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1. The background – why I am here

I knew hardly anything about CLARIN when I started working on Italian oral and speech archives 10 years ago. In 2011, the Region of Tuscany supported Prof. Bertinetto and me and gave financial support for a two-year project called *Grammo-foni. Le soffitte della voce* (Gra.fo), a project jointly conducted by the Scuola Normale Superiore and the University of Siena (Regione Toscana PAR FAS 2007-13). Although we conceived the project as linguists, we immediately realized how cross-disciplinary it was, and that we needed help from several disciplines. The creation of an archive incorporating the main oral archives of the region has involved different, interconnected stages of work. It has been necessary to lay the foundations for an interdisciplinary dialogue between linguistics, law, anthropology, informatics, and archival science. Tuscany is a privileged area for working on oral documents, as it abounds with both public and private sound archives, collected in different fields of research by scholars as well as amateurs. The majority of these archives are analogue and therefore risk deterioration unless they are transferred to the digital domain. The *Gra.fo* project has undertaken the challenging task of gathering different kinds of expertise and building a digitization and cataloguing system with the aim of creating a regional network for the management of sound archives (<https://grafo.sns.it>). Nevertheless, *Gra.fo* represented, again, only a starting point. Such a project can exist and live only in a broader universe, in order to overcome the parcelization of single research projects carried out more or less in isolation by independent research groups.

I had the chance to present some challenges related to the *Gra.fo* project at two different CLARIN conferences (Aix-en Provence 2016, with Francesca Frontini; and Budapest 2017, where I also had the opportunity to get to know the Legal Issue Committee closely). Aleksei Kelli helped me a lot in understanding the conflicting issues arising when dealing with oral archives and Intangible Cultural Heritage, as the demand for open access conflicts with ownership and authorship rights and ethical issues. Thus, my research on sound archives has begun to analyse the possibility of reaching a balance between two conflicting demands: the need for openness and accessibility of Intangible Cultural Heritage - in my case represented by the content of several oral archives - vs. the respect of all the rights related to ICH, e.g. copyright, intellectual property, and privacy law. In the very last years of my

academic work, I devoted special attention to the dissemination of oral heritage via new technologies, which requires a thorough reflection not only from the technological point of view, but also from the legal one, since most of the recordings which constitute our oral heritage were collected at a time when little or no attention was paid to the legal aspects of ICH. Gra.fo is now in the process of being documented in the CLARIN-IT repository as far as metadata are concerned. But obviously this is not enough.

Three challenges are now waiting to be resolved:

- 1) the first is to find a repository for the Gra.fo archive (preservation copies, metadata, access copy), ideally in Italy;
- 2) the second challenge regards the speech and oral archives I'm currently working on (outside of and after the Gra.fo experience), and the need to immediately start a feasibility study according to the CLARIN best practices, in order to avoid a substantial waste of time;
- 3) finally, we must also find a solution for Italian ASR, in order to work together with the CLARIN Oral History research group at the same level.

2. Towards the future – what I am doing now

Now that the CLARIN world has become familiar to me, it represents my starting point. At the beginning of December I came to Munich with two main research topics: ASR and metadata description for the archives that are now in the process of being digitized. I'm currently working on the oral archive of Anna Maria Bruzzone, an analogue archive (made of 36 compact cassettes) containing the testimonies (life stories) of more than thirty former patients of the Arezzo psychiatric hospital. It represents the documental basis of the book *Ci chiamavano matti. Voci da un ospedale psichiatrico* (Einaudi 1979). The author wrote it after a two-month stay in Arezzo, when she spent almost every day in the hospital. The book testifies to the patients' miserable lives inside and outside the hospital and sheds light on the atrocity of their everyday condition by *letting them speak for themselves*. Yet, what the book contains is not their actual voice: their voice is contained in the tapes that Bruzzone recorded during her research, when she witnessed the lives of the inpatients, in a continuous dialogue of which only a part is collected in the published interviews. After a long and strenuous search I was able to locate the original tapes. Such a discovery is of great magnitude, because the digitisation and cataloguing of this archive would produce the first digital oral archive related to an Italian psychiatric hospital – which was located in the same buildings as my Department (Department of Educational Sciences, Human Sciences and Intercultural Communication of the University of Siena – Arezzo), also where the Historical Archive of the Arezzo psychiatric hospital is hosted. So, who could help me with the metadata descriptions? That's why in September I asked for a CLARIN mobility grant and was awarded one under the H2020 project CLARIN-PLUS.

I arrived at the Bayerisches Archiv für Sprachsignale c/o Institut für Phonetik, Universität München on a snowy Monday morning. I spent the duration of my visit working with Dr. Florian Schiel and Dr. Christopher Draxler who explained how some of their wonderful BASWebServices work. With Dr. Schiel I explored the possibilities related to ASR services for the Italian language provided by BAS. The main problem that I have to face is the fact that ASR services are provided by third-party service providers such as Google, and not by the BAS. While the BAS only stores uploaded signals for the purpose of providing the service and guarantees that uploaded data are deleted latest after 24 hours, third party ASR providers reserve the right to permanently store uploaded and transcribed signal files with the aim of improving the ASR service.

At present I'm not in a position to give third parties oral materials for which I have limited licenses and permissions. This remains an open question for me (and not only for me, obviously) – but I am more aware now of the problems I have to face. In this respect, one possibility could be to explore the possibility of setting up a collaboration with the European Media Laboratory in Heidelberg, Germany, also trying to involve the community of Italian Speech sciences technologists. Gra.fo archive could represent a case study for them, with its huge amount of different speaker profiles, with varied dialectological backgrounds and with an extremely high variety of topics, genres, and styles.

With Dr. Draxler I addressed two issues: Metadata description according to COALA and the Oral history transcription chain. COALA generates corpus and session CMDIs according to the media-corpus-profile and the media-session-profile for the Component Registry, by converting five CVS tables to the CMDI format. As for metadata description, we discussed the architecture and the vocabulary a lot, using Anna Maria Bruzzone's archive as our case study. Archives, collections, series, sessions, actors, bundles... we first had to find a common vocabulary to start our collaborative work on a common background. We do need to agree on the labels, in order to avoid misunderstanding. Oral historians usually have different words with respect to phoneticians, and phoneticians usually have different words with respect to social scientists.

We then addressed the relationship between the document and the holder (e.g. the compact cassette). Philology aims at reconstituting the authentic *facies* of each document, as near as possible to the author's intention. This apparently clear definition turns into a thorny problem in the domain of oral archives for the following reasons:

- a) oral archives are usually created by different "authors" (i.e. interviewers, interviewees, secondary participants in the communicative event, archive owners, clients who commissioned the archives, etc. ...);
- b) the documents often need to be re-organized during the cataloguing process with the content privileged at the expense of the carrier;
- c) thus the concept of 'document' itself is controversial in many ways.

We decided on the reorganization of the speech data from the point of view of the content (over the next few months we will proceed with the metadata description, setting up a workflow between Italy and Germany). We also plan to work together on developing a sort of best practices, explaining to non-technical users the entire workflow, from the digitisation process to the building of the oral corpus to the final audio document that will be accessed via web.

All in all, the mobility grant visit was indispensable for the best organization of my work within archives according to CLARIN best practices. Not only did the in-person collaboration allow me to pre-emptively address many technical issues, it also paved the way for my future research.

I would really like to thank all the staff at the IPS/BAS for their kind and warm hospitality and I very much hope that I might have the opportunity to visit the IPS/BAS in future!