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Mis(sing)communication: deafness in a foreign environment

> […] al silenzio e all'ombra bianca che avanza, io ho opposto pagine scritte e i miei genitori una corda vocale stanca. A volte ci siamo fatti malissimo, ma lo sforzo è stato capirsi. (p. 197)

Introduction

Between two continents, between sound and silence, and between an eccentric mother and an unconventional father, Claudia Durastanti's memoir inhabits a space made of contrasts. *La Straniera* unfolds in these liminal zones, where identity is constantly negotiated at the intersection of opposing forces: cultural, linguistic, and familial.

The autobiographical novel, published by La nave di Teseo in 2019, represents deafness avoiding stereotypical portrayals; it is neither framed as a vehicle for social redemption nor as a source of moral instruction. Durastanti deliberately avoids the victimisation of deafness, refusing to reduce it to a narrative of deficiency or personal tragedy. The condition is presented as one of several factors shaping the lives of both parents and their children, treated with clarity and emotional detachment. This narrative approach opens multiple avenues for scholarly inquiry, particularly concerning the relationship between the rejection of standardised modes of communication and the subsequent linguistic challenges faced by CODAs (Children of Deaf Adults), foregrounding the difficulties of language acquisition and the resulting fragmentation of identity and sense of belonging, especially for children raised by non-hearing parents who refuse to adopt sign language. These linguistic tensions are further intensified by the family's relocations, first from Italy to Brooklyn in USA, than back to a remote village in Southern Italy, where regional dialects and non-standard linguistic varieties dominate everyday interactions, complicating access to a unified linguistic or cultural framework.

This article will offer a reading of *La Straniera*, with a particular focus on the linguistic and metalinguistic aspect, drawing from established theories from sociolinguistic and Deaf

studies, starting from Pierre Bourdieu's notion of linguistic capital,[1] engaging with his theories on language carrying social value depending on the field in which it is used. For Bourdieu, legitimate (or official) language is the language of power, while other forms such as dialects, sign languages, and minority languages, are devalued. This concept has been more recently expanded by scholars such as Monica Heller[2], who explores how language functions in multilingual contexts and how the linguistic capital is constantly re-evaluated according to changing market value. Furthermore, Dirksen Bauman and Joseph Murray[3] have extended Bourdieu's framework to the domain of visual-gestural languages, arguing that sign languages are systematically denied symbolic capital within dominant linguistic markets. Their work highlights how this devaluation is rooted in audist ideologies, which privilege spoken language and contribute to the marginalisation of Deaf cultural and communicative practices.[4] The same Bauman and Murray advocate for Deaf cultural-linguistic identity, building on Paddy Ladd's concept of *Deafhood*,[5] which redefines Deaf identity as plural, situated, and transnational (Murray 2021, Kusters 2014, Leigh et al. 2018). The second part of this article will explore how *La Straniera* can be read as a narrative of disrupted Deafhood, one in which sign language is absent and cultural belonging is deferred, yet Deaf experience remains central to the construction of self, memory, and language. The analysis concludes with a reflection on the broader sociolinguistic implications for the Deaf community, emphasising how alternative communicative modes, such as sign language, continue to be perceived as "foreign" and are consequently excluded from mainstream societal frameworks, thus reinforcing patterns of marginalisation and isolation.

Devalued languages and devalued speakers

In *La Straniera*, numerous instances illustrate what Bourdieu defines as a devalued communicative system (namely forms of language that fall outside the realm of a legitimate language) thus introducing the concept of linguistic capital, or the idea that certain languages hold more market value within specific social and economic contexts. This point is further

[1] P. Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).
[2] M. Heller, *Paths to Post-Nationalism: A Critical Ethnography of Language and Identity* (Oxford University Press, 2010).
[3] D. H.-D Bauman & J. J. Murray, *Deaf Gain: Raising the Stakes for Human Diversity* (University of Minnesota Press 2014).
[4] H.-D. L. Bauman, 'Audism: Exploring the Metaphysics of Oppression', *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, *9*(2) (2004): 239–246.
[5] P. Ladd, *Understanding deaf culture: In search of Deafhood*. (Multilingual Matters, 2003).

developed by Monica Heller, who examines the links between linguistic capital and standardised language. Non-legitimate forms, including regional dialects, often associated with specific geographic communities, lack symbolic value in broader social contexts, while fully functional within their own community of users. Through Heller's lens, the narrator's discomfort stems not only from linguistic deprivation but also from living at the margins of competing linguistic elements, such as the institutionally legitimate standard Italian, regional dialect with its local identity, and finally, the rejected sign language, devalued and lacking recognition as legitimate capital.

The CODA narrator underlines the profound linguistic disorientation she and her mother experience upon relocating to rural Southern Italy, where the common use of local dialect, largely unintelligible to both, marks their communicative isolation and highlights their peripheral position within the community's linguistic economy.

> Il dialetto era una sfida sia per me sia per mia madre, che non riusciva a leggere il labiale stretto degli altri abitanti, e ogni volta fingeva di capire cosa avessero detto; loro non se ne accorgevano e andavano avanti, ma io sapevo che annuiva per gentilezza o perché era stanca. Non voleva che le facessi da interprete sul momento, le spiegavo cosa avevano detto le maestre al consiglio di classe solo quando tornavamo a casa. (p. 116)

The narrator's attempt to integrate into this linguistic community features frequent errors, which are often met with mockery rather than correction. These moments of ridicule not only reinforce her status as a linguistic outsider but also intensify her broader sense of non-belonging, linguistically, culturally, and socially.

> [...] nel frattempo loro cercavano di insegnarmi a parlare in dialetto, ma solo perché si divertivano a sentirmi sbagliare. Mi tiravano dei sassi sulle gambe, "Questo si dice *b'scun*", oppure prendevano un tovagliolo sporco a mensa e me lo agitavano davanti alla faccia scandendo "*maccatur*", mi nascondevano le lucertole morte nello zaino, "*guard, 'na salicréc*!" e ogni volta che cercavo di ripetere quelle parole come fossero incantesimi che potevano far apparire una creatura dal nulla – *biscuno, maccatura, saligreca* – li sentivo ridere forte. "Lascia perdere, non è per te". (pp. 115-6)

These power structures embedded in language hierarchies and the social vulnerability of those who deviate from normative linguistic standards are inverted in the novel with the figure of the grandmother, acting as a counterpoint: while her broken English infused with dialectal

tones lacks symbolic legitimacy and draws ridicule, it also becomes a site of agency, personality, and cultural expression. It becomes a hybrid communicative register that reflects her transnational experience and linguistic creativity.

> Non capiva più tanto bene l'italiano e parlava un dialetto volontariamente buffo: diceva "Bruklì" invece di Brooklyn, "aranò" al posto di *I don't know*, la "bega" stava per *bag* e "porchecciapp" per *pork chops*; "a diec pezz" erano dieci dollari e "u' bridge" il casello dal New Jersey a New York. In realtà sapeva benissimo qual era la pronuncia corretta in inglese e si rifiutava di usarla: le piaceva essere presa in giro, era il suo modo di rivendicare una personalità. (p. 82)

Although others mock this idiosyncratic speech, the grandmother continues to use it intentionally, asserting her identity through a language that, though marginalised, is personally meaningful. In contrast to the narrator, whose linguistic errors provoke shame and reinforce her sense of exclusion, the grandmother embraces her illegitimate language as a form of self-definition. This juxtaposition highlights the varying degrees of vulnerability associated with linguistic marginality, as well as the complex emotional investments individuals make in languages that are socially devalued.

Across three generations of women, *La Straniera* builds a thread of displacement illustrating concepts such as belonging, identity, and agency. The grandmother, who emigrates from Southern Italy to Brooklyn, presents the first linguistic fracture: her "broken Italian" and conscious partial acquisition of English reflect Bourdieu's idea of deficit of linguistic capital in both linguistic markets. In fact, she chooses to speak a hybrid, non-standard idiom that is socially devalued in Italy and insufficiently legitimate in America, positioning her as perpetually "foreign." The consequent mockery of her speech highlights how language becomes both a visible marker of exclusion and also a form of resilience, able to preserve familial memory across borders. The narrator's mother inherits this linguistic marginality but reconfigures it through deafness and silence. Her refusal to learn or use sign language constitutes both an act of defiance and an attempt to align herself with the hearing world's norms of legitimacy. Yet, paradoxically, this refusal reproduces the same dynamics of exclusion experienced by her own mother: her inability to participate fully in either the Deaf or hearing linguistic community. In this sense, the mother's silence echoes the grandmother's fractured Italian: both represent liminal linguistic identities that fail to conform to the dominant model of communication. Finally, the narrator, third generation of this genealogical thread,

born into a transnational and translingual environment, manifests this inheritance as a profound linguistic insecurity, with her inability to speak local dialects upon the family's return to Southern Italy, reducing her to an outsider within her own community. Just as her grandmother's accent was ridiculed in Brooklyn, the narrator experiences similar forms of linguistic shaming in Italy for her non-native speech. In line with Bourdieu's theories, mockery functions as a disciplinary practice that enforces linguistic normativity and reaffirms social hierarchies.

This intergenerational trajectory of linguistic marginality finds its most complex articulation in the narrator's parents' shared refusal to communicate through LIS (Lingua dei Segni Italiana). Their decision to reject sign language cannot be read simply as denial or ignorance but as part of a deeper sociolinguistic inheritance of resistance and exclusion transmitted across generations. Their refusal isolates them not only from the hearing community where deafness remains stigmatised, but also from the Deaf community, whose linguistic culture they implicitly reject. This dual exclusion creates a communicative vacuum in which the narrator is forced to mediate between incompatible codes: the spoken Italian of the hearing world, the residual dialect of the local community, and the gestural approximations used at home. In describing her mother's linguistic dissimulation, Durastanti explains:

> Capire perché abbia rinunciato a imporre la sua lingua privata non è difficile per me, che ho avuto paura di parlare ad alta voce per tanto tempo: la lingua dei segni è teatrale e visibile, ti espone in continuazione. Ti rende subito disabile. In assenza di gesti, puoi sembrare solo una ragazza un po' timida e distratta. Leggendo le labbra degli altri per decifrare cosa stavano dicendo fino a consumarsi gli occhi e i nervi, parlando con la sua voce alta e forte e dagli accenti irregolari, sembrava solo un'immigrata sgrammaticata, una straniera. A volte quando prendeva l'autobus e gli autisti le chiedevano se fosse peruviana o rumena, lei annuiva senza dare altra spiegazione, quasi lusingata dal loro errore. (19-20)

Subsequently, the narrator shifts focus to her father's relationship with language, revealing a very similar approach, although distinctly more aggressive. His rejection of certain forms of communication is not only categorical but also accompanied by moments of hostility and emotional violence.

> Non gli piaceva gesticolare e non lo faceva neanche con i suoi genitori [...]. Quando i suoi familiari provavano a fare gesti per farsi capire lui li schiaffeggiava, allontanava le mani

che gli si agitavano attorno con uno scatto: voleva che le persone scandissero bene le parole in modo da poterne leggere il labiale [...]. (p. 34)

For them, LIS becomes a marker of disability in a society that fails to recognise it as a legitimate linguistic system. The marginal status of LIS also reflects broader historical patterns of exclusion in Italy. Italian Sign Language was only officially recognised by the Italian government in May 2021[6], following decades of advocacy by the Deaf community. As we read in Fontana et al.'s historical account,[7] this institutional delay contributed to widespread misconceptions about LIS as a lesser or incomplete form of communication, leading to deep social consequences, reinforcing stigma and discouraging its use, even among Deaf individuals. In 2012 Carlo Geraci[8], analysing the ongoing debate at the time, highlights two main views of deafness, already reported by Reagan, Penn and Ogily in 2006: a "pathological" view, which describes deafness as simply an auditory deficit, and a "sociocultural" perspective, which views deafness as an essentially cultural condition.[9] The mother's life and the narrator's linguistic insecurity represent the physical and psychic costs of the pathological model in which deafness is medicalised. The novel's fragmented, polyphonic structure exemplifies the sociocultural view, and Durastanti's aesthetic choices, such as shifts in register, linguistic hybridity, and self-reflexive narration, symbolically reclaim the legitimacy of non-hearing communication. Within *La Straniera*, in fact, the Deaf parents' refusal to adopt LIS in the 70s and for the whole duration of their lives can be interpreted as a strategic attempt to avoid further visibility and discrimination in a society where sign language has historically been associated with deficiency rather than cultural identity.

"Le sorde sono buffe e disinibite" and other social prejudice around deafness

The rejection of sign language in *La Straniera* must also be read through the lens of audism, a term first coined by Tom Humphries[10] and later defined by Bauman as "discrimination of Deaf

[6] Legge 20 maggio 2021, n. 95 - Riconoscimento della lingua dei segni italiana e della lingua dei segni italiana tattile.
[7] S. Fontana, S. Corazza, P. B. Braem & V. Volterra, 'Language Research and Language Community Change: Italian Sign Language, 1981–2013', *Sign Language Studies*, *17*(3) (2017), 363–398.
[8] C. Geraci, 'Language Policy and Planning: The Case of Italian Sign Language', *Sign Language Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 4, Special Issue: Language Planning and Policies for Sign Languages (Summer 2012), pp. 494-518.
[9] T. Reagan, 'Language Policy and Sign Languages', *An Introduction to Language Policy*, ed. T. Ricento, 329–45 (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell 2006). Also T. Reagan, C. Penn, and D. Ogilvy, 'From Policy to Practice: Sign Language Developments', *Post-Apartheid South Africa. Language Policy* 5 (2006): 187–208.
[10] T. Humphries, T. *Audism: The making of a word*. Unpublished essay. (1975)

people"[11] (2004:239). In societies where orality is privileged as the default mode of communication, Deaf individuals are frequently subject to patronising attitudes, often perceived as deficient, dependent, or childlike. This perception is not only socially constructed but is reinforced through everyday interactions, where signing in public can provoke stares, unsolicited assistance, or even ridicule. The parents' internalised and unconscious reaction to audism appears both radical and defiant, functioning as a form of self-protection. We find several examples in the text, as Durastanti introduces her mother's childhood, describing her grandmother's protective attempts to shield her daughter from societal judgment:

> Non sapeva come difendere sua figlia quando la chiamavano "la muta" o le dicevano che era una poveretta a cui Dio doveva fare più attenzione. Mia madre in realtà si difendeva da sola e non provava indulgenza verso chi non la capiva quando parlava: a quattro anni ha versato un calderone di acqua bollente su una vicina che stava spettegolando su di lei, lo aveva capito da come la donna gesticolava e la guardava con commiserazione. (17)

Durastanti's unusual narrative resists the conventional victimisation of deaf individuals by portraying her parents with emotional distance and complexity, rather than pity or moral redemption. As Rosemarie Garland-Thomson[12] argues, dominant cultural narratives tend to cast disability in sentimental or tragic terms, thereby flattening disabled subjects into objects of either inspiration or suffering. Durastanti disrupts this paradigm, offering instead a depiction that neither glorifies nor pathologizes deafness. This approach is also evident within the attitudes of her extended family:

> In realtà i suoi fratelli non credevano che fosse sorda, e quando giocavano a nascondino e contavano i numeri ad alta voce abbandonandola a sé stessa tra le stradine del paese non lo facevano per escluderla, ma perché si fidavano della sua capacità di orientarsi. Per loro mia madre non era una vittima, e non è mai stata speciale. (18)

This refusal to engage in what Arthur Frank[13] calls restitution narrative aligns her work with broader efforts in Deaf and Disability Studies to reclaim disabled subjectivities. Restitution narrative frames illness as a disruption in an otherwise stable life trajectory. It emphasises how the ill or disabled person is expected to be passive, placing trust in medical

[11] H.-D. L. Bauman, Audism: Exploring the Metaphysics of Oppression. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, *9*(2) (2004), 239–246.
[12] R. Garland-Thomson, *Staring: How We Look*. (Oxford University Press, 2009).
[13] A. W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

professionals who enable the returning to "normal" health, in agreement with audist and oralist ideologies, where the goal is to fix the deaf body (e.g., through hearing aids, cochlear implants, or speech therapy) in order to assimilate into hearing society. Frank argues that these narrative silences alternative perspectives of illness or disability, not involving recovery or restoration, and not in need of being cured.

Another clear instance of audism and pervasive ignorance surrounding disability emerges in the ways the narrator recounts how her mother is consistently referred to not as "the deaf" but as "the mute." This linguistic substitution reveals not only a lack of understanding of deafness as a sensory condition but also reflects a broader cultural refusal to acknowledge non-normative forms of communication. In the context of a small rural village, such terminology reinforces social marginalisation, prejudices and stereotypes, as we can see in this extract:

> In paese c'era una strana resistenza alla sordità di mia madre: qualcuno la chiamava "*a' mercan*", ma quelli della Vecchia generazione la chiamavano "la muta" anche se parlava fin troppo e non era per niente timida. Nessuno diceva mai "la sorda". (116)

For the CODA narrator, this mislabelling offers a temporary shelter from prejudices:

> […] era disorientante essere scambiata per la figlia di una persona che non poteva parlare, mi sembrava una cosa più offensiva rispetto al fatto di non sentire. Come se non mi stessero dicendo che mia madre era disabile, ma che era stupida. (116-7)

Encapsulating a complex negotiation of social stigma, Durastanti's observation exposes a hierarchy of perceived "normality" rooted in hearing-centric ideologies. Interestingly, the narrator finds a sense of relief in being referred to as "the daughter of the mute," a label that, while technically inaccurate, distances her from the deeper stigma associated with deafness in the rural Italian context. While mutism erases the linguistic reality of deaf individuals, who often have rich visual-gestural communication, it paradoxically becomes more socially acceptable than deafness, appearing more intelligible and thus more socially tolerable to hearing communities, as it implies a physical limitation of speech rather than a total disconnection from sound. Deafness, by contrast, carries heavier connotations of cognitive deficiency, as the narrator's reflection makes clear: being deaf is perceived not merely as an auditory difference but as a sign of diminished intelligence or capacity for reason.

Signs of a CODA who doesn't sign: lo stiro da ferro

Growing up in a communicative environment marked not by bilingual fluency but by absence and improvisation, Durastanti and her brother yearn to conform to normative expectations of spoken language:

> […] più i nostri genitori parlavano in maniera volgare e volutamente fastidiosa, più noi eravamo precisi, convinti che essere corretti nel lessico avrebbe implicato essere corretti anche nella vita, finalmente liberi dalle loro stranezze." (63)

This linguistic struggle is however increased by the sociolinguistic context in which Durastanti's childhood unfolds: a remote village in Southern Italy, where dialects and regional linguistic varieties dominate daily communication. In such a setting, Standard Italian itself becomes another inaccessible code, intensifying the narrator's sense of estrangement, once again leading to social ridicule:

> Ho imparato a leggere e a scrivere in italiano, ma la mia lingua conteneva sempre un margine di errore che faceva ridere gli insegnanti. Dicevo "stiro da ferro" invece di "ferro da stiro" […]. (109)

The narrator's mother's refusal to use sign language not only distances the mother from Deaf cultural belonging but also deprives the narrator, as a CODA, of access to an essential cultural-linguistic heritage. The narrator's discomfort in using sign language, despite her proximity to it, mirrors her parents' rejection and reveals how linguistic hierarchies are internalised even within intimate family spaces. As Bauman and Murray suggest, the denial of sign language constitutes a form of symbolic violence, whereby non-hearing individuals are persuaded to renounce their own communicative capital to conform to hegemonic linguistic norms. The result is not only communicative rupture but also an affective one: the narrator's inability to occupy a stable linguistic identity reinforces her sense of estrangement from both her family and her broader community. Scholars such as Jenny Singleton and Rachel Tittle[14] have emphasized how CODAs often experience linguistic insecurity when they lack proficiency in sign language, feeling caught between Deaf and hearing worlds without fully belonging to either. Durastanti's identity is fragmented across multiple, competing linguistic codes: standard Italian, dialect, English, and the absent sign language, illustrating how

[14] J. L. Singleton & R. C. Tittle, 'Deaf Parents and Their Hearing Children', *Deaf Studies Language and Education*, edited by P. E. Spencer, C. J. Erting, and M. Marschark, 41–53 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

linguistic deprivation in CODA contexts can compound feelings of cultural and social dislocation. More importantly, Singleton and Tittle remarked how all CODAs experience a stable sense of identification with the broader CODA community. Those who grow up without proficiency in sign language, or whose Deaf parents reject sign language (often due to oralist ideologies), may experience a "double dislocation": excluded from both Deaf cultural spaces and unable to fully integrate into hearing society. This dynamic results in what Adam et al.[15] term "CODA marginality", where individuals occupy a liminal zone between groups yet remain unrecognised by either. In this sense, CODAs like Durastanti's narrator do not merely struggle with linguistic insecurity; they face a compounded identity fragmentation, lacking affiliation not only with Deaf culture but also with CODA peer networks that often rely on shared linguistic and cultural capital rooted in sign language competence.

> Tutti i CODA (children of deaf adults) che conosco sanno parlare la lingua dei segni. […] Io non mi iscrivo a un Corso per imparare, ma faccio un sacco di sforzi per tirare fuori qualcosa che gli adulti attorno a me possano capire. Di solito i risultati sono insoddisfacenti e mia madre mi supplica di smetter di gesticolare quando siamo fuori, dice che sembro una ballerina pazza appena scartata da una compagnia. (193)

As previously mentioned, Heller explores how dominant ideologies shape linguistic choices and create hierarchies that determine the value of particular languages in social contexts. In *La Straniera*, the strong absence of sign language aligns with hegemonic norms that devalue visual-gestural communication in favour of spoken Italian, contributing to the narrator's alienation from Deaf cultural-linguistic norms.

Conclusion

> Alle conferenze accademiche sui disabili ci vanno solo quelli che lo sono o i loro parenti; l'empatia si è fermata all'integrità del corpo, anche negli studi culturali. (208)

Through this narrative of fragmented communication, Durastanti disrupts a more conventional restitution narrative, refusing to frame deafness as a deficit to be overcome or fixed. Instead, she offers a lucid depiction of how rooted prejudices manifest in audism, mislabelling ("the mute"), and rural ignorance toward disability, intersecting with linguistic barriers to produce profound social isolation. Crucially, her account invites a re-evaluation

[15] R., Adam, B. Carty, & C. Stone, *'Deaf Parents and Their Hearing Children: The Complexities of CODA Identity', Sign Language Studies,* 14(3) (2014): 241–264.

of the socio-linguistic conditions that perpetuate exclusion: not merely the lack of sign language access, but the broader failure of society to recognize and legitimize alternative communicative modalities. Towards the end of the novel, the narrator's relationship with her deaf mother and, by extension, with her own ambivalent identity as a CODA shifts from shame to visibility, marking a transition from internalized audism toward a conscious reclamation of communication practices. This act aligns with Heller's discussion of linguistic legitimacy, as the narrator consciously contests the devaluation of visual-gestural language by staging it in a way that demands recognition in public space. The narrator's refusal to hide her gestural interaction signifies not only personal acceptance but also an implicit critique of the audist ideologies that once compelled her to suppress it.

> […] dopo anni trascorsi a vergognarmi di fare gesti in sua presenza per essere capita, oggi parlo senza voce scandendo bene il labiale, cercando di imitare concetti che non significano nulla proprio per l'eccesso delle mie coreografie. Voglio essere vista dai passanti e che sia evidente che non mi vergogno più di lei […] (65)

When the narrator "speaks without voice," she articulates a deeply ambivalent relationship to language, simultaneously acknowledging her mother's deafness and portraying her own exclusion from both the hearing and Deaf worlds. Her refusal to attend a formal course to learn LIS highlights the emotional aspect of this linguistic choice: she wants the language to be inherited, not learned. By insisting that it should be passed down from her mother, she seems to affirm that sign language is a form of familial transmission rather than institutional knowledge. Furthermore, the absence of the father in this reflection emphasises the matrilineal pattern of linguistic inheritance. From the grandmother's hybrid Italian in Brooklyn, to the mother's self-imposed silence, to the daughter's voiceless speech, Durastanti traces a feminine genealogy of incomplete linguistic legacies, each shaped by forms of displacement and social exclusion. The narrator's multilingual exposure (English, Italian, dialect, and the unspoken presence of sign language) produces not only fragmentation but also a rich awareness of linguistic plurality as identity. Her familial female lineage of "imperfect speakers" ultimately forms an alternative community, one bound not by mastery of any single code but by the shared experience of linguistic insufficiency. In this light, *La Straniera* transforms linguistic imperfection into a form of cultural continuity and resistance, redefining belonging not as linguistic conformity but as the capacity to inhabit the margins of language creatively.

Ultimately, *La Straniera* performs a dual intervention: it dismantles cultural narratives that victimise deafness while simultaneously foregrounding the sociolinguistic mechanisms that render non-hearing communication invisible. Weaving together autobiographical memory, multilingualism, and reflections on language, Durastanti's work compels readers to confront how communicative hierarchies structure identity, belonging, and exclusion. In doing so, the novel not only enriches literary representations of deafness and CODA experience in Italy, but also contributes to broader debates on language, accessibility, and the politics of voice in contemporary society.