

# **On the use of *sì?* ‘yes?’ as invariant follow-up in Italian: A diachronic corpus-based account of pragmatic language change**

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This article investigates the diachrony of *sì?* ‘yes?’ in Italian when used as invariant follow-up (Andersen 2001), that is a linguistic item uttered as a reaction to what has been said by another speaker to signal that one is paying attention, to encourage the interlocutor to continue (ibid.: 98) or as a reply to a call. It is argued here that this is a case of pragmatic language change since in earlier stages of Italian, such function was performed solely by expressions such as *dimmi?* and *dica?* ‘tell me’. Diachronic lexicographic, quantitative and qualitative investigations carried out over a range of historical and contemporary dictionaries and corpora since 1200 to today will show that records of uses of *sì?* as invariant follow-up are not found before 1962. It will also be shown that since then, its frequency of occurrence has increased to the point that today, it is the preferred form, at least over the variants analysed here. The study also explores the hypothesis that *sì?* as invariant follow-up may in fact be a case of pragmatic borrowing - understood as the incorporation of pragmatic and discourse features of a source language into a recipient language (i.e., Andersen 2014) - from an analogous use of *yes?* in English.

## **References**

- Andersen, G. 2001. *Pragmatic Markers and Sociolinguistic variation. A relevance-theoretic approach to the Language of adolescents*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Andersen, G. 2014. Pragmatic borrowing. *Journal of Pragmatics* 67: 17-33.