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Code-mixing and intergenerational variation within an Italian community in Bletchley (UK)

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The paper aims to analyse some language contact phenomena between Italo-romance varieties and English within a well-defined Italian community in Bletchley (UK) from the province of Benevento (Italy), which has now reached the third immigrant generation. In particular, insertional code-mixing and its intergenerational variation will be examined from both a structural and a functional perspective. It will be argued that second-generation patterns of code-mixing are more complex compared to both first- and third-generation speech. In addition, the function of semantic specificity, among the factors that favour the manifestation of insertional code-mixing, will be explored, and its variation across the three generations assessed. It will be claimed that the role of semantics in triggering insertional code-mixing weakens with the increasing of the speakers' level of bilingual proficiency: while its action is very strong in first-generation speech, it loses ground in the second generation, and revives, in a different way, in the third.

KEYWORDS: code-mixing, Italian community, intergenerational variation, semantic specificity.

1. Introduction

In the last few decades, many scholars have been interested in communities of migrants in order to understand how migration can have an impact on the languages of the people involved. The study of Italian emigration has contributed to enriching this field, proving to be fertile ground for the analysis of different linguistic processes and phenomena that occur in contact situations. In particular, many Italian communities around the world have been studied, and attention has been paid to different linguistic aspects, such as language maintenance and shift (Bettoni & Rubino 1996; Rubino 2009; Di Salvo 2011), language attrition (Bettoni 1986, 1991; Scaglione 2000; Sorace 2004), language contact phenomena in speech (Auer 1984; Pasquandrea 2008; Rubino 2014), as well as outcomes of contact among some heritage varieties (Di Salvo 2019). Nevertheless, there is still much to say about Italians abroad, especially if we take into account new contexts and the new dynamics that have changed the scenario of such a fascinating phenom-

enon (Vedovelli 2011; Rubino 2014; Di Salvo 2017; Turchetta 2018). Accordingly, this paper aims to study the linguistic effects of migration within an unexplored Italian community in Bletchley (UK), characterised by close-knit social networks of people from the same two villages and often part of the same extended family. In particular, the main objective is to assess the role of the immigrant generation to which speakers belong in both the structure and functions of insertional code-mixing (Muysken 2000). More specifically, from a structural perspective, the size of the embedded elements and the role of the two languages involved are analysed; in addition, through a functional approach, the study examines some semantic and sociolinguistic reasons – in particular, the role of semantic specificity (Backus 2001) – for its manifestation, across three different generations. The analyses rely upon extracts of spontaneous speech, recorded by the speakers themselves in informal contexts, and have to be considered preliminary.

2. From Benevento to Bletchley: an Italian community in the UK

2.1. The community

The Italian community in Bletchley was born between the 1950s and the 1960s, a period during which a labour shortage in England met the financial difficulties that Italy was tackling during those years. As a consequence of this situation, a bilateral agreement between the British and Italian governments was stipulated and, through a system of bulk recruitment, many Italians were assigned to jobs in industries throughout the UK. A great number of men from the South of Italy were recruited on four-year contracts by the London Brick Company, located in towns such as Bedford, Peterborough, Loughborough, and Bletchley (King 1977; Bartrum 1986; Tubito & King 1996; Sponza 2005). After four years, and once earned enough money, many of them were able to buy a house, be reached by their families, and start their own family-run businesses (e.g. food trucks, fish and chips shops, etc.).

While in the first phase migrants were recruited in bulk, later on, the mechanism became more similar to chain migration, in that many workers were assisted by relatives or fellow villagers who already lived and worked there. For this reason, many people who settled in these towns come from the same few villages; thus, within regional groups, there are large concentrations of fellow villagers. Bletchley is a good example of such a situation, for it hosts a close-knit community of people from two small villages in the province of Benevento (Campania

region), namely Baselice and Colle Sannita.[1] Its members live in an extended family and village-based social network: even if well integrated into the host society, they usually socialise with people from the same family or village, who, in most cases, live on the same street or nearby. In addition, intragroup engagements and marriages have played and still play an important role in this. Furthermore, the bonds with Italy and the people who live there are very strong: Italians in Bletchley are in touch with their compatriots in Italy both via telephone and during their visits to the country once or twice a year. All this creates a strong sense of Italian identity, which is also emphasised by the presence of associations and events dedicated to the community.[2]

2.2. Sociolinguistic profile

When we look at the community's sociolinguistic profile, we have to take into consideration mechanisms that not only concern the context of immigration itself, but also the sociolinguistic situation of the places of origin, both when first-generation migrants (see §2.3) left their country and now (De Mauro 1963; Vedovelli 2011). Since the vast majority of those who left Italy during the 1950s and 1960s were dialect speakers and had low literacy skills, for many of them the Italian language was an L2, only partially learned.

Today, the level of education has increased, and the national language has reached the informal domains once occupied almost exclusively by the Italo-romance dialects. Thanks to the improvement of transport and communication, and to the arrival of new, more educated people, migrants as well, to some extent, participate in this new scenario. Furthermore, people (migrants and non-migrants) have now more experience with the written language, thanks to the new social networks and messaging apps, such as Facebook and WhatsApp, very much used among young as well as old people. However, despite things have changed today, having a closer look at our well-defined community in Bletchley, in addition to some of the aspects outlined above, in which it resembles other communities of Italians abroad, some peculiarities, deriving from both the current sociolinguistic situation of the villages of origin and the characteristics of the community itself, may be observed. As far as the first aspect is concerned, in these two villages, dialect is still much used in daily conversation, also among the youth and among educated people. In the immigration context, this means that, even if new young, more educated migrants reach the community, their contribution to the use of the Italian language is limited, since the preferred means of communication for many of them, even if proficient in Italian

as well, is still their dialect. Furthermore, considering the characteristics of the community (e.g. the village-based social networks), contact with people from other parts of Italy is scarce, thus the need to find a common code to communicate and the possibilities of a resulting linguistic 'homogenisation' (De Mauro 1963) are minimal. Nevertheless, we cannot claim that migrants in Bletchley do not have any competence in Italian, though the actual uses of this language are very limited. When they select the heritage language (in monolingual or in bilingual discourses with English), they choose dialect instead of Italian most of the time.

According to the profile described above, we can summarise that our migrants have three main language varieties at their disposal, each used to different extents, according to some variables: an Italo-romance dialect, a variety of Italian (mainly popular and regional),[3] and a variety of English. However, the position of these three varieties in the migrants' linguistic repertoire and domains of language use is not clear-cut, especially if we consider the common practice of code-switching: they can overlap, in a domain as well as in the same discourse, depending on some factors, such as the speaker's and the interlocutor's generation.

2.3. Generations of migrants

Following the classical categorisation of communities of migrants in generations, when speaking of 'first generation' (henceforth, G1), we refer to those, born and educated (at different levels) in a country (Italy, in our case), who moved, as adolescents or adults, to a different state, taking with them one or more languages of origin. In addition, once in the host country, they had to adapt not only to the new society but also to its language – English, for our specific case. The vast majority did not reach a high competence in this language, for they spent most of their time with other Italians, using the language(s) of origin. Their descendants, either born in the host country or in the origin country, from which they moved in pre-school age (but, in both cases, educated in the former), form what Turchetta (2019) refers to as *generazione 0* 'zero generation' (in relation to the country of origin), in which we can identify a 'second' and a 'third generation' (G2 and G3, respectively). Both G2 and G3 speakers acquired their parents' language(s) as children (an Italo-romance dialect/Italian, the former; English and, perhaps, an Italo-romance dialect/Italian, the latter) and both received their education in English, which became their dominant language. Despite the role of this language, G2 speakers are also very proficient in the heritage

language(s), still much used within the community. Starting from G3, however, the signs of a process of language shift become more visible, for their competence in the heritage language(s) is minimal and, in most cases, only passive.

3. Language contact phenomena

As we have seen, migrants in Bletchley have a complex linguistic repertoire at their disposal for communicating with the other members of the community. As a consequence of this complexity, the preliminary results of this study show a great deal of language contact in speech, between the home language(s) and English. When referring to these, we will use the term 'code-switching' (henceforth, CS) as a cover term to indicate, in general, the common practice in bilingual communities of using two or more languages in the same conversation. In order to account for specific kinds of CS, a distinction has to be made between inter-sentential and intra-sentential CS, the former occurring at sentence boundaries (and usually carrying a pragmatic function) and the latter within the same sentence (generally, but not necessarily, without any pragmatic value). Intra-sentential CS has proved to be very productive in our community and it will be the focus of this paper to which we will refer by using the term 'code-mixing' (from now on, CM), distinguishing among the three patterns described in Muysken (1997; 2000), i.e. 'alternation', 'insertion', and 'congruent lexicalization'. According to the first process, what is at stake is a proper switch from the grammar and lexicon of one language to the grammar and lexicon of another. This kind of CM is generally associated with structural constraints concerning the equivalence of the languages involved, in that the switch takes place at a specific point in the sentence where the two structures are equivalent (Poplack 1980). In the case of 'insertions', the grammar of one language dominates over the other, and part of the lexicon of language B is inserted into the morpho-syntactic structure of language A. The language that provides the grammatical structure is what Myers-Scotton (1993b) refers to as the 'matrix language' (ML), within which single lexical items or constituents (e.g. noun phrases, prepositional phrases, etc.) of an 'embedded language' (EL) are inserted. Finally, with 'congruent lexicalization' the languages involved have a similar structure, so that lexical elements from both languages are inserted quite randomly in a shared morpho-syntactic frame. However, the distinction among the three types of CM reported by Muysken is not always clear-cut. For instance, there are many cases for which it is difficult – if not impossible – to decide whether the instance of CM being analysed is a case of insertion or alternation.

Even if more than one pattern of CM has been observed in the community, the paper will analyse 'insertions' only, in order to look into more detail at the intergenerational variation of the phenomenon.

Insertional CM is typical of colonial settings and recent migrant communities, especially those cases where unbalanced bilingualism is the normal situation (Muysken 2000). Generally, in such communities, a shift may occur in the directionality of the dominant language between the first and third generation of migrants (Fishman 1972), the former being more proficient in the home language(s), the latter in the language of the host society, their L1s respectively. This asymmetry is equally reflected in the patterns of insertional CM, in that the ML and EL change according to the generation to which speakers belong and thus to their level of proficiency in each language (Muysken 1997). In addition, this intergenerational variation is also visible in the semantic and sociolinguistic reasons that trigger the insertion of content words of a language different from the one being spoken (Backus 1999; 2001).

3.1. Insertional code-mixing and the Specificity Hypothesis

It has been argued that a higher degree of semantic specificity favours the insertion of other-language lexical elements in G1 speech, while general words are less likely to be inserted (Backus 2001). In fact, words with highly specific semantics may have strong connotations related to the culture and life of the new context. In these cases, the speaker cannot rely on an adequate equivalent in the language that s/he is speaking (e.g. the language of origin): it does not exist or, if it does, it may not have the same connotations or nuances, or allow making necessary distinctions (Clyne 1967). Conversely, in the case of more general words there is no need for the speaker to turn to the vocabulary of the other language, for the ML already has "perfectly good words for the concepts encoded by such basic vocabulary" (Backus 2000: 104). In other words, speakers usually insert words from a language to fill in some gaps in the main language they are using; as a consequence, they will only insert what they need, not what they already have, such as basic vocabulary or grammar (Backus 2001).[4] As Backus states, "bilinguals seem to follow a maxim of Bilingual Economy that says that, when engaging in insertional CS, you only take from the other language what you need" (2000: 104).

According to Backus, an important concept to take into account when talking about semantic specificity is that of semantic domain:

> If semantic domain is an important predictor of switches, then it must be part of our definition of specificity: being saliently connected with

> the embedded language culture enhances a word's specificity. Such topics have been experienced and talked about in the embedded language most of the time, and are therefore identified with the embedded language. Embedded language vocabulary is better developed in these fields (Backus 2001: 132).

Therefore, as we will also see for the Italian community in Bletchley, English words, inserted in a discourse uttered in the Italo-romance variety, usually pertain to certain predominant semantic fields, those in which, for example, a speaker has had more experience during his/her life in the host country (see also Clyne 2003; Matras 2009). This allows speakers to use the appropriate lexical material to designate new realities and make more subtle distinctions (Clyne 1967; Haugen 1969). Nevertheless, examples of insertions of more general words have been observed as well: why is this the case? Firstly, other factors related to matters of prestige and speakers' attitudes towards the host society and language may lead to different paths where also 'unnecessary' insertions or borrowings are involved (Haugen 1969). In addition, the importance of semantic fields in enhancing CS decreases as the proficiency level of bilingualism increases (Backus 1999; 2001). We will see this effect in the data section, where, going through different generations, we will observe an intergenerational variation in the patterns of insertional CM, due to the speakers' different proficiency levels of bilingualism.

It will be argued that in G2 speakers' speech the use of other-language lexical material is sometimes motivated by a difficulty speakers have in retrieving a word from the ML, or, more generally, the inserted EL elements are the more "readily available" to them[5] (cf. Grosjean 1982). However, in other cases, given certain circumstances, even though on the surface a ML and EL do exist, in the speaker's intentions something different happens: instead of selecting words from two different languages (perceived as such), the speaker selects a bilingual 'medium' (Gafaranga 1999; 2001; 2017), or, to put it differently, s/he makes use of a bilingual 'mode' (Grosjean 2004), which constitutes the 'unmarked choice' (Myers-Scotton 1993a) for that interaction.[6]

4. Data collection and methodology

The data analysed in this section are part of a corpus of recordings of natural speech, collected with the help of the informants themselves, who have been asked to record their own conversations during some informal events (e.g. lunch or dinner, among others).[7] Most of the

conversations we collected are among people of the same (extended) family; however, thanks to the active participation of some informants, we also managed to gather some interactions among people from different families but within the same social network. A method of this kind has, among the advantages, the possibility to reduce the effects of the observer's paradox to a considerable extent; you can obtain authentic spontaneous speech and gain an understanding of the real language uses within a community. Furthermore, it permits avoiding the (quasi-)monolingual mode created by the presence of the researcher in most cases. On the other hand, it has some limitations as well: you cannot rely on a complete picture of the contexts in which conversations take place; in addition, the recordings do not usually have high-quality sound and this means that often transcriptions are very challenging.

As the focus of this paper is the intergenerational variation in the patterns of insertional CM, the examples that we will look at are divided into three different generational groups (see §5). We will look at the different structures of the embedded elements, on one hand, and at the semantic and sociolinguistic aspects that may trigger their insertion, on the other.

5. Code-mixing in Bletchley

5.1. First generation

As seen in section 2.2, G1 speakers possess an Italo-romance dialect and, only in some cases, Italian as their L1(s). The difference between the two scenarios mostly depends on the migration wave, which is linked to a different sociolinguistic situation of the country of origin, where the role of the national language and the Italo-romance dialects has changed over the years (see §2.2.). However, as already mentioned above, despite the different language proficiencies in these two varieties among speakers of different migration waves, the Italo-romance dialects generally prevail over Italian in everyday communication in this community of immigrants.

As far as the host language is concerned, first-generation speakers acquired English later in their life, as an L2, at very different levels, depending on many factors, among which the year of migration has a central role. Therefore, most of the time they use dialect to communicate with the other members of the community, sometimes in a bilingual mode with English, at various degrees. In this section, we will look at some examples taken from conversations of G1 speakers talking to either G1 or G2 interlocutors. More specifically, we will analyse patterns of

insertional CM and test the Specificity Hypothesis (Backus 2001) outlined in section 3.1, for which G1 speech is a great testing ground. In particular, insertions of English lexical items in a dialectal morpho-syntactic frame have proven to be frequent for those elements pertaining to specific semantic fields, in which the speaker has had more experience in the UK than s/he has had in Italy. Among the most frequent domains in which we found the manifestation of CM are 'work', 'food', 'health/healthcare system' and, more in general, 'life in the new country', some of which have proven to be productive in other Italian communities as well (cf. Di Salvo 2019). The following example shows a case of CM involving the insertion of an English word, related to the domain of work, in a dialectal utterance:

(1)
Interlocutor's generation: I

Qua	*è*	*statə*	*fattə*	*lu*	`plaster`?[8]
here	be.PRS.3SG	be.PST.PTCP	do.PST.PTCP	the.M.SG	

'Did they put `plaster` here?'

Here, the English word *plaster*, which designates a work material, has been inserted in a dialectal morpho-syntactic frame. The speaker, who has been a carpenter in the UK for several years, has gotten used to certain kinds of objects related to his job during his life in the UK, and is now used to designating them with English lexical material. In other words, he has had more experience with certain objects during his life in the host country, such that the language he is more familiar with when referring to them is English.

As mentioned, another field that favours the manifestation of CM, through the insertion of English words in a dialectal utterance, is food. What is interesting is that not only does it happen with English typical food (e.g. fish and chips, pie, etc.), but also when speakers refer to more 'neutral' elements, such as *cherry tomato* or *cheese* in example (2), related to the Italian as well as the English cuisine:

(2)
Interlocutor's generation: I

… cə	*po*	*mettə*	*lu*	`cherry tomato…`		
LOC	can.PRS.2SG	put.INF	the.M.SG			
… cə	*po*	*mettə…*	*lu*	`cheese`	*pə*	*dintə*
LOC	can.PRS.2SG	put.INF	the.M.SG		for	inside

'You can add some `cheese`… you can add some `cherry tomato`…'

This is probably due to the fact that such words are among the first lexical items that G1 speakers received as linguistic input from the tar-

get language, in that when they first arrived in the new country, among the first things they had to learn was how to name food, which is a primary human need. Another possible interpretation could be related to the different quality that food might have in the two countries, from which derives that the referents that the equivalent words in the two languages represent are not necessarily or exactly the same. However, since we are dealing with elements that speakers also learned in their home country employing their L1(s) for years, the insertion of such words, which are not specifically related to the host country, in dialect-based interactions with other members of the Italian community fluctuates and alternates with the usage of the Italo-romance equivalents. Conversely, there are some objects with which, even if present today in the origin country as well, many of our migrants have had their first experience in the UK, learning part of the English vocabulary to talk about them. This is the case, for example, of home appliances, such as freezer, fridge, dishwasher, etc. Furthermore, G1 people who have lived in the UK for several years are used to the British healthcare system more than they are to the Italian one. Thus, when referring to elements related to health or the healthcare system, they usually rely on English lexical material, as the insertions of *scan* and *mammogram* in example (3) demonstrate:

(3)
Interlocutor's generation: II

M'	*annə*	*fattə*	*lu*	`scan…`	
to_me	have.PRS.3PL	do.PST.PTCP	the.M.SG		
… *doppə*	*m'*	*annə*	*fattə*	*lu*	`mammogram…`
then	to_me	have.PRS.3PL	do.PST.PTCP	the.M.SG	

'They did a `scan` on me… then they did a `mammogram`…'

As the examples show, all the insertions follow the classical pattern of mixed constituents (mainly NPs), in which the determiner is from dialect and the noun is English. Therefore, in a dialectal morpho-syntactic frame, the English language contributes only insofar single lexical entries are inserted, a pattern only partially shared with G2 speech, as the next section will exemplify.

5.2. Second generation

As we move to the next generation, the data present a different picture: as seen in section 3.1, the different level of bilingual proficiency has important effects not only on the structure of CM, in terms of directionality of ML and EL and size of the switched element, but also on the semantics of the words involved.

Generally, G2 speakers are more balanced bilinguals, but, despite this, we observed that English still prevails over the heritage language(s). This is the reason why in conversations with people from the same generation or G3 speakers, the preferred language seems to be English, used in a monolingual mode or in bilingual discourses where it has a predominant role over the heritage language. However, things are different when a G1 or a monolingual speaker from the home country takes part in the conversation. We will focus on conversations with G1 speakers only, those during which the majority of instances of CM – what interests us here – occur.

For G2 speakers language contact phenomena patterns are more complex, and different types of CM can be observed. First, in addition to insertions, cases of alternational CM are found as well; however, for the purpose of this paper, they will not be considered here. As far as insertions are concerned, one of the consequences of G2 speakers' different level of bilingual proficiency, if compared to G1 speakers, is the fact that not only are the insertions more frequent, but also, the ML and EL are not fixed: they may alternate, even during the same conversation. Furthermore, in addition to insertions of single lexical entries, entire constituents (mainly NPs) are inserted as well.

Therefore we will have, on one hand, examples that are similar to those observed for G1 speakers, that is those in which English lexical items are inserted in a sentence otherwise uttered in dialect, and, in addition to these, we will also see instances of insertions that go the other way round. In both cases, single nouns or constituents are inserted into the main structure of the ML selected. What is important to notice here is that, even if a ML and EL do exist, fragments of the EL are not meaningful from a semantic point of view, for the elements involved often belong to basic vocabulary. In these cases, what triggers the manifestation of CM is either the different level of availability to the bilingual brain of the equivalent words in the two languages, according to which the speaker chooses the more readily available word (Grosjean 1982), or the selection of a bilingual 'medium' (Gafaranga 1999; 2001; 2017) that the speaker is used to choosing when talking to certain interlocutors, for which each passage into the other language does not allow for functional explanations of any sort.

Accordingly, this section is divided into two parts: the first one shows examples in which dialect is the ML and English the EL, while the second one reports examples that go in the opposite direction.

5.2.1. Insertions of English words in a dialectal morpho-syntactic frame

As said earlier, English insertions in G2 speakers' utterances do not always involve words pertaining to specific semantic fields, as happens for G1. Instead, they often consist of more general words, such as *bone*, *field*, or *mum* in the examples below.

(4)

Interlocutor's generation: I

... chicken wings,	*ma*	*senza*	*bone...*	*non*	*stevə*	*lu*	*bone...*
	but	without		NEG	be.IMPF.3SG	the.M.SG	

'... chicken wings, but without bone... there was no bone...'

(5)

Interlocutor's generation: I

Lu	*giardinə*	*mejə*	*vedə*	*lu...*	*lu*	*field*
the.M.SG	garden	my	see.PRS.3SG	the.M.SG	the.M.SG	

'My garden overlooks the... the field'

(6)

Interlocutor's generation: I

Pəcché	*mittə*	*colpə*	*a*	*your mum?*
why	put.PRS.2SG	fault	to	

'Why do you blame your mum?'

Considering G2 speakers' level of proficiency in English, the words inserted here are probably the more readily available to their bilingual brain (Grosjean 1982). This is especially true for example (5), where the switch to English is 'flagged'[9] by an esitation. It is not clear whether this holds for the other two examples as well, for there the passage to English is 'smooth'. We could hypothesise that either the other-language word got activated quicker than the equivalent in the ML in the speaker's mind (see works within the usage-based framework; e.g. Backus 2015) or that a bilingual 'medium' (Gafaranga 1999; 2001; 2017) or 'mode' (Grosjean 2004) has been selected, and then that it is the alternation of the two languages per se to be meaningful in the conversation. Furthermore, entire constituents are inserted too, as *your mum* in example (6) demonstrates, where the noun is accompanied by a possessive. This pattern is also found in utterances where English is the ML and dialectal EL islands are inserted into its structure, as the next section will demonstrate.

5.2.2. Insertions of dialectal words in an English morpho-syntactic frame

If G2 speakers' more dominant language is English and they are perfectly able to use it in a monolingual mode, why do instances as the following take place? Obviously, situations like these are more likely to happen when

the interlocutor is a less proficient bilingual, i.e. a G1 speaker; but, still, given G2 speakers good proficiency in dialect as well, the (quasi-)monolingual mode in this variety would be the most logical choice. However, as the ensuing examples exhibit, insertions of dialectal words in an English frame are frequent in this generation during interactions with G1 interlocutors.

As previously claimed, for these speakers the alternation of two languages itself is sometimes the 'medium' chosen to talk to some members of the community, such that each switched element is not functionally meaningful, though it might be explained in more cognitive terms (cf. Backus 2015).

Both examples (7) and (8) present insertions of general words like *fazzulettə* 'tissue' and *stojamanə* 'towel'. It is very unlikely that a G2 speaker does not know the English equivalents of such general words or that s/he cannot retrieve them. If this had been the case, CM would have probably been flagged; on the contrary, the utterances are smooth.

(7)
Interlocutor's generation: I

`I need more`	*fazzulettə*
	tissues

'`I need more` tissues'

(8)
Interlocutor's generation: I

`Can you get me`	*lu*	*stojamanə*, `please?`
	the.M.SG	towel

'`Can you get me` the towel, `please?`'

As far as the structure is concerned, as previously said, in G2 speech both single nouns, like *fazzulettə* in example (7) and constituents (NPs), as *lu stojamanə* in example (8), are inserted, showing that, for this generation, more complex structures are also possible.

5.3. Third generation

Generally, G3 speakers only have a passive competence in the heritage language(s), a proof that the community is undergoing language shift. What keeps the heritage varieties still alive to some extent is the presence of grandparents and other G1 speakers in the community with whom they interact. They use English all the time with G2 and G3 members and only when they talk to G1 interlocutors or when a G1 person is present in the conversation, a few elements in the dialect of origin are inserted in English-dominated discourses. Unlike G2, G3 speakers rarely select a bilingual 'medium' and when they do English is always the ML. What is then the function of Italo-romance insertions here? The

preliminary results of the analysis of insertional CM in this generation of migrants allow for two possible explanations, being, on one hand, the inserted words semantically meaningful, and constitute, on the other, cognate words in the two languages. Example (9) is an extract from a conversation between a G3 girl and her grandmother (G1), where the former, in answering to the latter's offer to have something to eat, inserts the dialectal word *biscottə* in an English frame.

(9)
Interlocutor generation: I
G1: *Ja, pigliətə nu cosarejə…*
'C'mon, have something…'
G3: *No, no, just… a couple of* *biscottə*
biscuits
'No, no, just… a couple of biscuits'

The word *biscottə* is very close to the English equivalent 'biscuits', both phonetically and semantically. However, the use of the dialectal entry also activates an association with the origin culture, especially represented by older people, such as G1 grandmothers. In other words, the speaker is not just referring to biscuits, but to something that she usually eats or hears about at her grandmother's house. This kind of connection is even more visible in example (10), which shows how a G3 speaker, even though talking to a G2 interlocutor, with whom she usually employs monolingual English as the preferred 'medium', inserts the word *medicinə* instead of using the English equivalent 'medicine' in a sentence that would have been otherwise entirely in English:[10]

(10)
Interlocutor's generation: II
G2: *Does he feel like he almost knows how to… if the pain is back, to take…*
G3: *Yeah… he wasn't doing… he wasn't taking the wrong* *medicinə* *or anything,*
medicine
he was…

The speaker is probably used to some dialectal words when talking or hearing about the health of older people (she is talking about her grandfather's illness). Furthermore, as was the case in the previous example, we are also dealing with cognate words, being *medicinə* and its English equivalent translation 'medicine' close both phonetically and semantically.

Our claim is that, with G3 speakers, the Specificity Hypothesis (Backus 2001) we encountered in G1 speakers' speech as a powerful predictor of CM

comes back. This time, however, the role of the two languages involved is reversed, being the insertions made of dialectal words in an English morpho-syntactic frame. In other words, G3 speakers, in conversations where a G1 is present, while speaking mainly in English, insert dialectal words or phrases pertaining to specific semantic fields, probably related to their community of origin. This interpretation is a result of a preliminary analysis based on data that are far less numerous, if compared to G1 and G2 speech. Therefore, further evidence will be necessary to confirm the hypothesis.

6. Conclusion

The paper has examined instances of language contact phenomena in the natural speech of three generations of migrants of Italian origin in Bletchley (UK). The preliminary results exhibit a great deal of insertional CM, which has been analysed from both a functional and a structural perspective. The functional approach aimed to find semantic and sociolinguistic explanations for the phenomenon. In particular, the Specificity Hypothesis (Backus 2001) has been tested and proved to be productive in G1 utterances, where, in a Italo-romance morpho-syntactic frame, single English lexical entries, adapted to the syntax of the ML, have been found. They usually pertain to specific semantic fields in which the migrant has had more experience in the host country than s/he has had in Italy. Nevertheless, the power of specificity decreases when the level of bilingual proficiency increases. Indeed, when we move to the next generation, we observe that insertions also involve words pertaining to basic vocabulary, those that are either the more readily available to the bilingual brain (Grosjean 1982) or part of a selected bilingual 'medium' (Gafaranga 1999; 2001; 2017). Furthermore, switches that go the other way round, that is when English is the ML and dialect the EL, are also found in this generation of speakers. It has been argued that, especially in these cases, even if a ML and EL are distinguishable, they are not perceived as two different entities by the speaker; that is to say that each switch in the other language is not meaningful. Instead, it is the bilingual discourse itself to be meaningful to the speaker, who chooses it as the 'medium' of the conversation, as the default choice with certain interlocutors and in presence of certain circumstances.

Proceeding to G3, we noticed that, even if the dominant language is definitely English, used in a monolingual mode with interlocutors of the same generation or G2 speakers, these speakers can sometimes switch to the heritage language, by means of single-noun or noun-phrase insertions, generally related to the community of origin. Therefore, it

seems that, even if with reversal of roles concerning the ML and EL, the Specificity Hypothesis regains ground, though in a different guise.

In general, the three generations investigated in this paper, despite the differences in the patterns of CM, have in common the selection, between the two virtually available heritage languages, of the Italo-romance dialect of origin most of the time. This outcome can be attributed to the peculiar features of the community under study, characterised by a well-defined area of origin and close-knit social networks. These characteristics could be a good starting point for further interpretations of data of bilingual speech and patterns of CS in the future.

However, it is necessary to clarify that the results presented here are preliminary: further analyses of more data will be paramount for the confirmation of the trends observed at the community level.

Abbreviations

1, 2, 3 = first, second, third person; CM = code-mixing; CS = code-switching; EL = embedded language; G1, G2, G3 = first, second, third generation; IMPF = imperfect; INF = infinitive; LOC = locative; M = masculine; ML = matrix language; NEG = negation; PRS = present; PST = past; PTCP = participle; SG = singular.

Notes

[1] More precisely, most immigrants from Colle Sannita come from a *frazione* ('hamlet') of the village, called Decorata.

[2] However, in the last few years, their action has diminished, according to the informants themselves.

[3] For a definition of 'popular' and 'regional' see, for example, Berruto (2012).

[4] Of course, as Backus (2001: 128) himself states, grammar can be borrowed too, but this happens when speakers have to fill in some gaps in that language, as it is usually the case in language attrition situations. Furthermore, gaps are filled when speakers perceive them and they do so with vocabulary more than with grammar: "lexical gaps are perceived easier than any other gap: looking for the right word is surely a more frequent phenomenon than looking for the right construction" (*ibidem*).

[5] This is something that may also happen to G1 speakers in a situation of language attrition.

[6] Something similar to what Auer (1999) refers to as 'language mixing'; see also Meeuwis & Blommaert (1998) for the notion of 'layered code-switching'.

[7] The speakers have also been interviewed and observed by the author in a different phase of data collection.

[8] For this and all the examples: *dialect*; `English`. In (9), *No, no* can be either English or dialect.

[9] Cf. Poplack (1987).

[10] However, a G1 speaker was participating in the interaction as well.

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