

Intergenerational variation in code switching. Some remarks

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This paper deals with intergenerational variation in syntactic and functional CS patterns in different contact situations: post-colonial settings, migrant communities and particularly standard language/dialect bilingualism in Italy. It is shown that the occurrence of a particular switching strategy may often be traced to the influence of factors outside the domain of syntax, as it largely depends on socio- and psycholinguistic factors interacting with age. This calls into question the assumption that there is one CS pattern per language pair and also what this assumption implies, i.e. that extralinguistic factors play only a minor auxiliary role in code switching with respect to the dominant primary role of internal linguistic properties.

1. Introduction

Code switching (CS) has been analyzed from different theoretical perspectives, but most research in recent decades has concentrated on the search for universal syntactic conditions and constraints. Even within the most universally biased models sociolinguistic variables are accorded some role (Meyers-Scotton 1993a), but their latitude has not proved to be wide enough to account for the varied manifestations of CS across different contact situations. The relative contribution of external and internal linguistic factors underlying CS therefore remains an important issue in present-day research.

The most fruitful way to approach this problem is to carry out comparisons in which some variables are kept constant (Muysken 1991). If one compares the same language pair in similar settings but in different speech communities, differences emerging in CS patterns are likely to depend on sociolinguistic factors (Gardner-Chloros 1995: 81). To mention just one case, which questions the universal validity of the notion of a matrix language (ML): whereas Mexican-American Spanish/English CS (Pfaff 1979) is of the insertional type, for which a ML needs to be postulated, Puerto Rican Spanish/English CS (Poplack 1980) belongs to the alternational type or to congruent lexicalization, neither of which require the notion of a ML, either because language choice in the former may change during the production of a sentence or because both linguistic systems contribute in

the latter to the grammatical structure of the sentence (Muysken 2000:114).¹

Another revealing comparison is between the same languages in two different settings – a post-colonial context and a migrant community for example – already hinted at by Nartey (1982). He wonders whether West Africans living in Great Britain might use differently constrained strategies than those who live in West Africa, because of the different prestige status of English in the two sociopolitical environments. The suggestion is that a universal theory of CS should look beyond mere linguistic behaviour, because once we start to ask questions about the relationship of a given structural constraint to the social background, “we find a very interesting dimension that the linguistic facts alone do not allow us to see” (1982:190).

This point was recently demonstrated by Berruto (2004): comparing the behaviour of determiners in Italian/German CS in three different settings, he shows that sociolinguistic conditions interfere with the internal linguistic categories of Myers-Scotton’s (1993b) model.

Determiners and function words in general exhibit a special behaviour in CS which can be explained by two main hypotheses (Muysken 2000:156).² According to the first, it derives from their special status within the mental lexicon and language production (Myers-Scotton 1993b:48).³ With respect to determiners in German/Italian mixing in particular, Myers-Scotton & Jake (1995:1009-1010) argue that lack of congruence between German and Italian definite articles at the functional level, and maybe also at the conceptual level, explains some asymmetries found in a corpus of second-generation Italian immigrants: when Swiss German is the ML, Embedded Language islands consisting of Italian NPs (DET + N) occur freely. But when the ML is Italian, German nouns are used with an Italian determiner.

A similar corpus of Swiss German/Italian CS analyzed by Berruto (2004) seems to confirm this type of asymmetry. But in a different sociolinguistic setting – i.e. the Walser minority of Gressoney in Northern Italy, where CS involves Italian and a local variety of German (Titsch) – such asymmetry is not to be found. A comparison in a third sociolinguistic setting, involving the same language pair – i.e. an ex-migrant German/Italian bilingual family returning to Italy – shows a totally different configuration: determiners are mostly drawn from German when either Italian or German is the ML and this of course openly contradicts Myers-Scotton & Jake’s explanation.

In the second hypothesis, proposed by Muysken (2000:156), the

special behaviour of function words derives from lack of equivalence of these elements across languages.⁴ One can in principle agree with Muysken's assumption that neutrality through categorial equivalence facilitates code mixing (CM),⁵ as is clearly demonstrated by standard Italian/dialect CS, where determiners and other function elements are freely mixed (Alfonzetti 1992a).

But how can we explain the different behaviour of determiners in three settings where the same two languages – Italian and German – are involved?

An answer is provided by Muysken (1991:253) himself: categorial equivalence should not be conceived as a purely objective notion, because both diachronic and sociolinguistic factors may contribute to determine it. If one adopts a broader perspective, which allows one to go beyond the merely internal linguistic dimension, one might find that “one bilingual speech community does not recognize the categories from different languages as equivalent, and another one does” and that this different recognition “may be due to frequency of use, degree and kind of bilingualism, and language attitudes” (Muysken 2000:58).

This is exactly what Berruto (2004) clearly shows: an intrinsically grammatical fact – i.e. determiner selection in CM – does not only depend on general linguistic principles and the structural properties of the languages involved, which are the same in all three cases, i.e. Italian and (a local variety of) German. It appears to be strongly influenced by the kind of bilingualism which characterizes each of the three different contact situations: balanced bilingualism in second-generation migrants in Switzerland (for whom both Schwyzertütsh and Italian are identity languages, endowed with equal prestige and social acceptability); strongly asymmetrical bilingualism in Gressoney (where the minority language enjoys no prestige at all and is undergoing a process of dramatic decline); a case of subtractive bilingualism or even semi-bilingualism in the ex-migrant family.

General linguistic principles and structural properties of the languages involved – especially typological similarities and differences – are, of course, among the most relevant factors influencing CS as they set the limits on what is possible (Backus 1992:262). And yet such limits are much wider than those allowed by global theories proposing universal constraints. In present-day literature, a fairly common trend seems to prevail which, even if from different theoretical backgrounds, points towards the simplest assumptions about what constrains CS, and probabilistic and relativized statements

linked to different language pairs and different contact situations (Giacalone Ramat 1995). Absolute constraints have proved on the contrary to be less appropriate in accounting for bilingual usage, on both empirical and conceptual grounds (Muysken 2000:28).⁶

If, on the other hand, we start from the assumption that CS is a manifestation of language use, variation in CS patterns stops being seen as just “an obstacle to potential generalizations” and becomes something “interesting in its own right” (Bentahila & Davies 1991:372). Together with similarities, differences are only to be expected and can largely be explained by paying more attention to extra-linguistic factors, which are related to and manifest themselves in the grammatical as well as the functional patterns of CS: they influence which structures are used and which will become conventionalized in each community (Backus 1992:262).

A complex interplay of pragmatic, psycho-, macro- and microsocio-linguistic factors – hard to differentiate clearly in practice – can help explain CS patterns: the political balance between the languages involved, the duration of the contact and the origin of bilingualism; the functional configuration of the linguistic repertoire, patterns of language use, functions, socio-symbolic meanings and the relative prestige and status of the two languages; attitudes towards CS and bilingualism in general; the type of interactional setting, social network and conversational context; the degree of bilingual proficiency, gender and, last but not least, age, which is perhaps the most relevant speaker-related factor in so far as it is closely related to some of the other variables just mentioned.

2. Age in CS research

In almost all communities age differentiates subgroups in terms of their CS behaviour. The correlation between age and CS can be approached from either a developmental or a sociolinguistic perspective.

In the former case, research focuses on the acquisition and gradual development of CS skills in the early stages of an individual speaker’s life and is therefore closely related to the study of language acquisition in general (Köppe 1992:209). Learning to codeswitch is seen as an aspect of the development of communicative competence (Genishi 1981, Jisa 2000), which requires grammatical competence in both languages and knowledge of sociopragmatic switching rules.

Many qualitative and quantitative syntactic and functional dif-

ferences between young children and adult bilinguals have been detected.

At a syntactic level, a somewhat common developmental pattern seems to be that found by McClure (1981) in Mexican-American children, in whom the type of CS correlates with the degree of control of the two languages: it begins with insertions of single words and culminates in the switching of more complex constituents. One-word switches are also frequent in young French-English bilingual children studied by Jisa (2000), whose rate of mixing increases with proficiency in both languages.

At a functional level, a developmental pattern has been hypothesized which goes from situational CS in earlier stages – when switches are mainly participant-related – to conversational CS, the extensive use of which does not appear until the age of 5-6, with particular strategies occurring only several years later (Lanza 1992:235).⁷ The relative lack of discourse-related CS in very young children is all too natural if one considers that it requires both social and pragmatic competence, the development of which seems to extend well beyond early childhood (Jisa 2000:1366).

In communities where young bilinguals are exposed to CS on a regular basis, they therefore seem to go through different stages on a developmental path leading towards a progressive increase in CS skills, which allows for a wider range of syntactic and pragmatic patterns to occur. This scheme does not, however, take into account the many intervening factors which can make this progression far from linear (Gardner-Chloros 1991a:279). Actually, the development of CS in individual speakers intersects with changes which are in progress even in stable communities. Needless to say, this developmental pattern does not apply to very unstable communities, where CS behaviour can be better analyzed from a sociolinguistic standpoint.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, age-related differences are assumed to remain more or less constant during the individuals' life span and are usually connected to some aspects of the speakers' language background: i.e. language proficiency, attitudes, status, sociosymbolic values, the functions and patterns of the two languages and the social network.

In this respect, intergenerational differences in CS, if considered in a dynamic manner, may be a key to understanding cases of ongoing language shift (Gardner-Chloros 1991b:59). At a more theoretical level, comparing CS patterns between the same two languages within the same community, but across different age-groups, helps to estab-

lish the relative role of the sociolinguistic *vs* linguistic factors underlying CS.

The following sections focus on some of the main results emerging from studies on the correlation between CS and age in migrant and post-colonial communities. A more detailed picture of dialect/standard language CS in Italy will then be given.

2.1. Migrant and post-colonial communities

After a few earlier works in the mid 1970s (Kuo 1974 on Chinese in the USA and Stölting 1975 on a Yugoslavian family in Germany), various studies provide evidence of remarkable cross-generational differences in syntactic and functional CS patterns within migrant communities.

Here the main factor which interacts with age in accounting for such differences is the degree of bilingual proficiency. Generally speaking, first-generation speakers – who remain strongly dominant in their mother tongue – codeswitch infrequently and often as a remedial or compensatory strategy (Dabène 1990). At the syntactic level, CS is mainly intersentential (Pujol 1991) or restricted to discourse markers and single words (Franceschini 1998). Second-generation migrants, on the contrary, develop a balanced bilingualism which allows a more frequent and fully functional type of CS to emerge, especially in peer group interaction, where very rapid CM is positively evaluated as a way to express an ethnically mixed, plural identity.⁸ This is what happens, for example, among second-generation Italian migrants in German-speaking Switzerland, where the formerly widespread sociopolitical xenophobic climate changed in the 1980s, leading to the relaxation of a normative, monolingually oriented attitude, and to the concomitant “development of a linguistically autonomous way of life fed by more than one language” and «increasingly admired by the indigenous Swiss-German population» (Franceschini 1998: 54; see also Pizzolotto 1991 and Schmid 1993).

Attitudes, therefore, can also play a role in partly explaining differences in CS patterns among age-groups within the same community: a more intimate type of mixing is indeed more likely to occur in situations of intense contact and with no strong attitudinal barriers against CM (Muysken 2000:247).

A third factor interacting with age is social network. In his work on the Tyneside Chinese community in the North East of England, where a language shift from Chinese monolingualism to English dominant bilingualism is in progress, Li Wei (1992) shows that the

use of certain discourse strategies is to a considerable extent generation- and network-specific. The British-born generation, unlike the first, has developed extensive network ties outside the family and the Chinese community; this, together with a better command of English and a more positive attitude towards it, accounts for remarkable variations in language choice and CS patterns. Children switch to English much more often and for a wider range of conversational purposes than do their parents and grandparents, who rarely switch to English and almost always to address members of the younger generation to mark turn allocation.

The behaviour of the second generation may of course vary greatly according to the degree of retention of the family language, as Dabène (1990) demonstrates in comparing two different migrant communities in Grenoble: while the young Spanish bilinguals show the pattern described above, the Maghrebin youngsters, because of a heavy loss of the mother tongue, develop a residual bilingualism which only allows emblematic tag-like switches, used as a marker of sociocultural identity. A somewhat different outcome of the process of family language loss is described by Gardner-Chloros (1991a:279) in the London Greek Cypriot community, where the second/third generation shows such limited proficiency in Greek that the most common type of CS is due to the inability to carry on a whole speech turn in this language.

Even if sociolinguistically different, both cases testify to the process of language shift taking place in many migrant communities, the final stage of which is represented by the third generation who may revert to almost complete monolingualism in the new language (Bettoni 1986:61).⁹

On the whole, studies on migrant communities seem to confirm Poplack's (1980) hypothesis of a strong relationship between high levels of bilingual proficiency and propensity towards CM: second-generation bilingual migrants switch more intrasententially than older non-fluent speakers, who favour inter- or extrasentential CS.

Nonetheless, Poplack's hypothesis is not uncontroversial: in some studies – for instance Berk-Seligson (1986) on Spanish-Hebrew bilinguals in Jerusalem – no relationship seems to appear between degree of proficiency and type of CS, while in others, a relationship does appear but in exactly the opposite direction.

For example, of the two groups of second-generation Turkish migrants in Holland studied by Backus (1992), the Turkish dominant adolescents living in Tilburg switch more intrasententially, mainly following fixed insertion patterns where Dutch content words are

inserted into a Turkish grammatical frame. The more balanced bilinguals from Hilversum on the contrary, favour extra- or intersentential switching, with rare CM, and not of the insertion type. According to Backus (1992:260), fluent bilinguals with daily exposure to both languages have a greater tendency to keep constituents together “simply because within the unit one word triggers the other”, whereas for less fluent bilinguals fewer units are available in the weaker language because of lack of exposure and use.

Similar findings emerge from Bentahila & Davies’s (1991) comparison of two generations of educated Arabic-French speakers in post-colonial Morocco, whose CS patterns show striking differences. These contrasts correlate with their somewhat different linguistic backgrounds due, in their turn, to changes which have occurred 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. The older generation of balanced bilinguals, aged 28-40, who use both languages regularly in a wide range of domains, favour a style in informal conversations with bilingual contemporaries in which the constant alternation between whole sentences or clauses in French and Arabic, endowed with an equal communicative load, is exploited to achieve a variety of rhetorical effects (style 1). At times, they may also shift to a French dominant style, in which brief switches to Arabic for isolated grammatical items are used as an in-group marker, in so far as they signal solidarity, familiarity and Moroccan identity (style 2). The younger generation, aged 16-24, for whom French is definitely a secondary language, favour a clearly Arabic-dominant style, in which occasional switches to French for informative elements may serve to suggest sophistication and education (style 3). In discussing informally technical topics, they can shift to a style characterized by a large amount of CM – with French lexical items inserted into a basically Arabic syntactic framework – and by verb-internal switches (style 4). Like all the others, this pattern, exclusive to the younger generation, can be given a 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’ and Bentahila & Davies’s results seem to contradict Poplack’s prediction: their balanced bilinguals switch more intersententially while the less proficient ones prefer CM. What this point actually shows is that opposing intra- and intersentential switching may not be enough to predict degrees of bilingual proficiency. One also has to consider *what type* of CM is involved, i.e. whether it just

consists of insertions of single words and simple constituents – as is the case with most of the data produced by less fluent bilinguals in Backus and Bentahila & Davies – or whether it is much more diverse grammatically. In other words, “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), that characterizes the New York Puerto Rican community on which Poplack based her hypothesis. Similar remarks can also be applied to intersentential switching, as we will see below in relation to dialect/standard Italian CS.

2.2. Dialect / standard language CS

Studies on CS between dialect and standard language are few, especially those focusing on intergenerational differences. The best investigated cases in Europe are Holland (Giesbers 1989), West Flanders (Vandekerckhove 1998) and Italy (Alfonzetti 1992a; Berruto 1985, 1990, Giacalone Ramat 1990, 1995; Sobrero 1992a, b, c) Trumper 1984, etc.).

In all of these contact situations, a process of gradual shift towards the standard language is taking place, although it proceeds at a different speed in each country and in their various internal areas: it is much more advanced in cities and towns than in small villages (Sobrero 1992a, b), in North-Western Italy than in the South, and in the Netherlands than in West Flanders (Vandekerckhove 1998).

As often happens in diverse settings (Dorian 1981), the shift occurs through a restriction in the social functions of the dialect, which has lost ground even in those domains where it was formerly dominant. Within the family, for example, a domain which is crucial to the continuity of the language, dyadic constraints are often apparent along generational lines: the parents speak dialect to each other and to their own parents and siblings, but the standard language to their children, fewer and fewer of whom are socialized in the dialect, the use of which may be actively discouraged or even prohibited so that it tends to become a language for adults.

The basic picture that emerges from studies on standard language/dialect bilingualism therefore points to significant intergenerational differences in dialect proficiency, patterns of language use and the functions and socio-symbolic values of the two codes, which are reflected in CS practices.

2.2.1. The Italian case

In Italian-dialect CS the notion of neutrality (Appel & Muysken 1987) plays a central role, at both a sociolinguistic and structural level (Alfonzetti 1992b).

At a sociolinguistic level, neutrality refers to conditions which characterize in-group communication among speakers sharing a bilingual and bicultural identity, who use CS as a neutral communicative mode to express such a mixed identity. It presupposes much overlapping and interchangeability of the two codes in a wide range of domains and the absence of strong sociocultural and ethnic conflicts. In many Italo-Romance communities, where bilingual discourse is a widespread form of communicative behaviour, the fluid functional separation between Italian and dialect is one of the conditions which favour, in everyday conversation, a CS pattern similar to what Scotton (1988:161) defines as “overall switching as the unmarked choice”. It accounts for the occurrence of frequent intra-tutorial conversational switching and for a high degree of reversibility of the switch direction: CS serves a wide range of discourse-related functions, in most of which it works as a contextualization strategy and acquires its functionality through the contrastive juxtaposition of the two codes within a single conversation (Alfonzetti 1998).

At a syntactic level, CS can be of both the intersentential and intrasentential type. As regards the latter, both the genetic relationship and grammatical convergence between the two linguistic systems determine conditions of neutrality (Muysken 2000) which allow the prevailing syntactic pattern reported to occur in many Italo-Romance communities: a great quantity of homophones (which serve as bridges or triggers for switches in both directions) and a general structural equivalence, both linear and categorial, may be seen as conditions which favour the bi-directional, rapid, frequent, smooth, grammatically diverse and syntactically unconstrained switching between Italian and dialect, which closely resembles the intimate type of switching described by Poplack (1980) in relation to the Puerto Rican community in New York, and which Muysken (2000: 122-135) defines as congruent lexicalization. In this mixing strategy, because the two varieties contribute equally to the grammatical structure of the sentence, which is largely shared by both: (i) the switch can occur at any point; (ii) it can involve multi- or non-constituent stretches; (iii) all categories can be mixed, even function words and closed-class items, thus violating both Joshi's (1985) constraint and Myers-Scotton's (1993b) system morpheme principle, because the concept of a ML does not apply to this pattern of switching (Berruto 2001, 2004; Regis 2002).

The picture outlined above, based on data drawn from different geographical areas, describes a CS pattern which, apart from great individual and sociolinguistic variation, mainly characterizes fluent adult bilinguals interacting in informal contexts and in-group communication. The few studies on young generations show significant changes in bilingual behaviour, at both a syntactic and functional level, thus providing a clear sign of the ongoing process of language shift away from the dialect.

In research on young Sicilian speakers, aged 14-25, from different social backgrounds in either urban or rural areas, Alfonzetti (2000, 2001) reports an almost total absence of the rapid, bi-directional, smooth type of switching typical of competent adult bilinguals from the same communities studied in an earlier work (Alfonzetti 1992a). In the corpus as a whole, intersentential switching strongly prevails (75%), followed at a distance by CM (15%) and tag-switching (5%).

According to Poplack's hypothesis, the small amount of CM might be interpreted as a sign of low bilingual proficiency in the younger generations, who are more and more Italian-oriented. But what at first glance seems surprising is the great quantity of intersentential switching, as it requires a certain degree of bilingual competence, higher in any case than that required by tag-switching, which unexpectedly shows a very low frequency. One might be led to assume that young speakers' dialectal skills are good enough to allow them to produce whole sentences in this code, alternating with whole sentences in Italian, in a way similar to the balanced bilinguals' style 1 described by Bentahila & Davies (1991) (cf. 2.1.). Actually, closer analysis of *what kind* of intersentential CS is involved – i.e. the syntactic structures of the switched sentences – together with conversation analysis of the entire bilingual discourse – i.e. the relative communicative load of the two codes – reveals that this is not always the case and that Poplack's correlation between type of switching and degree of bilingual proficiency somehow needs to be refined.

In particular, two somewhat different patterns emerge, which clearly correlate with two different sociolinguistic sub-groups.

The first pattern – which one may call *emblematic* CS – is mainly produced by the urban sub-group from a middle- or upper-class background, strongly Italian-dominant and closely resembling the imperfect or semi-speakers described in situations of language death (Dorian 1981, 1989). They rarely codeswitch into dialect and, when they do, they just insert single words, tags and very short, isolated sentences with an elementary syntactic structure (stock expressions,

elliptical, interrupted or one-word utterances, often with no verbal phrase), the production of which requires minimal linguistic competence, not much greater than that required by tag-switching.

The second pattern is almost exclusive to either the urban subgroup from a lower-class background or the speakers living in villages and rural areas, who are more balanced bilinguals. Not only do they switch more often, but they usually do it for stretches of longer and syntactically more complex sentences, so that the two codes have a more equal communicative load in their speech, although Italian is still dominant.

No substantial differences emerge in the type and quantity of CM, which is quite rare in both sub-groups.

The first main factor which accounts for the two styles is the different degree of bilingual proficiency – quite good in the second group, very limited in the first – that is related in turn to the different socio-geographical backgrounds. The fact that both categories mainly switch between sentences but in a quite different way shows that, in order to predict degrees of bilingual competence, it is not only the general distinction between inter- or intrasentential switching which matters, but also, more specifically, what kind of sentences are switched, as much as different types of intrasentential switches – insertions of single items *vs* rapid back and forth, grammatically diverse switches – are respectively associated with a greater or lesser bilingual competence (cf. 2.1.).

The second major factor is the different functions assigned to the two codes by speakers in the two sub-groups. As is often the case with semi-speakers of obsolescent languages,¹⁰ the first sub-group's switching in formulaic expressions and short simple sentences is also due to a restriction of and specialization in the functional range of the dialect: this is used almost only for humorous, ludic and comic effects – thus serving a strong bonding purpose within the peer group – or to strengthen the pragmatic force of emotive speech acts such as insults, parodies, teasing, curses, etc., but it has ceased to serve as a regular medium for conveying semantico-referential information.

Reduction in both competence and functional use of dialect produces a similar style among young generations from other geographical regions of Italy, about whom unfortunately little information is available. In Sardinia, according to Rindler Schjerve (1998), the local language is mostly used by young speakers in interjections, stock expressions and curses.

Giacalone Ramat (1990, 1995) reports that among youngsters from the province of Pavia, CS plays an essentially symbolic role

offering the peer group a way to affirm its identity. A clear preference for intersentential or tag-switching emerges, with dialect insertions mainly used to make jokes or for emphasis.

The use of dialect for ludic and expressive effects is also reported by Cerruti (2003) among young speakers from Turin, but only those aged 19-30. Teenagers up to 19 on the contrary show a total rejection of dialect, which they perceive to be associated with traditional values and customs they do not share and from which they therefore intend to distance themselves, also linguistically.

This point deserves further investigation in other parts of the country, because it demonstrates the influence of speakers' perceptions of the socio-symbolic values of dialect on their CS behaviour. For middle-class Sicilian teenagers, for example – who do not display such a contrast in comparison with slightly older speakers – the frequent parental ban on speaking dialect may result in the use of the 'forbidden' code as a rebellious breach of parents' rules and as a strong identity marker within peer group interaction.

A clear functional restriction is also reported by Sobrero (1992b) among young speakers from Lecce, who openly state, and then confirm in their behaviour, that dialect is mainly used for fun and joking: they codeswitch much less than adults and mostly in stock phrases and whole sentences.

But among young speakers from a rural or a lower-class background – such as the second sub-group in the Sicilian study, or youngsters from villages in Salento (Sobrero 1992b, d) – the process of functional restriction and specialization is much less advanced, as they still speak dialect in the family or with members of the same community. They also use CS to contextualize major situational changes, especially interlocutor-related. This seems to imply a sharper compartmentalization between Italian and dialect than that found in older generations, who use a far larger amount of conversational than situational switches (Alfonzetti 1992a).

This might explain why even speakers in the second sub-group, despite their good bilingual proficiency, use very little CM, no more than the strongly Italian dominant speakers in the first group (see also Sobrero 1992b). The point is that the more complex, grammatically diverse, frequent, smooth back and forth unfunctional mixing typical of the older fluent bilinguals, requires not only good mastery of both linguistic systems, but also conditions of sociolinguistic neutrality that no longer seem to hold for younger generations in general. And this is reflected in two other distinguishing features of their CM, mainly involving single nouns: (i) they tend to behave like

Weinreich's (1953: 73) "ideal bilingual", often using some flagging device – like hesitation, repetition, pauses, intonational highlighting, explicit metalinguistic commentaries, laughing, etc. – to draw attention to their switches; (ii) most of the switches are functionally motivated and therefore need to be made salient in order better to accomplish their local purpose, but also, and even more importantly, in order to show explicitly the speakers' full awareness of and control over their switching into dialect.¹¹

On the other hand, the unaware, stylistically unmotivated use of dialect is perceived to be inappropriate and can even be censored by overt stigmatization, teasing and parody, as happens several times in the Sicilian study, and is also reported by Cerruti (2003) to occur among young speakers from Turin.

This is due to the fact that the fluent, competent and spontaneous use of dialect on the part of young speakers is more or less explicitly considered to be a clear sign of social inferiority and/or provincialism. What the young Italian-oriented generations are ready to accept and even positively evaluate is just a reduced, controlled, symbolic use of dialect, whose expressive connotations are exploited in a CS style which is shown to be an intentional communicative strategy.

Together with different functions and degrees of bilingual proficiency, speakers' perceptions of and attitudes towards the two codes, and changes in their socio-symbolic values – which always go together and determine processes of language shift (Gal 1979) – may therefore influence both structural and functional patterns of CS, determining significant intergenerational variation.

Many more studies than can possibly be mentioned here show that in different kinds of contact situations, age is the best indicator of significant sociolinguistic changes which are reflected in intergenerational differences in CS patterns.¹² To mention just one more case, older generations in Brussels, like those in Italy, switch more within sentences than younger ones. This is due to the fact that while for older speakers, who still identify with both French and Dutch, CS is the unmarked choice, the polarisation and tensions between Francophones and the Dutch-speaking group have created a negative climate for CM. The result is that younger generations now identify with either one language or the other and no longer consider mixing as an appropriate expression of their identity (Treffers-Dallers 1992).

3. Concluding remarks

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 there is a great consensus among scholars in 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 (Muysken 2000). It is often argued that these differences are largely 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 pattern may occur, as demonstrated by the studies discussed above. This shows that typological considerations cannot 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 and also to other sociolinguistic factors (Muysken 2000). In standard Italian/dialect contact, the action of the conditions of structural neutrality – which favour congruent lexicalization in older generations – is overridden by that of 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: age is clearly one of these, in so far as it interacts with other socio- and psycholinguistic factors, such as bilingual proficiency, functions and patterns of use, exposure to the language, social network and socio-geographic background and the attitudes and socio-symbolic values of the languages involved. Intergenerational variation in CS patterns puts into serious doubt, even more radically than other types of comparisons, 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 code switching only have a minor auxiliary function with respect to the dominant primary role of linguistic properties (Backus 1992:257).

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Notes

¹ On the various ways of defining the ML that have been proposed in the literature and on the difficulties of determining it cf. Auer (2000).

² Restrictions on singly occurring function words were proposed by Joshi (1985).

³ According to Meyers-Scotton (1983b: 48-59), system morphemes participate in CS in a different way from content morphemes because they are retrieved in a different manner or at a different stage in production.

⁴ Muysken (2000: 172) suggests that Myers-Scotton's (1993b) System Morpheme Principle can be interpreted as "a special case of the categorial equivalence constraint". According to Muysken (2000: 164), there is no general consensus on the definition and categorization of functional elements and no claim can be made either of binary distinction between content and function words or of absolute universality. And "this makes it difficult to appeal to a single principled distinction between content and system morphemes" (Muysken 2000: 172). Later reformulations of the System Morpheme Principle are discussed in Berruto (2004).

⁵ *Code mixing* is used here as a synonymous with intrasentential CS.

⁶ Within the Minimalist Program, Mac Swan (2000: 43), after reviewing the empirical and conceptual shortcomings of the main universal constraints based approaches, proposes as a "research agenda" that "nothing constrains code switching apart from the requirements of the mixed grammars". And, from a sociolinguistic perspective, Berruto (2001: 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.

⁷ A similar pattern is also described by Genishi (1981), Köppe (1992), Jørgensen (1998) and McClure (1981).

⁸ Qualitative and quantitative differences between first- and second-generation migrants were observed by Bettoni (1991: 265) among Italians in Australia: "the rare code-switches of the first generation become more numerous and longer" in the second generation, who show strong signs of attrition in the ethnic language. See also Jørgensen (1998).

⁹ This "immigrant language cycle" was described by Bettoni (1991) with reference to Italians in Australia.

¹⁰ Cf. Weinreich (1953) and Dorian (1989).

¹¹ These intergenerational differences in the use of a smooth *vs* flagged kind of switching closely resemble the two contrasting patterns described by Poplack (1987): whereas Spanish-English Puerto Ricans in New York produced many smooth intrasentential switches, in Ottawa-Hull – because of differences in attitudes and tensions between Francophones and Anglophones – bilingualism is not considered to be emblematic of the local identity and hardly any smooth intrasentential French-English CS was found. A similar situation in Brussels is described by Treffers-Dallers (1992).

¹² Cf. Gal (1979) for Oberwart in Eastern Austria, Gardner-Chloros (1991b) for Alsace, Heller (1988a) for Montreal.

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