

Understanding intermarriage from the native's perspective: Spain and Italy compared

Joana Serret, Centre d'Estudis Demogràfics (CED)
Agnese Vitali, University of Southampton

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Abstract

The number of immigrants has been substantially increasing in the past ten years in countries of the European South, which were traditionally migrant-sending rather than migrant-receiving countries. Intermarriage is also gaining importance. Of all marriages celebrated in Italy and Spain at the end of the 2000s, about 15% are mixed marriages.

This paper analyzes intermarriage from the native's perspective in Spain and Italy, two countries of recent immigration which share many social and demographic characteristics. Our results show that intermarriage is becoming an option for men and women who are not "attractive" partners in the natives' marriage market. We interpret the increase in intermarriage as a response to the difficulties to find a partner in the national marriage market.

Theoretical Assumptions

Historically, men have tended to marry women who had achieved a lower educational attainment than they did (Schwartz et al. 2005), and used to be the sole or main breadwinner for their families (Beker 1981). From the 1960s onwards, as women entered education and employment, educational homogamy among spouses increased (Qian et al. 1993) and dual-earner couples became widespread (Oppenheimer 1994). In the 2000s, wives were more likely to have achieved higher education than their husbands in the US (Schwartz and Mare, 2005). In spite of the prediction formulated by the Beckerian model of the family that women's increased economic autonomy would have led to a decrease in women's desirability of marrying and staying married, high-educated working women are more likely to marry with respect to lower-educated women (Oppenheimer, 1997; Goldstein and Kenney, 2001).

High-educated women might have problems to find a partner with the same or higher level of education. By contrast, there are low educated men who have problems to find a spouse because they are not so attractive for these new women.

Most research on intermarriage focuses on the societal, structural and individual factors that make immigrant population to marry out of their group (Pagnini & Morgan 1990; Qian & Lichter 2001; Jacobs & Labov 2002) while limited attention has been devoted to the factors that make natives to marry out of their group (Glowsky 2007). The overall question that we tackle in this paper is whether we can gain insights into the social and demographic dynamics driving couple formation by studying intermarriage from the native's perspective. We will be able to inspect whether e.g. native men with low educational achievement –who might be unattractive partners in the internal marriage

market, or might seek for a spouse with a traditional gender-role vision on marriage—could turn to foreign wives from certain countries of origin to get married. We will be able to account for differences in country of origin of the foreign spouse.

On the other hand, the women native with high level of education will have more problems to find an interesting husband so they would marry men from North America or Europe, or also younger men from Africa.

Our empirical analyses compare two Southern European countries, Italy and Spain, which experienced a similar increase in immigrant inflows at the beginning of the 2000s, while having for long been migrant-sending countries. Italy and Spain are also similar in other respects. Both are characterized by Familialistic welfare state (Esping-Andersen 1990), strong family ties (Reher 1998), traditional gender roles (Esping-Andersen 2009) and late transition to adulthood (Billari 2002) which leads to a late partnership formation.

Data and Methods

The data used in this paper come from the official registers of marriages which come from the National Institute of Statistics: ISTAT (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica) in the case of Italy and INE (Instituto Nacional de Estadística) for Spain, and cover the years between 1998 and 2010. The data registers all marriages celebrated in Spain or Italy with information on year of marriage, age at marriage, origin, nationalities and level of education of both spouses. The main advantage of this data is the access to the whole population who get marry (it is not a sample).

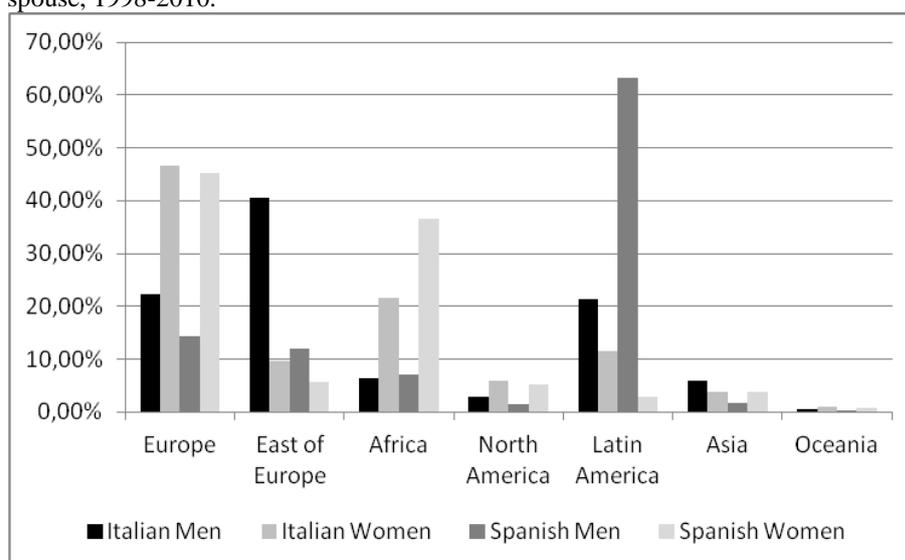
Multinomial logistic models are employed to estimate the probability of marrying a partner of a given origin. The dependent variable is constituted of 6 categories: a native man/woman can marry a native spouse, -ref., or can intermarry a spouse from Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Africa, North America and Latin America. As a robustness check, we also replicated the analysis considering as origins individual countries which represent the main immigrant groups in Italy and Spain (Albania, Rumania, etc. for Italy; Morocco, Colombia, etc. for Spain). As independent variables we consider: age of native spouse and its square, difference between husband's age and wife's age, education of native spouse (low ref., medium, high), difference in education between spouses and order of marriage of the native spouse (first ref., second marriage). We ran separate models by gender of the native spouse for Italy and Spain separately.

Preliminary Results

Intermarriages increased in the period 1998-2010 in Italy (from 4% to 8%) and particularly in Spain (from 5% to 17%). The majority of mixed marriages are celebrated between a native and a foreign bride (84.2% in Italy and 59.7% in Spain in 2010).

Italy and Spain differ in terms of origins of the foreign spouses. Italian men mainly intermarry with women from Eastern Europe while Spanish men with Latin American. Native women in both Italy and Spain, instead, tend to intermarry with European men, followed by African (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Intermarriages in Italy and Spain by gender of the native spouse and nationality of the foreign spouse, 1998-2010.



Results from the multinomial logistic regression (not shown) indicate that native men who intermarry tend to be lower educated and older with respect to men who marry a native woman. When the age difference between the spouses increases, the likelihood of intermarry also increases (except for wives from Europe). The magnitude of the estimated effects changes depending on the origin of the foreign bride, but the signs of associations remain the same.

On the contrary, when we estimate the model for native women, we find different patterns of associations according to the origin of the foreign groom. Native women tend to be older, higher educated and with smaller age difference with respect to women who marry a native, when they marry a husband from North America or Europe. On the other hand, native women tend to be younger, lower educated and with more age difference with respect to women who marry a native, when they marry partners from East Europe or Africa. Results for Spain and Italy are very similar.

The key contribution of this paper is a new perspective on intermarriage, based on the characteristics of the native rather than the immigrant spouse. This perspective allows investigating to what extent intermarriage can be considered as a substitute to marrying someone from the own group by individuals who are less attractive in the marriage market due to their socio-demographic characteristics.

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