

BILINGUAL SOCIALIZATION PRACTICES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERACTIONAL RESOURCES

Le développement des compétences interactionnelles est crucial pour devenir un locuteur compétent. Dans cette contribution, nous analysons qualitativement des interactions enregistrées auprès de deux familles de Vénétie (Italie) où le vénétien (langue régionale et minoritaire) et l'italien sont parlés dans la communauté. Nous suggérons que, dans cette situation, l'exposition à un environnement bilingue pourrait fournir d'importants indices de socialisation préemptant éventuellement les idéologies sous-tendant les langues en présence. Nous nous interrogeons également sur les implications de ces résultats dans un contexte où les langues parlées ne bénéficient pas du même statut social.

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1. The emergence of pragmatic skills in bilingual interactions: intricate relations between language skills and ideologies

Pragmatic competence starts early from approximately the first birthday when the child starts engaging dialogically with an adult in joint attention but is only fully mastered by the age of 10 (Cekaite, 2012). From the start, children learn the conversational skills that comply with the social norms established in their social community (see review in Witko & Ghimenton, 2019). As Veneziano (1997) points out, conversations present children with a double challenge: They need to manage a face-to-face interaction whilst simultaneously mobilizing their language skills. Bilingual children have to manage the language resources in their repertoire and are expected to attune their language choices according to the interactional context. Analyzing older children and adolescents' code-switching, Auer (2000) distinguishes participant-related from discourse-related code-switching. The former refers to the preference for one language over the other and the latter indexes changes

in the conversational context. Code-switching entails complex multilayered linguistic operations meaning that, from a developmental perspective, mixed utterances convey valuable cues on the language systems in contact and on the pragmatic and metacommunicative functions related to each language spoken in interaction. In turn, these functions often signal the speakers' orientations towards the ongoing interaction, and contain information on the appropriate or expected communicative behavior and language use depending on the participant frameworks (Ghimenton, 2015). In addition, parents' conversational styles when interacting with their bilingual children may affect the language choices of the family (Lanza, 2001) offering more or less support for the production of the minoritized / minority language. Children do not grow up in neutral, ideology-free contexts. Indeed, languages spoken in the environment do not always benefit from the same social status in the speaker and hearer's eyes. Children thus have to gather information concerning the "degree" of desirability associated with each language. For example, in

Paugh's (2005) study on children's language practices in Dominica, adults avoided speaking Patwa to the young and gave preference to English – the prestigious variety – in child-directed speech. Yet, children's use of Patwa revealed sophisticated metapragmatic knowledge of the communities' practices: when enacting adults during role-play they used Patwa. Observing how speakers select (or avoid) languages, children become aware of the linguistic ideologies of their community and, on their turn, learn to choose their languages according to the community's expectations. In sum, children's involvement in interactions is critical as they learn the socially appropriate uses of language (Clark, 1978), essential for the control and accomplishment of their communicative activity.

Because discourse produced in the child's language environment conveys speakers' attitudes with regards to what is considered to be the "appropriate" use within the interactional context, having access to this information is crucial, in particular for multilingual children who speak languages that do not benefit from the same status. In fact, decoding the pragmatic subtleties of code-switched utterances is an important part in the bilingual (or multilingual) child's process of language socialization (Auer, 2000). Although many studies have focused on various aspects of interactions involving children, scholarly work on the emergence of (bilingual) conversational skills in interaction remains scarce (Sidnell, 2016).

In this paper, we investigate three children's interactional and pragmatic skills in the Italo-Romance context of Veneto. Our analyses focus on the specific functions bilingual productions cover and on how the language choice mediation contribute to the meaning-making process.

2. Methodology

2.1 Description of the corpora

The data was collected in two (extended) families, respectively Family S. and Family B. Both live in Castelfranco Veneto (Northeastern Italy)¹. Castelfranco is a town of about 35000 inhabitants in the region of Veneto (Northeastern part of Italy). Here, Venetan and Italian are spoken. Italian is the official and national language in Italy and is the medium of instruction in schools. Venetan, despite its prestigious historical background (it was the official language of the Republic of Venice from the 7th- 19th Century), is mainly used by adults and, consequently, is the minoritized language (cf. ISTAT survey results mentioned in the introduction: over the years, its use is declining particularly among the youth). However, compared to the rest of Italy's Romance varieties, Venetan is one of the most spoken regional languages across all age groups. The two families, each of which will be presented separately here below, are related: The mother in Family S. is the cousin of the father in family B. At times, the investigator was present and participated in the interactions that took place in the two families. Both families gave their informed consent for the use and analysis of the interactional material presented in this paper.

a) Family S. (Corpus Francesco)

At the time of the data collection, Family S. comprised two parents – a mother and a father – and a child, Francesco, recorded longitudinally from 17 to 30 months. His parents are two attorneys. We instructed the mother to record spontaneous interactions, from meal time interaction to play sessions. Audio recordings were collected in different types of interactional settings (dyadic and multiparty), with (extended) family members and at times with the parents and family friends on visit. Once monthly, the mother audio-recorded approximately one-and-a-half

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¹ The investigator of the research project is related to the two families.

hour interactions. The analyses in this paper are based on a corpus of 35 hours of recorded and transcribed material.

b) Family B. (Corpus Sarah/Rachele)

Family B. comprises two parents – a mother and a father – and two children, Rachele and Sarah, of respectively 5 and 9 years of age. The father is a truck driver and is often abroad and the mother is a secretary and is the two children's main caregiver. Audio recordings were done at the child's home and at grandmother's and great-grandmother's home. The two sisters were recorded by their mother and by one of the paternal aunts (when in the grandmother's home). The same instructions for the recordings were given to them: it was preferable to record free play sessions and meal time exchanges. The analyses in this paper are based on 6 hours of recorded and transcribed material.

2.2 Data coding and methods of analysis

Each utterance has been assigned to a speaker and to an addressee. Only the utterances produced in presence of the child (whether these were directed to the child or to another adult) have been transcribed² and analyzed. Adopting a qualitative approach to the data, we observe how the interactions are co-constructed and how the participants shape and structure their talk-in-interaction collectively. The first key notion is the participant framework (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2004) and refers to the fact that speaker and hearer roles are constantly negotiated and organized through their respective stances and actions. When describing participation, Goffman (1981) distinguishes the roles of ratified and unratified speakers, meaning that some speakers have the rights and obligations to participate and take part in the conversation whilst others, the unratified speakers, do not. This distinction is of particular importance to our analyses because there is a strong link between the speaker's status (ratified or unratified) and language choice mediation. A second key point is what Pomerantz (1984) calls preferred-action turn shape and dispreferred-action turn shape. She shows how assessments are performed and are embedded in interactions and how they may be achieved in preferred or dispreferred responses. A dispreferred response is an elaborate answer that is potentially face-threatening to the hearer

because it consists of declining an offer or answering negatively to a demand. Our goal is not to generalize the results, but to describe the bilingual communication process at work and how these contribute to the development of socio-pragmatic skills, through the analysis of the ordinary practices to which the children are exposed.

3. Bilingual practices and the development of socio-pragmatic interactional skills

In this section we explore the practices the target children are exposed to. We selected instances where the bilingual choices had specific socio-pragmatic functions which were either performed by the children or by the adults. In the first extract (Corpus Francesco), the child (CHI) is 23 months old and is engaging in a dyadic interaction with the mother (MOT) while she prepares lunch. This extract below shows a general trend found in this corpus: Italian is the predominant use in child-adult dyadic exchanges.

Interaction 1: Dyadic conversation between CHI and MOT during meal preparation

1. MOT: Si (.) vuoi che tolgo i pantaloni e metto le ciabatte↑
%Eng. Yes (.) Do you want me to take off your pants and put your slippers on?
2. CHI: Si
%Eng. Yes
3. MOT: Ok, aspetta.
%Eng. Ok wait
4. CHI: =Volio *ciabatte³ mamma
%Eng. =I want slippers mommy
5. MOT: Guarda tutti i ceci (.) vediamo allora qui possiamo fare la zuppa di grano che buona (.) i peperoncini ripieni
%Eng. Look at all the chick-peas (.) let us see here we can make the barley soup how lovely (.) stuffed peppers
6. CHI: **Varda mama**
%Eng. **Look mommy**
7. MOT: Dimmi (.) le orecchiette (.) siccome è una specie di pasta vedi?
%Eng. Yes (.) *the orecchiette* (.) because it is a type of pasta, you see?

MOT opens the conversation offering to take off CHI's trousers and put his slippers on for him (line 1). CHI approves MOT's offer (line 2). In line 3, MOT assures CHI that she will do so (*ok*) but not immediately and tells him he has to wait (*aspetta*). CHI reinforces his intention of

wanting his slippers (line 4). In line 5, MOT channels CHI's attention to the meal she plans to prepare for supper and labels the ingredients for the soup. So far, the interaction is in Italian yet in line 6, using Venetan, CHI directs MOT's attention towards an object. In line 7, MOT follows CHI's attention and labels the referent selected (*orecchiette*) and expands on this item. In this dyadic interaction, the mother's utterances contain more pauses and create space for the child to engage with elements in the environment. Although the linguistic choices revolve around Italian, Venetan, initiated by the child whether consciously or not, functions as an interactional resource allowing CHI to focus MOT's attention on a referent he has selected among others. Interestingly, his insistence expressed in Italian (line 4) did not receive the same attention from the mother's behalf as this turn in Venetan did (line 6). The code change from Italian to Venetan may present a more efficient way to attract the addressee's attention to the content of the utterance, providing the child with cues on how language choice can serve mediation between speakers.

The following interaction was recorded in Family B. (Corpus Sarah/Rachele) to which the investigator (INV) was present. MOT opens the conversation announcing, in Italian, that they are having pasta for lunch.

Interaction 2: Multiparty interaction between MOT, Sarah, Rachele and investigator (INV).

1. MOT: Pastasciutta per mezzogiorno!
%Eng. Pasta for lunch
2. Sarah: Pranzi da noi INV?
%Eng. Are you eating with us INV?
3. INV: **Mi dopo** devo **partire perché** devo **tegnerghe el ceo aa M.**
%Eng. **Later, I have to leave because I meant to babysit M.'s kid**
4. MOT: **Dove vaea a M.?**
%Eng. **Where is M. going?**
5. INV: All'ipermercato
%Eng. *To the hypermarket*
6. MOT: ALL'IPER (.) co' tuta sta gente!
%Eng. *At the hypermarket with all the people that are going to be there*

In line 2, Sarah asks in Italian whether INV is staying over for lunch. In the second part of the adjacent pair (line 3), INV's reply resists the *yes-no* constraints imposed by Sarah's question and produces a dispreferred response switching to

Venetan. In INV's response, the subject pronoun *mi* ('I'), albeit optional in Venetan, places the focus on the speaker. More specifically, attenuating INV's rejection, the first part of INV's response prefaces the expression of the incumbent obligations on INV, emphasized by the repetition of the Italian modal verb *devo* ('I have to'). MOT, in line 4, converging with INV's language choice, asks where M. has to go to. INV's reply concerning M.'s choice of going to the hypermarket is questioned by MOT who dismisses M.'s decision to go shopping at that particular time of the year (i.e. Christmas season). The base language is Venetan, but the switch to Italian on the word *gente* 'people' has a specific discourse function because this item bears the focus of her assessment and criticism. This particular use can be seen as having an indexical function carried by the switched form with its content encapsulating the speakers' critical stance. The code choice mediation noticeable in this interaction, moving from Venetan and Italian, contributes to the negotiation of positively (avoiding shopping during the festive season) or negatively viewed practices (shopping amidst myriads of people).

In the following interaction taped in Family B.'s home, the two sisters are playing together while MOT tidies up the house. The two sisters are playing together while MOT is tidying up the house. Sarah starts the conversation by playing the role of a grandfather, whilst Rachele enacts a little child. This interaction is characterized by an ebb and flow movement between different roles performed by the children.

Interaction 3: Enacting multilingual practices in a role-play interaction between Rachele and Sarah

1. Sarah: Il pancino mio caro pulcino (.) XX proprio come un'arancia (.) e hai il pelone grosso come una crosta di melone
%Eng. My tummy, dear little one (.) XX like a real orange (.) and you have a big fur thick like a melon's crust
2. Rachele: Nonno ma sei *baszo⁴ (.) nonno nonno
%Eng. Grandfather but you are *baszo gr-grandfather grandfather
3. MOT: Basta (.) **mettite i cosi** basta Sarah!
%Eng. Stop it (.) **put the things** and stop it Sarah!
4. Sarah: **Ou ma dai chea me tira i XXX** in-indietro
%Eng. **Hey but come on, that one throws the**

⁴ *Baszo* does not exist neither in Italian nor in Venetan. The could have meant to say pazzo ('crazy'). The data does not allow us to give this item a specific meaning.

Bilingual practices play an important role in the meaning-making process and co-construction of the interaction, in that the variation generated by these practices enclose specific pragmatic functions and resources.

XXX be- behind
 5. MOT: Basta Sarah!
 %Eng. Stop it Sarah!
 6. Rachele: **Nono** io vado via
 %Eng. **Grandpa**, I am going away
 7. Sarah: **Gheo digo a to nona e to mare** ((leaves the room)) XX
 %Eng. **I am telling your grandma and your mother**
 8. Rachele: No ce l'ho di sopra
 %Eng. No, I have it upstairs
 9. Sarah: **O a ga tacà el fucile** (.) fu- bah con la telecamera (.) ((turning to her mother)) mi stai registrando?
 %Eng. **Hey she has loaded her rifle** (.) ri- oh with the camera (.)are you taping me?

In line 1, the “grandfather”, enacted by Sarah, addresses the “little child” (enacted by Rachele) in Italian. Rachele acknowledges Sarah’s role and calls “him” *nonno* ‘grandfather’ (line 2). MOT interrupts the exchange telling Sarah in Venetan to put on “those things” (line 3). In line 4, Sarah does not shift to her “daughter role” and continues playing her part as the grandfather, this time shifting to Venetan. In her utterance, she does not address “the child” in the pretend play, but rather talks *about* her. MOT is not lenient towards her daughter’s avoidance and tells her to stop (*basta*, line 5). In line 6, Rachele continues her role-playing and threatens Sarah by saying that she is going to leave. Sarah, in line 7, speaks in Venetan and she too threatens “the child” by saying that she will tell “the child’s grandmother” and “mother” and promptly leaves the room. In line 9, maintaining Venetan, Sarah continues speaking about “the child” who apparently has loaded her rifle. However, Sarah, in this same turn, switches to Italian as she moves out of the grandfather’s role and addresses MOT, asking her if the recorder is on. The children’s codeswitching gives a clear idea of the fluidity of the bilingual practices: Children mediate their language choices as the children move from one role to another. These bilingual practices also show the children’s subtle knowledge of the metapragmatic functions underlying language practices according to the role the speaker plays in that particular

community (daughter, child, grandfather, etc.). However, language choices are not crystallized or encapsulated in particular roles because the marked choices – Venetan – may be part of the two children’s daily, ordinary, conversations as can be seen below.

Interaction 4: Sarah proposes Rachele to play catches
 1. Sarah: Dai giochiamo a prenderci Rachele?
 %Eng. Come let’s play catches Rachele?
 2. Rachele: Eh no no (.) guarda mi metto a posto **calsetti**
 %Eng. Hey no no (.) look I am tidying **socks**
 3. Sarah: Anch’io **speta** (.) no (.) **ciaparse -n atimo**
 %Eng. Me too **wait** (.) no (.) **play catches a moment**

Sarah, using Italian, opens the conversation and prompts her sister to play catches with her. Rachele produces a dispreferred response and declines her sister’s offer and directs her sister’s attention to her activity instead: tidying her “socks” (item produced in Venetan). In line 3, Sarah converges with her sister’s code choice and partakes in the joint activity (“sock tidying”). However, in the middle of her turn she signals a change of idea (*speta* (.) *no*) and tries her luck once again by reiterating her initial offer. This time she uses Venetan and not Italian as in line 1, marking the activity Sarah is proposing. Interestingly, this code change corresponding to a specific pragmatic need is similar to the one that was observed in Francesco’s use of “varda” in interaction 1.

Discussion

An interactional perspective gives an insight on how daily, ordinary, conversations create spaces for bilingual exposure and production. It is within these ordinary bilingual practices that the children are confronted with different ways of using – and playing with – language (in terms of language choice or style) that convey the same meaning yet have different pragmatic functions (e.g. emphasis, attention-seeking, role-playing, etc.). In our corpora, interactions

involving children are mainly Italoophone. Yet, the children are nonetheless exposed to Venetan, particularly as bystanders to inter-adult discussions (see quantitative results in Ghimenton & Chevrot, 2006 showing that inter-adult practices in these families are mainly in Venetan). The practices within these two families tend to favor Italian as it is the socially more desirable language, allowing for greater social mobility and assuring a wider integration to society. Yet, the presence of Italian and Venetan in the language environment may contribute to the children’s development of their pragmatic, interactional skills too. For example, as our analyses illustrate, using Venetan on an Italian backdrop highlights the desire for joint activity or the acknowledgement of conviviality (e.g. invitation, cf. Interaction 2 and 4). Even if these children use Italian more often than Venetan, these bilingual experiences provide cues that shape their socio-pragmatic skills, fundamental to their communicative development. It has also been shown that Venetan may be used in dispreferred responses (e.g. Interactions 2 and 4) as it seems to attenuate the face threatening act of rejection. Hence, the older children use Venetan as an interactional face-

preserving resource. More importantly, despite the occasional moments of exposure to Venetan, these may contribute nonetheless to the broader scope of language development (Bambi Schieffelin, personal communication). For instance, Sarah’s ability in enacting the part of an elderly person does not only reflect her skills in Venetan. It also reflects an understanding of the cultural and linguistic set-up of the roles performed in her community: Her bilingual performance of different roles in the stretch of an interaction indexes typical adult and child practices and “defies” the “mainly Italian” format of child production. Sarah’s language choice mediation between Venetan and Italian challenges and possibly preempts the ideological forces that shape the statuses of the languages involved. In this paper, we observed how the three children’s socio-pragmatic skills emerge in interaction. To be able to grasp children’s communicative development in this specific language contact situation, it was necessary to go beyond a language-specific account of the children’s performances. It has been suggested that the bilingual practices play an important role in the meaning-making process and co-construction of the interaction,

in that the variation generated by these practices enclose specific pragmatic functions and resources. Moving from one language to the other attracts the interlocutor’s attention (e.g. interactions 1; 3 and 4), puts emphasis on the content of utterances indexing particular stances (e.g. interaction 2), or allows to mediate between one role and another (interaction 3 in particular where the language shift coincides with a shift in the interactional role). Even in its small-scale nature, our paper provides a first step towards the understanding of how both Venetan – the minoritized language – and Italian are used within family interactions. Importantly, our paper shows how bilingual practices, regardless of the languages’ status and/or frequency, constrain children’s socio-pragmatic and interactional skills. This point underscores the need for future research on minority/minoritized language acquisition with more practice-centered approaches thus going beyond the language system *per se* in order to draw a more holistic assessment of the pragmatic potentialities that these languages offer to the speaker, regardless of the status of the languages involved.

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