

# Russian Language in Negotiations: An Italian Experience

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**Abstract**—This research work is devoted to the language peculiarities affecting the relations between Italian firms and their Russian counterparts. According to authors pre-work research, this topic was not investigated by previous academic works, thus should be employed as a starting point to further analysis on the linguistic business interactions regarding the two countries in question. Two parallel researches were carried out. The first was an on-line anonymous survey of linguistic and economic metadata provided by Italian firms well-established on the Russian market. The second was an on-field selection of linguistic events observed during the interactions between Italian and Russian managers at the last Agri-food Prodexpo Exhibition 2019 in Moscow. Data gathered show patterns of approach to the linguistic problems of interaction with Russian language from Italian companies along with problems of oral communication due to inherent differences in grammar and vocabulary.

**Keywords**—*Russian language, Italian language, business language, negotiation, languages in contrast*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Language and culture are closely interconnected and greatly influence verbal and nonverbal communication. Language is not just a mere tool to express someone's opinion, willingness or needs, but reflects the very inner nature of every individual capable to manage it. A person's innermost world, connection through culture, educational background, values and beliefs are expressed by language means [10] and every time we deal with a foreign language we should not forget the hidden world behind each oral or written activity. It would be naive or at least not wise to think that our language knowledge may be exempted by hints of local culture and work as a monolithic tool to make ourselves understood or to understand our interlocutor. Also in written translation of legal importance we should take account of the peculiarities of some expressions that may be misleading and corrupt the original version, through specific procedures, like functional equivalence [16], which assume a deeper knowledge of the language we are going to translate. Thus, the role of the language student, or in our case study, of the export manager

requires more skills than the simple ability of understanding and making himself/herself understood. When dealing with business language we need [15]:

- a system of ethno linguistic knowledge, which should be parallelly developed during the language learning stage;
- a system of cross-cultural attitudes, most likely to be learnt by social contact with foreigners, personal experience abroad, also during exchange studies (programs like Erasmus+ play a major role in this context) [29];
- a system of norms inherent to the individual, like the ability and willingness to learn, teamwork and cooperation, willingness to do extra work, self-control and analytical thinking [17].

Language is also a powerful and effective tool to develop business contacts among firms of different areas of the planet. As we know, English is the most useful language to spread ideas, knowledge and business information around the world, but sometimes it may be not as useful as expected [2]. In this paper we discuss the case study of Italian firms already doing business with the Russian counterparts, and those willing to settle new agreements with them. Our research was made on the hypothesis that communication between Russian and Italian firms is not as effective as it could be expected because of language barriers. Two parallel researches were made accordingly. The first consisted on gathering information directly from the companies whose products are already present on the shop shelves of Moscow, and on the other hand an on-field research was carried out among those who are looking for new partners at the Moscow Agri-food Prodexpo Exhibition 2019 [30]. The first research was made through an anonymous on-line survey with 14 questions about the general position of the firm on the Russian market, and its evaluation of the relationship with Russian partners also from a communicational point of view. The number of potential respondents, based on the gathered data was more than one hundred ( $N = 103$ ), however the actual number of interviewed was more than twenty ( $n = 23$ ). The second was on-field research at the exhibition as a representative of the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University further), being an Italian native speaker was not difficult to find fellow countrymen eager to share their experience in Russia. Many of them were interested in the research and showed unexpected willingness to provide us with any useful

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information regarding my questions. Someone gave me the permission to spend some time at their booth to report those critical language aspects which were not possible to be spotted without an observation of the realia as it was. Being focused on the sales and acquaintance they were not able to single out those phenomena which are relevant to linguists. Misleading words were observed, the so called false friends, incorrect translation from Italian to Russian through English were reported and, in our opinion the most interested phenomena, cross-linguistic expression, also known as interferences [3].

It is likely that the owner of an Italian small or medium enterprise (SME) had already have contacts with foreigners in the context of his business affair. As appears from data, the Italian economy is the 7th most export-oriented in the world, but Russia is far from being considered one of the top export destination [31]. While analyzing the language peculiarities relevant for communication between Italian and Russian firms, we could not leave aside a series of metadata not directly correlated to language difficulties.

## II. DATA ANALYSIS

Let us start from data gathered about the means of communication between Russian firms (RF) and the Italian firms (IF). First of all, we should say that collecting a relevant number of potential respondents required an on-field type of research. Due to the sanctions from the Russian government counterpart many food products, which constituted the bulk of Italian export were no more imported [32]. For the first step we relied on different sites, from institutional sources where a list of Italian firms operating inside the Russian territory was disclosed [37]. We used two main online sources, one site affiliated with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the other linked with the Italo-Russian Chamber of Commerce. On the first site the information about the Italian entrepreneurship presence in Russia is very accurate. There are names, addresses, phone number and e-mails. While on the second site there are barely the name of the firm and the corporate site. Anyway, both sites were fully employed to find managers willing to participate to our research. We did not stop there, to find more up-to-date data, a research throughout the main retailer shop in Moscow was made, though time-consuming we were satisfied of the data collected. The highest Italian presence was registered in the wine ward of the supermarket, being wine an excellence product of the IF not subject to sanctions.

We asked in which percentage the Russian market contributes to their total revenue. As we can observe from the graph, for the very majority of the sample, the impact of this market is relatively small.

Accordingly, our hypothesis was that the majority of IF does not have a Russian-speaking employee within their company staff. This hypothesis was made before the personal approach at Prodexpo 2019, and found its bases on the scarce job request on the Italian market for Russian-

speaking candidates [38] compared to English-speaking ones [38], in export management human resources. Data from our respondents confirmed the tendency to employ English-speaking personnel for the Russian market as well. The greater part of the interviewed (65%) replied in a negative way to the question: "Do you have Russian-speaking employees in your company?". For a simpler approach you can observe the graph below.

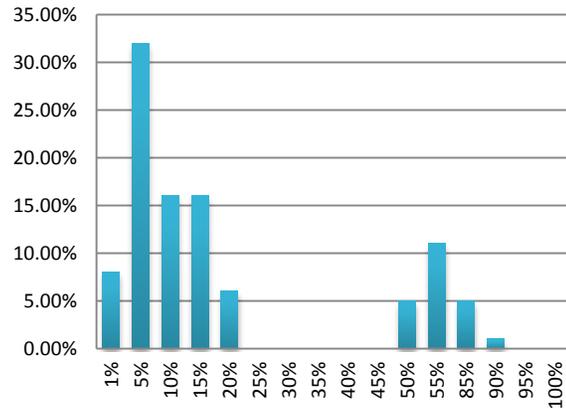


Fig. 1. Contribution of Russian market on total revenue

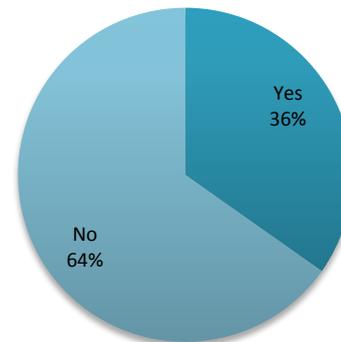


Fig. 2. Do you have Russian-speaking employees in your company?

We draw your attention to the fact that here we did not take for granted the use of English by the minor part. Hence, we saw the need to ask for further linguistic details on the language employed for inter-firm communication. In the following question more than one answer were possible, since the use of different linguistic instruments with different customers should not be excluded. The question was about the language used to communicate with the RF. Four choices were available, English, Russian, Italian and others. According to graph below, reporting the results obtained, the overwhelming majority (86,4%) uses English in his communication with RF or, if we would like to state it differently, the majority of RF operating with Italian suppliers use English for their negotiations with IF. A consistent proportion of the interviewed employs Italian as a negotiation language. This choice finds two main explanations:

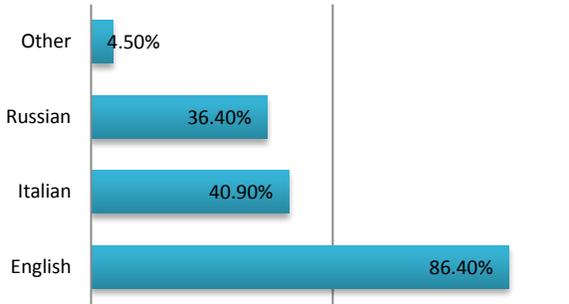


Fig. 3. What language do you use to speak with your Russian partners?

a) in the RF there is a manager who speaks Italian, this facilitate communication from the IF side, where the export manager may be engaged on the Russian market without incurring the extra cost of learning another language and make himself understood.

At the same time, the IF does not sustain the extra cost to hire a Russian-speaking specialist to deal with RF.

b) The RF, though established in the territory of the Russian Federation is owned by Italian fellow countrymen. Some examples were encountered during the Prodexpo 2019, when was asked to evaluate the quality of communication between the Italian and the Russian counterpart. In case of an extremely positive answer, further explanations were requested. It turned out that the RF was owned by an Italian entrepreneur, who communicates directly with the top-management of the Italian counterpart in his native language.

The third-ranked language is Russian, through a more attentive observation we can notice that this percentage (36%) is the same as the first graph. Therefore, we can conclude that this indicator is fully explained by those firms where Russian-speaking employees are included in the company staff. We may not exclude a priori the use of other languages different from the two native-speakers' and the English as lingua franca. As it appears to be there are few firms which use other languages, some of them disclosed the relevant information:

- a) French
- b) German

This choice may come from two sources: the business relation with a French or German firm situated in the territory of the Russian federation; the presence of bilingual managers who employ lingua francas different from English. Even if they are a small percentage, it would be a hint for those who are investigating the use of language business relations through lingua francas, even if a deeper knowledge of the usage of lingua francas within this frame require a strong collaboration from the firm side, sometimes difficult to achieve.

A general overview of the language employed in this scenario has been provided, now let us analyze the perceived quality of communication among IF and RF

independently from the language employed. In the following question we wanted to collect data from those people who inside the IF are directly involved into the negotiations with their Russian counterpart. Our expectation was that the quality of the inter-firm communication depends on the degree of knowledge of the linguistic instruments used to fulfill negotiations. Thus, probably those who utilize Italian would rate the quality of communication entirely high, on the other hand, those who are not Russian native speakers may find some difficult to understand their clients by phone or in person. Consequently no major trend would be expected to be observed. To the question "How do you evaluate the quality of communication between you company and the Russian partners?" an evaluative scale from 1 to 5 was provided. As you can spot from the graph below there is not a strongly prevailing evaluation, however, if "3" would be our benchmark between high and poor quality, we may state that the majority of firms evaluate positively their communication in this context.

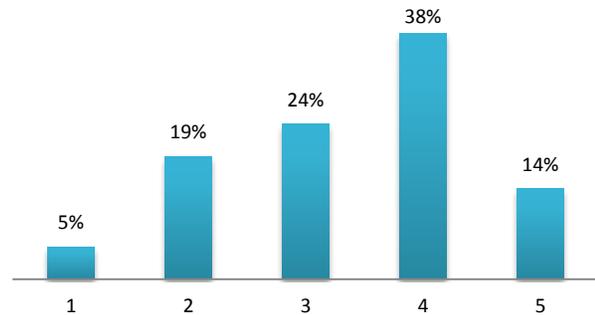


Fig. 4. Quality of communication

Given the scenario above, where we saw that quality may assume different shades, we were also interested in the possible misleading transfer of information and relevant misunderstanding. For this reason, we asked IF whether there were occasions when such negative phenomena were reported. Proportions from 1 to 5 were provided, 1 means "never", while 5 stands for "always". Regarding this issue a cautious approach should have been taken into consideration while making expectations, for two main reasons:

- a) Companies have a great incentive to minimize incomprehension with their partners because it may result in money loss or in bad relationship with clients. In the long-term problems attributable to communication may force a firm to leave a client or a particular market.
- b) Considering the above communication quality assessment, we may expect a positive situation and minimize anomalies.

The graph below confirms our hypothesis. No mutually advantageous trade relationship may be carried on if communication is undermined by relevant problems. If we took "3" as the borderline between the presence or not of communication problems, where 3 is not taken into account, we see that a 70% of the IF interviewed does not

experience relevant problems due to language misunderstanding. If we compare this graph below with the previous one, a more positive scenario is depicted. Though the quality of communication was rated positively (marks 4 and 5) by the 52% of the Italian respondents, a 18% more is included in the highest marks here, meaning that it is also possible not to experience relevant problems of misinterpretation even if the quality itself of communication is not satisfactory.

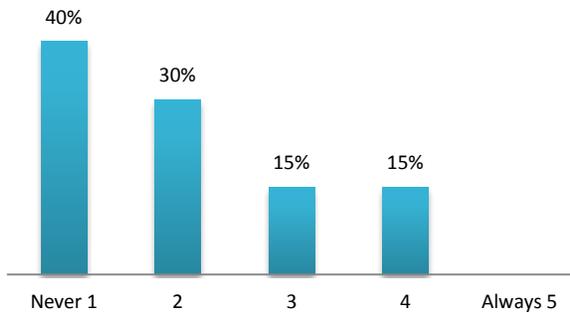


Fig. 5. Relevant misunderstanding due to language

Subsequently, we kindly asked the interviewed to provide us with any useful information to understand deeper where and how misinterpretation may appear, the question was not compulsory, and the majority skipped that step. However, some information was also useful, focusing mainly on three fields:

a) Misunderstanding about payment methods or/and payment deadlines. Some respondents report the difficulty to transfer money from the RF and frequent delay of payment, according to them attributable to language difficulties as well.

b) Misunderstanding about documents needed from the RF to import goods, especially wine and oil, related to bureaucratic asymmetry between the two countries. These problems include not only customs and tax declaration, but also specific requirements on packaging (label and/or back label) where language difference and cost of a reliable translation play their role.

c) Misunderstanding during the preparation of contracts, due to asymmetry in the law system but also to language difficulties. The process involves certified translation, legal assistance and bureaucratic requirements from both parties, raising the cost of the making an agreement. Consequently, the whole cost to enter the Russian market is high for IF also due to language differences.

The interviewed were also asked to provide a subjective reason to explain the problems in communication with RF. As it appeared, lingo-cultural issues constitute the bulk of perceived reasons which may affect the effectiveness of communication. The graph below reports all the variables in relation to the percentage of their evaluation. According to the opinion of IF managers, the first-ranked cause was

found in cultural differences, the second-ranked identified in the difficulties to understand Russian, the third-ranked was attributed to the employees of the Russian counterpart. Even if the Russian Federation has the largest territory in the world, where 11 time zones are included, only a 5% of the managers found it a cause of not efficient communication. The explanation for this low percentage is to be found in the geographic location of high industrialized areas, which are around the municipalities of Moscow and Saint Petersburg [33], where the time difference with Italy is of one hour in summer and two hours in winter [34]. Among those who chose "other", the different business ethics of RF was declared to hinder effective communication.

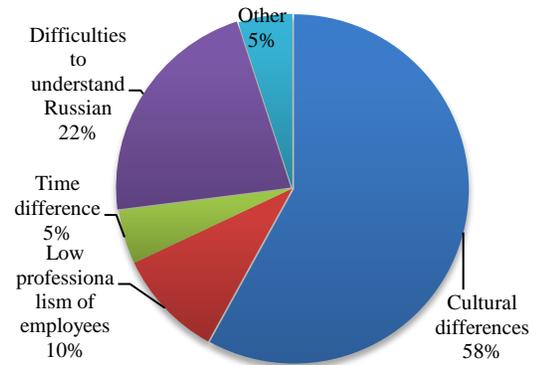


Fig. 6. What is the reason of the problems in communication?

Further investigation was made to clarify whether the same communication problems observed with the Russians are also detected in communication with partners from other countries. The question proposed to our respondents was: "Do you find the same communication problems with other nationalities?". The possible answers were "No" and "Yes", in the latter case they were kindly invited to provide some examples. We expected the majority of the participants to choose the answer "Yes", for the reason that a firm operating outside Europe may find relevant communication problems when dealing with countries with different business ethics or where English is not used as lingua franca. The pie below highlights the situation from the managers' point of view. The majority (61%), though not overwhelming, found the same problems with partners from other countries, while a 39% found communication problems only with the Russians. Two main explanations may be used to make clear this choice:

a) The company has only English-speaking export manager(s), so that it finds difficulties in expanding its business outside those countries where English may not be fully employed as lingua franca, like in Russia.

b) The company does not possess enough resources to deal with markets outside Europe, and looks at the Russian market as the closest alternative to the EU common market. Accordingly, it makes use of the same strategies involved in the domestic market (EEA) on a foreign market, as a consequence of which difficulties arise.

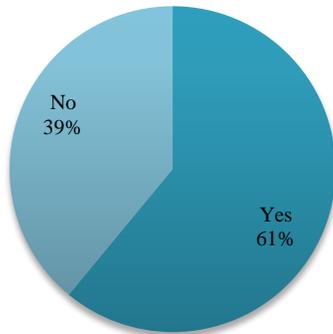


Fig. 7. Do you find the same communication problems with other nationalities?

Let us analyze deeper the option singled out by the majority of the sample. Here a series of country was listed, however we gathered them into three macro groups:

a) China, though many Chinese import managers speak English, it is difficult for the Italian counterpart to understand them due to asymmetry in accent and pronunciation [21], additionally, legal requirements for the imported goods raise up the cost of entering this market [23].

b) Central Asia, in particular Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan were listed. This territory presents double lingo-cultural issue. The first bulk of differences is to be found in the inherent peculiarities of the Turkic-speaking Muslim culture, while the second is attributable to the heritage left by the Soviet period [20]. From a linguistic point of view, Kazakhstan is a strongly russified country, above all in the main cities, defined by one of our respondents as "the Russian Switzerland", includes the peculiarities of the Russian market plus a relatively simplified approach to import. On the other hand, Uzbekistan is far more traditional country than Kazakhstan, foreign investment are still low, and is not making significant progress to enter the WTO [24]. From a linguistic point of view, English is slowly becoming a lingua franca, but the use of Russian for international commerce is still largely employed [25].

c) South America, though far from the context of Asia or Eastern Europe, presents some linguistic problems to Italian managers. On the one hand, the entire continent speaks mainly two languages, (Spanish and Portuguese), with the exception of Suriname and Guyana, on the other hand, English is not widely used as lingua franca. According to the statements of our respondents only few top managers speak good English, while the overwhelming majority of export managers use Spanish. However, to settle business relations with the Brazilian partner a knowledge of Portuguese is necessary. Brazil is the main business market to export in South America, but for those who think to enter the market with English-speaking or Spanish-speaking staff the mission would be difficult to accomplish. Hence, the Italian companies are advised to hire specific managers with the knowledge of both languages if they want to succeed in achieving their project

in South America.

To the average salesperson the word negotiation presupposes the attainment of a certain objective which is satisfactory for both parties through a process in which they reduce the original demands to a mutually satisfactory meeting place more or less below each other's initial requests. Here is a concise but clear definition of the term taken from the Merriam-Webster online dictionary: Negotiate: to confer with another so as to arrive at the settlement of some matter [22].

Though all of us may have clear in mind the idea of a negotiation process, our own approach to it may differ in some way. Let us think about the differences in language, culture and belief, which may affect negotiation process to a certain extent positively or negatively. Let us think of negotiations between Americans and Russians during the cold war, when it was easy to perceive that there were strong differences in the line of action of each other's strategy. In fact, a robust assumption behind negotiations is that both parties should have an interest to reach an agreement, when only one party is open to negotiate but the other is not open to review his own demands, then there is no room for negotiation [5]. One of the greatest asset a negotiator may possess is patience. Any person involved in a negotiation of any kind must bear in mind that the deal may not be signed in the forthcoming period, but patiently settle the path for a long-term relationship, which is even more advisable than a one-time deal. To settle such path it is critical to the firm to collect previously some information about the country we want to make business wit, bearing in mind that the greater is the distance between two cultures the higher is the risk of miscommunication, and consequently of failure of the process. Some scholars think that it is impossible to understand fully and deeply a foreign culture, therefore we should aim to a certain degree of success given our poor knowledge of the matter. The cultural gaps, which exist among countries, influence all aspects of business activities: business negotiations; consumer and organizational behavior and decision making; the measures taken to avoid uncertainties; employer and employee relationships; time and resources consumed in a firm's operations. It is these differences and their impact, which make understanding and managing cultural differences properly a critical issue in international business operations [19]. Some other authors state quite the opposite, that it is possible to understand how other cultures' values differ from our own and postulate that, "culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one Human group from another. Culture, in this sense, includes systems of values, and values are among the building blocks of culture" [8]. Hence, culture is not inherent to every individual but it is learned, the same way we can learn other cultures, understand them and make good use of them to pursue collaboration in business as in life. So, everybody would agree that a cultural preparation may increase the probability of success when dealing with foreign markets. Even if these preparations were not to have a direct impact

on a firm's operational performance, they can help firms to identify cultural gaps and to develop appropriate adaptations that narrow these gaps, and to handle the consequences of these gaps better.

Let us take a look to the time needed for negotiation from the IF point of view. The question posed to the interviewed was: "How much time on average do you need to spend on negotiations with your Russian partners?". We tried to give the potential respondent a broad spectrum of possible answers, from one week to more than five years, the actually chosen answers are depicted in a pie below.

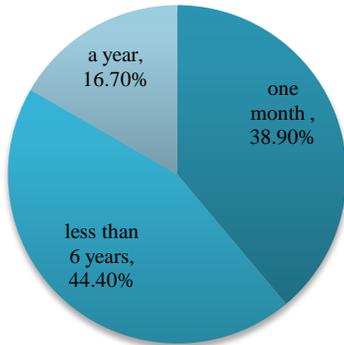


Fig. 8. Time spent on negotiations

The range was not as dreadful as we expected. Almost half of our volunteers need less than six months to settle an agreement with their Russian counterpart. It seems that nobody has such negotiations which may last more than one year, which make an overall relieving picture of the scenario. This pie confirms data saw above about the quality of communication and the relatively little misleading information received. Nonetheless, in no case we may here suggest that an average Italian firm will need less than one year to find interested customers and settle with them an agreement. Here another variable must be taken into consideration, the time those firms already operate on the Russian market. For this reason, we also asked them to disclose information on this relevant issue. Since the contacts were gathered on institutional sites and on the shelves of the leading retailers of Moscow [26], the IF was expected to work on this relevant market for more than a year. According to the results depicted in the pie below, the overwhelming majority of the sample works on the Russian market more than 5 years.

Once we know the time of operation of IF on the Russian market, our previous data should be observed with this filter as well. Those difficulties and peculiarities spotted in the graphs above should be mainly seen from the point of view of a company which has had time to enter the market, most likely has adapted the structure of sales and marketing to the specificities of the country and has made conclusions about whether or not to keep a position within it. From a linguistic point of view, every firm tend to optimize its communication with RF with different degrees of effectiveness through its operational time.

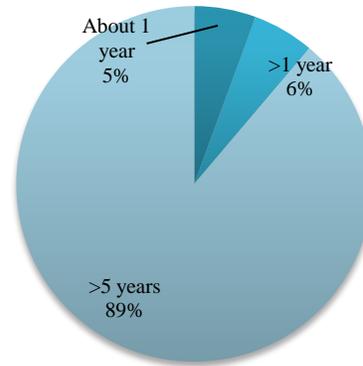


Fig. 9. Years of presence on the Russian market

The last question analyzed here is about international exhibitions in Russia. Seeing that the following part of our discussion will be about living language peculiarities observed at the most important agri-food exhibition in Russia (Prodexpo 2019), a pertinent discussion has to be done about this topic. Whether or not IF participate to exhibitions in Russia depends firstly on the resources a company want to dedicate to this market, and the projects related to it. Exhibitors were mainly grouped in common booth sponsored by a government agency, which helps the SME of Italy to be present in markets abroad [35]. Only few big foreign companies can afford a private booth, at least in Prodexpo 2019 [30]. Since, the choice to exhibit one's own production far from the European Economic Area requires considerable resources, we expect the majority of the respondents not take part to trade exhibitions in Russia.

Results confirms expectations, the bulk of IF does not take part to exhibitions even if maintains customers in Russia. Among the trade fairs cited by our respondents we find: Prodexpo, Interplastika, Polyurethanex, Mioje, Ecwatch, Ski Build Expo, IGM, Agropromash and Brau Beviale Moscow.

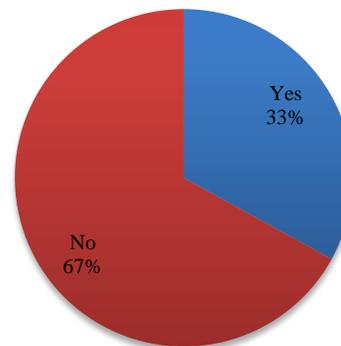


Fig. 10. Does your company take part to trade exhibition in Russia?

### III. A FAIR EXPERIENCE

In this second part of the work we analyze some features of the spoken Italian and Russian employed by foreign speakers. For reasons of conciseness we depict just

the most remarkable linguistic phenomenon registered at Prodexpo 2019 in Moscow, last February.

#### A. *Relevant false friends*

Some difficulties may arise from the fact that certain Italian words do not translate well into Russian and that certain, often used, English words have an entirely different connotation when translated literally. This does not mean that problems in reaching an agreement may be fully overcome if both parties speak fluently each other's language, but certainly it would enhance the quality of communication even if resulting in no agreement at all. For example, the verb *compromise*, that in English has the first following definitions [39]:

- Settle a dispute by mutual concession.

In Russian the verb *kompromitirovat'* means: to harm someone, to throw shades on someone's name or reputation [36].

In this case, the Italian version *compromettere* is more similar to the Russian version than to the English one. Used as a transitive verb it means "bring into disrepute, undermine someone's reputation" [40]. Also diffused is the usage of the reflexive variant *comprometter-si*, which means "undermine ourselves' reputation". From the Italianization of the word there may originate the Russian rendering *kompromitirovat' sya*, with the reflexive ending *-sya* which does not exist and is not understandable to a mother tongue speaker. Here, to exit the misunderstanding trap we advise the use of a more suitable form through a periphrastic form: *Nayti kompromis*, like the Italian *trovare un compromesso* (reach a compromise).

The list of Russian words used in business conversation from which misunderstanding may arise is quite relevant, let us see the ones reported by our managers respondents. A misleading word may be the term used to say *negozio* (*shop, store*) and *magazzino* (*warehouse*). In Russian the correct variants are in order: *magazin, tochka prodazhi, sklad*. As you can easily spot the words *magazzino* and *magazin* may easily be mistaken, though here the price to pay in case of misunderstanding may be less than in the case seen above, attention should be paid as well. I would like to draw your attention towards the word: *tochka prodazhi*, in Russian, this word is used to indicate a store, literary it means "point of sale", in Italian we have the same expression *punto vendita*, in particular to define a company store, a franchising store.

Businessman is an often employed word in the Russian work environment [1], in its Cyrillic version reflects the English phonetics, where one letter corresponds to a phoneme *biznesmen*. It started to be used in a context where the very majority of the population worked as employees in state-owned facilities, to determine those people who were not subject to a state employer, but tried to find the means to live by themselves, by illegal activities as well [14]. For the Italian native speaker this word is linked to large enterprise owner or top management

company employees. Sometimes it is also used in a humorous way to define someone who consider himself a great entrepreneur with a small business or with no business at all. Expressions like: *Sta arrivando il businessman*, in Italian is spelled like in English, (the businessman is coming) is more often used ironically than in work environment. In today's Russian it is used to define any self-employed person. It is not difficult to hear: *moj muzh - biznesmen* (my husband is self-employed/businessman). From this discrepancy in the perception of the word, we found in the frame of the Prodexpo 2019, some Italian small entrepreneurs surprised by the relative small size of their costumers' business activity.

From the nineties the word *manager* started to be employed when referred to what is considered in the Anglo-Saxon work environment a top-manager or a member of the board of directors [41]. Wide is the employment of this word as a synonym of *dirigente* (director) [42]. Now it is widely applied by firms in job advertisement to attract applicants, being the word considered a "prestigious" variant of the Italian *impiegato* (employed). At international exhibitions the representatives of firms, who are not the owners, introduce themselves to potential customers as *export manager*. Nowadays, a manager may be any employed with the specific role to coordinate a department, to whom is attributed a certain degree of responsibility and freedom of choice. There are some fixed expressions to use this word: *area manger, product manager, project manager, export manager* [43], all Anglicisms. In Russian it includes a more complicated meaning. Firstly, because the word *menedzher* is completely russified and used as a word of Russian origin. Secondly, because it may define the most widely range of employees, but rarely those who occupy the highest posts. For example, in job advertisement you can see the *menedzher po prodazham* (sales manager), *menedzher po rabote s klientami* (customer care manager), *ofis-menedzher* (office manager), *menedzher po personalu* (HR manager), *menedzher magazina* (cashier) and so on with the most different attributes [44]. The usage made in Russian is wider than in Italian, sometimes it is not trivial at all to understand who is in charge for what, since the only word *menedzher* without any additional attribute may be misleading.

In Russian the use of the word *administratsiya* indicates all the organ of executive government [36], often at a municipality level. Not so far from the meaning of *amministrazione* (administration), used as well to denote the people in charge of running a business. However, the role of the so called *administrator* has not so much to do with the role of administrating a firm. Very often he works at the reception of a hotel, a theatre or a business center, the role of *administrator* is not considered a prestigious job position, and consequently the wage offered are not above the average [45]. If not for a semantic similarity, he is not included in the *administratsiya* of a company, leading to misunderstandings from an Italian point of view, due to the

fact that in Italy the *amministratore* is an executive manager, not to mention the role of the *amministratore delegato*, which may be confidently translated in English as CEO. A member of a company who works in the *amministratia* (administration, top management) is called *upravlyayushchiy* [36], or *rukovoditel'* [36], also the word *direktor* [36] is used, in the company top-management context together adjectives in the form *general'nyy direktor* (general director) or *ispol'nitel'nyy direktor* (executive director). The use of the word *direktor* is much more advisable to use on the part of Russian to make themselves understood by the Italian representatives, because it shares the same root as the Italian variant *direttore*. On the Italian side, it is advisable not to use the word *amministratore* to refer to the top management or to the owners, but use the English word *director*, which is easy to understand by both parties.

The word *vkusnyy* in Russian is used to express a positive evaluation of food, perfume and even cigarettes. Since this adjective comes from the substantive *vkus* (taste, flavor), which is translated in Italian as *sapore*, his literally translation is often *saporito* [46]. Unfortunately the Italian adjective has two meanings [47]: a) some food which is tasty because of its nature or for the spices used to dress it; b) something slightly salty (similar to the English adjective savory). It is the right epithet to describe a savory dish, but it result amusing if used to describe a wine. Was not unusual at the degustation desks of the Italian representatives to hear some Russian using that word in simple (and incorrect) expressions like: *vino saporito* ([this] wine [is] tasty, savory wine) to say *questo vino è buono* (this wine is tasty) Certainly, for an Italian native speaker it makes an unusual association of the two words, but this does not hinder communication and understanding among those present. However, not all those who commented the taste of the wine made the same error. In fact, the most used and useful adjective to express a favorable opinion on something is the word *khorooshiy*. We may translate is as "good" or "fine" in English, while in Italian the simplest translation would be *buono*. Though not always the literally translation is consistent with the Italian usage of it (when describing the weather or a person), using it reduces the likelihood to give the interlocutor a misleading judgment.

#### B. Cross-linguistic expressions (interferences)

Interferences among the three languages in place (English, Italian and Russian) were not unusual to hear. Hereby we report some of the most remarkable cross-linguistic expressions and try to explain the sense of them and the lingo-cultural background at the base of them. The use of foreign substantives and verbs was registered within a phrase, whilst the use of foreign adjectives was not observed. The first example regards the use of some foreign substantives which are understood by both interlocutors and put within a sentence of another language also for their simplicity to remember. Positive transfer refers to the facilitating influence of cognate vocabulary or any other similarities between the native and target

languages [6]. However, negative transfer, or Source Language Interference (SLI), complicates such exchange of information.

When dealing with another culture, at least for the first approach it is advisable to keep brevity in our discourse. Too complicated concepts are more difficult to translate, and hence may easily misunderstood. Once we enter in the misunderstanding-trap, escaping from it may be a great issue for some reasons we are about to analyze in the forthcoming paragraphs.

Thinking rightly in our native language may not be the most effective way to make ourselves understood: *senza pagare di più* (without paying more), the construction without + verb, though possible in Italian and English leads to an unpleasant error if literary translated in Russian: ~~bez platit' bol'she~~ is not only incorrect, but it is also not understandable for a Russian speaker. Instead the use of substantives is recommended: *bez dopol'nitel'oy oplaty* (without an additional fee).

It is also possible to use the gerund with negation even if, in the given context it has no much sense: ~~ne platya bol'she~~ since the word *bol'she* (more), even if is often used after a verb, in this circumstance sounds not correct to the native speaker. The use of substantives or other simpler forms should prevail. A more involved form in the use of gerund require a special verb in Russian *pereplachivat'* which is translated in English as "to overpay" but as not such equivalence in Italian.

- The clarification of our error may involve the use of a vocabulary we might not possess yet:

*Mi scusi, non intendo dire questo* (I am sorry I did not mean this), to express this in Russian you need at least a basic knowledge of past imperfective and accusative, the knowledge of the word "I am sorry" may not help you to explain the motivation of your regret.

- Too many words may be interpreted as a way to cheat the client, presenting him a product not really worth of its value, even if, as appears from the observed reality, they love to be involved in good conversation with their counterpart, which makes the so called emotional selling a good approach to persuade the customers. Certainly, to make this approach effective you should need to speak good Russian, which as observed was a rare case. Making written propositions may be a solution to overcome problems of verbal communication [18].

Many words in Russian and Italian have different genders, sometimes it makes association of possessive pronouns and substantives of different gender. Though it sounds amusing for a Russian native speaker, it does not make a relevant obstacle to the conversation, to a certain extent from the outside it looks like the Italian speaker said those correctly.

The expression *eto moya gorod* (this is my town) in Russian was reported, here the Italian speaker mistook the gender of *gorod* (town) masculine, for the Italian *città*

(feminine). The signal that this process is in place appears through the incorrect use of the possessive pronoun *moya* (my f.) instead of *moy* (my m.). From which the correct form would be *eto moy gorod*. The Russian speaker did not correct the Italian interlocutor, because the error, though relevant does not disturb the communication. In Italian there are only two genders, masculine and feminine, while in Russian there is one more, the neuter. Italians tend to associate those neuter substantives with Italian masculine for two reasons:

a) according to the grammar of Russian language, neuter shares far more features with masculine than with feminine, for example the declension of the adjective.

b) the major part of Russian neuter substantives correspond to the Italian masculine.

Some examples regard traditional Italian export goods, oil (*maslo*) and wine (*vino*). According to Russian grammar, when a substantive terminates with -o is neuter, like in the case of those words. There is evidence of the existence of interferences between the Italian and Russian gender system when other grammatical elements which need a gender harmony are included. We saw some examples with possessive pronouns, but the phenomenon was reported from the Italian Russian speaker also with verbs at the past tense. In fact, the past tense of verbs, both of perfective or imperfective aspect, depends on the gender of the subject. Since in Italian there is no neuter gender, as stated above, they tend to assimilate it with masculine also in the use of verbs. The following sentence was stated: *vin**o** byl dorogoy* (wine was expensive), here the gender of the verb "to be" at the past tense and the following adjective do not agree with the neuter substantive but are used at the masculine. The correct form would be *vin**o** byl**o** dorog**oe***, where the ending -o for the verb and -oe for the adjective determine the neuter form. In Italian not only the neuter gender does not exist for the adjective, but the past tenses are conjugated independently from the speaker gender.

The use of the cases, as stated by the Russian-speaking Italian managers constitutes the bulk of the problems of communication. Unfortunately, though in the Italian education system there is still Latin and Ancient Greek [9], which present a system of grammatical cases far more complicated than Russian, Italian do not see the usefulness of those subjects for a future employment. Furthermore, other languages taught are English, French and Spanish, which do not follow the same system, so that they do not make effort to fully understand the declension system [4]. From personal experience, many first-course students of Russian switch to other languages to avoid the cost of learning the grammatical case system. Many comparisons may be analyzed, however only the most noteworthy examples will be given here. When starting a question using the pronoun *kakoy* (what/which), we should bear in mind how it inflect for gender, number (like in Italian), and also for case. It was noted that Italians find difficult to use the pronoun at feminine gender for accusative case at the beginning of the phrase when asking a question. For

instance: *kak**uyu** butyl**ku** khotite?* (which bottle do you want?) is the correct form, where the adjective and the noun agree for accusative feminine case. The version reported was instead: ~~*kak**aya** bityl**ka** khotite*~~, were the endings are at feminine nominative case improperly because they are not the subject but the object of the sentence, given the verb *khotet'* (to want). In our perception the wrong version may have two strictly linked explanations:

a) The pronoun *quale* (what, which) in Italian does not change for gender but only for number.

b) The pattern of the phrase sees the verb at the end, thus the logical consequences verb + noun (at the related case) must be inverted. It seems that when the reverse process becomes more complex, it is to determine the right case of noun and adjectives.

Another notable disturbance is the way the Russians speak Italian. In particular for the feminine singular nouns, there were expressions where Italian vocabulary was inflected in accordance to the Russian grammar. Just to cite one example: *dayte penn**u** pozhaluysta!* (give [me] the pen, please), where *dayte* (give [you pl.]) is used to make a formal request and *pozhaluysta* (please) is added at the end of the sentence to confer politeness, but what about *pennu*? It is the Italian substantive *penna* (pen), inflected for the Russian accusative case where -a becomes -u. The clarification of this language event is to be found in the interference from the Italian-speaking environment where it was registered, probably this person did know just few words in Italian compared to the knowledge of Russian of his interlocutor, but there is also an "objective" reason. Russian and Italian share the same ending -a for feminine singular nouns, which is one of the possible endings in Russian, making the application of accusative or other Russian cases is straightforward.

The same phenomenon of assimilation of words is made on the Italian counterpart, where foreign words are used as native through the use of article according to gender and number. An interesting example was: *hai letto la mia anketa?* (Did you read my questionnaire/form), were the sentence is stated in Italian but the noun is from the Russian word-stock. This example is relevant because, as stated above, the Russian and Italian feminine singular ending -a is a common feature, what is observed here is an interference where a Russian word, influence the possessive pronoun *mia* (my [f. s.]) and the definite article *la* (the [f. s.]) in gender and number.

Interference in the use of verbs was also reported, above all with modal verbs. Reasonably because the use of them presupposes the application of infinitive in the following verb and a wide usage is made of them in Russian [11]. Infinitive is also one of the first elements we acquire from a language, such as the nominative of a noun in inflected languages[7], its acquisition does not require the knowledge of further grammatical rules. In this view we analyze the statement: *nie khotyat pagare* (they don't

want to pay), where the Russian verb *khotet'* (to want) is used as the modal verb of the Italian infinitive *pagare* (to pay). This construction may be explained by the common features of the modal verb *khotet'* and *volere*, requiring an infinitive, however in this case there was an emotional nuance related to the word used by the Italian employer when the Russian sales representative asked for more money. Communicative events where the parallel use of foreign languages corroborated with gestures were registered. When the potential buyer approached the desk with wine bottles asked: *mozno poprobovat'* (Can I try/taste it?) in Russian to the Italian seller, from the counterpart he replied: *questo?* (this one?) pointing the finger at the bottle supposed to be tasted. In the end the two interlocutors understood each other without any particular linguistic effort.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

This paper was meant to clarify the current situation of affair between Russian and Italian companies including a linguistic point of view. Some patterns were determined regarding the use of Russian language from the Italian firms' perspective, providing up-to-date information about the peculiarities in the inter-firm communication between the two countries. This work has found also some language interferences which may constitute a noteworthy hint for further research about Italo-Russian interactions not only in a business-analysis field but also from a more educational point of view. Would be worthy of interest to study whether such interferences appear in the early studies or they are more used in a more advanced phase of learning and whether or not the speaker are aware of the reasons at base of such errors. We expect this work to constitute an applicable base to make further investigation about the business communication among EU firms and Russian-speaking counterparts, since the peculiarities of this phenomenon are not a widespread topic of research from an academic point of view.

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