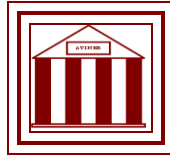


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**Age-related Variation in
Code-switching between
Italian and the Sicilian Dialect**

**Giovanna Alfonzetti
Associate Professor
Department of Human Sciences
Catania University
Italy**

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Athens Institute for Education and Research
8 Valaoritou Street, Kolonaki, 10671 Athens, Greece
Tel: + 30 210 3634210 Fax: + 30 210 3634209
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Age-related Variation in Code-switching between Italian and the Sicilian Dialect

Giovanna Alfonzetti
Associate Professor
Department of Human Sciences
Catania University
Italy

Abstract

The paper deals with intergenerational variation in syntactic and functional patterns of code-switching (CS) between Italian and the Sicilian dialect. The research is based on two kinds of data: (i) a corpus of spontaneous spoken language, recorded, transcribed and then submitted to conversation analysis (Alfonzetti 1992, 2012); (ii) a written corpus of e-mails, text messages, posts in social networks, etc. The main purpose is to show that the occurrence of a particular switching strategy largely depends on sociolinguistic factors interacting with age (language proficiency; sociosymbolic values and communicative functions of the two languages; speakers' attitudes, etc.). This issue is extremely important both from a sociolinguistic perspective (age-related differences in CS are a key to understanding an ongoing language shift) and from a theoretical one (comparing CS patterns between the same two languages within the same community but across different age-groups helps to establish the relative role of sociolinguistic *vs* syntactic factors underlying CS).

Keywords: Code switching, age, conversation, polylinguaging, language shift.

Acknowledgments:

Introduction

Age-related variation is an important topic in present-day research on CS for two main reasons: (i) from a theoretical perspective, it helps to establish the relative role of sociolinguistic *vs* syntactic factors underlying CS patterns; (ii) from a sociolinguistic perspective, considered in a dynamic manner, it is a key to understanding an ongoing language shift (Gal 1979).

According to Muysken (1991), the most fruitful way to approach the first question is to carry out comparisons in which some variables are kept constant: any difference emerging is likely to depend on sociolinguistic factors. Three main types of comparisons can be carried out:

1. *Comparisons between the same language pair in similar settings* but in different speech communities. CS between Mexican-American Spanish and English (Pfaff 1979) is of the insertional type, for which a Matrix Language (ML) needs to be postulated, whereas CS between Puerto Rican Spanish and English (Poplack 1980) belongs to the alternational type, which does not require the notion of an ML.

2. *Comparisons between the same language pair in two different settings*. In her study on Adãñme-English CS, Nartey (1982) showed that Ghanians living in their country (a post-colonial context) use different CS strategies than those who live in Great Britain (a migrant context) because of the different prestige status of English in the two sociopolitical environments. Berruto (2004) found that the behaviour of determiners in Italian/German CS in three different settings is strongly influenced by the kind of bilingualism: (i) balanced bilingualism in second-generation migrants in Switzerland; (ii) asymmetrical bilingualism in the Walser minority of Gressoney (where Titsch is undergoing a process of dramatic decline); (iii) subtractive bilingualism in an ex-migrant German/Italian bilingual family returned to Italy.

An intrinsically grammatical fact, therefore, does not only depend on the structural properties of the languages involved. Linguistic principles are very relevant factors as they set the limits on what is possible in CS (Backus 1992), but these limits are wider than those allowed by theories proposing universal constraints. A complex interplay of pragmatic, psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic factors largely influence which grammatical and functional patterns are used and which will become conventionalized in each community: *age* is perhaps the most relevant speaker-related factor, in so far as it is closely related to other variables.

3. *Comparisons between the same language pair in different generations*. In most communities age differentiates subgroups on the basis of their CS behaviour. The correlation between age and CS can be approached from two different perspectives. From a developmental perspective, learning to codeswitch is an aspect of the development of communicative competence: it requires a certain degree of bilingual competence and knowledge of

sociopragmatic switching rules. Research focuses on the acquisition of CS skills in the early stages of the speaker's life (Cantone 2007).

The development of CS in individual speakers, however, may intersect with changes in progress even in stable communities. A sociolinguistic perspective is therefore required, which assumes that age-related differences remain more or less constant during the individual's life span and are connected to aspects of the speakers' language background, such as language proficiency, attitudes, socio-symbolic values, communicative functions of the languages in contact, etc.

In three main situations, age-related variation in CS has more sociolinguistic relevance: migrant communities, post-colonial communities and standard/dialect bilingualism. The first two types will be dealt with briefly here, whereas the third will be discussed at length in the next section, mainly with reference to Italian/dialect CS in Sicily.

In migrant communities, remarkable cross-generational differences in syntactic and functional patterns of CS are to be found. Age interacts with: the degree of bilingual proficiency (perhaps the most relevant factor) and attitudes towards CS. First-generation speakers usually remain dominant in their mother tongue: they codeswitch as a remedial or compensatory strategy (Dabène 1990); their CS is mainly intersentential or restricted to discourse markers or single words (Franceschini 1998). Second-generation speakers vary greatly their behaviour according to the degree of retention of the family language. Second-generation Italian migrants in German-speaking Switzerland studied by Franceschini (1998), for example, develop a balanced bilingualism, which allows a frequent and fully functional type of CS; rapid code mixing (CM, i.e. intra-sentential switching) is positively evaluated in peer-group interaction as a sign of plural identity. This configuration is accounted for by socio-political reasons: during the 1980s the xenophobic climate changed; the normative, monolingually oriented attitude relaxed and a linguistically autonomous way of life fed by more than one language developed and was admired by the indigenous Swiss-German population.

Attitudes, therefore, play a crucial role in explaining differences in CS patterns among age-groups: a more intimate type of mixing is more likely to occur in situations of intense contact and with no strong attitudinal barriers against CM (Muysken 2000: 247). The two communities of second generation bilinguals in Grenoble studied by Dabène (1990) show big differences between them: Spanish bilinguals follow the same pattern found among Italian migrants in Switzerland, whereas Maghrebin youngsters show residual bilingualism, because of a heavy loss of the mother tongue. They mainly engage in emblematic tag-switching, used as a marker of sociocultural identity. Second generation of Greek Cypriots in London show a very limited proficiency in Greek, and therefore their CS is due only to the inability to speak the family language (Gardner-Chloros 1991). The third generation usually represents the final stage of a process of language shift, often reverting to almost complete monolingualism in the new language. Bettoni (1991), for example, talks of immigrant language cycle with reference to Italians in Australia.

Different groups of migrants and different generations have therefore developed different ways of mixing and switching: a typology of these styles is still a desideratum of research (Auer 2005: 407). Generally speaking, studies on migrant communities confirm Poplack's (1980) hypothesis, according to which there is a relationship between high levels of bilingual proficiency and propensity towards CM: second-generation speakers switch more intra-sententially whereas first generation favour inter- or extra-sentential CS.

This hypothesis however is controversial. Berk-Seligson (1986), for example, found no relationship between the degree of proficiency and type of CS in Spanish-Hebrew bilinguals in Jerusalem. Backus (1992), on the other hand, did find a relationship but in exactly the opposite direction: the two groups of second-generation Turkish migrants in Holland studied by him show the following patterns: (i) the Turkish dominant adolescents from Tilburg switch more intra-sententially; (ii) the more balanced bilinguals from Hilversum favour extra- or inter-sentential switching.

Similar findings emerge from Bentahila & Davies's (1991) comparison of two generations of educated Arabic-French speakers in post-colonial Morocco. Their CS patterns show striking differences, correlated with changes in the roles of the two languages since independence in 1956, which determined the spread of Arabic and a decline in the use of French. They describe four CS styles, each of which has a functional explanation:

(i) Older Generation of Balanced Bilinguals (aged 28-40)

style 1: alternation between whole sentences with a wide range of functions; functional explanation: Arabic and French have equal communicative load;

style 2: French dominant with short switches to Arabic for isolated grammatical items; functional explanation: it is used as an in-group marker to signal solidarity and Moroccan identity;

(ii) Younger Generation Dominant in Arabic (age 16-24)

style 3: Arabic dominant with occasional switches to French for informative items; functional explanation: to suggest sophistication and education;

style 4: large amount of CM with many French lexical items inserted into an Arabic syntactic framework and many verb-internal switches; functional explanation: it offers a compromise between the need for Arabic as a medium for informal conversation and the need for French as a source of technical terminology.

Both Backus's and Bentahila/Davies's balanced bilinguals switch more inter-sententially, while the less proficient ones prefer CM. This point shows that opposing intra- and inter-sentential switching may not be enough to predict degrees of bilingual proficiency. It is important what type of CM is involved: <it is not simply code-mixing as such that requires considerable bilingual proficiency as the diverse and complex switching back and forth between

languages» (Muysken 2000: 228). Similar remarks can also be applied to dialect/standard Italian CS.

Dialect / Standard Language Bilingualism

Almost everywhere in Europe the relevance of the standard varieties in everyday life has increased enormously (cf. Auer 1998b, 2005), because of the mobility in industrialized societies; centralization of the state; spreading of mass-media and changes in educational systems. There are three main linguistic consequences of this phenomenon: (i) a two-sided process of convergence between dialects and standard, in so far the standard takes on regional features (regionalization) while dialects tend both to converge to the standard and to reduce their mutual differences; (ii) the emergence of intermediate varieties between standard and dialects, as the original diglossia evolves into what Bellman (1998: 24) defines as diaglossia, based on «a continuous intermediate scale of features»; (iii) a process of gradual shift towards the standard language.

In Europe, different constellations are to be found (Vandekerckove & Britain 2009): dialects are almost extinct in Denmark; they have undergone dramatic reduction in France and large parts of the Netherlands; in Norway and West Flanders dialects enjoy great vitality; England and Spain are in an intermediate position. In each country one can find a lot of internal variation. In Italy, for example, there is strong inter- and intra-regional as well as socio-demographic variation: in the North West dialect, use is strongly reduced; while in the North East, South and Sicily dialects still enjoy great vitality. Furthermore, dialects are much more used in villages than in towns; by low rather than middle/high class speakers, by older rather than younger people.

Comparison between CS Patterns in different Generations: The Case of Sicily

In Sicily, despite the vitality of dialects, a process of language shift is taking place, which implies that: Italian is more and more often acquired as the mother tongue; the use of dialect is often discouraged or even prohibited by parents; it reduces its functional load, even within the family; significant intergenerational differences in dialect proficiency, patterns of language use, functions and socio-symbolic values of the two codes are to be found. Research based on a large corpus of spontaneous spoken language, recorded in different communicative situations and submitted to syntactic and conversation analysis (Alfonzetti 1992, 2012), shows relevant age-related differences in CS patterns.

Adult balanced Bilinguals' Style

In this style, a central role is played by sociolinguistic and structural neutrality (Muysken 2000). Sociolinguistic neutrality refers to two main conditions which favour a CS pattern definable as «overall switching as the unmarked choice» (Scotton 1988: 161): (i) much functional overlapping and interchangeability of the two codes in informal domains; (ii) the absence of strong sociocultural and ethnic conflicts among speakers. Structural neutrality refers to conditions due to both genetic relationship and structural convergence between Italian and dialect: (i) a great quantity of homophones, which trigger switches in both directions (Clyne 1969); (ii) a general structural equivalence, both linear and categorial.

The combined action of these two kinds of neutrality accounts for the main characteristics of the CS pattern typical of adult balanced bilinguals interacting in informal contexts and in-group communication (Alfonzetti 1992, 1998), i.e.: CS is a widespread form of communicative behaviour in everyday conversation; it works as a neutral mode to express a bilingual and bicultural identity; it occurs frequently within the same conversation and even within the same turn, both between sentences and within the same sentence; it has a high degree of direction reversibility; it serves a wide range of discourse-related functions; it mainly works as a contextualization strategy and acquires its functionality through the contrastive juxtaposition of the two codes. In this style CM is bi-directional, rapid, frequent, smooth, grammatically diverse and syntactically unconstrained; it falls indeed within the strategy defined by Muysken (2000: 122-135) congruent lexicalization: the two varieties contribute equally to the grammatical structure of the sentence, which is largely shared by both; the switch can occur at any point and can involve all categories, even function words and closed-class items; the concept of an ML does not apply to this pattern of switching (Berruto 2005).

Young Generations' CS Styles

Young speakers (aged 14-25) show significant changes in their syntactic and functional CS patterns. In Alfonzetti (2012), two somewhat different styles were detected, largely correlated with two different sociolinguistic variables: urban vs rural/provincial residence and social background/level of education:

(i) the first style (emblematic CS) is typical of young speakers living in towns and with high education: (colloquial) Italian is the base language of their informal speech; CS into dialect is not very frequent; it is mainly extra- or inter-sentential; switched sentences, however, are very short, with such an elementary syntactic structure that their production requires minimal linguistic competence;

(ii) the second style is typical of young speakers living in villages or in towns but with low education: CS is more frequent; it too, like the first style, is mainly extra- or inter-sentential but the switched sentences are longer and syntactically more complex. The two codes have therefore a more equal communicative load (although Italian is usually dominant) and the base

language of their speech can change, as they sometimes alternate bunches of Italian and of dialect sentences.

The first factor which accounts for these two different styles is the degree of bilingual proficiency and age of dialect acquisition. The first group is strongly Italian dominant: Italian is their first language, used in all domains; the local dialect is acquired as L2 through peer-group memberships, a kind of age-group slang learning of very small bits of language (Blommaert & Backus 2011). They closely resemble semi-speakers in situations of language death (Dorian 1989; Nettle & Romaine 2000). The second group has a more balanced competence: dialect is their first language, spoken within the family and within the peer-group with mates coming from the same village or belonging to the same social environment.

A remarkable feature in both groups is that the rapid, bidirectional, smooth type of CM (typical of adult bilinguals) is almost absent, even in the group of balanced bilinguals. This contradicts Poplack's hypothesis (cf. 1.), which is partially confirmed instead by the CS pattern typical of the first group: they are not balanced bilinguals *ergo* they rarely switch intra-sententially. But why do young balanced bilinguals also seldom use CM? I will try to answer this question later on.

The second factor accounting for the two styles is the variety of functions dialect plays. In the *first group's repertoire*, dialect has undergone a drastic functional specialization: it is never used as the normal medium of everyday conversation with referential/informative functions. CS in a dialect serves only two main pragmatic functions. The first is to perform acts with a humorous key, often signalled by laughter of the speaker and/or of the audience, as in (1). Just speaking the dialect can sometimes provoke laughter (no matter what is said), as happens with all obsolescent languages, which tend to develop comic connotations (Weinreich 1953):

(1) *Humourous function*

In the classroom

- Am14¹ [he sneezes loudly]
 Bm14 madonna! [laughing] *ma cchi cci ai u vulcanu ntô nasu?*
 [goodness me! but do you have a volcano in your nose?]

At the catechism

- Teach. Gesù dov'è stato per quaranta giorni? [...]
 [Where did Jesus stay for forty days?]
 [all] nel deserto! [in the desert!]
 Teach. e come li ha passati questi giorni? col computer? con la radio?
 la televisione? ... NO! DA SOLO! ... ha mangiato? ... No:::
 [and how did he spend these days? with the computer? with the
 radio? TV? ... NO! BY HIMSELF! ... and did he eat? ...
 NO:::!]
 Fm10 ha digiunato! [he fasted!]

¹Speakers are identified with capital letters; *f* and *m* refer to female and male gender; numbers indicate age.

Teach. bravo! e perché ha digiunato? [good! and why did he fast?]
 Fm10 *picchi non c'aveva fami!* [because he was not hungry!]
 [everybody laughs]

The second function is to strengthen the pragmatic force of aggressive speech acts, such as insults, curses, threats, quarrels, etc., as in excerpts (2):

(2) *Reinforcing function*

In the classroom

[the teacher tells the pupils to take their exercise-books]

Af14 non lo sapevo che dovevo portare anche il quaderno degli
 esercizi

[I didn't know I had to bring my exercise-book too]

Vm14 non ti ricordi mai niente tu!

[you never remember anything!]

Af14 V, ora ti rugnu na iancata ntâ facci!

[V, now I'll box you about the ears!]

University students

[A had a struggle with her boyfriend and asks B about him]

Af hai visto R? [did you see R?]

Bf oggi mentre faceva il lavoro part-time

[today while he was doing his part time job]

Cf come lo vedo gli pianto un pugno in faccia che gli faccio cascare tutti i
 denti che ha ... lo stronzo che non è altro anzi *u strunzu* che non è
 altro

[when I meet him I'll punch him in the face and knock his teeth out.

He's nothing less than a bastard ... or rather *a bastard*]

The last example clearly shows the use of CS as a reinforcing device: the Italian offensive epithet *stronzo* ('bastard') is replaced by the dialectal equivalent *strunzu*, introduced by the correction marker *anzi* ('or rather'), which signals that it is not just a repetition but a real repair. This implies that a word is felt to be more offensive just because it is spoken in dialect.

In the second group's repertoire the process of dialect functional specialization is much less advanced. Speakers from villages and/or with low education use CS also to contextualize major situational changes, especially interlocutor-related, as in (3):

(3) *In the classroom*

[a pupil comes back into his own classroom and addresses his mates]

Bm14 allora ascoltatemi! v'ai'a ddiri na cosa ... parrài in italianu nâ l'autri
 classi ccà pozzu parrari n dialettu [...]

[well listen to me! I've to tell you something ... I spoke Italian in the
 other classrooms I can speak dialect here]

Examples of situational CS like this seem to imply a sharper separation between Italian (*they-code*) and dialect (*we-code*) than that found in older

generations. And this might explain why young speakers, even if balanced bilinguals, use very little CM. The complex, grammatically diverse, frequent, smooth back and forth unfunctional mixing (typical of the older fluent bilinguals) requires indeed good mastery of both linguistic systems, but also all conditions of sociolinguistic neutrality, which no longer seem to hold for younger generations. One might say that social constraints lead to grammatical ones (Lantto 2012). This is reflected in some distinguishing features of young speakers' CM, i.e.: most switches are functionally motivated and are made salient in order to explicitly show speakers' full awareness of and control over their use of the dialect. Therefore they are often marked by some *flagging device* (hesitation, repetition, intonational highlighting, explicit metalinguistic commentaries, laughing, etc.) to draw attention to the switching itself, as in (4). By so doing, young speakers tend to behave in the manner of what Weinreich considered the «ideal bilingual» (1953: 73):

(4) *Flagging by explicit commentary*

[a student is complaining about her ex-boyfriend's rude behaviour]

Bf se ne stava andando senza salutarmi ... ha salutato tutti tranne me e mi è passato a *ttàgghiu* come si suol dire

[he was leaving without saying goodbye to me. He said goodbye to everybody but me and he passed by *beside me* as they say]

Several clues seem to demonstrate that the fluent, competent and spontaneous use of the dialect on the part of young speakers is often considered to be a sign of social inferiority and/or of provincialism. Consequently, it is indeed sometimes censored by overt stigmatization, teasing and parody, as is clearly shown in (5):

(5) At the disco

[a young couple is looking at a boy dancing in a funny way]

Am20 guarda! *chiddu pari n ariddu ca sàuta com'abballa* [laughing]
[look! *he looks like a jumping cricket the way he's dancing!*]

Bf19 cos'hai detto? [what did you say?]

Am Sembra un *ariddu* [he looks like a *cricket*]
[long pause]

Am un grillo che salta ... *au! ma s'è ntrunata?*
[a jumping cricket ... *hey! but are you still asleep?*]

Bf ma che ci posso fare se quando parli pari ostrogoto!
[but what can I do if when you speak you seem to be an 'Ostrogoth!']

Am Va bene! è ar/*arrivàu chidda ca sapi tutti cosi, a ddottoressa!*
...Anch'io so parlare bene, però:
[that's all right! she ha/*the one who knows everything arrived, the educated one!* ... I can speak well too but]
[they both go on looking at the boy dancing]

Am ma è proprio *scunchiurutu!*
[but he is really *ridiculous*] [they both laugh]

This kind of data seems to put into question a widespread opinion in Italian sociolinguistics today, according to which dialects have lost the derogatory social meaning they had in the past. Actually, what rather seems to be accepted and positively evaluated by the young Italian-oriented urban generations is just a reduced, controlled, symbolic use of the dialect, whose expressive connotations are exploited in a CS style which must be overtly shown to be an intentional communicative strategy.

Language Shift in Sicily?

Changes in speakers' attitudes and in the dialect socio-symbolic values determine significant intergenerational variation in CS patterns. Attitudes are indeed central to language change, as they may determine processes of language shift (Gal 1979). In this respect, one may wonder if the CS patterns emerging from my research provide evidence for a language shift. The question is very hard to answer because of contradictory clues which will be summarized here.

On the one hand, fewer and fewer children acquire the dialect as their mother tongue; on the other, it is acquired anyway as a second language at a later stage in life within the peer group. After puberty, however, a full competence is very hard to achieve: what kind of dialect will they be able to transmit?

Dialects seem to be still partly associated with low education and/or provincialism and yet they are undergoing re-evaluation. They are losing their main function as a medium for everyday communication but have recently gained ground in several domains, such as pop songs, rap music, theatre performances, cartoon strips and, above all, in electronic media (texts, mails, chats, blogs, social networks), a real stimulus to their use. As a consequence, dialects, traditionally defined as spoken varieties, have become also written ones in young speakers' repertoire.

Several kinds of reasons can be mentioned to explain why dialects are being re-evaluated: (i) because people usually start cherishing what is perceived to have become rare and fear losing it; (ii) because young people tend to violate parents' prohibition to speak a dialect and enjoy performing a streetwise identity attributed to lower class youngsters, overtly despised but unconsciously admired; (iii) for a renewed interest in the role dialects play as local identity markers, as means of emotion and solidarization, partly in reaction to globalization. Last but not least, (iv) because their use helps to satisfy the need of a non-conformist and creative use of language which leads young people, especially in electronic media, to follow the norm of *polylingualism*: i.e. to employ «whatever linguistic features are at their disposal to achieve their communicative aims as best as they can, regardless of how well they know the involved languages» and «without regard to norms of linguistic purity» (Jørgensen *et al.*, 2011: 34 and 32). This is what happens in (6) where, in excerpts taken from several kinds of electronic media, bits of foreign languages (English, Spanish, French, German, Latin) and of various

local dialects (from Sicily, Rome, Naples, Northern Italy) are inserted into a basis of informal Italian:

(6) *Polylinguaging*

I LOST YOU!! (*ti pessi!*) (English/Sicilian translation)

Dani ti aspetto domattina alle 9, colazione insieme, *ergo* non mangiare! [Italian/Latin]

[Dani, see you tomorrow morning at 9, let's have breakfast together, *therefore* do not eat]

Amour, sono a casa perché non mi sento bene, se puoi mi porti un'aspirina? [French/Italian]

[*Love*, I'm at home because I'm not well, can you bring me an aspirin?]

Tomorrow ore 18 sei invitata all'inaugurazione dell'asilo di xxx. Mi rakkomando vacchi xkè c'è e poi *sa pigghia cu mia...*☺ [English/Italian/Sicilian]

[*Tomorrow* at 6 p.m., you're invited to the opening ceremony of xxx's kindergarten. Please go because he cares about that and then *lays the blame on me*]

Hola mora soy Giorgio. Ti aspettavo da tempo. dove possiamo incontrarci? [Spanish/Italian]

[*Hello brown-eyed girl I'm* Giorgio. I've been waiting for you for a long time. Where can we meet?]

Ohi, ma che stai *a fa*? Fammi sap. :- ([Italian/dialect from Rome]
[What are you *doing*? Let me know]

Non ne hai letto neanche una riga, *neh?* *Hier kommt die Sonne...* [Italian/dialect from Turin/German]

[You didn't read it at all, *did you?* *Her comes the sun*]

Young people use these fragments for fun: they like playing with languages, treating the linguistic materials as toys to manipulate, mix, turn around, take apart and put together again in new combinations (Jørgensen 2005: 398). The question whether dialects will disappear and when, is hard and perhaps useless to answer. What one can say for sure is that dialects, together with other languages, enter young speakers' repertoire in «very small bits» through different learning trajectories (Blommaert & Backus 2011: 12) and acquire several functions: they serve to typify and identify them; they contribute the potential to perform certain social roles, inhabit certain identities, be seen in a particular way by others, who affiliate or disaffiliate with them. In short, they become indexical resources: language materials that enable them to produce more than just linguistic meaning but social and cultural images of themselves. They are of course unstable and, as everything else, may change several times during the individual's life span.

Concluding Remarks

I would like to conclude by going back to the issue concerning the relative role of external and internal linguistic factors in determining CS patterns (cf. 1). After an early stage in which grammatical constraints specific to particular constructions were proposed, and a second one in which the search for universal constraints was dominant, in the present stage a fairly common trend seems to prevail which, even if from different theoretical backgrounds, points towards the simplest assumptions about what constrains CS. MacSwan (2013: 234), for example, within the Minimalist Program, proposes as a research agenda that «nothing constrains code-switching apart from the requirements of the mixed grammars». From a sociolinguistic perspective, also Berruto (2011: 281) comes to the conclusion that switching can occur at any point in the sentence provided that the syntactic rules of both languages involved are not violated. This leads to accepting the existence of alternative strategies, linked to different language pairs and contact situations, each of which may be differently constrained or even not constrained at all. These differences – it might be argued – are due to typological characteristics of the languages involved: typologically distant language pairs seem to favour insertional strategies, while typologically similar languages favour both congruent lexicalization or alternation. And yet, within the same community and between the same two languages, a generational shift in the prevailing CS patterns does occur, as has been demonstrated here. This shows that typological considerations should not be overestimated.

In migrant settings, for example, the type of CS often shifts across generations from insertion to alternation or congruent lexicalization, and then to insertion again but in the other direction, according to changes in bilingual proficiency. In standard Italian/dialect contact, conditions of structural neutrality – which favour congruent lexicalization in older generations – are overridden by sociolinguistic changes which lead youngsters, even proficient bilinguals, to modify their CS behaviour. This means that the occurrence of a particular switching strategy may often be traced to the influence of factors outside the domain of syntax, such as *age*, which interacts with other socio- and psycho-linguistic factors. Therefore, intergenerational variation in CS patterns puts into serious doubt the assumption that there is one CS pattern per language pair and also what this assumption implies: i.e. that social and situational factors influencing CS only have a minor auxiliary function with respect to the dominant primary role of linguistic properties.

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