

Endangered Languages in Times of Crisis: The Materialisations of Emilian in Landscapes of Trauma and Erasure

Jessica Hampton, University of Liverpool

Supported by the Society for Italian Studies Networking Scheme
UCD 4th November 2025



LANGUAGE AND PLACE

- 7,000 world languages – 50% expected to be extinct in the next few decades (Olko and Sallabank 2021)
- Languages are a vessel for ecological knowledge and wisdom
- Their loss can mean loss of that wisdom too
- Often endangered language communities are bearing the brunt of climate crisis
- Language injustice and environmental inequality go hand in hand

LANGUAGE AS PLACE

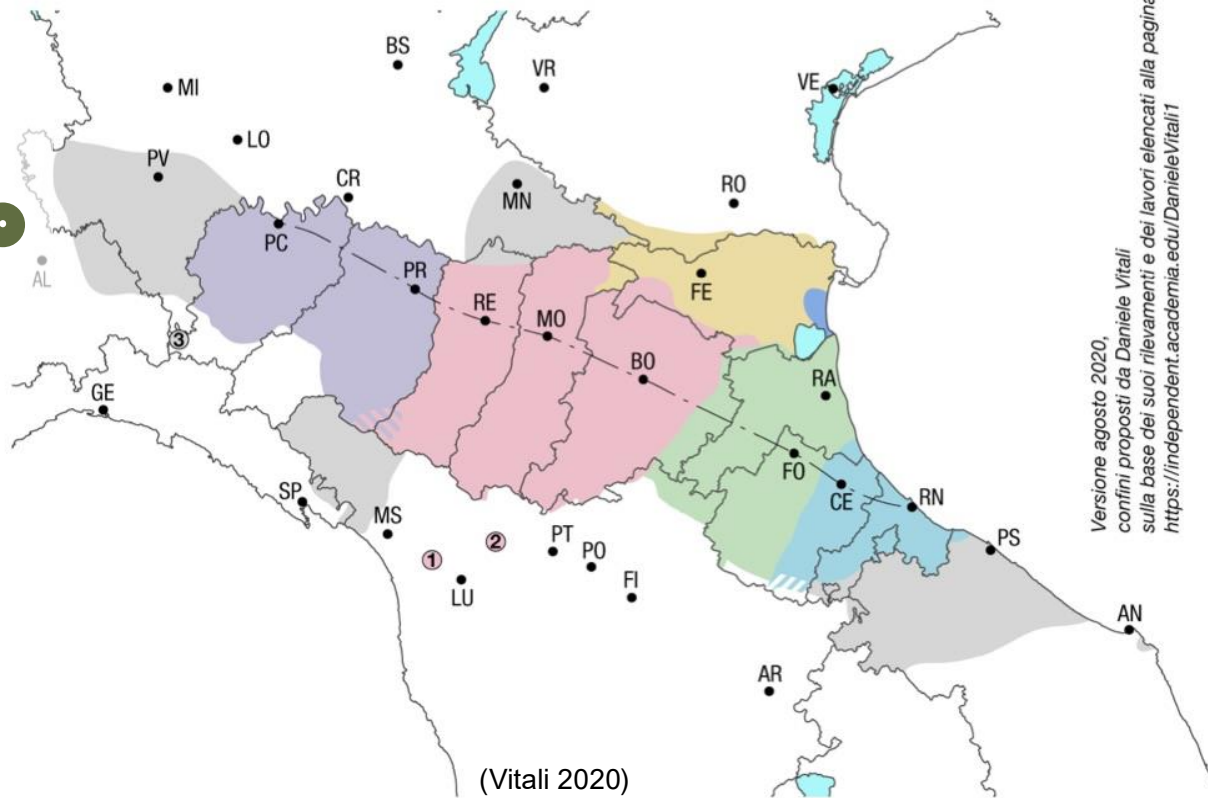
- Colonial thinking: language and land as resources and opportunities
- “the disembodiment of language can make it easier for land and the earth to be exploited” (Chiblow and Meighan 2022: 207)
- Languages as ways of knowing and being in the world

“Language reverberates within and through Land, and thus is intrinsically connected to all beings upon that land; it is not a variable easily separated, as it allows and acknowledges both communion with—and understanding of—land” (Ferguson and Weaselboy 2020: 2)

EMILIAN



EMILIAN & ROMAGNOLO



Versione agosto 2020.
confini proposti da Daniele Vitali
sulla base dei suoi rilevamenti e dei lavori elencati alla pagina
<https://independent.academia.edu/DanieleVitali1>

EMILIAN

- A Gallo-Romance variety historically spoken in Emilia, Italy (continuum with French rather than Italian, Tamburelli and Brasca 2018)
- not a variety of Italian (not a dialect of Italian/Italian dialect)
- Shifting/definitely endangered
- Pórt-et fòra al røsc? [EMIL] ‘Porti fuori il rusco?’ [REG ITA] ‘Porti fuori l'immondizia?’ [ITA] *Are you taking out the rubbish?*
- No status, no written standard, no koine, no official recognition, no survey -->Coretta et al. 2025
- Language erasure (Hampton 2022): not present/not overtly identified in the collective mind of the community
- Lack of awareness leads to lack of willingness for revendication of language (“linguistic citizenship” Stroud 2018)

TOWARDS A SOLUTION FOR LANGUAGE AS LAND

Jones and Ogilvie (2013) argue language documentation can be a powerful instrument for all endangered languages in the planning of revitalisation efforts but only when done with the specific needs of the community in mind.

1. Practical scope (document the language)
2. Symbolic scope (validating the language and its community) -> language salience vs language erasure
3. Embodying local traditional ecological knowledge for climate crisis



ECOLINGUISTICS

“Ecolinguistics is about critiquing forms of language that contribute to ecological destruction, and aiding in the search for new forms of language that inspire people to protect the natural world” (Stibbe 2021: 1).

- Belonging can be fostered through the construction of an environmental identity:

“a sense of connection to some part of the nonhuman natural environment that affects the way we perceive and act toward the world; a belief that the environment is important to us and an important part of who we are” (Clayton 2012: 45-46)

- A crucial component of a language support strategy

ANALYSIS OF ECO POEMS IN EMILIAN

- 5 poems by 3 poets, all written in the 1950-60s
- Stibbe's (2021) framework
 - Stories are “cognitive structures in the minds of individuals which influence how they think, talk and act” (p. 6) they become *stories we live by* when established at the collective level
 - Evaluations are a kind of story that influence our behaviours on the basis of whether we deem an area of life as good or bad (attitudes)
 - Salience: an area of life presented as being worthy of attention
 - Erasure: an area of life unworthy or missing from the discourse

LINGUISTIC STRATEGIES

Activation (Halliday 2014)

- Participants are represented as doing, thinking, feeling, and saying things (Stibbe 2021: 221)

Appraisal pattern

- “A cluster of linguistic features which come together to represent an area of life as good or bad” (Stibbe 2021: 222)

Metaphors (also a type of story)

Level of abstraction, hyponymy

Possessive pronouns

1) *Àqua de mé Cantér*

“Water of my Cantiere”

L' é l' àqua, l' àqua cèra,

“It’s the water, the clear water”

nèda da e mé Cantér,

“born from my Cantiere”

quòla ch' sèlta e la spōma in mèz a i sas,

“that jumps and froths in between the rocks”

ch' la ralénta la fuga int' na pianlina;

“that slows down its escape in a small plain”

àqua che ancòra aiér

“water that still yesterday”

l' éra néva, lasō tra al mac ad faz:

“was snow, up there in the beech wood”

àqua frasca, pulida cume l' anma

“water, fresh and clean like the soul”

d' un pipìn inucént, che ancòra e n sà

“of an innocent child who’s yet to know”

de mònd 'd la véta.

“about the world, about life.”

L' é l' àqua, l' àqua cèra

“It’s the water, the clear water”

da mé Cantér: e me, cume un pipìn,

“of my Cantiere: and me, like a child”

a m gòd a sént' la scòrer tra al mée mèn,

“I enjoy feeling it flow between my hands”

a zùgher cun la gèra,

“playing with the gravel”

a arvèr' r un témp luntèn.

“reliving a faraway time.”

2) *E a vrée*

“And I wish”

E a vrée, a vrée, psér una nòta andér

“And I wish, I wish I could one night go”

là, duve e sònn l' amöcia

“where sleep gathers”

i insòni 'd la zénta.

“all people’s dreams.”

E a vrée truvèr i mée e purtèn véia

“And I wish I could find mine and take away”

un, un sulamént: quast ché.

“one, one only: this one.”

Ragazöl artruvèm a caminèr

“a kid, finding myself walking”

daschèlza suvr' i prà

“barefoot in the fields”

dal mée Pièn e, a l' impruvis,

“of my Plain, and all of a sudden”

dascröver, drée a un maciun, un né d' uslìn:

“discovering behind a bush, a birds’ nest.”

e ster lé, lé a guarder.

“and to stand there, there watching.”

Appraisal pattern and similes->positive evaluation

Possessive pronouns-> belonging

Activation-> salience

Mundane as extraordinary-> salience

4) *La Vanga*

“The spade”

A i ho fini d' vanghèr la me piantèda
“I’ve finished digging up my orchard”
A son stoffe a i ho spòlt fin la camisa
“I’m tired and I’ve even drenched my shirt”
Mo a peins che incò a i ho fat bona giurnèda
“But I think that today was a good day’s work”
E la fadiga l’ an n’ em pésa brisa.
“and the strain doesn’t weigh on me.”
A m pies ed lavurèr a la mateina
“I like working in the morning”
Quand al sol al saluta la campagna
“when the sun greets the countryside”
E a s seint al frasc al zér d’ un’ ariarèina
“and one can feel the light coolness of a breeze”
Ch’ al fa termèr la brina in t l’ erba spagna.
“which is shaking the dew on strands of lucerne”
A gh’ è i uslein ch’ i froll’ in mez a i ram
“Birds are messing around in the trees”
E i n la finèssen mai ed ciacarèr
“and they won’t stop talking”
A gh’ è el galein ch’ el bèchen da la fam
“chickens are pecking out of hunger”
I bégh ch’ i selten fòra in t al vanghèr.
“worms jumping out amid all the digging”
Tótti el volt ch’ a se sfànda una vanghèda.
“every time a dig goes through”
L’ è una bataglia con i mort e i fri
“it is a battle with the dead and with the priests”
La vanga la va avanti e l’ an gh’ abèda
“The spade carries on and takes no notice”
La sbrisa tòtt infin ch’ l’ an n’ à finì.
“eventually it crumbles everything that hasn’t already finished”
I bistiulèin ch’ a n psu schivèr al tai
“the beasties who couldn’t dodge the cut”
I s’ vàdden a scapèr a zèint, a mèll:
“you can see them running away in their hundreds, thousands:”

Zèmes, lumbris, lusért, furbsèl, parpai
“stink bugs, earthworms, lizards, earwigs, butterflies”
Ragn, cavalàtt, furmigh, lumegh, e grèll.
“spiders grasshoppers ants snails and crickets”
“spiders, grasshoppers, ants, snails and crickets.”
E chi sa quant milion in tòtt al prè
“And who knows how many millions in the whole field”
Ch’ i s’ èren fàt famia, povr’ inuzèint!
“who had a family of their own, poor innocents!”
I s’ cherdiven de n’ èser desturbè
“they believed they weren’t being disturbed”
E i s’ la passèvn insàmm chièt e cuntèint.
“and they were just passing time together, quiet and happy”
L’ è gnu al castigamat, l’ è gnu stavolta
“The martinet has arrived, he has come this time”
A ardüser tòtt al camp us d’ na gratusa!...
“to reduce the whole field to a grater!...”
Al v’ taia, al v’ sbat, al v’ péccia, al v’ scaravolta
“he cuts you, he hits you, he beats you, he throws you”
E avanti, senza gnanch dmandèrev scusa.
“and on and on, without even apologising.”
Mo quand a srà passé soquanti sman,
“but when so many weeks will have passed”
A n gh’ srà piò al brutor d’ la vanga ruda,
“there will no longer be the burning from the rough spade”
L’ erba la srà chersuda dò o tre span
“the grass will have grown by two or three spans”
A cróver d’ un bèl vérd la tèra muda.
“to cover the naked earth of a beautiful green.”
L’ é quall ch’ sucéd in tòtt i sit d’ la tèra:
“That’s what happens everywhere in the world:”
Quand a s’ è chièt e a s bèda a lavurèr
“when you’re quiet focused on working”
A scopia un fulmin, un mapèl, na guèra...
“there explodes a lightning bolt, a hustle, a war...”
Mo a n pása tant ch’ a s torna a prinzipièr!...
“but not much time goes by that we go back to start again!...”

Hyponymy-> salience

Metaphor-> empathy

5) *Meravii dla natura*

“Wonders of Nature”

Sa vagh a girer per mez la campagna

“If I go wandering in the countryside”

am seint duminer da la curiosità

“I feel dominated by curiosity”

cunchili fosil fra i sass ed muntagna ...!

“Sheels, fossils among the mountain rocks...!”

ch' em fan pènsèr ai teimp luntan... pasê ...!

“which make me think of the passed time now faraway...!”

E po' a guerd iott é-gli' érb e i fior piò curios

“and then I look at the tree and the flowers most curious”

argoi di campion da imprin' una sportla,

“enough samples to fill a bag”

(e ancàra a m arcord ed ch- l' erba 't sant Ambros

“(and again, I remember of that grass of Saint Ambrose)”

che sovr' una man, l'am fé gnir 'na sfiopla...!)

“which on one of my hands gave me a blister”

Vè... inzema a cal fior 'na bela farfala,

“Look... on that flower a beautiful butterfly,”

a per cla respira muvand el sò el,

“it looks like she's breathing moving her wings”

pian pian a m avsein... a guerd... mo esa fala

“slowly, slowly, I'm getting closer... I look... what is she doing”

l' è ed sovra a cal fior, e l' ha scelt al piò bel...

“she's on top of that flower, and she's chosen the most beautiful...”

La mób e-gli anténne e a per cla s' orienta...

“She's moving her antennas and it looks like she's orienting herself...”

forse, per radio!, l' avertés na cumpagna,

“maybe via radio!, she can sense a companion,”

ed gnir ché da lê e cla staga cunteinta;

“coming here for her and may she be happy,”

ca gh' è t-cla roba cla s-sócia e cla s-magna.

“there is so much stuff that she sucks and eats.”

Stel bistiuleini e-glien anch misteriosi ...

“These beasties are also mysterious...”

el s' dan, forse, di radio avertimeint ...!

“maybe, they give each other radio warnings...!”

anch nueter a-s-sam fat stel cos famosi!

“we have also created such famous things!”

mo préma, a lor, a gh-li fé l' Onnipoteint !!!

“but first, it was them who the Omnipotent made them for!!!”

3) *Guardand al mée muntàgn*

“Looking at my mountains”

Quènd e turna la föia, quènd luntén

“When the leaf returns, when faraway”

a sént in méz al mac usée cantér,

“I hear in the middle of the wood birds singing”

a n pröv gudiöl più grand che pièn, pièn, pièn,

“I don’t feel more enjoyment than slowly, slowly, slowly”

andèr in zéma a un strat e pò guardèr.

“going to the top of the range and looking.”

Guardèr intur’n a me al mée muntàgn

“Looking around me, my mountains”

ad vérd vistidi da la premavéra,

“of green dressed by Spring.”

d’ un vérd fräsch, acsé bèl, che ün cumpàgn

“of such a fresh green, so beautiful that one like it”

e n’ as tröva, par me, int la tèra intéra.

“to me, cannot be found in the whole world”.

Guardèr e me Cimun, e me Cantér,

“Looking at my Cimone, and my Cantiere”

cal gli èter zémm ch’ al s’ élzen ché e là,

“at the other peaks raising here and there,”

e, intènt, lasér andèr e me pensér

“while letting my thought go”

duve e völ: a e presént, a e pasà,

“wherever it wants, present or past”

a quóst e a quòl. E cuntemplànd la blàza

“to this and that. And contemplating the beauty”

dal mée muntàgn a sént cràser l’ amur

“of my mountains I feel my love growing”

p’r ogni cosa creèda: e la grandàza

“for everything created: and the greatness”

ché, piö che in césa, a sént ad nòster Sgnur.

“here, more than in church, I feel of our Lord.”

DISCUSSION

Linguistic choices analysed to reveal the stories behind these texts:

- Value of simple and ordinary things, empathy with other living beings, sense of belonging, solidarity [benevolent stories] – salience on the mundane as anticolonial act

Through power of storytelling the reader can empathise, reflect and develop own environmental identity and relationship with the language

- Narrative texts tap into our values and emotions and can rewire our neural connections (Damasio 1994)
- Change attitudes to change behaviours (linguistic and wider)

Attitudes only one part of the problem

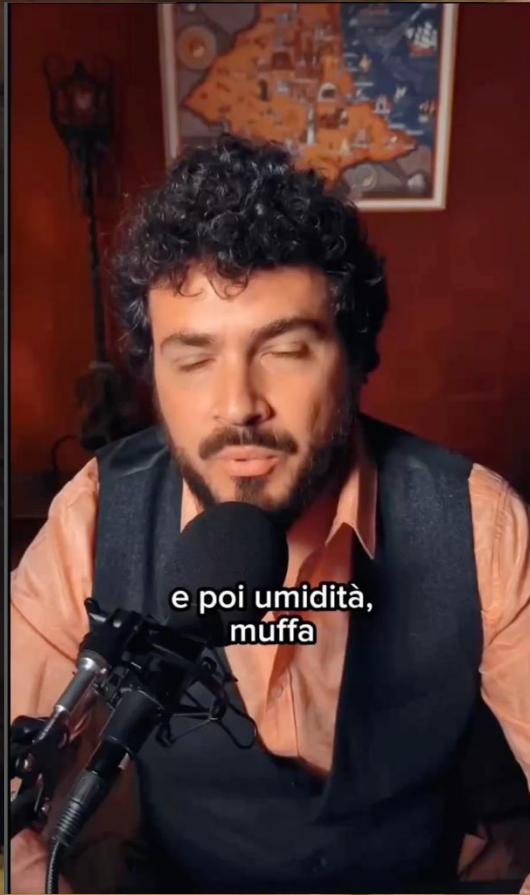
- Language is a social practice and “languages are a product of the deeply social and cultural activities in which people engage” (Pennycook 2020: 1)
- Because time spent in nature can shape our identity on a cognitive level and fulfil our sense of belonging, language support strategies for Emilian ought to incorporate activities in green spaces
- These activities can lead to reconnection to both language and natural world
 - ecological/linguistic diversity: a local solution to a global crisis

Ecolinguistics can be a powerful tool to identify texts on the basis of benevolent stories to live by to use as materials for language revitalisation efforts

We can all contribute!

Collect, analyse, share, repeat.





- ❖ Romagnolo (endangered language)
- ❖ Poetry for expressing trauma
- ❖ Collapse and transformation:
landscape, language and
(ecocultural) identity

Credits: E' Rumagnulesta

Context and framework

Publications:

Hampton & Soukup (2021) NEWCON2020

Hampton & Tufi (forthcoming) “Centering peripherality as cultural resilience in times of crisis”

Key concepts and frameworks:

Trauma and identity

Duane et al. (2020)

Vulnerability

Tufi (2024); Moriarty (2025) [embodied vulnerability]

Post-traumatic growth

Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996)

Ecolinguistics and LL

Language as heritage and language as land

Emilia Romagna



Earthquake 2012

Modena Province (Emilia)

Covid-19 pandemic

National/Global

Floods 2023-24

Romagna

Emilian & Romagnolo

Both Gallo-Romance

(Coretta et al 2025)

Both endangered

(Coretta et al 2025)

Little awareness

Linguistically different

(Vitali 2022)

Culturally different

(Foresti 2010)

High awareness

Trauma and Vulnerability

- Trauma as a “blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds of attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of community” (Duane et al. 2020: 1).
Collective trauma can “shatter the core” of community connection
- “Often, language is insufficient ... to express trauma and pain”
“the SL ... provides a means to communicate experiences and emotions when language fails” (Moriarty 2025: 157)
-> ***Local/endangered languages as a multimodal resource to express trauma***
- Vulnerability as strength -> agency “embodiment of vulnerability ... to explore the intimate relationship between self and society” (164)
-> ***Local/endangered languages as intimate space***
- “Vulnerability becomes a source of empathy and a foundation for solidarity” (Tufi 2024: 147)
- Not just the semiotic landscape but the language itself is a “vital resource for coping and resilience” (Moriarty 2025: 157)

Post-Traumatic Growth

- Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) introduced the concept of posttraumatic growth (PTG) central to understanding how suffering can lead to strength and transformation
- PTG in the wake of severe crises where individuals and communities not only recover but are transformed—emerging with reconstructed worldviews, greater resilience, and a new benchmark for future trajectories (Blevins and Tedeschi 2022: 11–12)

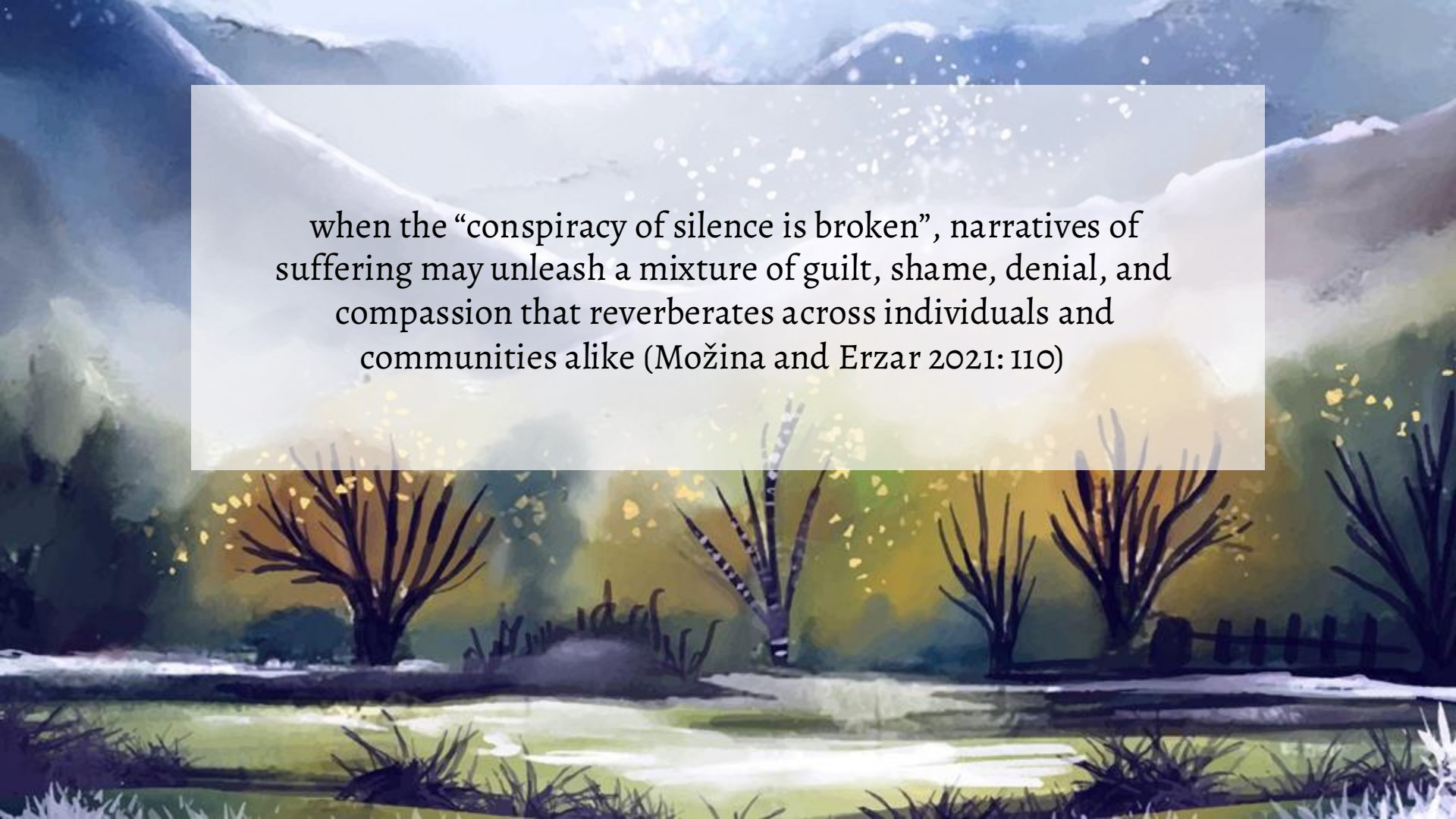
Role of narrative in PTG:

- Trauma victims embody the “memory of suffering, rage, and pain in a world that longs to forget” coping with social pain as crucial as addressing individual wounds trauma is often transmitted intergenerationally through silence and secrecy (Možina and Erzar (2021: 118)
- Narratives allow us to participate in the suffering of others narratives as “infrastructuring of vulnerability [for] engender[ing] future imaginings” (Tufi 2024: 150)

Language as Heritage and Land

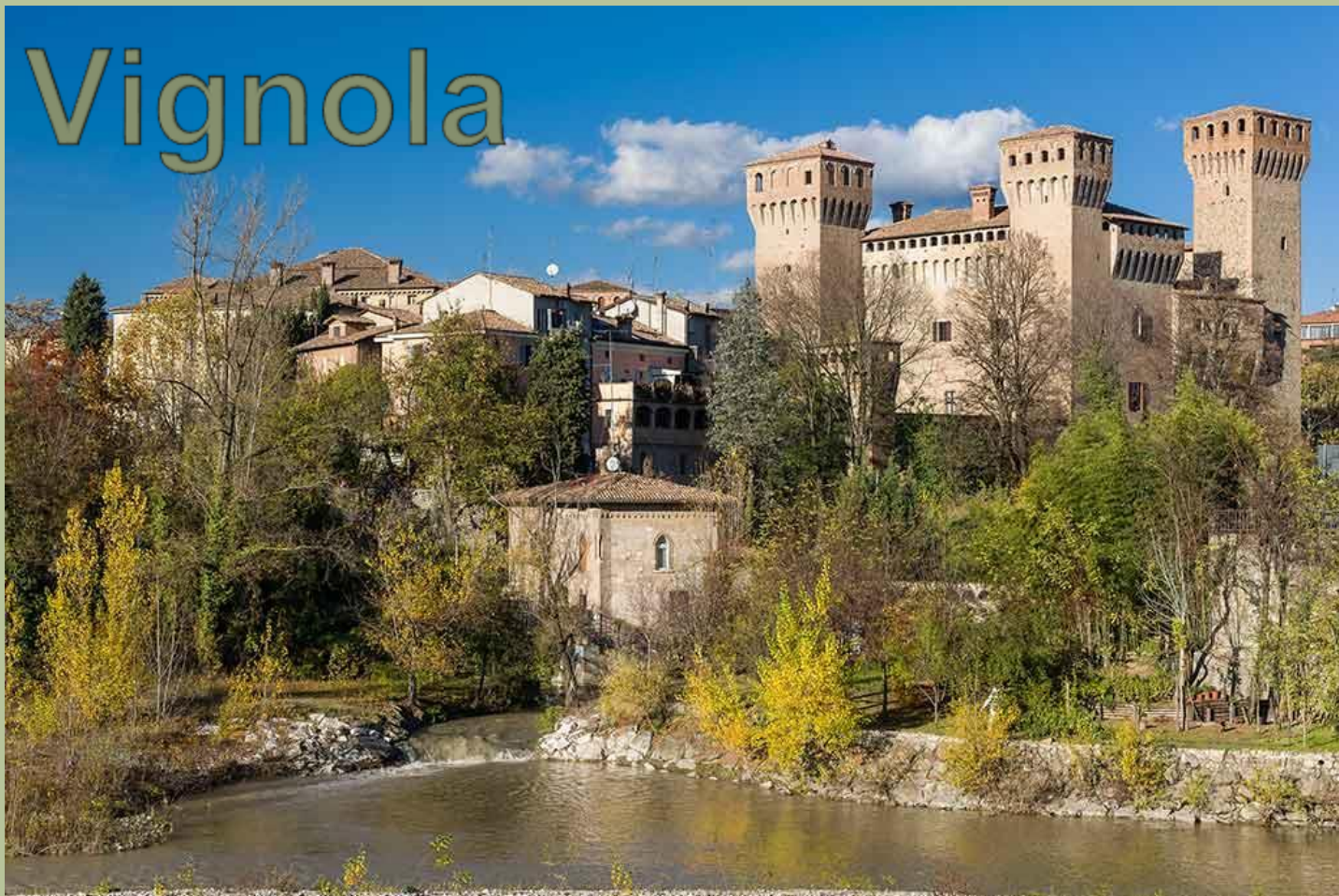
Language as Heritage: not static relics, but living systems of continuity, identity, and interdependence (Hampton and Buckingham, forthcoming)

Language as Land: Indigenous/local languages inseparable from place; anchors of knowledge, belonging, and wellbeing (Ferguson and Weaselboy 2020)

The background is a watercolor illustration. At the top, there are blue and white mountains. Below them, a body of water in shades of green and blue reflects the sky. In the foreground, there are several dark, stylized plants with long, thin leaves. A small wooden fence is visible on the right side. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

when the “conspiracy of silence is broken”, narratives of suffering may unleash a mixture of guilt, shame, denial, and compassion that reverberates across individuals and communities alike (Možina and Erzar 2021: 110)

Vignola









https://www.ilmessaggero.it/italia/terremoto_emilia_romagna_ricostruzione_economia_morti_vittime_sergio_mattarella-6701885.html

A stam béin



2012 Earthquake
(Astambéin – “We are well”)

Origin: Branding project (2007) with Emilian name, initially for urban design/commerce.

Post-earthquake revival: local shops re-used logo → re-semiotised as stoic resilience.

Collective survival strategy, transforming a market slogan into a community healing narrative.

A watercolor illustration of a landscape. In the background, there are mountains with soft, hazy colors. The sky is filled with light, airy clouds and small, golden-yellow specks that look like falling petals or light. In the foreground, there is a body of water reflecting the light. Several stylized, dark, spiky plants are scattered across the middle ground. A simple wooden fence is visible on the right side. The overall mood is serene and ethereal.

COVID-19

A global pandemic



Tin bota

/tin bô-ta/ *encouragement*

keep hit, lit

Æmilian expression used to encourage someone to resist and keep doing something

When the virus spread is starting to get lower, I say to each and everyone of you: STAY HOME and **"tin bota"**



Mè a stâg a cà

COVID-19

(Mè A Stâg A Cà – “I’m staying home”)

Instagram campaign: hoodies/jumpers in Emilian sold to fund hospitals -> virtue

Semiotics: combined food icons (gnocco fritto, tortellini), Modena's architecture, Ferrari, and Modena colours → local pride.

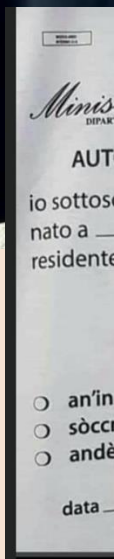
Emilian = comforting and intimate language, mobilising trust in institutions and embodied responsibility
(wearing language = acting collective care)



Per piasér
gnî dèinter
un a la volta,
stê luntan
un méter
l'un da cl'èter
e...pochi ciacri!

Dai c'a saltàm fóra
anch da quàsta!

AN TLA
PURTAM
MENGA
AL TEVEL
TOLA TE



Tin bota

/tìn bô-ta/ **encouragement**

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<https://site>

<https://www.scienzaire.it/articolo/dopo-lalluvione-dell'emilia-romagna-va-ripensato-tutto/luca-carra/2024-06-06>

Tin bota

2023 Floods

(Tin bota – “Hang in there”)

Rimini beach club sunbeds arrangement

Local language on landscape = visible resilience, framing hope as communal rather than individual, rooted in place identity.

Emilian and Romagnolo convey/embody the vulnerability that transforms into resistance (“performative agency” Butler 2016)

Land is the wound/sufferance – the site of vulnerability and resistance, it is the community

Language as land -> Tin bota -> skinscape (Peck and Stroud 2015) of the community for solidarity and resistance -> embodied vulnerability (Moriarty 2025)



Summary

A stam béin

- Resemioticised branding (public)
- Stoicism
- Mutual aid through supporting local businesses

Mè a stâg a cà

- Fundraising campaign (virtuous)
- Online and “private space”
- Solidarity and civic responsibility


Tin bota

- Communicating through the beach
- Hope
- Collective resilience

- Crises strip away hegemonic logics, revealing interdependence
- Endangered/local languages as resources for future survival & collective healing
- For Emilian and Romagnolo a narrative is needed to deal with the trauma and lead to PTG (language revitalisation)

What's Next?

- Collaborate with De_Vulgare to open a call for narratives of grief, survival, and solidarity for Emilian, Romagnolo and other minoritised languages
 - Open up space to reflect on language loss
 - Compile a documentation of existing stories of place in Emilian+ to expose and create sensitivities around minoritised language and place belonging
 - Use these to inform language revitalisation strategies
- Applied for Research Ireland Postdoctoral Fellowship to embed this within a bigger project with Irish in peatlands
- Open to collaborations and to creating synergies around this

The background is a watercolor illustration of a landscape. At the top, there are blue and purple mountains. Below them, a river flows through a green valley. In the foreground, there are several stylized, dark green plants with long, thin leaves. The overall style is soft and painterly.

“L e’ bēl fni int un culōr
E a so fni indētr a che’ vērd nēca me
Ch’u m ha magnê e’ fiō
U m è vnu a zarchê, u m ha ciap
E u m ha arspudê fura
Un pô piò vērd”

It is beautiful to end inside a colour.
And I too ended up inside that green,
The river that swallowed me.
It came looking for me, It took me,
And it spat me back out,
A little greener.

—E’ Rumagnulesta

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Thanks!

Let's keep in touch

jhampton@Liverpool.ac.uk
jesshampton.github.io

SIS Networking Scheme -> open for 2025/26!

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