ABSTRACT

CECILIA TOMASATTI. Same Route, New Immigrants: Identity Practices and Forms of Belonging among Recent Italian Immigrants in the U.S. (Under the direction of Professor Agnes Bolonyai.)

While Italians have always had a strong presence in the U.S. from the early 20th century, a recent flow of highly transnational, college educated, career-driven immigrants seem to challenge the existing features and perceptions of Italians in the U.S. This paper examines the identity practices and forms of belonging of recent Italian immigrants in the U.S. through discourse analysis. Research on migration discourses has addressed the ways in which migrants’ communicative practices can shed light on migrants’ own understanding and negotiation of the experience of migration. Data was collected through sociolinguistic interviews and responses to an online questionnaire collected among Italian-born immigrants who moved to the U.S. after the year 2000 and have been residing in the U.S. for at least two years. The sociolinguistic interviews and online ethnographic fieldwork mainly focus on Italians living in the Seattle area.

The theoretical framework incorporates a discursive approach to the construction of identities (Bamberg et al. 2011) and of national identities (De Cillia et al. 1999), narrative analysis (Baynham & De Fina 2016), and chronotopes (Bakhtin 1981) in order to examine 1) what being Italian in the U.S. today means, 2) how recent Italian immigrants understand their national, ethnic, and cultural belonging, and 3) how they position themselves vis-à-vis earlier immigrants to the U.S., other immigrant groups, and Italians in Italy. Stance (Du Bois 2007) and calibration (Silverstein 1993) are additional analytical tools used to highlight the ways in which this group of highly transnational, college educated, and career-driven Italians navigate their experience of migration.

The study finds that historical and sociocultural changes both in the U.S. and in Italy, as well as the elite feature of this group of migrants, affect the ways in which migrants construct their identity and forms of belonging by privileging more fluid trajectories and dispositions, and less clear-cut categories of belonging.