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THE DEMOCRATIC LANGUAGE POLICY OF PLURILINGUAL CODE-SWITCHING: A COMPARATIVE STUDY ACROSS MINORITY LANGUAGE COMMUNITIES

The complex linguistic scenario in present-day Italy is still not fully acknowledged by an appropriate provision of democratic language policies promoting minority languages alongside Italian as the official language of the country. Nevertheless, the concept of language policy cannot be restricted to institutional provisions alone as it also encompasses the language practices and beliefs of all the minority communities present on the national territory. This key aspect allows for a major democratization of language policy and for its promotion at grassroots level. This paper advocates the importance of conducting research on the specific language practice of plurilingual code-switching (PCS) across standard and non-standard varieties, and also on disclosing related beliefs held by minority community members. In this light, an empirical survey was conducted across three minority communities in the southern Italian region of Calabria, namely, Albanian, Occitan, and Filipino. Data was collected on sample informants' attitudes towards PCS and on their acceptability judgments, based on the criteria of the integrated model of PCS we propose. Findings from the comparative analysis generally highlight positive attitudes towards PCS, although noticeable differences in terms of language practices and beliefs were found across the three communities. The study thus contributes to highlighting the importance of adopting a bottom-up approach to better promote democratic language policies as it discloses the policies of single communities, which can inform institutional language policymakers.

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1. Democratic Language Policies and Plurilingual Code-Switching

Global socio-economic drives are contributing to the reconfiguration of traditional linguistic landscapes as a result of increasing migratory fluxes and of the subsequent rise of new minority communities. Nevertheless, language policies mostly continue to promote the official language of a country, resulting in a "[...] pejorative 'positioning' of minority languages and their speakers [...]" (May 2006: 257). While policies are still not properly implemented, the notion of language policy cannot be limited to institutional levels. Alongside the institutional component of language management, language policy also incorporates the language practices and beliefs of a speech community (Spolsky 2004). In this view, research can contribute to grassroots or bottom-up policymaking (Johnson 2013) through the use of *policy devices*, or "[...] different mechanisms used implicitly or covertly to create de facto language policies" (Shohamy 2006: 57).

This study adopts the *policy device* of studying the complex context of language use more closely, as suggested by Ricento (2000). It specifically springs from the longstanding institutional inadequacy shown by the Italian Parliament, which has still not ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages introduced in 1992 to protect and promote historical regional and minority languages in Europe (Coluzzi 2007). In response to this void, the Italian Linguistic Society (*Società di Linguistica Italiana*) issued "Seven Theses for the Promotion of Democratic Language Policies" in 2013¹. The first thesis underlines how:

for a democratic language policy, it is fundamental to recognize that each language system has equal dignity both for those who use it – as a native or non-native variety – and for whoever holds political and administrative decision-making roles (p. 2; our translation).

In this bottom-up and top-down policymaking approach, the second thesis values both standard and non-standard varieties:

every historical-natural language is to be considered in all its components of variation and variability, regardless of the presence of a standard variety (p. 2; our translation).

Available at: http://riviste.unimi.it/index.php/promoitals/article/view/3116/3308.

The thesis clearly refers to plurilingualism as a permeating feature of the Italian linguistic scenario, but also draws attention to the current legislative void. After the legal recognition of twelve minority languages in 1999, numerous other regional varieties historically present in Italy have been completely ignored. Similarly, the phenomenon of Italian neoplurilingualism (Vedovelli 2013), arising from the new linguistic entity built by migrants (cf. Pala 2005). has been so far neglected. As migrants' already complex linguistic repertoire inserts itself on the local one made up of Italian and dialect (cf. Guerini 2002), we argue that the use of a more composite repertoire is increasingly characterized by the language practice of plurilingual code-switching (PCS), or the alternation between more languages. While a truly democratic language policy thus needs to take PCS into account, this relatively new practice requires expanding bottom-up research as a key policy device for several reasons. First, it is no longer tenable to conduct research on recurring PCS practices supported by traditional bilingual code-switching (CS) models (Auer 1984, Grosjean 2008). The co-existence of standard and non-standard varieties needs to be investigated using a holistic approach. Second, it is important to integrate traditional research methods which have focussed either on sociolinguistic or on psycholinguistic variables without seeking their dynamic interplay also with lexicalist variables. Third, this kind of bottom-up research can only be implemented following the design of an integrated model of plurilingual code-switching (Plastina and Selvaggi 2016, Selvaggi 2016) as an implicit mechanism (Shohamy 2006) supporting a *de facto* language policy.

2. The Integrated Model of Plurilingual Code-Switching

The starting point of the proposed model is the sociolinguistic situation of a minority community with its three main variables: the languages used by community members, the kind of contact between these, and their status (Figure 1). In detail, the *common language* is usually the standard national variety (e.g. Italian); *minority languages* are those regularly used in specific areas, while additional languages (e.g. foreign languages) are those used occasionally.

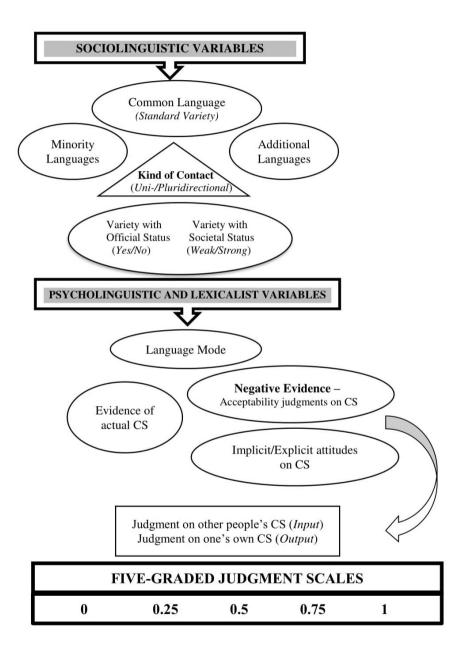


Figure 1. The Integrated Model of Plurilingual Code-Switching (Plastina and Selvaggi 2016, Selvaggi 2016)

A valid analytical comparison across different language properties is thus made possible. All languages are then categorized in terms of *contact*, which can be one-way from the minority to the majority community via the societal dominant language (*unidirectional*), or both ways from the minority to the majority community and viceversa via different varieties (*pluridirectional*). Languages are then classified for their *status* based on: institutional recognition (*official status*: yes/no); the number of speakers/generations and domains of use (*societal status*: weak/strong).

Moreover, as community practices influence individual language beliefs, identifying the prevailing community language mode (Grosjean 2001) helps shed light on practices considered as actual CS evidence, usually collected from real conversations in natural situations, or even elicited and recorded in controlled environments. This step is key to investigating two main psycholinguistic and lexicalist variables²: attitudes towards CS and acceptability judgments of CS utterances. By attitude, we refer to people's positive/negative beliefs towards their own socio-cultural identity and language(s); by acceptability judgment, we mean a reported perception of "how good, or acceptable, a sentence sounds" (Sprouse et al. 2013: 220) based on: the gradience of sentence comprehension (comprehensible vs. incomprehensible); the frequency of the sentence (usual vs. unusual); the *possibility/grammaticality* of the sentence (possible vs. impossible; grammatical vs. ungrammatical) (MacSwan 1999, Selvaggi 2016). In detail, attitudes are *implicit* when they lie at the unconscious level, and explicit when they are at the conscious level and therefore easy to self-report. Attitudes can be formed towards both one's own CS (inner) and that of others (outer). Acceptability judgments, instead, are introspective, and can be made on other people's CS (input) and one's own CS (output). Hence, while capturing members' attitudes can provide insights into PCS practice as they evaluate "some degree of favor or disfavour" (Eagly and Chaiken 1993: 1) towards linguistic stimuli, individual introspective acceptability judgments are also key to disclosing local community language policies.

When applied, the proposed model supports empirical data collection via questionnaires, tests and interviews, designed particularly according to the psychological construct of *self-perception*, given that "total self-perception is nothing more than linguistic competence" (Titone 1999: 112; our translation). Measures of acceptability judgments are provided along a five-point scale on a range from 0 for completely inacceptable, 0.25 for scarcely acceptable, 0.50 for partially acceptable, 0.75 for largely acceptable to 1 for completely acceptable.

² Lexicalist variables refer to all the morphosyntactical properties of single lexemes, and their possible/impossible combinations (cf. MacSwan 1999).

3. The Bottom-up Survey as a Language Policy Device

3.1. Aim and Method

The current bottom-up study aims at investigating the attitudes towards and acceptability judgements of PCS within minority language communities by addressing two main research questions:

- 1) What are the explicit attitudes of minorities towards plurilingual code-switching?
- 2) What kind of acceptability patterns of plurilingual code-switching do informants show?

The study was theoretically framed by our proposed model in the mix-method research. The survey method was implemented in the design of a semi-structured questionnaire and interview formats to collect data through the use of purposive sampling, which is suitable for studying specific groups.

3.2. The Minority Communities

Three minority communities settled in the province of Cosenza (Calabria, Italy) were involved in the study. The Albanian and Occitan communities were chosen as historical minority language communities, whereas the Filipino community was selected as a new-immigrant community. Although Standard Italian was not the native variety across the historical communities, it has recently attained this status among the younger generations alongside the local Calabrian dialect, which is part of the Romance language family. While majority Calabrians are mostly bilingual (standard Italian and local dialect), minority members are, instead, *de facto* plurilingual, and standard Italian is the only common variety in contact (Selvaggi 2016).

In detail, Arbëreshë and Occitan are two non-standard varieties, which so far have not developed their own stable script and usually take advantage of the script systems used for the standardized varieties spoken respectively in Albania and France. In terms of formal language policy, both varieties are officially protected as autochthonous codes since 1999 at the national level and in 2003 even at the regional level. However, they are seen as threatened (Ethnologue³) or "definitely endangered" (UNESCO⁴).

³ Source: www.ethnologue.com

⁴ UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger (www.unesco.org/culture/languages-atlas/en/atlasmap/language-id-1339.html).

Arbëreshë is spoken in 40 Calabrian communities as a "non-covered dialect" (Altimari 2002; our translation), given that its speakers generally do not know the literary or standard Albanian variety. Arbëreshë is thus in linguistic regression due to the strong influence of the surrounding latinophone communities and of Standard Italian.

Occitan, instead, is a collection of Romance varieties originally used in Southern France, and whose written use rapidly decreased after the 16th century. The variety named *Guardiolo*, spoken in Guardia Piemontese in Calabria as a consequence of Middle-Age settlements of Piedmontese farmers, is most likely a mix of several Piedmontese Occitan dialects with a few borrowings from the Calabrian dialect. It is now spoken by no more than 600 people as physical persecutions and the enforcement of acts explicitly forbad its use from 1592 to the XIX century.

On the other hand, the new immigrant community of Filipinos arises in Calabria in the early '90s with the growing request of domestic workers. About 700 members, currently belonging to this community based in the city of Cosenza, speak two standard varieties, namely Filipino (an Austronesian language mostly based on the Tagalog variety) and English. Most Filipinos also use *Taglish*, a mixed Filipino-English variety with Filipino in dominant position, *Englog*, a mixed English-Filipino variety with English in dominant role, and/or the local Iloko and Kapampangan varieties (Ang 1978).

3.3. Participants and Research Tools

Overall, 124 randomly chosen informants took part in this survey, and more specifically, Italo-Albanians/Arbëreshës (N = 68), Filipinos (N = 40) and Occitans (N = 16). Italo-Albanians and Filipinos were asked to complete the designed semi-structured PCS questionnaire respectively related to Italian-Calabrese-Arbëreshë and Italian-Filipino-English PCS. Data were collected on informants' linguistic biography, code-switching practices and attitudes and on their acceptability judgments. Due to the small sample of Occitan informants, interviews were considered more suitable to collect richer qualitative data based on PCS between Italian-Calabrese-Occitan. Interviews were structured similarly to questionnaires, but they also included a final session on bilingual education and language planning/policy.

4. Survey Results

4.1. Sociolinguistic findings

Although PCS was a popular language practice, the sociolinguistic situation differed slightly across the three minority communities (Table 1). While Italo-Albanians and Filipinos share a strong social status of their minority language, the status of Occitan is weak, especially in young generations and mixed families. Arbëreshë and Occitan varieties are legally recognised since 1999, whereas Filipino and English lack official status in Italy.

Sociolinguistic Variables	Arbëreshë	Occitan	Filipino	English	Italian	Calabrese
Type of variety	Non Standard	Non Standard	Standard	Standard	Standard	Non standard
Social Status	Strong	Weak (especially in young generations and mixed families)	Strong	Strong	Dominant	Strong
Official Status	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Prestige	Medium	Medium	High	High	High	Medium

Table 1. The sociolinguistic situation across the three minority communities

The social prestige of the minority language is medium for Arbëreshë and Occitan, but high for Filipino as it is a standard variety. Since the majority group in Calabria does not usually speak minority varieties, language contact is featured by *unidirectional plurilingualism* for all minorities, and particularly by *unidirectional neoplurilingualism* in the Filipino community, where Italian is added to members' prior plurilingual repertoire. Moreover, the *bilingual mode* resulted as the default *language mode* of Italo-Albanians and Occitans as Arbëreshë-Italian and Occitan-Italian are respectively used most of the time. A *trilingual mode* was detected, instead, among Filipinos, who also use a third language, especially when listening concurrently to English TV programmes with Italian subtitles and to Filipino ones with English subtitles (Table 2). This confirms a co-activation of all three languages in *non-selective* mode thanks to auditory and visual semiotic systems (Plastina 2014).

Minority Community	N° Informants				
Arbëreshës	Arbëreshë	Albanian	Calabrese	Italian	
Bilingual mode: Arbëreshë+Italian	51	13	26	66	
Occitans	Occitan	Italian	English	Calabrese	
Bilingual Mode: Occitan+Italian	16	15	2	-	
Filipinos	Filipino	Italian	English	Calabrese	
Trilingual Mode: Filipino+Italian+English	40	40	40	5	

Table 2. Prevailing language mode across the minority communities

Findings for communicative domains show that all minority languages are predominantly used in informal domains (family, friends and entertainment), while Italian is used in formal communicative situations (work and school) (Table 3).

Languages	Formal Domains		Inform	al Domains	5	
	Work	School	Travel	Family	Friends	Entertainment
Italian	19	37	-	27	27	40
Arbëreshë	31	35	28	44	48	28
Italian	8	10	16	1	16	16
Occitan	1	-	-	16	16	16
Italian	34	10	8	5	16	20
Filipino	4	17	2	34	26	16
English	5	23	30	5	17	33

Table 3. Language(s) used in various communicative domains

As for the frequency of personal CS practice, Filipinos claimed to code-switch *always* (46.25%) or *often* (50%); Occitans *always* (25%) or *often* (31.25%), while Italo-Albanians distributed their answers more equally across the frequency range (Table 4).

Self-perception	I always	I often	I rarely	I never	Total
	code-switch	code-switch	code-switch	code-switch	
Italo-Albanians	5	29	30	4	68
	(7%)	(43%)	(44%)	(6%)	(100%)
Occitans	4	5	2	5	16
	(25%)	(31.25%)	(12.50%)	(31.25%)	(100%)
Filipinos	17	20	2	1	40
	(46.25%)	(50%)	(2.5%)	(1.25%)	(100%)

Table 4. Frequency of personal CS practice

4.2. Psycholinguistic Findings

Personal attitudes towards PCS were filtered as not all informants provided responses. Data analysis was thus based on a sample of 66 Italo-Albanians, 16 Occitans and 35 Filipinos (94.4% of the informants). Positive attitudes were found across all informants who perceived PCS as a help in plurilingual (PL) interpersonal communication with the Occitans outstanding the others (87.5%). Italo-Albanian and Filipino informants also showed a positive attitude in terms of good PL oral skills (respectively 52% and 48.5%). This clearly denotes positive explicit attitudes towards PCS, suggesting that it is a *de facto* language policy. Low percentages were consistently recorded for negative attitudes referring to *something to avoid in PL conversation* (8.6%-14%), and to *something to strongly repress in PL conversation* (0%-8.6%). No neutral attitudes were recorded (Table 5).

	Positive attitude		Neutral attitude	Negative attitude	
	Helps in PL interperson- al communica- tion	Sign of good PL oral skills	Neither good nor bad in PL	Something to avoid in PL conversation	Something to strongly repress in PL conversation
Italo-Albanians (<i>N</i> =66)	19 (29%)	34 (52%)	-	9 (14%)	4 (6%)
Occitans (<i>N</i> =16)	14 (87.5)	-	-	2 (12.50%)	-
Filipinos (N=35)	12 (34.3%)	17 (48.6%)	-	3 (8.6%)	3 (8.6%)

Table 5. Informants' attitudes towards PCS

As for acceptability judgments, informants were provided off-line written stimuli on intrasentential and intersentential CS, using the graded scale (0-1) proposed in our model (Table 6).

Values	1	0.75	0.5	0.25	0		
Judgement descriptors	S/he speaks very well	S/he speaks well	S/he ma- kes him/ herself understo- od	S/he speaks badly	S/he speaks very badly		
INTRASENTENT	IAL						
Italo-Albanians	1	14	28	19	4		
(N=66)	(2%)	(21%)	(42%)	(29%)	(6%)		
Occitans	12	2	1	-	1		
(N=16)	(75%)	(12.50%)	(6.25%)		(6.25%)		
Filipinos	* 27 (73%)	4	1	1	4		
(N=37)		(10.8%)	(2.7%)	(2.7%)	(10.8%)		
INTERSENTENTI	INTERSENTENTIAL						
Italo-Albanians	2	14	33	13	4		
(N=66)	(3%)	(21%)	(50%)	(20%)	(6%)		
Occitans	6	4	4	-	1		
(N=16)	(42.75%)	(25%)	(25%)		(6.25%)		
Filipinos (N=37)	** Characterial judgement only						

Table 6. Acceptability judgments: intrasentential and intersentential CS

Italo-Albanian judgments were concentrated mostly at the intermediate value (0.5) for both intrasentential (42%) and intersentential (50%) CS stimuli, thus showing neuter acceptability. Instead, Occitans high-rated (value=1) both intrasentential (75%) and intersentential (42.75%) CS stimuli. Filipino judgements are provided only for intrasentential CS as acceptability judgement was replaced by characterial judgment on intersentential CS in order to test a possible correlation with findings from Bautista's study (1980).

High ratings (value=1) were found for intrasentential switching between Filipino and English (73%). Conversely, ratings not reported in Table 6 referring to intrasentential switching between English and Filipino were found to lie in the negative range. These data suggest that Filipinos adopt a *de facto* language policy of practising Tagalog-English code-switching in the Philippines or in other similar communities around the world (Bautista 1980).

5. Concluding Remarks

This research has investigated the issue of promoting democratic language policies, advocating the importance of PCS practices in historical and new minorities, and related language beliefs. Although findings are small-scaled, they shed light on informants' attitudes and acceptability judgments.

On one hand, attitudes towards PCS were extremely positive across all three minority communities. Informants overtly acknowledged the importance of valuing this language practice as an important component of more democratic language policies; on the other, their acceptability judgments reported significant differences across the complex PCS contexts. Positive acceptability ratings (higher than the value of 0.5) were detected for most Filipinos and Occitans, especially for ratings at the intrasentential level; Italo-Albanians exhibited neuter-prevalent ratings (equal to the value of 0.5) and a neatly higher percentage of negative judgments (inferior to 0.5). These results suggest an implicit rejection of PCS or even a scarce reliance on it as a functional communicative strategy. Further research within other minority communities is necessary to verify whether there is a clear preference for intrasentential CS over its intersentential counterpart.

Overall, our research suggests that the implementation of true democratic language policies promoting PCS should include at least the following steps. First, minority community members need to be increasingly involved in defining the kind of plurilingualism and CS which can be fostered. In our study, PCS practice was found to be extremely frequent among Filipinos and Occitans, but less among Italo-Albanians. Raising majority language speakers' awareness may also be an implicit policy device for the promotion of minority languages currently confined mostly to informal communicative domains. Finally, policy-makers should be made fully aware that the default monolingual mode is a theoretical construct as speakers and even language learners commonly operate in the bilingual language mode (Plastina 2017), or in a trilingual language mode as in the case observed with the Filipinos.

In sum, the current research has contributed to highlighting the importance of adopting a bottom-up approach as it discloses the policies of single communities, which can more readily inform institutional language policymakers.

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Demokratska politika jezika višejezičnoga prebacivanje kodova: Komparativna analiza govora manjinskih zajednica

Sažetak

U ovome radu iznose se rezultati empiričkoga istraživanja o jezičnoj praksi višejezičnoga prebacivanja koda (VPK) u sklopu triju manjinskih zajednica koje borave u južnoj talijanskoj regiji Kalabriji. Istraživanjem se proučavaju stavovi i procjene prihvatljivosti slučajnoga uzorka ispitanika u pogledu prakse VPK-a, u okviru integriranoga modela VPK-a kojega autori predlažu. Podatci ukazuju na ukupni pozitivan stav prema VPK-u te na značajne razlike politika lokalne zajednice. Naime, istraživanjem se potvrđuje da su jezične prakse i vjerovanja ključni pokretači demokratskih jezičnih politika za promicanje manjinskih jezika, osobito kada iste nisu zastupljene na institucionalnoj razini kao u slučaju Italije.

Ključne riječi: višejezično prebacivanje koda, demokratske jezične politike, stavovi, procjene prihvatljivosti

Keywords: plurilingual code-switching, democratic language policies, attitudes, acceptability judgements