in the field. In a country where most of the inhabitants do not know what language is spoken in Senegal, showing interest in Wolof sparked the attention of my interlocutors, most of whom were both pleased and amused by this fact.

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[1] Due to privacy reasons, all the research participants' names that appear throughout the thesis do not correspond to the real names of the people I met in the field.

It took me quite a while to get used to the condition of a beginner-level learner, a condition in which I would eventually appear ridiculous, especially in the first interactions. My disposition to try my best to use Wolof, despite my evident limitations, helped me connect with my interlocutors, who were very pleased to teach me, to discuss and show off their knowledge of this language. Nonetheless, this approach was not always useful, and my poor knowledge of Wolof also became a motive for critique. This was the case with Samba, an older man selling at the entrance of Florence station, who critiqued my slow progress in learning the language. However, these were isolated cases that represented the exception to the rule rather than a common circumstance.

My approach usually consisted of taking the initiative in establishing contact when crossing paths with Senegalese street sellers. At first, I thought that maybe such an approach could have turned out to be favourable to me, as I believed that I would have had the chance to show my good intentions towards them, and, by doing so, gaining their confidence. However, that turned out not to be the case. Despite having got some good reactions from this strategy, I quickly noted that my behaviour appeared strange and somehow suspicious to the majority of street sellers I approached in this way. Therefore, this dynamic usually resulted in an awkward situation, especially for them. As I later realised, this awkwardness was mainly due to the fact that they were not used to being approached but rather avoided by people.

These awkward situations, which were very common in the first part of the research, turned out to be very useful sources of information. The awkwardness that my interlocutors and I felt in these encounters was insightful to understand the dynamic of interactions between street sellers and customers and the expectations from both parties in the conversation. After some time though, this strategy of approaching people eventually became counterproductive as many of the street sellers who already knew me started to avoid me, probably doubting my intentions.

Therefore, I decided to change my approach and I opted for sitting or wandering in the touristic spaces where some street sellers were working, waiting to be approached by them. In the first stages of the fieldwork, my interlocutors often perceived me as a suspicious and somehow undesired presence. In part, they started to wonder why I was spending considerable amounts of time with them. Besides, they started to be suspicious of my intentions, as was revealed by the numerous questions they were posing to me

about why I was always with them. Eventually, they also started to perceive me as an undesired presence. This perception was mainly due to the fact that, on almost all the occasions I engaged in conversation with them, my interlocutors were busy with their job. For this reason, they perceived the time they were spending with me as wasted time that could otherwise be used for engaging in possibly remunerative interactions. In some cases, this was made clear to me explicitly. For example, when I first met Modou, a young man around his thirties selling bracelets on the streets, I could tell that he was annoyed by my presence. In some cases, he would just point that out by making me notice - not always nicely - that he was trying to work. On other occasions, he would simply avoid me when he saw me in the streets. However, except for these isolated cases, my interlocutors were always polite in making me notice that they could not spend too much time talking to me because they had to go back to work. In this sense, this situation represented an important obstacle in establishing a relaxed, natural discussion with my interlocutors.

Eventually, the close and continuous contact I had with some of them, coupled with my interest in Wolof, gained me their confidence. Then, they started to refer to me as the 'white African'. Usually, this expression was used by street vendors to 'gain' clients, to make them feel like one of them and take them out of their comfort zone. In my case, though, I felt that such an expression assumed a different connotation. This nickname described my position in a limbo, in between two worlds: the Italian one and the Senegalese one. In getting close to the participants the description of my research plans had a fundamental role. Once I felt more comfortable in the field, I started to share my research interest with the people I interacted with. Some of them were pleased about my academic interest in Wolof, others less. However, explaining my intentions was fundamental to offer clarity on my position in the field and, consequently, to make me accepted.

Due to the changing situation dictated by COVID-19 restrictions, the relations in the field rapidly evolved. I began noticing that the people in the field started to have different expectations from the contacts they had with me: mostly, they sought my help to find job alternatives. The upcoming second Corona wave in November exacerbated this situation. Relying primarily on tourism, almost all street sellers experienced a significant drop in their incomes parallel with the drop in tourism numbers. At this stage, most of the contact that I had with people through WhatsApp revolved

predominantly around two topics. On the one hand, I helped some of them update or correct their CV to find a new job. On the other hand, I became an intermediary for other men to understand the developments of the COVID-19 emergency in Italy. This was exemplified especially by Cheick, one of the first people I met in Florence. After the explosion of the second wave and the imposition of restrictions on travel, Cheick used to contact me to understand what the restrictions were and how he could have avoided them to keep working by travelling from region to region.

2.3 Methodological challenges

During the development of the research, I had to face several methodological and personal challenges. The first and probably most difficult challenge was related to the field that I chose for the research: my home country, Italy. When at university we are introduced to fieldwork, the first idea that comes to mind is to travel to an unfamiliar setting where getting used to new circumstances represents one of the main challenges. The fieldwork entailed a totally different experience for me since I conducted my research in a very familiar city, Florence, close to my hometown. In the first moment, the choice of a familiar setting gave me a sense of confidence and security with regard to the research. I felt that I would not have to go through many of the difficulties that are to be faced when approaching a new environment. However, I slowly realised that other problems and unexpected challenges resulted from carrying on my fieldwork so close to home and to my everyday life. Firstly, using my home as a base made it difficult to approach fieldwork freely. Many of my friends back in my hometown did not understand the aim of my research quite well, and they revealed a not-so-open disposition towards it: they did not understand the reason of my research and were worried that I would spend days with street vendors. These circumstances made it difficult for me to conjugate my life in the field and my personal life and posed the necessity to separate spaces between research-dedicated spaces and everyday life spaces.

Besides, the process of research in my home country also involved other difficulties for me. Immersed in that very culture where I grew up, the Italian culture, I found myself dealing with some preconceived ideas during the fieldwork. Often, when I had to approach a street vendor for the first time, I happened to be thinking that my

interlocutor would have necessarily tried to take advantage of our interaction to get money from me. In line with this perception, I found myself thinking that it was difficult to establish a disinterested relationship with them and that my interlocutor would interpret the possible relationship that would have come out of our interaction only in terms of the monetary profits that he could have drawn from it. On such occasions, the idea of what a street seller is in the Italian imaginary prevailed over the idea that my interlocutors were, firstly and foremost, people. In part, these perceptions resulted from my fear of being perceived by these men as nothing more than a 'Toubab', a wealthy European.[2] However, I also felt that this interpretation resulted from how I got used to looking at Senegalese street sellers while growing up. In many of these cases, I felt that I was aware enough to deal objectively with these ideas and discard them. However, these occurrences led me to question the essence of my relationship with my interlocutors more than once and, sometimes, the entitlement that I had to carry on my research.

The second important challenge that I faced was making my presence accepted in the field and revealing my purpose to my interlocutors. At first, I thought that making my purpose clear from the very start would have alarmed my interlocutors, so it took me a while before revealing why I was always with them. Once I explained to some of the youngsters that I was studying languages and I was interested in Wolof, I was surprised to notice that this information did not bother them at all, apparently. However, I had to explain the reason for my presence more than once, when they would eventually ask me again why I was there with them so often. In some cases, I felt that these questions were related to a sort of thoughtlessness; in other cases, I could perceive that they were related to a kind of suspicion that my interlocutors were feeling towards me, a suspicion that started to be evident when they realised that my continuous presence there was more than a mere coincidence. At first, this situation was quite distressing for me because it revealed that they were wary of my intentions and prevented me from establishing any kind of natural conversation with them. Eventually, after several

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[2] The term 'Toubab' is used in Senegal to refer to European people. Used both in Senegal and abroad, this term also became synonym of westerner, and implicitly recall stereotypes usually attributed to white people by Senegalese people (Riccio, 2004). One of these representations refers to the relevance that is granted to purchase and money in the Western lifestyle, something that is considered to influence negatively how "Westerners transact with each other" (Riccio, 2002, p. 179).

explanations of why I was there in the first place, they started to feel more comfortable and accepted my presence.

Apart from being the main topic of this research, language also represented one of the main challenges of the research. As I said before, this work was originally conceived as a research focused on the Wolof language. However, once I got into the field, I quickly realised the difficulty of 'observing' language, especially if it is a language you are not so acquainted with. I could not speak Wolof and, despite my efforts to learn it, I could not reach a level necessary to communicate properly in the language. This limitation and the interesting information I got on the use of multiple languages by Senegalese street sellers convinced me to reshape the research scope to focus on multilingualism. In this way, I could draw more easily from other languages I know to conduct my research. On many occasions, I used French to communicate with street sellers, despite not being a proficient user in that language. I thought that by using a language that I supposed was more comfortable for them to speak, I could have made my interlocutors feel at ease. Even so, most of my interactions with Senegalese street vendors were in Italian, considering that the majority of them were able to communicate in Italian and, in many cases, demanded to do so. However, from the conversations I had with Mamadou, with whom I only spoke in French, I could see that it was easier to make my interlocutor feel more comfortable when we communicated in a language well known to him. Nevertheless, the knowledge of Wolof would have been useful in many ways, since most of the conversations that Senegalese men held between them were in that language. Therefore, when I witnessed a conversation in Wolof, I could not draw information from what was said.

Another problem concerning language refers to the expectations I had about what kind of information I could have gathered in the field. Being used to the academic context, where it is common to be over-analytical on the subject you are studying, set me in the field with a distorted understanding of how much people were reflexive about their use of language/s. I quickly realised that I asked my interlocutors questions that were abstruse for them, being inspired by academic literature. Here is where the importance of ethnography made itself evident and where the relevance of street sellers' narratives about linguistic competence came to the fore: How did they portray themselves, linguistically speaking? How did they talk about languages to distinguish themselves

from other people, either tourists, other Senegalese or Italians? Where and why did they learn such languages? How well could they communicate in each of them? All these issues emerged in different ways and shapes from the informal conversations I had with informants in the field.

The advent of the Coronavirus represented the last important challenge that I had to face in the field, a challenge that led me to "questioning the research design" (Marte, 2018). With the advent of harsher restrictions to mobility, face-to-face contact with my informants became impracticable. Therefore, the interactions I had with them quickly shifted from physical conversations to virtual ones. Whatsapp messages and, rarely, calls became the main means to keep in touch with Senegalese men and keep the research going. Finally, the difficulties posed by this situation, among which the loss of familiarity and the difficulties to reach interlocutors or establish a conversation with them, brought me to opt for a thesis more theoretical in nature.

2.4 A social scientist studying language: how the data is used in the work

So far, we have seen the difficulties and the challenges that I had to face in the field. These circumstances explain much about how the present thesis has been conceived and how it is structured. More precisely, this information is necessary to understand some of the methodological choices that I had to make in the present work.

In the first place, the many changes that the research has undergone resulted in a specific use of the data. As I already mentioned, due to the circumstances dictated by COVID-19 in the field, I could not protract the research for too long, and this kept me from gathering a quantity of data sufficient enough to observe regularities and infer conclusions from them. For this reason, the empirical data do not constitute the core of the thesis. On the contrary, they are used as illustrations to support the theoretical argument developed throughout the thesis.

In the second place, determined methodological choices were dictated by my lack of a background in linguistics. Coming from a social sciences background, I often faced the difficulty of approaching the study of language without delving too much into linguistics. Despite the fact "that the research questions of sociolinguistics are

preeminently social questions" (Woolard, 1985, p. 738), there is no doubt that my position as a social scientist posed many problems throughout the development of the work. Therefore, it is important to make clear the methodological choices that I embraced to adventure in the study of language use.

In the present work, I focus specifically on what Nicolaï (2013) defines as "dimension apparent" (p.3), that is to say, not that much "in the content of the proposition enounced but in the modalities of their transmission that take part in the control, verification/confirmation/ratification of the position and roles of the interlocutors in the circumstance in which they organise themselves contextually" (Nicolaï, 2013, p. 4). Through this approach to language, I manage to connect the topic with the theoretical discussion around agency and, in this way, maintain the work grounded in social sciences. That is to say, by taking into account the factors that may influence the use of language, I am considering the elements that define language as a social practice without the need to delve too deep into linguistics analysis that could be outside the boundaries of my academic skills.

Methodological choices also had to be made because of the nature of the topic at hand. When it comes to considering intentionality, it is impossible not to notice that a lot has been done on it from different disciplines, from the social sciences to the cognitive, passing from psychology to philosophy. For this reason, it is no surprise that the body of knowledge built on this topic is vast. If we relate the study of intentionality to language, we can surely delimit the topic further. However, it is undeniable that the field of investigation covered is still wide.

Despite the difficulties presented by these aspects, in the present work I necessarily draw from the perspectives of disciplines other than the social sciences - mainly philosophy and linguistics - to develop the discussion around intentionality. However, social sciences always work as the gravitation centre of such an interdisciplinary approach; that is to say, as a base from which I develop the connection with other disciplines in order to shed light on new perspectives to approach the study of language use.

3. BEING A SENEGALESE STREET SELLER IN FLORENCE: NAVIGATING THE STREET AND THE LINGUISTIC MARKET

In the present chapter, I introduce the figure of Senegalese street sellers and the dynamic of interaction within the context of Florence. Only then I move on to describe the "market conditions" for street selling. In this sense, the present section familiarise the reader with the street selling's spaces of interaction, the usual customers, the merchandise sold and the intercourse dynamic between street seller and customer. In this way, I will reveal the importance of language for Senegalese street sellers both in connecting to the clients and in positioning towards them.

3.1 Street selling in Florence: market conditions, actors involved and interchange dynamics

When it comes to talking about the Senegalese migrants in Italy, it is important to bear in mind that a significant number of them are either seasonal workers or irregular residents (Riccio, 2000). Hence, the difficulty of giving a precise estimate of the community. According to the most recent statistics (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, 2019), 106.256 Senegalese citizens reside in Italy. However, it is estimated that the population number would be at least 30% higher if we consider the number of illegal residents in the country (Kaag, 2013). These high numbers enlist Italy among the European countries with the highest Senegalese population, together with Spain and France (Vickstrom, 2019).

Traditionally the majority of the diasporic group is composed of men and, it is only in recent times that the number of women started to increase, especially as a consequence of family reunion (Riccio, 2002). In any case, economic reasons are unanimously recognised as the main drive of Senegalese migration to Italy (Kaag, 2008; Riccio & degli Uberti, 2013). According to Kaag (2008), it was only from the 1980s that Italy became the destination of first-generation Senegalese migrants. This change of migratory route was in part due to the installation of visa requirements in France, a process that implied new restrictions for migrants to work and live in France and to get access to the country (Kaag, 2008; Riccio & degli Uberti, 2013; Vickstrom, 2019). However, it was also a response to the increasing demand for cheap and flexible work in Italy (Pascual de Sans *et al.*, 2000), combined with the relative ease of getting a visa in

this country (Marabello & Riccio, 2018). At first, the main destinations of Senegalese migrants were Rome and other touristic areas of the country –mostly in the regions of Sicily and Sardinia -, where they would work mainly as street vendors (Schmidt di Friedberg, 1993; Riccio & degli Uberti, 2013). It was only from the 1990s when the Senegalese migrants started to move to the Northern regions, looking for a job in the industry, food processing or construction (Vickstrom & González-Ferrer, 2016). Due to its condition as the main industrial pole of the country, the Lombardy region quickly became the leading destination for Senegalese immigrants eager to find a job. As a consequence, the region became the home of relatively stable Senegalese communities, like the case of Bergamo and Brescia.

In 2008 the economic crisis that hit Italy had a significant impact on Lombardy, particularly on its small enterprises (Coletto, 2010), "the real backbone of the Lombardy economy" (OCDE, 2012, p. 28). Due to this situation, "the demand for immigrant workers" (Riva & Zanfrini, 2013, p. 1) declined, and the Senegalese population started to look for other destinations within the country. In this context, Tuscany slowly became one of the main alternative destinations for Senegalese migrants. According to the migrant annual report issued by the Senegalese community in Italy, Tuscany (11.5%) has slowly overcome Emilia Romagna (10.5%) as the region with the second-highest Senegalese population (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, 2019). Historically, the Senegalese community in Tuscany distributed principally around three cities: Livorno and Pisa in the coastal zone and Florence, the region's capital. In Florence, the population registered is engaged mainly in the tanning industry or independent trade (IRPET, 2019). However, insecure forms of job - generally, street selling - are still the principal occupation for most of the Senegalese population in the city, especially for the newly arrived (Gasparetti, 2012).

As Riccio (2000) suggests, street selling "constitutes in some cases a survival strategy at the periphery of the formal labour market, in other cases a genuinely profitable job and it functions either as temporary employment while waiting to find a better job in the Italian labour market" (p. 50). Within these terms, the activity of street selling in the streets of Florence may also be better understood. Street selling is the first occupation of many of the Senegalese young men who arrive in the city. In line with what Riccio (2000) said, this activity constitutes a survival strategy for the newly arrived to support themselves while waiting for a better job. However, in the case of Florence, we cannot

talk of this activity as a genuinely profitable job, as the same Riccio (2000) says it is in some cases.

In the city of Florence, street selling is also regarded by many of these young men as an opportunity to introduce themselves to the city, to its people and to learn their language. Due to the long-standing presence of street selling in Florence, the practice has become very stable over the years. Even if we cannot speak of an organisation of street vendors in Florence, there is surely a relatively stable cooperation behind the activity. This builds upon the pre-existing strong bonds of the Murid community. As Kaag (2008) suggested, the Murid community is characterised by a strong sense of solidarity between the followers and the Murids know "that they can depend on the help of their fellow Mourides in hard times. Mutual help particularly concerns the reception and lodging of newly arrived migrants" (Kaag, 2008, p. 275), however, it also relates to their insertion in remunerative activities. It is in this sense that Murid solidarity entangles with street selling. Usually, the newly arrived are introduced to the street selling activity by Murid companions and, as Kaag (2008) reveals, it is not unusual that the latter provide the newcomers with "merchandise as a loan, and support in contacts with the administration and employers" (Kaag, 2008, p. 275). In this sense, it is also common that "in Italy, as in Murid communities elsewhere, successful merchants act as patrons of groups of street-peddlers" (Kaag, 2013, p. 1430).

When it comes to introducing the street selling activity in Florence, the first thing to make clear is that this practice revolves predominantly around tourists and not so much on the figures of the locals. Being more familiarised with street selling and knowing what to expect from it, locals are more reluctant to engage in conversation, expecting that it will eventually end in an economic transaction. On the other hand, tourists are mostly unaware of that or, at least, not used to it; besides, they have more time and are more relaxed as they are in Florence for leisure. For all these reasons, tourists represent a preferable candidate to establish a conversation with and sell merchandise.

Consequently, the places where Senegalese street sellers are most likely to be found is in the touristic hubs of the city: Piazza della Signoria, Ponte Vecchio, Piazza del Duomo, Piazza della Repubblica. Usually, many street sellers wander around these spots, taking chances to establish a conversation with people. However, there are also

cases where specific city spots, like Ponte Santa Trinita, correspond to a specific group of vendors.

The economic activity of street sellers revolves around the trade of different kinds of goods. For example, some of them sell leather bracelets or beaded bracelets of different qualities, materials and fashions. Usually, the same street vendors also sell little wood statues representing either turtles or elephants. However, the trade can also include more everyday-use products such as tissues packs, umbrellas, portable waterproof raincoats, selfie sticks or little electronic devices like chargers or earphones. Finally, an important place in the street selling is occupied by the trade of books on a wide variety of topics, usually related to Senegal: the history of Senegal, Senegalese cuisine, histories of successful Senegalese migrants in Italy, narrations of the difficult travel to reach Italy or of integration matters, among the others. In this sense, the book catalogue offers chances to have specific books for different categories of readers. Street sellers play with such a multivariate book choice to offer the right book to the right customer, depending on their interlocutor's profile.

The interaction generally starts with a recurrent dynamic to connect with the person they are speaking with. The first approach usually consists of different kinds of formalities, such as asking how the family or specific members - usually the mother - of the family are doing. Only then, the conversation focuses more on getting to know the person they are speaking with. So, they ask for his/her age, if he/she is from Florence or somewhere else, what he/she dedicates to in their life.

When the interlocutor actively engages in the interaction, by answering these questions, he/she would probably ask the same to the Senegalese man. So, the conversation may last for a long time and could get astray from the objective it was envisioned to accomplish, namely, selling something to the interlocutor. In this way, it is interesting to notice that, even if the conversation customarily concludes itself with the Senegalese seller trying to sell some of their products to the interlocutor, the aim of the overall conversation is not strictly related to this end, but it is also a way for the Senegalese man to discover more things about Italy or other places of the world, to show what he know about the interlocutor's country of provenance; in other words, to connect with the interlocutor. It is against this background that the importance of communication and language comes to the fore.

3.2 The role of language in street sellers activity: from language as a connecting tool to language as a commodity in the linguistic market

When it comes to considering the role of language for Senegalese street sellers in Florence, the first idea that comes to mind is to look at the functionality of language in relation to their position in their new context. If we consider their condition as migrants, we understand that these Senegalese people need to know to a certain extent the language of the city, Italian, to get by in their hosting society. Besides, language is a means to maintain relations with the Senegalese diaspora community in loco or other African diasporas present in Florence.

However, it is in their work context where their linguistic skills appear to be especially relevant. As we have seen before, street selling relies pretty much on the capacity of the street seller to communicate and establish a connection with clients. In this sense, a good level of linguistic capacity is required - possibly in more than one language - to suit the linguistic capacities of the interlocutors. Using the interlocutor's language is more useful for capturing the hearers' attention, arousing their curiosity, or making them feel more comfortable in joining the conversation. In other words, a good knowledge of the language is helpful to deal with the customer and getting more chances to do business. As a matter of fact, in the light of the street selling interchange dynamic, possessing a good level of competency in more than one language multiplies the possibility of interchange and the number of possible customers that one can connect with.

From this perspective, language is not only a tool to communicate but also a precious commodity for street sellers. As a matter of fact, the possession of a wide linguistic repertoire appeared to result in better job opportunities for Senegalese street vendors. This was expressly stated by one of the participants, Adama, a 27 old guy involved in street bookselling. When I first met Adama, the first thing that he made me notice was his linguistic repertoire that, to his recount, spanned from Italian, French and Wolof to Spanish and German. According to him, he was responsible for the book trade in Florence and this was mainly due in part to his knowledge of Florence, having lived there for almost sixteen years, and in part to his knowledge of the Italian language. More precisely, Adama stressed his role as administrator in the book trade to select the new sellers and provide them with books. When we started talking more specifically of

his work, he instantly made clear that that specific trade, bookselling, was not as 'the others', referring to bracelets or gadget selling. He told me that it was more remunerative than these activities but also more difficult to get into. According to his explanation, this difficulty was due to the importance of fluency in different languages that one should display, especially Italian. To remark his point, Adama explained that selling bracelets and little souvenirs was easy because it was not necessary to know Italian well; for that reason, that was the principal activity the newcomers started with. On the contrary, when it comes to bookselling, he explained that it is fundamental to know Italian to read and present the book to the possible purchaser. In summary, the conversation with Adama revealed that the possession of a vast linguistic repertoire, comprising a very good knowledge of Italian, was fundamental to get access to a better job position, in this case, bookselling.

To capture the very essence of the dynamic Adama referred to, Bourdieu (1991) introduced the concept of linguistic market. As Hamid (2016) clearly explains, the concept of linguistic market refers to "a field of linguistic exchange in which people trade their language varieties and linguistic proficiencies, which serve as linguistic capital and produce linguistic profit" (p. 38). The value of language is partly dictated by the field in which it takes place. For example, a formal expression may assume a higher value if it is pronounced in an informal setting where nobody knows it; conversely, an informal word may lose value in a formal context, where it may be considered inappropriate. The place where the interaction takes place is also fundamental to consider the value of the linguistic product based on "what institutional and social authority underpins the product" (Hamid, 2016, p. 38). In the case of Florence, the use of Italian or of a certain regional variation of Italian would assume a higher value than in other places. Finally, the position of the linguistic trader in the social structure is influential in determining the value of the linguistic product he uses. For instance, slang words would be valued differently depending on if it is a high, middle or low-class person to pronounce them.

Through the linguistic market framework, society is conceived as "a structured space of positions in which the positions and their interrelations are determined by the distribution of different kinds of resources or 'capital'" (Thompson, 1991, p. 14), language proficiency being one of them. In the social context of street selling in Florence, the linguistic capital, identifiable either with high linguistic competency in

Italian or other languages, can be converted into a higher-level job. If we relate this discussion with the circumstances of Senegalese street sellers in Italy, we may understand that language is perceived as a possession that grants social and economic benefits to its speaker.

Even if this economic explanation can be useful to understand how Senegalese street sellers perceive language, it does not fully reveal how Senegalese street sellers make use of it. In fact, seeing language competency and use in terms of better job opportunities leaves much unexplained of the other functions of language in the field, like the use of language as an identity marker. In their conditions of migrants in Italy Senegalese street sellers use language to maintain the connection with their Senegalese roots on the one hand and to forge a new identity in the Italian context, on the other. Besides, they also recur to language to react "to the surrounding environment and the image that [Italian society] reflects back on them (racism, rejection, etc.)" (Calvet, 2006, p. 29). In this sense, language is to be seen as a tool to construct "an interstitial culture which they can call their own, and which takes the form of various marks of identity" (Calvet, 2006, p. 29). All these elements point to the fact that Senegalese street sellers also draw from the value of language to "produce a profit of distinction on the occasion of social exchange" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 55).

Language - and speech style as well - has always represented one of the main dimensions of group identity (Edwards, 2009). As Edwards (2009) puts it, language is "an emblem of groupness, a symbol, a psychosocial rallying point" (p. 55). This symbolic function is clear "in modern nation-states [where] language can function as a marker of individual or political identity", especially "in cases where there is more than one officially recognized language in the community" (Clackson, 2015, p. 63). In the African context, the language was considered, and in most cases still is, a "marker of social and ethnic group" (Kerswill & Salifu, 2019, p. 23).

The relationship between language and identity assumes different meanings and forms depending on the country and influences people's linguistic behaviour in many ways. This influence also reflects on Senegalese street sellers, who find themselves between two societies, the Italian and the Senegalese one, and their respective language representations. In the light of these considerations, the following chapter introduces the reader to the circumstances that may define how Senegalese street sellers perceive the

relationship between language and identity. On the one hand, I take into account the linguistic circumstances to what they were used to by considering how language and identity intertwine in Senegal; on the other hand, I introduce how identity is conceived in Italy, how language plays a role in the debate about national identity and how Senegalese street sellers adapt themselves to the linguistic context of Florence.

4. LANGUAGE AS AN IDENTITY MARKER AMONG SENEGALESE STREET SELLERS IN FLORENCE: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF THEIR SENEGALESE BACKGROUND AND THE CONDITIONS MET IN ITALY

As mentioned before, Senegalese street sellers occupy an intermediary position between two societies. This condition, described by some authors (Riccio, 2001; Kaag, 2008) as transnational, calls Senegalese migrants to navigate between different social groups. In this situation, language became relevant both as a tool to communicate and exchange, and as a marker of identity. Although the attitudes towards language and its use for demarcating identity depend in part on the context where the individual has grown up and practised language, they may also be determined by the new circumstances where a person finds himself speaking. In this respect, when we look at the linguistic behaviour of a migrant speaker, it is fundamental to bear in mind how his previous context may affect the way he perceives language and the influence that his new environment has on his linguistic attitudes.

The first part of the chapter introduces the reader to Senegal's linguistic environment and the many ways in which language intertwines with identity in Senegal. Conversely, the second section is dedicated to the Italian context and is structured in two parts: a first part where I deal with the concept of Italian national identity and the role language plays in relation to it; a second one in which I focus on Florence's linguistic environment and the status of different languages within the city. In the final section of the chapter, I consider the influence that the aforementioned contexts may have in how Senegalese men recur to language to position themselves in Florence.

4.1 Language and identity in Senegal

When looking at Senegal's linguistic situation, one thing is clear from the start: it is a complex multilingual environment. From a juridical perspective, the country recognises one official language, French, along with six national languages: Diola, Malinke, Pulaar, Seereer, Soninke and Wolof (Constitution of the Republic of Senegal, 2001). Though, as many as thirty local languages coexist in the country (Sall, 2009). Also, we have to consider the position of Arabic, a language that even if it "has never been used as a medium of communication in the daily life of the Senegalese people" (Ngom, 2003,

p. 353) has still a relevant position in a country where over 90% of the population is Muslim (Ngom, 2003).

In such a multilingual context, the attitudes towards these different languages are complex and diverse, and there is a significant discrepancy between "the official representation of the language situation in Senegal, [and] the true situation" (Golovko, 2018, p. 105). In fact, despite presenting itself as a francophone country, the number of people who speak French in Senegal is very limited, and the use of this language is mostly circumscribed to institutional spaces (Golovko, 2018). On the contrary, since its independence the country has witnessed the rapid expansion of the Wolof language that rapidly became the country's *lingua franca*, currently spoken by more than 90% of the population (Golovko, 2018). Thus, Wolof is tacitly recognised as the national language of the country. However, this title is not publicly outspoken due to the connection that is still perceived between language and ethnicity and the political implications that can derive from prioritising a national language over the other languages of the country.

Historically, the French language was introduced in the country to instruct a selected minority of Senegalese people to perform the administrative function in the country for the colonial administration (Calvet, 1974). In this sense, this language was a fundamental instrument in the assimilation plan of the colony and quickly assumed a pejorative connotation to the eyes of the Senegalese population (Ngom, 2003). In the wake of independence in 1960, the French language was maintained as the official language of Senegal. In part, this solution was a necessary choice to guarantee the integrity of the country (Golovko, 2018): the decision to recognise French as the official language prevented the government from choosing one of the many national languages to be prioritised above the others, avoiding in this way possible complaints from the different ethnolinguistic groups. However, French was kept in its position also because of its important role as an international language and as a language of prestige representing the pinnacle of European culture (McLaughlin, 2008).

Despite the important position granted to French in the state apparatus, only a relatively small percentage of the Senegalese population (around 12%) is competent in French, and the language has never become the vehicular language of the country (Golovko, 2018). Even after the independence, French remained limited mainly to the institutional context (Fall, 2020). However, due to its institutional relevance, it became one of the

main requirements to cover official or public charges (Cruise O'Brien, 1998). Therefore, rather than being regarded as the nation's language, French came to be perceived as a functional language: people learn it because it opens more opportunities in the labour market. However, no strong sense of national belonging developed around this language. A clear indication of this situation is the constant decrease of French speakers witnessed since the 1980s, when the economic crisis hit the country. As Cruise O' Brien (1998) underlined, the economic decline resulted in a decline of hiring rates by the state and, along with it, a decline in the incentives to learn French. For all these reasons, standard French remains the "language of inaccessible officialdom" (Cruise O'Brien, 1998, p. 31), a language that still recalls the times of colonial domination, but that also "enjoys high prestige [...] [being] generally associated with education and high social class" (Ngom, 1999, p. 135).

A similar dynamic works in the case of Arabic, even if in a somewhat different way than in the case of the French language. As I said before, Arabic is not used in daily life; even so, it plays a fundamental role in Senegalese society, being the main language used within the religious sphere of Islam (Ngom, 2003). Namely, "classical Arabic is respected and is granted a holy status, as it is the language of the Koran, the Islamic holy book of over 90% of the Senegalese population" (Ngom, 2003, p. 353). In this sense, whereas the prestige and power associated with French are strictly connected to the important role that this language has in terms of social mobility and economic opportunities, the importance of Arabic derives from its status as a holy language (Ngom, 2003).

The status of Arabic "is preserved and promoted by Koranic schools, mosques, religious sermons (on regional and national radios and TV stations), and the five major religious brotherhoods (Murid, Tijaan, Xadr, Layeen, and Njaseen)" (Ngom, 2003, p. 357). However, in none of these institutions Arabic is taught as a subject, and it is used mostly in relation to religious practices. Despite the presence of Arabic as a second language in many school curricula, this language is among "the least popular foreign languages among young people in the country. This is because, although Arabic carries 'holy prestige' in the country, it is believed that it does not ensure economic success as compared to French." (Ngom, 2003, p. 357). For this reason, old people seem to be those who make the most use of Arabic words, usually in their Wolof, to draw from the religious prestige associated with the language (Ngom, 2003).

The cases of French and Arabic give a clear example of the important role played by language as a marker of one's social position in society. On the one hand, we have seen how French has a fundamental role in marking one's high class, education and position in society; therefore, we have also noted that French is perceived as the language to 'acquire' if you aim to move upwards on the social and economic ladder. On the other hand, Arabic appeared as the language of religion, a language that marks the speaker's identity as a knowledgeable person about Islam, and thus a morally advanced person; however, we have also seen how Arabic does not offer the same opportunities of social and economic mobility as French. As I made clear at the beginning of the chapter, these are only two of the many languages that coexist in the country; thus, their condition is not representative of the many ways in which the remaining national languages intertwine with identity. Like in the case of many other African countries, national languages are perceived as connected to ethnic identity and, consequently, to the traditions of one's ethnic group (Keese, 2016).

Complexity and multivalence characterise the relationship between ethnicity and language in Senegal (McLaughlin, 2008). As more than one author has shown (Irvine, 1993, Gal & Irvine, 1995), the classifications based on language and ethnicity in Africa mirror European ideologies about race and language instead of the complex reality they want to describe (McLaughlin, 2008). However, we cannot deny that the ethnic classification plays an influential role in the national lives of many African countries and "African populations seem to embrace it, without being manipulated to do so: categories of ethnicity appear to play an essential role in their life" (Keese, 2016, p. 2), a role that, in the case of Senegal, is entangled with language use. As a matter of fact, as Ngom (2004) suggests, "local languages are still believed to carry the culture, pride, knowledge, and wisdom of the people" (p. 110).

A simple look at the country's recent history is sufficient to get proof of such a situation. A good example in this sense can be found in the phenomenon referred to as *Haalpularisation* (Faty, 2015). With this term, Faty (2015) refers to the reaction of Haalpulaar speakers against the massive expansion of the Wolof language. Facing the rapid expansion of the Wolof language, the two main ethnic groups that compose this community of speakers, the Tukuloor and Fulbe, attempted "to construct a single ethnic identity" (McLaughlin, 1995, p. 153) on the sole basis of their common language, Pulaar. That is to say, they reconfigured their identity on the basis of their language to

resist the spread of Wolof in the country (McLaughlin, 1995). Another good example is the case of the southern region of Casamance. In a similar way to the Haalpulaar case, also in Casamance the ethnic majority fought against the expansion of Wolof, perceived as the language of the Northern coloniser (Cruise O'Brien, 1998). In this region, where the Diola ethnic group constitutes the majority of the population, the use of the Diola language is privileged over Wolof and French (Dreyfus & Juillard, 2001).

The cases of Haalpulaar and Diola are good examples of the relationship that exists between language and ethnic identity in Senegal. However, the way in which the language-ethnicity relation is understood is not univocal and may change from one ethnic group to another. The case of the Seereer is exemplary in this sense. As McLaughlin (1995) showed, Seereer people, representing 14,9% of the country population, have a totally different way of understanding the relationship between language and ethnicity or, better said, "the elements that go to make up Seereer identity are surprisingly independent of language, and language itself plays almost no role in Seereer ethnicity" (p. 163). Consequently, compared to Haalpulaaren and Diola, the Wolof language expansion assumes a totally different meaning for Seereer people, who do not see any contradiction in taking up Wolof (McLaughlin, 1995).

These examples show the complex relationship that exists between ethnicity and language. Sometimes language is perceived as a fundamental element of ethnic identity, like in the case of Haalpulaar. In other cases, though, language is not central in the conceptualisation of ethnicity, even in circumstances in which it may be perceived as being so. According to McLaughlin (2008), the ambiguity that permeates the relationship between language and ethnicity derives from the fictitious nature of this association. In the author's view, even if each one of these two categories is independent of one another, they are strictly related by language ideologies, a term used by authors like Kroskrity (2010) to refer to:

> "beliefs, feelings, and conceptions about language structure and use which often index the political economic interests of individual speakers, ethnic and other interest groups, and nation states" (Kroskrity, 2010, p. 192).

The misleading character of these conceptions of language becomes evident when we consider that many people speak several local languages and they often come from multi-ethnic families; so, in many cases, it is difficult to tell precisely whether a person

is Wolof and Peulh, Mandinka, Diola just from the language they speak. In these circumstances, the language spoken by the people does not coincide with the one associated with their ethnicity and vice versa. As McLaughlin (2008) showed, it is not uncommon to find people who define themselves as Diola or Seereer despite their lack of competency in these two languages, just because their parents were so; or, people who present themselves as Wolof because Wolof is the only language one they speak, even though their parents are not Wolof (McLaughlin, 2008). In part, this phenomenon is accentuated by the expansion of Wolof, which is influencing how language and ethnicity are perceived (Cruise O'Brien, 1998; McLaughlin, 2001).

The rapid expansion of Wolof in the urban zones of the country is slowly disconnecting it from its ethnic roots to make it the language of the Senegalese people. In many urban centres like Dakar, "first generation inhabitants sometimes consider themselves Wolof regardless of their parents' ethnicity because that is the only language they speak" (McLaughlin, 1995, p. 154). And, as McLaughlin (2001) notices, "claiming that one is Wolof for lack of any other plausible ethnic identity is, in fact, an unconscious abandonment of ethnicity as an identifying category. Wolof, and especially Wolof in the urban context, is simply the unmarked or default ethnicity when there is nothing else to fall back on in self-definition" (p. 158).

It is however important to notice that this discourse does not apply to all the variants of the Wolof language. As Ngom (1999) reveals, "the long contact between French and Wolof created two Wolof varieties in Senegal: Urban Wolof, used especially in cities such as Dakar (the capital of the country), and Kajoor Wolof (pure Wolof)" (Ngom, 1999, p. 135).

These two variants of the language are respectively indicators of urban/rural identity. On the one hand, pure Wolof, being a French-free Wolof, is perceived as a more traditional way of speaking proper of the country's rural areas. Also known as Kajoor Wolof - considering that Kajoor is the region of origin of Wolof people - this version of Wolof is free from any borrowing from French. According to Ngom (1999), pure Wolof was a symbol both of "Senegalese speakers' pride toward their language and their reticence toward French language and culture" (p. 139). However, more recently, pure Wolof started to be perceived in negative terms. In this sense, this version of Wolof, nowadays spoken mostly in North and Central rural Senegal, is usually associated by

urbanites with the least educated people in the country and with a lack of knowledge of the modern world (Ngom, 2004).

For this reason, this variant of Wolof contrasts diametrically with urban Wolof, spoken in the metropolitan centre of Senegal. Urban Wolof is a Wolof in which the influence of French is significant and, as its name suggests, is an indicator of urban belonging. According to Swingart (2000), the denomination of urban Wolof points to a wide range of linguistic usage observable in the city of Dakar and, more recently, in other important urban centres of the country. The common ground that unites all these different linguistic expressions is the insertion of foreign words, usually French ones, in a linguistic structure proper to Wolof language (McLaughlin, 2001). Until recently, urban Wolof was alternated with French in cities, and its use was relegated predominantly to informal situations. However, in the last few years, the language has gained more legitimacy and has quickly become a marker of urban lifestyle and identity.

More recently, as Smith (2015) revealed, the introduction of other global languages has further influenced the linguistic attitudes of the population. This phenomenon refers mostly to the "increased access to English language classes, as a means to enter the global linguistic community" (Smith, 2015, p. 130). According to Ngom (2003), "it can be argued that the recent English influence in the country results from the combination of the following factors: (1) the Senegalese educational system, (2) the influence of reggae music, and (3) the global impact of the United States in the world conveyed through youth culture, the media, TV, and the American movie industry" (p. 354-355). As the same author suggests, this language has become an important alternative to French in combination within urban Wolof. In part, "the urban youth's preference of stigmatized English words is indicative of their rejection of the overt prestige for French and Arabic, and their acceptance of the covert prestige of English as [a] sign of group solidarity and membership" (Ngom, 2003, p. 360). Besides, such a language is also becoming relevant in people's repertoire, especially young people, as a marker of cosmopolitan identity (Smith, 2013). Thus, the person who speaks English is seen as knowledgeable in global issues, educated and connected to the global community represented by the English language, the world's *lingua franca.*

All these examples give us a clear idea of how Senegalese people are used to navigating between different languages. Besides, the analysis of Senegal's linguistic context helps

us to understand how Senegalese streets adapt to Florence's linguistic environment: they use their adaptability skills in a multilingual context in their job to talk to tourists and to learn Italian faster. More importantly, all the examples cited also highlight the different and somehow intertwined ways in which language works as a maker of identity in Senegal. By doing so, we got an idea of how these representations of language may influence how Senegalese migrants understand the Italian linguistic scenario and how they try to interact within it.

4.2 Introducing Italy and the linguistic environment of Florence

So far, we have seen the relationship between language and identity in Senegal. We observed the different ways in which language plays a role in the definition of one's identity along ethnic, religious and social lines, among others. All that helped us understand how Senegalese street sellers are used to perceiving and using language and how such attitudes may affect their disposition towards new linguistic environments they may find themselves in, like the linguistic reality of Florence. Now I will discuss Italy's situation, where different kinds of considerations must be made to understand the position of Senegalese migrants and the use they make of language. The way national identity is constructed in Italy is very influential in how Senegalese men are perceived and how people interact with them. Therefore, a discussion about identity in Italy is necessary to understand the position of these actors in Florence.

As to be expected, identity in Italy is not played out in the same fashion as in Senegal. The definition of national identity in Italy resulted from a turbulent historical process and it is still the object of debate. Especially significant in the debate around national identity in Italy has been the vexed relationship between the North and South regions, a situation generally known as the 'Southern question' (Moe, 2002). The expression of 'Southern question' refers to a situation in which the Northern regions of Italy, in virtue of their position as the industrial and economic centre of the country, discriminated against the economically backward Southern regions, whose inhabitants they considered inferior and a burden to the country. The influence that this ideological divide has had in the country until now explains why the creation of a common sense of belonging to the nation has been an arduous task that still cannot be considered accomplished in many ways. Besides, such ideological debate gives us also a first hint of the image that Italian

people had of Africa, since one of the connotations used to pejoratively describe the South of the country also reflected the idea that most Italian had of the African continent itself: the "Italian Africa" (Cimino & Foschi, 2014, p. 283).

However, it was not until the colonial period that a certain image of 'the African' was inculcated in the public imaginary. Even if the country had a minor role in the colonisation of Africa, its experience in the continent was used by the fascist regime in the attempt to reunite North and South against an external 'other'. It was in this sense that the regime tried to use a simplistic and racist figure of 'the African' to create unity in the population. However, this plan was not successful and only helped instill in Italian society a distorted and racist perception of African populations that still persists today.

Nowadays, these perceptions are becoming more evident since the migration from Africa to Europe have brought to the surface many of these ideological perspectives on the African people. As Grillo (2002) rightly pointed out, "immigration into Italy led to a wave of encounters with difference which seemed to give cause to reflect on self and identity, or at any rate, [...] provided the material through which to articulate an emerging redefinition of contemporary Italian identity" (p. 8). It is in this sense that both the southern question and the colonial legacy come to the fore. In this circumstance, the role played by right-wing parties such as the Lega Nord has been especially relevant. By actively promoting a political discourse based on the opposition of us, the Italians, against them, the migrants/southerners, the Lega Nord party, under the guidance of Matteo Salvini, has played a fundamental role in legitimating xenophobia. In its effort to reaffirm the 'truthful' Italian identity, "attacks first on Southerners (terroni) and then on international migrants (extracommunitari) have been a long-term theme" (Pratt, 2002, p. 37) of the Lega Nord's political discourse.

In this sense, we can see how to this day, Italian identity has been built through the opposition of North and South: on the one hand, Italy's own South, on the other, the global South (Grillo, 2002). For this reason, as Grillo (2002) pointed out, the representation of cultural difference in Italy is still embedded by "the pervasive 'Orientalist' and 'Africanist' conceptions of the Other" (p.12). On the one hand, "Orientalism has been and remains one source of the contemporary discourse of otherness encompassing immigrants in Italy" (Grillo, 2002, p. 12). On the other hand,

inspired by the recent emergence of migration from the African continent, this ideology has emerged primarily in its Africanist version. With the term Africanism, authors like Grillo (2002) refers to "a potpourri of motifs and tropes in which in this case a "tribalist" imagery is paramount: Africanism is not just about "blackness", but about tribes and 'tribalism", chiefs and clans, witch-doctors and fetishes, feuds and vengeance, and untrammelled sexuality" (p. 13). These are all aspects that must be kept in mind when considering the position of a Senegalese migrant in Italy who, in the perception of many people in Italy, embodies this figure of 'the Other'. A figure that, in the case of the Senegalese street sellers, gravitates around a series of distorted and negative representations resumed by the derogatory term 'Vu cumprà' used to refer to them.[3] All these representations constitute a fundamental element for understanding how Senegalese actors are perceived in Italy and how Italian people interact with them. In this sense, they clarify that the way Senegalese street sellers are perceived has much to do with the role that such representation of otherness had in the definition of the Italian identity.

Along with this construction of unity through alterity, language was another important element that played a role in the difficult shaping of an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983) that would have united the nation. The linguistic situation of Italy is very different from the Senegalese one, and language does not have many of the identitarian connotations that it has in Senegal. Even so, this does not mean that language is not relevant as an identity marker. The linguistic environment of Italy reflects the fragmented identity that, as we have seen, finds its most evident example in the North-South divide. Compared to other European countries, the history of the linguistic unification of Italy under a standard language is a recent one:

> "It was not until the completion of Italian Unification in 1871 that the environment was finally conducive to solidifying the Italian language debate, known as the questione della lingua, and transforming the linguistic landscape" (Smith, 2013, p. 60).[4]

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[3] A derogatory term generally used by Italians to designate street vendors. The appellation 'Vu Cumprà' derives from the contraction of the Italian sentence 'vuoi comprare?' ('do you want to buy?').

[4] The term "questione della lingua" (see Marazzini, 2018) refers to the debate about what dialect should be adopted as the standard Italian language. This debate firstly emerged in the literary environment at the beginning of the 16th century and had been going on for the following three centuries.

Despite the institution of a standard Italian as the national language, Italy is still a fragmented linguistic reality where a plethora of dialects coexist. According to the latest data on the matter (ISTAT, 2017), despite a decrease in their use, dialects still play an important role in Italy, considering that as much as 32% of the population reported using them at home or with friends.

Nowadays, Italian legislation protects these dialects; however, it was not always like that. It was only eighty years ago when, during the fascist regime, Mussolini's dictatorship tried to eradicate dialects because of the impediments they posed to the definition of a united national identity (Smith, 2013). However, these attempts were not as successful as in other European countries, like France. So, still today, "while the majority of Italians speak standard Italian, in everyday life many prefer to speak a different variety, displaying a certain pride in and loyalty to their native region" (Smith, 2013, p. 61). The fragmented linguistic reality of the country has thus called "into question the notion of a coherent national Italian identity and complicates the language learning progress of foreigners who want to communicate in the preferred language of the local population" (Smith, 2013, p. 61).

Even though Italy appears from the inside as a fragmented linguistic environment, the country is regarded as a monolingual reality. If we exclude the dialects spoken in the country, Italy's population shows a low competence level in foreign languages (ISTAT, 2017). Still today, Italy figures among the lowest positions in the European foreign language competency charts (EUROSTAT, 2021). However, this situation does not exclude the presence of multilingual spaces in the country. Being one of the main tourist destinations in the world, with 60 million tourists on average in the last three years (UNWTO, 2020), Italy is also home to complex linguistic landscapes where multiple languages coexist.

Florence is a good example of that. In this city, where millions of tourists come every year (Becheri, 2005), tourism has become an integral part of the city that lives off the incomes brought by this activity. The massive and continuous flux of tourists has had a fundamental impact on the city, which quickly became a varied multilingual space. In this sense, Florence can be considered a multilingual hub within the monolingual reality of Italy. However, the situation is more complex than that and a clarification needs to be made about the relationship between the tourist community and the Italian one.

Although many inhabitants do not see tourism in a good light and blame tourists for many of the city's problems, most of the locals accept the presence of tourists. However, in both cases, people seldom integrate with them for various reasons, mainly linguistic. With the exception of the touristic industry's operators, the great majority of the Italian population is not fluent in English, and even if they are competent in its use, they prefer to communicate in Italian. By contrast, many of the tourists who come to Florence cannot communicate in Italian and rely mostly on English to get along within the city. As a result, it is not strange that the tourist and the local communities constitute two separate realities that do not interact, except in formal circumstances.

When we consider what languages are relevant in the context of Florence and which role they play in city life, a series of clarifications must be made: regarding the coexistence of dialects with the standard Italian language, it is important to understand that they are not to be considered as variations of the Italian language but as different languages in their own right that evolved alongside Standard Italian language from a common ancestor, the vulgar Latin (Cerrato, 2018). Standard Italian is the result of a historical process, which imposed and nationalised one of the dialects of the peninsula over the other, the Florentine dialect of Tuscany (Cerrato, 2018). However, this means in no way that the standard Italian is identical to the modern Florentine dialect. The standard version of Italian has gone through a process of standardisation that further differentiated it from its original form. Once the standard Italian language began to spread throughout the country through education and mass media, it started to assume different characteristics when interacting with underlying local dialects. In this way, many local varieties of the Italian language developed throughout the country and, even if their area of influence does not coincide with the regional boundaries, these variations came to be generally known as 'regional Italians' (Cerrato, 2018). Namely, "all those variants of common Italian that, either for pronunciation, lexicon and grammatical rules, manifest the influence of the dialect over which the national language imposed" (Cerrato, 2018, para. 12). The Italian spoken in Florence can be considered one of the regional variations of the Italian language, mainly characterised by some variation in pronunciation and lexicon. These differences with standard Italian would not hinder the communication between a Florentine and a person speaking standard Italian. In this sense, the Florentine dialect is relatively accessible for a person who speaks standard Italian and vice versa.

Among the languages that also coexist in the city, English represents one of the most relevant, being the *lingua franca* of the tourist community and the language used by tourists to communicate with locals and vice versa. Considering that the linguistic proficiency in English of many of the Italian population is somewhat limited, communication between locals and tourists is rather scarce. Arguably, only the local people who work in the touristic sector (museum or touristic guides, retailers, hostelers) are the ones who know English thanks to their profession and actively engage in communication with the tourists. However, this is not always the case, and many people responsible for activities in the city centre do not have the required level to communicate in English with foreign customers. Other languages are also present in the field, but they are not so relevant in comparison with the use of Italian and English and, even if they are languages very close to Italian (Spanish, French or Portuguese), they are seldom used as alternatives to English or Italian in conversation. For this very reason, when we consider the local and tourist communities, we can talk of two distinct realities that live together but rarely connect with each other.

In these circumstances, we find the figure of Senegalese street sellers that, in a sense, appear as intermediary figures between these communities, being able to take advantage of the linguistic circumstances of the city and to manipulate both Italian and English to a certain extent. In this sense, when they speak with Italian people, they can correspond their linguistic capacities by speaking in standard Italian and, in isolated cases, regional Italian or dialects of the country. Conversely, when they talk with a tourist, they manage to do the same by speaking the tourist *lingua franca*, English, or, in some cases, communicating in the tourist language.

From the perspective of Senegalese street sellers' interlocutors, the linguistic expectations of the conversation vary according to their profile. The Italian person would probably prefer to communicate in Italian, either in its standard version or in its regional one. Any other language, in this sense, is excluded from the conversation. Few are the chances that Italian people would try to accommodate the Senegalese man by speaking in another language such as French or English. Therefore, from the street seller' perspective, using a language other than Italian is excluded, also if we consider the tones that the conversation usually takes: as we mentioned before, most of the Italians are not keen on stopping to talk with street vendors, therefore, they usually try to avoid them. For this reason, if the Senegalese man aims at establishing a conversation

with them, this must be done in Italian. Otherwise, the use of another language would be used as a pretext for the Italian interlocutor to avoid the conversation. In the case of tourists, the language used in the approach is generally English. However, if the tourist appears to be from a francophone country, there is a high chance that the conversation will rapidly switch to French. Many of the tourists are not used to street selling, therefore, are usually more open to engaging in conversation. Nevertheless, also in this case, the Senegalese street seller would try to accommodate the interlocutor's linguistic competencies by using - to a certain degree, depending on his linguistic skills - a language comfortable for the tourist to talk.

4.3 Finding a place between old and new lives through language?

Understanding the old and new linguistic realities - 'the linguistic markets' in which the Senegalese street sellers are entangled - it is fundamental to understand in turn the position they adopt in Florence's environment.

On the one hand, the description of the way in which language and identity intertwine in Senegal gives clues to understand how Senegalese men may perceive language as a marker of identity and, consequently, how they understand the use of multiple languages. The discussion of the sociolinguistics of Senegal, in this sense, opens space to consider what influence the previous linguistic environment of Senegalese men has had in the adaptation to a new context. In this sense, it is out of doubt that the *habitus* that these people may have developed in their socialisation in multilingual Senegal played a fundamental role in navigating the multilingual spaces of Florence. With the concept of *habitus*, we refer to "a set of dispositions which incline agents to act and react in certain ways. The dispositions generate practices, perceptions and attitudes which are regular without being consciously coordinated or governed by any 'rule'. The dispositions which constitute the habitus are inculcated, structured, durable, generative and transposable" (Thompson, 1991, p. 12). From this perspective, the way in which Senegalese men approach language in Florence may be perceived as an unconscious transposition of a linguistic disposition assimilated in Senegal to adapt to a new situation.

On the other hand, when we take into consideration the condition of Senegalese street peddlers in the multilingual landscape of Florence, the first question that comes to mind

is what the actual relation of these actors with language/s in this new context is and how they may perceive and use language as a consequence. Meeting the standards of a superdiverse city (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011), the city of Florence represents a complex linguistic scenario where Italian coexists with many other languages. By considering these aspects and following the recent ongoing debate on language and space agency, authors like Blommaert, Collins and Slembrouck (2005) put stress on how Senegalese street sellers' linguistic attitudes in Florence may be determined by the new linguistic circumstances they encounter and not so much by some kinds of *habituses* assimilated back at home. In the perspective of these authors, space is not is not merely `location' [...], but rather a deeply complex and stratified social sphere" (Miller, 2012, p. 445) that actively defines patterns of multilingualism: space legitimises or sanctions specific linguistic acts "by assigning differential value and function to individuals' multilingual repertoires, and by constraining identity options in those spaces, both self-constituted and ascribed identity positions" (Miller, 2012, p. 445).

From these perspectives, it may seem that, no matter what these Senegalese men try to do, their linguistic attitudes will be determined by the structural circumstances they are in, either by old linguistic *habituses* or the constitutive power of Florence's linguistic context. However, to what extent can it be said that these structural circumstances define the linguistic conduct of Senegalese street sellers? How about the street seller' agency? I will delve into this question in the following chapter.

5. SENEGALESE STREET SELLERS AS ACTIVE AGENT IN LANGUAGE USE AS AN IDENTITY MARKER

The discussion that I have introduced in the previous chapter is fundamental to understand how the past and current life circumstances of Senegalese street sellers may influence their linguistic attitudes in Florence. However, this discussion also entails one problem: it gives the impression that the linguistic attitudes of Senegalese street vendors result solely from the influence of structural factors. Although both *habituses* and linguistic spaces play a role in how Senegalese migrants perceive and use languages, these discussions undermine their subjectivity in this process and give only a partial understanding of their linguistic behaviours I am trying to observe.

For this reason, in this chapter I take into consideration the role played by Senegalese actors in the use they make of language. Thus, I try to find an answer to the question that closed the previous chapter. To do so, in the first place, I am going to discuss the concept of agency, how it has been defined and how it can be implemented for the aim of the present work. After that, I am going to introduce intentionality as a concept to understand how agency works in language uses, using illustrations from field data.

5.1 Old linguistic habits in a new environment? Agency, habitus and structure

When it comes to agency, it is important to notice that the definition of this concept is in no way clear or un-debated. A simple look at the very different ways in which agency has been defined is indicative of this situation (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Without going into detail to consider the good and bad points of many of these formulations, I instead concentrate on an important differentiation that is being made about this concept. In one of the most comprehensive descriptions that have recently been made, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) define human agency:

> "as a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment)" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 963).

On the other hand, in his work on anthropological linguistics, Duranti (2004) describes it:

> "as the property of those entities (i) that have some degree of control over their own behavior, (ii) whose actions in the world affect other entities' (and sometimes their own), and (iii) whose actions are the object of evaluation (e.g. in terms of their responsibility for a given outcome)." (Duranti, 2004, p. 453).

From the opposition of these two definitions, it is interesting to notice that the interpretations offered by these authors are in no way contradictory but instead shed light on different aspects of the same concept: agency can be considered a property if, as Duranti (2004) does, we understand it as the capacity to act in potency; however, it may well be seen as a process if, as Emirbayer and Mische (1998) do, it is considered in terms of its actualisation, that is to say, in his becoming real through action.

In this sense, the handling of these two definitions together helps us to understand the different ways in which agency is conceived. However, it is also necessary to make a further distinction about what Emirbayer and Mische implicitly suggest through their definition: agency is not social in itself, but rather it becomes social as an expression of human action in society. For this very reason, I argue, it is not correct to define agency as "as a temporally embedded process of social engagement" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 938) because it would suggest that agency is by essence social when it is not. For this reason, when considering agency in relation to language use, it is fundamental to move, as Nicolaï (2013) suggested, from the conceptualisation of the individual as a speaker to perceiving him as an actor. That is to say, to shift the attention from "the condition of existence of the linguistic object" to the effective relations of the speaker "with the languages that they actualize, use and manipulate" (Nicolaï, 2013, p. 5). This shift is fundamental because it allows us to consider the individual as someone "entangled in a flux of different determinisms (historical, economic, social, politic) [...] [who responds] to the constraints imposed by the social and interactional communicative contingencies where [he is inserted]" (Nicolai, 2013, p. 5). In this sense, to connect with what Nicolaï (2013) suggests, agency becomes social only when the individual is called to act according to, because of or in social settings; in other words, when he engages in a dynamic of social acting (Goffman, 1956).

When it comes to considering how social factors influence language use, it would be relatively easy to consider how singular social factors may affect the language use of a speaker in a certain interaction. In this sense, by isolating social factors, it would be easier (not more accurate, though) to tell the different ways in how they influence language use. However, the situation becomes more problematic if we take into account the complexity of social reality. In the first place, these social factors I am talking about never 'appear' singularly: when you are interacting with a person, you are not interacting with someone who is only a male or female, but also with someone who is of a certain age and a certain ethnic background and so on. While hanging around with Senegalese street peddlers in the field, I frequently observed them in conversation with women. In some of these occasions, it was evident that, independently of the language they were using, they were trying to engage in playful conversations by using romantic words to catch the attention of their interlocutors. However, even if this could be considered a recurrent trait in different conversations where the interlocutor was a woman, in each case there were subtle differences in the way they talked to her, mainly associated with the combination of multiple social factors, such as her age or her ethnic background.

Besides, we must consider that every conversation does not necessarily presuppose clear interactional roles. In the case I mentioned before, like in most of the cases I could witness as an external observer, the situation implied very clear interactional roles: the man was acting as a seller and the girl as a customer, and this was, on most occasions, a fact known to both interlocutors. Therefore, also the purposes of the interaction were, to a certain extent, intelligible for both of them. In this case, it was easier to understand the use Senegalese street sellers were making of language. However, this is not always the case, mainly because most of the circumstances of speech may suppose a vague purpose, or they may not (apparently) reveal any kind of purpose at all.

Another important aspect to consider is that all interactions occur in a determined social context, with specific linguistic 'rules' and power relations. For example, while street sellers were working, they were often well aware of the power relation between them and the customers. They also knew that, in most cases, such a relation was not in their favour, considering the dynamic of their occupation, i.e. trying to sell something that, in most cases, the customer had no evident need of. This situation often resulted in the Senegalese man's recognition of the interlocutor's language as the 'legitimate' one to

proceed with the interaction. In this given circumstance, street sellers knew that most of the success of their job interactions depended on the success of the conversational act, intended as the establishment of a common ground of understanding between them and the customer. Therefore, very distinctive words were not envisaged in these kinds of interactions because it would have led to a possible misunderstanding with the customers and useful opportunities missed. All these examples show that street sellers always try to conform to the linguistic competencies of their customers to the extent they can.

However, outside the boundaries of the negotiation space, I could appreciate a totally different behaviour: in fact, it was in such cases where Senegalese actors did not need to bend to the requirements of the multilingual context around them. One of these examples can be drawn from the first days of my fieldwork, when my presence was not yet 'accepted': in given circumstances, where I find myself speaking with many street sellers at the time, these lasts would use Wolof to exclude me from the conversation in certain given moments (as they explained me later on). In other words, they used their language as an encrypted code when in the presence of a speaker outside the group.

Another good example of the different 'rules' that are effective outside Senegalese vendors' working environment can be deduced from the playful approach to language that young street sellers adopted when they involved in informal conversation between them. It was on these occasions that these young men would mix typical Italian dialect words with French and Wolof ones (French being a language that they supposed I could not understand well, Wolof a language that they knew for sure I could not understand).

In the light of these examples, it may be argued that, as I suggested before, the social space of interaction may be perceived as playing a role in either legitimising or de-legitimising certain patterns of language use. However, it must also be noticed that these uses do not depend only on the context. Even if we cannot underestimate the social environment's influence in the interaction and patterns of language use, it would be wrong to assume that the Senegalese men assimilate passively the dictamina imposed in the environment.

While adhering to a certain extent to the language uses legitimised by the social context, the speaker has a certain space to involve in subjectively-dictated language behaviour. In each conversation in the job context, Senegalese street vendors try to convene to the

expected rules of the conversation dictated by the apparent relation between them and their interlocutors while, at the same time, they also try to find some space to get an advantage in the conversation. In this sense, while attaining to the rules of the context, street sellers, by using Silverstein's (1981) words, involve in a process of "relative creativity [by bringing] some contextual factors into existence" (p. 7) through the use of language. In other words, they use language to create conversational circumstances that in the end will make the conversation more fruitful for them. However, this process is not without risk. The street seller should always be careful to play within the boundaries imposed by the context. If he fails to respect these, it will have a negative effect on the conversation. For this reason, if he pretends to be successful in the interaction, the street vendor needs to be sensitive enough to shape his way of speaking depending on the profile of the person he is speaking with and in accordance with the limits posed by their social relationship. This sensibility may in part refer to the perceived level of closeness/remoteness that the speaker feels with his interlocutor.

There is an example in connection with ethnicity: the skin colour may be interpreted as a clue of similar experiences (closeness) in Italian society (racism, discrimination, etc.). This contextual factor (ethnic background) may be used by the street seller to confer a comradely tone to the conversation between him and his customer. In this situation, the street seller may use specific language forms that, referring to this perceived closeness between him and his interlocutor, create contextual circumstances favourable to him. However, he should always be careful to not exceed in playing on this factor, otherwise, he may get the opposite result of what he aimed for.

The same dynamic could take place referring to age: a young man would probably feel closer to a speaker of his same age. This would not be the case if an old man spoke to a younger man or the other way around, considering the remoteness they would feel in life experiences. The influence of age in conversation is exemplified by the different terms of address that street sellers use when talking with Italian customers. These forms of address relatively determine the contextual dimension where the conversation will take place, in terms of the power relationship between the street seller and the customer: if the Senegalese vendor is younger than the customer, there are high chances that he will refer to him with the expression "capo" (lit. boss). By using this simple address, the Senegalese individual tries to impose a certain relationship to create conditions that will be favourable to reach his aim. In this case, the sense given to the relationship is an

unequal one, as the word "boss" implicitly suggests. However, there were also cases when, assuming a certain closeness with the speaker, street sellers use speech forms to demarcate a horizontal relationship: like the word "bello" (lit. beautiful, nice person), a word mostly used by young people when referring to each other; or the words "fratello" (brother) or "fratello africano" (African brother), a very usual form that Senegalese men use to refer to the interlocutor.

It is important to note that all these examples do not coincide with the experience of every Senegalese street seller. On the contrary, their disposition towards the social environment was very different depending on their subjective traits. For example, there was not a common disposition towards the multilinguistic possibilities offered by the city, even if there were some commonalities. As a matter of fact, it was mostly young street sellers who, also in friendly circumstances, used to adopt a playful disposition in the use of language. In contrast, older people in the group were less inclined to adopt this same attitude (and to speak in general). In this sense, young men seemed to put major effort to assimilate and use new terms from the different languages they were in contact with and they were also more inclined to show off their linguistic skills.

All the circumstances we have considered so far are useful to appreciate how social factors may play a role in the speech act and its dynamics. However, the discussion of these aspects also revealed another important point: when considering street seller's language uses in relation to the social context of the interaction, the speaker's agency seems to disappear from the analysis.

In all language uses considered beforehand, we have only been able to hint at the agential role played by street sellers in language use. In fact, it may well be argued that all the linguistic behaviours that I have discussed so far may be an expression of assimilated *habituses* (Bourdieu, 1991). Or, we could say that these language attitudes were determined by the social context in which these individuals interacted. In the light of these considerations, when we approach the analysis of a linguistic interaction, it comes natural to ask: how can we prove that a language act is agency-driven? How can we approach agency to reflect the role of the speaker in language use? To overcome this obstacle, I propose to look at intentionality. As I will show later on, intentionality can be considered as a useful concept to ground the analysis of agency in language use and to focus on the linguistic interaction from the viewpoint of the actors involved in it.

However, before delving into the analysis of language from this new perspective, I am going to define a theoretical framework to understand intentionality and distinguish it from other terms that are generally used in relation to it.

5.2 Intentionality as a window on agency in language use

Language is entangled in different ways with (un-)intentional behaviour and reflects the tension between intentionality and un-intentionality at different levels. As Thomason (2007) pointed out, different considerations can be made on a macro level, considering the influence of intentionality in the way natural languages change. However, the intertwining of language and intentionality can also be interpreted in more specific ways, referring to the multiple functions that language has as a social instrument; functions that, as Nicolaï (2013) suggests, goes far beyond the communicative purpose and that presupposes a "plurality of the communicative intentions" (p. 3) to be explored. Nonetheless, a common element seems to join these different takes on the study of intentionality: when it comes to talking about intentionality in language use, there is little clarity on the definition of the concept used to investigate such a topic. In fact, when dealing with works on intentionality in language use, we often find this term alternated with words such as awareness or consciousness. These analytical concepts are used quite interchangeably in the literature to discuss the agent's role in language use; however, little clarity has been offered about the differences between these two concepts. Nonetheless, these terms, far from being synonyms, have very different implications in the study of intentionality in language use. Therefore, it is important to make the relation between them clear.

Nicolaï (2013) made an effort to offer some clarity on this topic when he tried to differentiate between consciousness, intentionality and planning in relation to linguistic change. In doing so, he relied extensively on the work of Keller (1994, as cited in Nicolaï, 2013) and, sometimes, not so critically. Drawing from Keller's work, Nicolaï (2013) refers to intentional and conscious as "independent predicates because intentional [...] characterizes an action from the point of view of the logic of action, while conscious characterizes the action from the psychological point of view" (p. 3). From this argument, which Nicolaï develops only superficially, it almost seems that he tries to divorce two terms that, in my opinion, cannot be considered independently: even

if he may be right in what he says when he defines consciousness and intentionality as pertaining to different domains (i.e. intentionality to the logic of action and consciousness to the psychology of the speaker), I think that he goes too far by considering them as independent concepts. I would rather say that these two concepts are deeply interconnected: consciousness works as a basic prerequisite for intentionality to take place. In this sense, I would say that he is pointing to a spurious distinction.

By saying so, however, I am not assuming that consciousness necessarily implies intentional action. In this sense, I can understand that there is partial independence of these two terms: the presence of consciousness does not necessarily imply the presence of intentionality. Consciousness is intentionality in potency that transforms into intentionality only when it becomes action, in this case, language use.

However, consciousness is not the only requirement for intentionality to take place: it is here where, in my opinion, the concept of awareness comes into play. I would say that even if awareness is usually seen as a synonym of consciousness it is not the same. On the contrary, I would rather suggest that awareness refers to the ability to know and perceive elements of the surrounding environment directly; that is to say, it is projected towards the external situation. On the contrary, consciousness, as Nicolaï (2013) observed, points to the knowledge of an internal process or state of mind.

Starting from the definition of intentionality as a planned action, oriented towards an end, I would say that, in order for an intentional action to take place, two conditions must be met:

a. The speaker must be conscious of his internal disposition, the plan that he aims to put into practice, and the end he is pursuing with his action (in our case, the linguistic act).
b. He must be aware of the situation in which he is in and understands to a certain extent how the situation may relate to his personal end and if there are the prerequisites for his end to be attained (through speech).

These circumstances must not be understood as necessarily sequential steps, but they can also develop simultaneously.

5.3 Revealing intentionality in practical language use

During a conversation, certain choices are to be made to keep the interaction going. The translation of such choices into practice results in specific patterns of language uses depending on the context of speech and on the purposes of the conversation. In multilingual settings, this choosing process may involve the selection of a specific form of speech or one language instead of another. Therefore, in these contexts, we can observe language uses that, by combining different codes, may reveal patterns of intentionality within language choices. These choices can be interpreted in terms of intentionality and purpose. However, much could be said about the purpose behind the use of a determined linguistic form.

In the first place, it is natural to believe that, when it comes to the use of a linguistic form, there is always a first time of use after which it may or may not become a recurrent speech form in the linguistic repertoires of the speaker. It may also be expected that the purposes behind the use of a certain linguistic form for the first time would be very different from the ones implied in the successive use of that same linguistic form. In the first use, it may be the case that an explorative/curious attitude moves the speaker. Imagine a Senegalese street seller who starts to get acquainted with Florentine slang. It is utterly improbable that he will manage to understand all the possible nuances associated with it and all the possible uses made of it before using it. In this sense, the first time that a Senegalese street seller uses an Italian slang word (for example, the word 'bello', used to refer to peers) it may for 'exploratory' reasons: such use may be aimed at understanding the word in its context of use, at corroborating what effect it may produce on the hearer or to get a hint on how he will be perceived as a user of such a word. To put it differently, the first use of a form of speech reveals useful in making guesses on the possibilities of the linguistic form, such as: the circumstances and ways in which it may be used or the profile of people with whom it could be uttered. In this sense, it is probable that when a Senegalese street seller uses a linguistic form for the first time, he will do so independently from the fact that his interlocutor may be acquainted with the linguistic form at hand or not. In case the interlocutor would hear the language form for the first time (or he is not simply well used to it), he would still be perceived as an individual on which to 'test the effects' of such a linguistic term: the street seller may want to understand if the language use he is making is understandable to someone who does know it, or he may simply try to detect how he is

going to be perceived in pronouncing that word (in terms of competent or not-competent user). The same could be said if the Senegale man's interlocutor is a competent user of the word he pronounces, but the expectations from the interaction will be different. In fact, it is to be expected that the information obtained from the interaction with a competent hearer may be very different from an 'ignorant' one; probably, the street vendor will expect to get useful information about the use he makes of the term. In all these interpretations, the first language use may be interpreted as the first step of an assimilatory process aimed at extrapolating general rules for using specific linguistic forms.

However, it could also be said that the first use of a word or form of speech may be playful in its purpose. In this case, the purpose behind the use of the word would be more dependent on the profile of the interlocutor/s. Imagine that the speaker is in a familiar space, that is to say, he is talking with people of his same group, like young Senegalese men talking with each other during shift breaks. In this circumstance, it could be said that the street seller's use of a certain language form - such as a dialectal variation of Italian - may be playful/ironic in purpose. However, when street sellers talk to someone not familiar to them, - either a client or a person that they stop in the street for a simple talk - the same playful use of language may unveil a different purpose: his playfulness may hide his incompetence in the use of a particular word. In this sense, the use of irony or playfulness may not be intended as an end in itself but a disguise to avoid harsh judgments from a person who is not familiar and that may be linguistically competent enough to judge whether the use the vendor makes of the word/form of speech is correct or not. Maybe the Sengalese man is not very fluent in the language that he wants to use with customers, so he might expect a sanction from them on his way of speaking. In such circumstances, playfulness kicks in: when pronouncing the slang word the street seller assumes a playful attitude that projects carelessness regarding how such a word may be pronounced or whether it is the right situation for uttering it. This strategy may also reveal fundamental to give the street vendor some chances to boast his symbolic capital in the possible case that the person he is speaking with is not acquainted at all with such a term (as it could easily be the case in a touristic city like Florence): whether he is recurring or not to a speech form for the first time, he may appear to the 'ignorant' hearer as someone who is linguistically competent in the language used.

On the contrary, when we look for the possible purposes implied in a language form used recurrently, different considerations need to be made. Being more informed on the use of a linguistic form, the speaker may also be more aware of how he can use it and, therefore, he may change the purposes from the first time he tried to use it. It may be the case that the speaker resorts to such a linguistic form to set the tone of the conversation and so to establish the interactional relationship that is going to be adopted in that conversation. So, if the Senegalese street vendor is talking with someone of his own age, he might use the term 'amico' (the Italian word for "friend") to establish a horizontal relationship with him. Otherwise, he could choose to use the same speech form to engage in a confrontational conversation if the person is older than him and may not 'accept' such a nickname. However, also in this last case, the dynamic changes if we consider other aspects that concern the relation between the interlocutors.

Let us suppose that there is familiarity between them; that is to say, they already know each other: a person talks with street sellers more than once and, apart from engaging in economic interaction, he also has a conversation beyond the relation seller-buyer and, for instance, asks about the country of provenance, about his stay in Italy, etc. In this case, the Senegalese man can rely on more information to make more accurate guesses about the linguistic competence of his interlocutor and change his speech forms accordingly: he may use a certain way of speaking to remark a certain degree of closeness with him or 'introduce' the latter to his way of talking. On the contrary, if the Senegalese vendor does not know his listener, he may frame the purpose behind his language use in different terms, maybe in a challenging perspective: he may try to challenge his hearer to join him in such a conversational use of language. Depending on the interlocutor's reaction, the street seller may decide to change the purpose of his language use accordingly: if the interlocutor succeeds in keeping up with the expectations, then he may establish a playful conversation or create a certain degree of closeness with him; otherwise, he may decide to play on the 'ignorance' of the interlocutor to project a certain image of himself to him. In this sense, there might be a re-elaboration of the purpose according to the evolution of the interaction.

Another important aspect that should be taken into consideration when considering possible purposes behind language use points to the connection of the interlocutor to a certain group: the street seller may consider himself as part of an imagined group (Senegalese youngsters in Florence), and he may perceive his interlocutor as well as a

representative of another group (Italian community). For this reason, it is important to consider that the purpose behind the use of a certain form of speech or words may be associated to the speaker's desire to be accepted by the listener and the the group he represents: from the perspective of a young Senegalese talking with a young Italian, the acceptance by the latter could be interpreted as an acceptance by the Italian youth as a whole. Thus, a young Senegalese street seller in a new context like the city of Florence, may be guided by the desire to be accepted in the new community where he is. Therefore, he may try to imitate the people's way of speaking in this new context and use specific words to show his effort to adapt to his new environment. However, it may also be the contrary: he may use language as a way to distinguish himself from the hearer and the community he represents. For example, to show his linguistic abilities a reflection of his international lifestyle as opposed to the stationary lifestyle of many Italian people.

Besides, the language choices Senegalese street sellers make can be understood as a way to conform or not with the images of them present in the Italian society: the purpose behind the use they make of language may be that of challenging the image of myself that such a society has of them. For example, one day, I was talking with Ibrahim about work, about the lack of job opportunities. He was complaining that there was no job for Senegalese men like him, and he explained that this was also due to how they were perceived in Italian society. In our discussion, Ibrahim mentioned that he speaks more languages as an example of the fact that he, like many other Senegalese men, had skills and was driven to learn. In contrast, he referred to the fact that most Italians did not know more than one language. This explanation, even if it does not explain the use he made of a specific language/languages or forms of speech, may give a possible key to interpret some of the linguistic choices that I observed in the field. Apart from being a justification of his value as a person, this conversation could also be interpreted as an explanation of their use of different language/s or ways of speaking: the use of foreign words in the speech of street peddlers may be intended to challenge the hearer by showing that, despite what he or society may think about him, they have skills and take the chances offered by the Florence's multilingual landscape to keep on improving their linguistic competencies. From this perspective, the purpose behind Senegalese seller's language choices may be to challenge a representation that society has about them.

However, the language that street sellers use to accomplish this purpose may not necessarily indicate an actual linguistic competency. From how these young men talked about it, it seemed that they were very good at speaking multiple languages as they also made an occasional show of that by using certain English or Spanish words with clients. However, when I tried to talk to two of them in one of the languages (Spanish) that I saw them using in a conversation and that I happen to know, I quickly realised that they were not competent enough to maintain a sustained conversation in the language. For this reason, it appeared that they used foreign words from languages they did not know very well only with interlocutors that may also not know them. In this sense, it seemed that the use they were making of these foreign words was aimed at building an image of competency and not to prove an actual linguistic competency (even if, sometimes, it seemed to be the case). In this sense, the communicative purpose of the word/form of speech used (i.e. to engage in a conversation or to transmit an idea/concept in that language) lose every meaning in favour of a use centered on the symbolic dimension of the speaking for, that is to say, to transmit a certain image of themselves to the interlocutor.

All the examples presented throughout the chapter show the many ways in which Senegalese street sellers play an active role in using language: I considered the relevance of social factors in relation to Senegalese street vendors' linguistic behaviour and the purposes that may hide behind specific uses they made of language. Then, I discussed how language can be used as an explorative tool or as a means to challenge interlocutors. Despite the fact that Senegalese street sellers appeared to use language in many ways, there was a common motif behind their linguistic choices: to portray a specific image of themselves, an image of competence and cosmopolitan lifestyle. Most of my interlocutors used language as a mirror to reflect their travel experience to other countries. This was the case of Ibrahim, who explicitly referred to his knowledge of Spanish as a result of his life experience in Spain. Or Cheick, who presented his command of various Italian dialects' words as the testimony of his time travelling around the country. However, there was also an underlying idea of competency at hand. My discussion with Adama was exemplary in this sense: he particularly stressed his mastery of many European languages by proudly referring to the fact that he is currently studying languages at Florence University. The same goes for Ndiaga, who used to refer to his multilingual skills as an indicator of his suitability to occupy the job positions he

was applying for. In all these cases, the use of language reflected its importance as a marker of identity.

6. CONCLUSION

It has been argued in this thesis that the analysis of intentionality in language use can contribute in different ways to understand the active role that Senegalese street sellers play in Italy. Now the time has come to consider the implications of such a proposition.

Throughout the development of the work, we have seen the many ways in which language is essential to Senegalese street sellers. Within the wide spectrum of possibilities in which language can be used, we observed how language works as a fundamental tool to navigate through a new environment and to position oneself within different social groups. In this sense, it was made clear that the relationship that Senegalese actors have with their social environment has a fundamental impact on how they perceive and define their identities. As we have seen, the influence of Senegal's environment is fundamental to understand the linguistic behaviour of Senegalese street sellers in Florence. The internalisation of language attitudes in terms of assimilated *habituses* can determine to a certain extent the approach that Senegalese men adopt towards different languages or forms of speech in Florence's context. However, we also saw that the environment in which these individuals find themselves is in no way neutral. In this way, I showed how Florence represents a complex and stratified social context in which certain linguistic expressions or ways of speech may be legitimised or censured. By taking Senegalese street sellers in Florence as the subjects of this research, I have looked at how environmental constraints account for the use they make of language. In this sense, I have shown how identity construction through language use is context-dependent and how the different linguistic circumstances that Senegalese street sellers experienced have an important impact on the use they make of language.

It is only after considering the influence of social environments that I pointed to the role of the individual in language use. By approaching such a topic, I demonstrated how looking at intentionality in language use can contribute in different ways to understand the active role that Senegalese street sellers play in Italy. While I agreed with the conception of identity in relation to social environments, I contended that by implementing intentionality in the analysis of language use, sociolinguistic research can better demonstrate the agential role Senegalese street vendors play in using language as an identity marker.

The conclusions drawn from this research are several, ranging from more practical and methodological concerns to theoretical ones.

Through language use, the present work rescues Senegalese migrants from the generalising images made of them in Italy. Looking at the linguistic attitudes of street sellers allowed us to consider their behaviours in the light of individual choices and highlight the diversity in their approach to the same linguistic environment. In other words, I managed to emphasise the agential role of individuals without losing the possible influences that other contextual and group features may have in their behaviour. In this sense, the approach to language use adopted in this thesis adds another layer to the analysis of agency, usually studied by scholars focusing on (African) migration.

At a more theoretical level, this analytical approach has contributed to adopting a different perspective in the analysis of agency. For example, by showing that language can be seen as an asset to express agency, I have been able to reconsider the structure vs. agency debate from a different perspective, and contribute to it by drawing from interdisciplinary contributions. Besides, by looking at intentionality, I could focus the attention specifically on the individual as such and not necessarily as a part of a wider social group.

With the present work I have also show that, while sociolinguistics has much credit to give to the social sciences for its development, sociolinguistics can contribute in its own way to dealing with some of the problems that were firstly approached within the social sciences. In this sense, sociolinguistics, by looking at the specific use of language in which Senegalese street peddlers are involved, provides a detailed framework for studying agency: language use gave us not only a way to put into light Senegalese street sellers' agency but also to ground its analysis in practical, concrete life experiences.

Finally, the study of Africa outside its boundaries has helped us get a more detailed perspective of Africa's position in the globalised world in which we live by considering the role of Africans as active agents in Italy.

When thinking about possible follow-up research, we should not confine ourselves to look at language use in migration contexts. On the contrary, we should direct our attention to reintegrate the context of Senegal into our research plans. As we have seen,

the way in which Senegalese acquire, perceive and use language in their country has significant implications in how they use language in Italy. As many authors have pointed out, "the rapid growth of urban centres on the African continent has impacted linguistic practices and has resulted, for instance, in the emergence of new varieties and creative multilingual strategies, as well as in transformations of the linguistic ecology of many African cities" (Nassenstein & Hollington, 2019, p. 535). In addition, many Senegalese/African migrants return to their home countries, adding linguistic experiences, repertoires, and strategies to the linguistic ecologies of their home countries. Given these ongoing changes, a more accurate study of Senegalese linguistic circumstances is necessary.

With the present work, I have shown how Senegalese street sellers are active agents in Italy, deserving attention as individuals with their own stories and their own choices. In doing so, I highlighted Senegalese men's ability to navigate all the possibilities that the city has to offer. Now, this must not be interpreted as a naive approach to the conditions of life of these people. As we have seen, there are many hardships and structural barriers that Senegalese migrants have to go through. However, it is fundamental to acknowledge that, despite the circumstances they are in, there is an active effort to deal with and change them. And, whether these efforts translate into success or not, they are indeed worthy of our attention.

By having contact with these young people on the field, no matter how briefly, I have thoroughly experienced that they are people with dreams, expectations and hopes. Through their use of language I could observe what was the image of themselves they wanted to project: an image of competence and cosmopolitan lifestyle. We can all agree upon the difficulties that characterise these Senegalese men's lives in one way or another. However, they did not fail to reinvent themselves in this new condition and reshape their dreams and expectations without giving them up. In this sense, their active role is still even more accentuated if we consider the continuous effort that they make to develop their narrative over the negative representations that they have to face in their day-to-day life.

As I conclude this thesis, all the people I met in the field are still working in the streets of Florence, waiting for better life opportunities, but always dreaming of a better future. Just like Cheick, who told me about his plans to go to the Netherlands where he thinks

better job opportunities await him or Adama, wanting to go to France where he would be able to reunite with his sister. But everyone is missing their home in Senegal, where their roots lie and where they all hope to come back one day in the future as the men who found success in Europe.

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[5] All the direct quotes taken from articles written in languages other than English have been translated by the author of the present work.

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