

# Linguistica e Filologia

# 29

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HUGO SCHUCHARDT

*La lingua franca\**

Traduzione italiana di Federica Venier

All'inizio degli anni ottanta [1880] mi ero occupato intensamente della lingua franca. Un decennio più tardi questo interesse è tornato a farsi vivo in me; da allora però – e vi prego di tenerlo in considerazione per quanto segue – non ho raccolto alcuna ulteriore notizia sull'argomento e prevedo anche che non ne raccoglierò altre. Tuttavia, dal momento che nuovi sentieri mi riconducono, seppure a distanza, agli antichi luoghi, mi sento spinto a presentare quanto avevo allora raccolto il più sinteticamente possibile, con alcune indicazioni su come completarlo e svilupparlo, nel caso che qualcun altro decida di intraprendere un lavoro sistematico su questo argomento. Per quanto infatti Cherbonneau all'inizio delle sue *Observations sur l'origine et la formation du langage arabe africain* (1855: II, 550) respinga il sospetto che, nella sua opera, si sarebbe occupato della lingua franca<sup>1</sup> dicendo che “Un travail de ce genre ne serait point un travail”, tuttavia ogni lavoro è scientifico nella misura in cui si ha come scopo di determinare l'estensione e l'essenza di

\* L'originale del testo qui tradotto è reperibile al seguente sito: <http://schuchardt.uni-graz.at>

Tutti i testi cui Schuchardt fa riferimento sono invece stati raccolti da Renata Zago nella sua dissertazione (*A Dissertation on Lingua Franca*) e sono dunque consultabili al seguente sito: <http://www.uwm.edu>

Per la trascrizione dei termini arabi si è data la versione di Schuchardt e, laddove ci fossero differenze, anche la traslitterazione corrente dell'arabo classico, fornitami da Alessandro Mengozzi.

Siccome anche Schuchardt usa le parentesi quadre ho segnalato ogni volta quanto aggiunto da me con “F.V.”, così come ho siglato le poche note supplementari oggi indispensabili alla corretta comprensione del testo con “N.d.T.”.

Per l'idea di tradurre *Die Lingua franca* sono grata ad Alejandro Marcaccio che, in tempi ormai remoti, mi aveva raccomandato la lettura di questo testo. Per la revisione della traduzione la mia gratitudine va innanzitutto a Frank Jodl e al già citato Alessandro Mengozzi, amici affettuosamente scrupolosi, appassionato romanista l'uno e acuto semitista l'altro, e poi ai pochi che hanno voluto leggere e annotare quanto andavo facendo: Pierluigi Cuzzolin, Elisa De Roberto, Alessandro Parenti, Domenico Proietti e Arianna Uguzzoni. Ogni eventuale errore residuo è ovviamente da attribuirsi solo a me.

<sup>1</sup> Egli la definisce “un amalgame curieux de mots espagnols, de termes italiens et de tournures françaises”; questo alternarsi di sostantivi lascia supporre una relazione che nella realtà non sussiste.

FEDERICA GUERINI  
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## *Polyphony in multilingual interactions: code-switching in reported speech among Ghanaian immigrants in Bergamo*

*One of the many methods people have for differentiating situations and displaying attitudes is to draw on (or carefully avoid) the “voices” of others, or what they assume those voices to be.*

Judith Irvine (2001:31)

The present contribution is based on the analysis of some narrative sequences extracted from a sample of face-to-face interactions and semi-structured interviews involving a group of (first-generation) Ghanaian immigrants in Italy. The analysis combines the interpretative frameworks of conversation analysis and interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz 1982) with Bakhtin's (1981) analysis of the “layering of voices” emerging in narrative texts, as well as with the findings of recent research on identity as an interactional accomplishment. It will be argued that, in the narrative sequences examined, multilingual competence is creatively resorted to in order to construct socially interpretable identities and to mark portions of reported speech, thereby isolating from the surrounding utterances the different voices alternating within the narration itself. Code-switching will be pointed out as a versatile conversational strategy enabling the speaker to recreate the polyphony which is typical of any dialogic sequence and to convey both personal and group identity.

### *1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>*

In certain multilingual communities, speakers may develop a very subtle awareness of language use and language choice, an awareness shaped by the symbolic value acquired by the various languages (or language varieties) in the community at large.

The interest in the discursive practices whereby multilingual speakers index social and/or ethnic identity, and express affiliation to

<sup>1</sup> A shorter version of the present paper was presented at the International Symposium on Bilingualism (ISB7), which was held at the University of Utrecht (Netherlands) from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> of July 2009. The Author's participation to the International Symposium was funded by a FAR grant by the University of Bergamo (grant number 60GUER09), which I thankfully acknowledge.

(or disaffiliation from) social groups (e.g. Auer 2007) is rooted in the well-established empirical finding that, in both monolingual and multilingual contexts, “identities are constituted in talk; identity work is interactional; the indexical dimension of linguistic forms is central to identity constitution and achieved identities are partial, multiple, contingent and shifting” (Bailey 2007: 346). Indeed, the importance of investigating the relationship between language choice and the expression of individual and/or group identity had already emerged quite clearly in Le Page and Tabouret-Keller’s work on “acts of identity” (1985), which drew attention to the fact that in bi- or multilingual settings language choice is always an “act of identity”, regardless of the language (or languages) involved, and highlighted speakers’ ability to “create their linguistic systems so as to resemble those of the groups with which from time to time they wish to identify” (1985: 182). As a result of these findings, identity has been increasingly viewed as a dynamic and multilayered notion, the investigation of which requires what has been described as an “identities-in-interaction approach” (Antaki / Widdicombe 1998: 3).

The present contribution is based on the qualitative analysis of some narrative sequences extracted from a sample of face-to-face interactions and of semi-structured interviews (a total of roughly 40 hours of recordings, collected between 2001 and 2007, and partially examined in Guerini 2006) involving a selected group of first-generation Ghanaian immigrants in Italy. The study combines the interpretative frameworks of conversation analysis and interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz 1982) with Bakhtin’s (1981) analysis of the “layering of voices” emerging in dialogic and narrative texts, as well as with the findings of recent research on identity as an interactional accomplishment (e.g. Eckert / Richford 2001). It will be argued that, in the narrative sequences examined, multilingual competence is creatively resorted to in order to construct socially interpretable identities as well as to mark portions of reported speech, thereby isolating from the surrounding utterances the different voices emerging and alternating within the narration itself (cf. Günthner 2007). Code-switching will be pointed out as a versatile conversational strategy enabling the speaker to recreate the polyphony which is typical of any dialogic sequence and to convey both personal and group identity in everyday informal interactions.

## 2. Background: the Ghanaian immigrant community in Bergamo

The immigration process from Ghana to Italy began towards the end of the 1970s, but it gained some consistency only in the following decade. The Ghanaian community in Bergamo and its province is presently composed of about 1500 individuals, two thirds of whom are male.<sup>2</sup> The majority of its members are first-generation immigrants, who were born in Ghana and moved to Italy in order to overcome the permanent lack of job security typical of many African countries, and improve their standard of living.

In Ghana – a former British colony where English remains the main language of literacy – more than sixty languages are currently spoken by a population of about 18 million people. The year 2000 national census reveals that the native language of about 40% of the Ghanaian population is Akan (a language belonging to the Kwa branch of the Niger-Congo family), and that the speakers of Akan as a second (or third) language amount to a further 44% of the Ghanaian citizens. This means that an Akan dialect is spoken as a first language by seven million people at least (Anyidoho / Dakubu 2008: 142) and that Akan can be considered the dominant means of inter-ethnic communication within Ghana's national borders. Indeed, the Akan-speaking majority tends to be monolingual (as far as the indigenous languages are taken into account, i.e. not considering English) or bilingual, while minority language speakers are usually multilingual (cf. Guerini 2008: 12). Akan enjoys considerable prestige and is currently employed in a variety of domains: in religious ceremonies, in political debates, in television and radio programs, within the judicial system and even in formal education where, until May 2002, Akan was used as the teaching medium during the first three years of primary school.

Immediately after independence, English was selected as the only official language of the country, thus inaugurating a language policy the main purpose of which was to encourage the spread of the local variety of English, commonly known as *Ghanaian English*. At present, English

<sup>2</sup> In December 2006 the official report of the Italian Statistical Institute (ISTAT) placed the number of Ghanaian immigrants within the Province of Bergamo at 1,505 (see <http://demo.istat.it/str2006/index.html>).

is generally perceived as the only language worth being literate in or even the sole language worth investing (both in financial and in cognitive terms) since the early childhood. Proficiency in English is tied to the ideas of well-being and economic development commonly associated to life in a Western country and tends to be perceived as a key requisite for occupying the most important and remunerative national positions. Nevertheless, as in most African countries, the ability to speak English remains the prerogative of a minority of the population, the highly educated and wealthy elite who have the opportunity to attend the local school system long enough to develop literacy skills and gain reasonable confidence in written communication.

The only variety of English available to illiterate speakers, that is to say, to those individuals who never enrolled in the local school system, is the local variety of West African Pidgin English, called *Ghanaian Pidgin English* (Huber 1999). This English-based pidgin is probably the most stigmatised variety among those available to the local population, being associated with the lowest social classes and with speakers' lack of formal education.

We have already noted that Akan has a fully developed written standard – a condition shared with a few other indigenous languages, such as Ewe and Ga in the south or Gonja and Dagbani in Northern Ghana – and is extensively used in number of public and formal domains. Given the functional differences among the linguistic systems mentioned so far, the languages' relative prestige, and their distribution in a set of distinct but also partially overlapping domains of usage, I will rely on Fasold's (1984: 44-5) notion of *double overlapping diglossia* in order to sketch out the general sociolinguistic setting of the home country of the immigrants investigated here.

As illustrated in figure 2.1 below, the sociolinguistic situation in Ghana involves two partially overlapping diglossic relations: the first one opposes Ghanaian English (as a high variety) to Akan, as well as to the other languages employed in written domains (i.e. Ewe, Ga, Gonja, and so on...), whereas the second diglossic relation involves Akan (this time as a high variety) as opposed to the various local languages and vernaculars lacking a written tradition and to the local variety of English-based pidgin, that occupy the low level of the diglossic pattern.

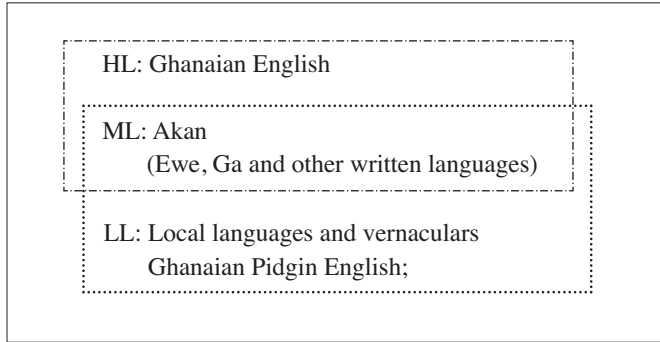


Figure 2.1: Double overlapping diglossia (adapted from Guerini 2006: 51).

Indeed, all the Ghanaian immigrants involved in the present research learned either a local vernacular or Akan as their native language at home (or from the general Akan-speaking environment), in a spontaneous way, a typical pattern of acquisition of ‘low’ varieties in diglossic situations. When they entered the local school system, Akan (or, as an alternative, one of the languages locally employed within the educational system, i.e. Ewe, Ga, Gonja, and so on, depending on the region where the individual immigrants were born and/or grew up) was adopted as the medium of instruction during the first three years of primary school, while English was taught as a subject. Eventually, English would replace the local language as the teaching medium of all subjects. In this sense, English typically fulfils the functions of ‘high’ variety, prevalently employed in written and formal domains – though its use in spoken communication is of course quite common as well – whereas Akan (together with the other written languages) occupies an intermediate functional position, being a ‘low’ language vis-à-vis English and an ‘high’ language vis-à-vis the other indigenous vernaculars and the local English-based pidgin.<sup>3</sup>

The multilingual repertoire of the Ghanaian immigrant community

<sup>3</sup> Needless to say, the diglossic relations that I have just described do not imply the same rigid, complementary distribution of functions and potential domains of usage originally delineated by Ferguson (1959). Communication in African multilingual communities is actually much more complex and intertwined than any model can possibly account for. A more detailed discussion is offered in Guerini (2006), but see also the recent overview by Anyidoho / Dakubu (2008).



in Bergamo results from the intertwining of the complex sociolinguistic situation that I have just outlined with the linguistic repertoire of the host community in Bergamo – which includes the Italian language, an official, highly elaborated prestige language, regularly used in a variety of institutional and formal domains, and the *Bergamasco* dialect (see figure 2.2 below). It is worth pointing out that the latter is an Italo-romance variety, i.e. a linguistic system completely independent from the Italian language – though genetically related to it –, to which the dialect is functionally subordinated.<sup>4</sup>

HL: Ghanaian English, Italian
ML: Akan ( <i>Bergamasco</i> dialect?)
LL: ( <i>Bergamasco</i> dialect?) Ghanaian languages and vernaculars Ghanaian Pidgin English

Figure 2.2: Language repertoire of the Ghanaian community in Bergamo and its province (adapted from Guerini 2006: 65)

It is not easy to place the *Bergamasco* dialect within the community's repertoire: my personal observation led to the conclusion that Ghanaian immigrants in Bergamo cannot speak or understand the local Italo-romance dialect for the simple reason that the local community members refrain from speaking in dialect to them. This occurs even in the case of all the foreigners who do not belong to the local (Italian) community, and are therefore perceived as outsiders. In

<sup>4</sup> It is important to point out that here the term dialect is used in order to translate the Italian term *dialetto*, the meaning of which is different from the meaning normally attributed to 'dialect' within an English context. English sociolinguistic tradition employs the term 'dialect' as a synonym of 'language variety': a language is typically composed by a number of dialects, which differ grammatically, phonologically and lexically from each other and/or are associated with a particular geographical area. In this sense, standard English is considered to be a 'dialect' just as any other regional or socially marked variety of the English language. On the contrary, Italo-romance *dialetti* are not varieties of Italian, but autonomous linguistic systems that, just like Italian, derived from the varieties of Latin spoken in Italian territory (see Berruto 2005: 82-83).

other words, the immigrants' proficiency in the dialect is poor because they have no or limited access to it, as locals use the dialect only to communicate with other locals. In this sense, the dialect can be regarded as a *we-code* (cf. Gumperz 1982) of the local community, whereas Italian – in most cases, a simplified variety of Italian – is the default choice in order to communicate with immigrants.

As I will illustrate in the following section, the local dialect is perceived as a crucial component of the linguistic identity of the host community. However, attitudes towards the dialect are ambivalent. On the one hand, the dialect enjoys a lower degree of *overt* prestige than the Italian language (the dialect is hardly ever written, it is rarely heard on radio and television programs, it cannot be employed in official documents, etc.); on the other, participant observation has revealed that some Ghanaian immigrants attribute a certain degree of *covert* prestige to this variety, which tends to be perceived as a code strictly related to the host community's ethnic identity, as well as to the values – productiveness, determination and industriousness – traditionally associated to it (cf. Guerini 2006: 62).

### 3. *Polyphony in multilingual interactions*

#### 3.1 *Code-switching and reported speech*

As I anticipated, the present analysis combines the interpretative frameworks of conversation analysis and interactional sociolinguistics (cf. Gumperz 1982) with the findings of recent research on identity as an interactional accomplishment (e.g. Eckert / Richford 2001), in what Auer has recently described as an “identities-in-interaction approach”, presupposing that “identity-relevant activities in interaction are “indexical and *occasioned*”, i.e., they cannot be understood unless their embedding into the conversational and larger context at hand is taken into account” (2007: 8, emphasis in original).

Code-switching among Ghanaian immigrants in Bergamo is a relatively frequent and unmarked conversational practice, especially in spontaneous, informal conversations involving community members. Many switches serve a local discursive function, i.e. contribute to the

organisation of the ongoing interaction, thus functioning as *contextualization cues* (Gumperz 1982: 132-5), that is to say, as a strategy that speakers may creatively exploit in order to signal the transition from one type of verbal activity to another.

In my sample of empirical data, a number of code-switching occurrences take the form of quotations, either in direct or in indirect speech, of the words that someone else has pronounced in a previous interactive episode. This kind of conversational device is especially frequent in narrative sequences, where code-switching is commonly resorted to in order to mark portions of quoted speech thereby isolating from the surrounding utterances and accentuating the different voices emerging and alternating within the narration itself (cf. Bakhtin 1981; Tannen 1989).

As a rule, the code selected for the quotation coincides with the language (presumably) employed by the original speaker. In other words, most of these switches appear to be occasioned by a mimetic intent, i.e. by the desire to reproduce as faithfully as possible the language choice operated by the original speaker. Extract 1 illustrates this conversational practice: Zita, a Ghanaian immigrant in her late thirties, switches from English into Italian in order to reproduce the words addressed to her by the Italian doctor she uses to meet when she gets a check-up at the local hospital.

[Extract 1]

523 √∧ LAST TIME I WENT TO THE HOSPITAL % THE DOCTOR SAID, % NO  
MORE INGLESE, adesso eh, capisci bene, brava, brava! [laughs]  
'... now, eh, you understand well, well done, well done!'

Note that in this case the quotation and the switched portion do not coincide: the switching takes place *after* the beginning of the quotation, which is consequently lengthier than the switched unit. However, we can safely assume that the language switched to is the one employed by the original speaker, who is likely to praise the interlocutor's improved proficiency in Italian by employing that very language, which would be the unmarked choice in the setting described here.

The same mimetic intent is apparent in extract 2 below: indeed, Twi – a vehicular, simplified variety of Akan – is likely to be the unmarked

choice among Lebanese (and other foreign) immigrants living in Ghana's main urban centres, especially in the highly informal and multilingual context (the local market of European goods) mentioned by the informant in this narrative sequence.

[Extract 2]

- 558 \Rl\ LEBANESE PEOPLE ALSO SPEAK TWI/ LEBANESE-  
 559 \Int\ LEBANESE?  
 560 \Rl\ LEBAN, IN MIDDLE EAST, LEBANESE ARE FROM THE MIDDLE EAST-  
 561 \Int\ I SEE  
 562 \Rl\ LEBANESE, THEY ARE STINGY, THEY ARE MUSLIM, EHI! WHEN THEY GO  
 563 TO THE MARKET, TOMATO IS EXPENSIVE, *ne bo ye den, tew so!* [laughs]  
 '... the price is expensive, reduce it!'  
 564 \Int\ [laughs] *Ne bo ye den!*  
 'The price is expensive!'  
 565 \Rl\ YES! ... WHEN THEY GO TO THE SUPERMARKET THEY HAVE A SHOP LIST,  
 566 THEY ARE STINGY, THEY CALL IT THE EUROPEAN MARKET, IT SELLS  
 567 EUROPEAN THINGS, YOU/ EHI! AT TIMES THEY STAND AND LOOK AT  
 568 THAT, IT'S EXPENSIVE, *wofiri se mennim ne boɔ, wope se wobu me?*  
 '... do you think I don't know the price, do you want to cheat me?'

Interestingly, both the quotations contained in extract 2 share the following conversational features: *i*) they are not introduced by verbs of quotation (*verba dicendi*), *ii*) the switching takes place after the beginning of the reported speech, and *iii*) the code selected for the quotation coincides with the language which is supposed to have been employed by the original speaker. To be sure, the lack of *verba dicendi* at the beginning of the quotations is typical of informal, casual speech; note however that, despite the partial inconsistency mentioned in *ii*), the adoption of a code contrasting with the language of interaction is the only discursive cue signalling that a certain unit should be interpreted as reported speech. Hence Rita contributes to the effective development of the narrative episode by drawing on her multilingual competence, which enables her to set off a “voice” other than her own by means of a situated (i.e. context-bound) switching into another language.

Extract 2 also shows that there is not a stable, one-to-one relationship between the use of a certain language and the social affiliation that the same language may potentially convey (cf. Bailey 2007: 355): in the

specific local context evoked by Rita, Akan, a Ghanaian language, is adopted in order to enact a foreign, non-Ghanaian identity, which is not normally associated with the use of Akan.

For code-switching to contextualise someone else's speech, the switched portion need not coincide with a whole utterance: a few words or a phrase involving a switch into a language contrasting with the one used up to that point of the conversation may, in a specific interactional context, enable the speaker to recreate the polyphony which is typical of dialogic sequences. The following extract is a portion of a longer spontaneous conversation involving two middle aged immigrants, Emmanuel and James, and carried out in the absence of other interactants. The language of the conversation is Akan (both informants are Akan native speakers), even when the topic shifts to their migratory experience in Bergamo, e.g. to the difficulties encountered on the working place:

[Extract 3]

- 348 \E\ *Adwuma yi ye lavoro pesante. Ali taa gye malattia wɔ* INPS  
'The work is hard. That's why Ali is always on sick-leave.'<sup>5</sup>
- 349 \JA\ *HUNGARYfoɔ no nso gye malattia baako baako*  
'The Hungarians too have started going on sick-leave one after another.'
- 350 \E\ *Wɔse adwuma no ye den*  
'They say the work is hard.'
- 351 \JA\ *Na se adwuma no nyɛ* EASY  
'But the work isn't easy.'
- 352 \E\ *eno nti na obiara ba a, na ɔkɔ!*  
'That's why people come and go!'
- 357 \JA\ *Na se nnipa pii mpe*  
'Many people don't like it [the job].'

The first turn of extract 3 (line 348) is extremely interesting. It displays an Italian noun phrase (*lavoro pesante*, 'hard work'), the presence of which, at first sight, may appear unquestionably redundant: indeed, the literal translation of '*Adwuma yi ye lavoro pesante*' is 'this work is hard work', which suggests that either Emmanuel makes use of

<sup>5</sup> INPS is an acronym indicating the Italian Pensions and Social Security Department (*Istituto Nazionale Previdenza Sociale*).

the Italian phrase *lavoro pesante* without actually analysing its meaning or its presence needs to be accounted for in a more convincing way. Note that the corresponding Akan lexemes (*adwuma*, ‘work’ and *den* ‘heavy, hard’) are employed by the same speaker in the following turn (line 350), therefore an interpretation in terms of a (momentary) gap in the speaker’s lexical competences can be safely ruled out.

If we focus on the larger conversational context in which the first line of extract 3 is embedded, we may notice that in fact Emmanuel and James’ comments on the hardness of the work echo the general mood among their colleagues – such as Ali (line 348) or “the Hungarians” (line 349), who ask for sick-leave “one after another”. In this sense, the Italian noun phrase ‘*lavoro pesante*’ is apparently meant to allude to the words pronounced by those colleagues as a justification for their absence from work, in a context of Western awareness of employment-related rights, which condemns heavy work as a form of exploitation and encourages sick-leave as a means of drawing the employer’s attention to her/his responsibilities. In other words, I suggest that the insertion of this Italian noun phrase is aimed at infusing into the conversation the ‘flavour’ of the setting (the working place) that Emmanuel is about to evoke. Incidentally, both Emmanuel and James resigned from their job a few months after this conversation was recorded.

In spontaneous, casual speech, the continuous interchanging between primary and secondary sequences is a very common narrative strategy; competent speakers can accordingly resort to their multilingual skills in order to mark the beginning and/or the end of a quotation, which is inserted within the main flow of a narrative sequence, without the explicit recourse to *verba dicendi*. The following extract has been selected from a longer anecdote narrated by Raphael, an immigrant in his late forties, who was among the first to reach Italy at the beginning of the 1980s, and who is consequently a very fluent and competent Italian speaker. Since he was born in Ghana’s Northern region, just a few kilometres from the Burkina-Faso border, his competence in Akan is actually rather limited, his native language being Kasem (Niger-Congo, Gur). In informal gatherings with other Ghanaian immigrants, English is Raphael’s preferred choice, unless one or more members of the local Italian community are present, as in the following case. Extract

4 reproduces the beginning of an anecdote centred upon the conversation between an Italian lady, who has just arrived in Ghana, and her young (Ghanaian) domestic servant:

[Extract 4]

444 \R\ Senti questa, eh/ questo qui è molto molto interessante. C'è una

445 signora italiana, no? Quelle che mi hanno portato qua, allora lei la

446 prima volta che è venuto in Ghana/ c'è eh! HOUSEBOY, maggiordomo,

447 no? Allora questo qui è andato a chiedere MADAM, CAN YOU GIVE ME  
SOME

448 CHEESE? Mamma mia, questa qui si è arrabbiata, & perché sua  
mamma= &

'Listen to this, eh/ this one is very very interesting. There is an Italian lady, no? the one who brought me here [in Italy], so the first time she went to Ghana/ there was, eh, houseboy, a domestic, you know? So he approached the lady and went to ask madam, can you give me some cheese? Good gracious, she lost her temper, since her mother='

(1st dialogic  
sequence)

449 \G\ [laughs] & perché sua mamma- &  
'since her mother-'

450 \R\ =suo marito non c'era, no? Allora lei si è arrabbiata, CHEESE,

451 CHEESE, MADAM, CHEESE! MADAM, NO KISS, CHEESE!

'=her husband wasn't there, you know? So she lost her temper, cheese, cheese, madam, cheese! madam, no kiss, cheese!'

452 \nt\ [laughs] Ah, ho capito!  
'Oh, I see!'

453 \R\ Hai capito? Lei ha capito dare un bacio, no?  
'You see? She understood can you give me a kiss, you know?'

454 \nt\ [laughs] Eh sì!  
'Yes!'

455 \R\ Allora quando è arrivato suo marito-  
'So, when her husband came back home-'

- 456 \Ita\ Glielo ha detto?  
 ‘Did she tell him?’
- 457 \R\ Ha detto subito, ecco, guarda, questi qua mi chiedono anche baci  
 adesso!  
 ‘She told him immediately, look, these people are even asking me  
 for kisses now!’
- 458 \Int\ [laughs] Poveretto!  
 ‘Poor boy!’
- 459 \R\ Allora suo marito fa, no, cosa ha detto poi? Fa/ ha detto ragazzo,  
 460 cosa hai detto a MADAM? Ho chiesto se mi poteva dare CHEESE... e lui  
 461 rideva, dopo ha spiegato a sua moglie, io non sapeva che formaggio si  
 462 chiamava CHEESE!  
 ‘Then her husband enquired, you know, what did he say then? He  
 says/ he said to the boy, what did you say to madam? I asked  
 whether she could give me some cheese ... and he was laughing,  
 then he explained to his wife, I didn’t know that *formaggio* was  
 called cheese!’

The anecdote narrated by Raphael is a sort of joke involving three characters: *i*) the Italian lady (who is first introduced by means of the Italian form *signora* ‘lady’, and later by means of the English ‘*madam*’), *ii*) the domestic servant (‘*houseboy*’, line 446), and *iii*) the lady’s husband.

A closer analysis of extract 4 reveals the succession of three dialogic sequences: the first one, involving the Italian lady and her domestic servant (lines 444-51), is supposed to have been carried out in English: the amusing misunderstanding originated by the lady’s poor competence of the language could not be explained otherwise. Note that the first quotation (lines 447-8) is preceded and introduced by a *verbum dicendi*, whereas this marker is omitted before the second quotation (lines 450-51), as is often the case in emotionally charged contexts, where speakers tend to omit all the details that they deem unnecessary or redundant. The interactants’ emotional involvement is also the cause of the lapse of both Raphael and George (lines 448-9), which was about to



alter a fundamental piece of information for the correct interpretation of the story.

The second dialogic sequence is a conversation between husband and wife, that Raphael resumes in a single turn (line 457), uttered by the Italian lady; given the lady's poor competence in English and the Italian origin of both interlocutors, we may suppose that Italian is the unmarked choice as the language of interaction.

The last dialogue is the one between the husband and his domestic servant, which eventually leads to the explanation of the misunderstanding (lines 459-461), as well as to the lady's acknowledgement of her mistake ("*Io non sapeva che formaggio si chiamava CHEESE!*", line 462). In this case, despite the presence of the Italian lady, English must have been the language of interaction, otherwise it would have been difficult to find out the reason why the misinterpretation occurred. Raphael, however, reports the whole dialogue in Italian, with the exception of the lexemes *madam* and *cheese* (line 460), which mark the end of the utterances respectively pronounced by the husband ("*Ragazzo, cosa hai detto a MADAM?*") and by the domestic servant ("*Ho chiesto se mi poteva dare CHEESE*"). The same is true of line 462 ("*Io non sapeva che formaggio si chiamava CHEESE!*"), which is supposed to be uttered by the lady. *Madam* and *cheese* are thus the key words of this narrative sequence, not only because in their absence the anecdote would inevitably lose part of its cohesion, but also because of their role in conveying a crucial component of contextual information (i.e. the interchange between reported speech and the main flow of the narrative sequence) without inhibiting the smooth development of the story.

### 3.2 Language crossing

As Judith Irvine's statement quoted at the beginning of this contribution suggests, the relationship between language choice and the expression of identities in interaction is also an important source of information about individual (as well as community) attitudes towards the languages (or the language varieties) switched to, which tend to be metonymically associated to the social and/or ethnic group which is perceived as the 'prototypical' user of a certain variety (Garrett / Coupland / Williams 2003: 12).

Rampton's (1995) classical study, investigating language use among British-born adolescents in a South Midlands multiethnic urban centre, provides a useful starting point in this respect. His work highlights the prominent role of a conversational strategy, that Rampton names *language crossing* (1995: 14) – a “form of code-switching” involving “the use of language varieties associated with social or ethnic groups the speaker does not normally ‘belong’ to” – in the expression of social knowledge about group membership in informal interactions. As Rampton explains, language crossing always involves a certain component of stereotyping and stigmatization: speakers employ a language other than their own, to which they have been at least occasionally exposed, in order to express their affiliation to (or most frequently, their disaffiliation from) the social and/or ethnic group traditionally associated to the language variety in question. In this sense, language crossing is a “form of code-switching” largely independent of language fluency, in that it may be effectively performed by speakers knowing just a few words or ritual expressions in the language switched to. As Rampton again attests,

Crossing [...] is concerned with switching into languages that are not generally thought to belong to you. This kind of switching, in which there is a distinct sense of movement across social or ethnic boundaries, raises issues of social legitimacy that participants need to negotiate. (Rampton 1995: 280).

As I mentioned in the previous paragraph, the Italo-romance dialect spoken in Bergamo and its province is a sort of *we-code* of the local community, to which immigrants and other ‘outsiders’ have no or limited access, since the local people use the dialect only to communicate with other locals. The main consequence of this state of affairs is that the dialect tends to be perceived as a crucial component of the linguistic identity of the host community, although the immigrants’ proficiency remains limited to a few words and other unsystematic expressions (such as greetings and leave-taking formulas) drawn from occasionally overheard conversations. The episode described in extract 5 below is emblematic of this use of the *Bergamasco* dialect as the preferred means of in-group communication by the local people:

[Extract 5]

- 176 \Z\ [...] I WORK WITH A FAMILY/ I WORK WITH A FAMILY, AND WHEN THEY ARE  
QUARRELLING,  
177 THEY SPEAK ONLY Bergamasco! ... THEN, LATER, THE MAN ASKS ME, signora Zita,  
178 DID YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT WE ARE SAYING? DID YOU HEAR WHAT MY WIFE SAYS?  
179 I WOULD SAY, no. AND HE, IT IS GOOD THAT YOU DID NOT UNDERSTAND, IT IS  
180 A VERY BAD WORD THAT MY WIFE HAS TOLD ME! [laughs]

Attitudes towards the dialect, however, are ambivalent, not only as a result of the immigrants' poor competence, but also because in Italy – and the province of Bergamo is no exception – Italo-romance dialects are generally placed at the lower end of the prestige continuum: their use is stigmatised in most formal and institutional domains (e.g. in the education system) and tends to be associated to backwardness, provincialism and lack of formal education.<sup>6</sup>

In my sample, this ambivalence towards the local dialect is displayed by the mocking use of *Bergamasco* in order to assert one's distance from the 'prototypical' speaker of the dialect (perceived in a simplified, stereotyped way) and play with an identity other than one's own. This may be observed in the following extract, extrapolated from an interview with Iulie, a woman in her forties who has been living in Bergamo for roughly fifteen years, and Lydia, a 26 years old Ghanaian who has just arrived in Italy and has established only limited contacts with the local community:

[Extract 6]

- 120 \Int\ AND DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE BERGAMASCO DIALECT?  
121 \L\ NO  
122 \Int\ AND, IULIE, DO YOU UNDERSTAND?  
123 \L\ [laughing] *Pòta ma*  
'Sure, but-'

<sup>6</sup> The existence of ambivalent attitudes towards the Italo-romance *dialetti* spoken in Italy is well-documented in the literature; for a general overview, the reader is referred to Sobrero / Miglietta (2006) and Ruffino (2006).

- 124 \ \ *Pòta ma, asee kyerε sen?*  
 ‘What is the meaning of “*pòta ma*”?’
- 125 \ \ [laughing] *Pòta ma ... stà sö!*  
 ‘Sure, but ... stay upright!’
- 126 \ \ *Pòta ma ete sen?*  
 ‘... what does it mean?’
- 127 \ \ *ɔbi ka asem a wontumi nkyere asee, pòta ma, pòta ma!* [laughs]  
 ‘If someone says something you will not be able to explain, [you say] *pòta ma, pòta ma!*’
- 128 \ Int \ [laughing] YOU ARE RIGHT!
- 129 \ \ *Ma fà sító!*  
 ‘(Literally) But shut up!’
- 130 \ Int \ *Fà sító* MEANS “SHUT UP!”
- 131 \ \ [laughing] *Pàsa dét, pàsa dét!*  
 ‘Go inside, go inside!’

When questioned about her ability to understand the local dialect, instead of offering a direct reply, Iulie makes repeatedly use of short phrases or ‘chunks’ in a language of which she apparently knows only a limited number of words, in order to give a jokingly demonstration of her “competence”, but also to underline her distance from an identity to which she feels she does not belong. In this context, the use of the local Italo-romance dialect is not motivated by the desire to sound like a member of the local community. As Iulie’s laughter suggests, it is intended as a parody of the local community members, who are portrayed as people uttering rude orders (‘*Stay upright!*’, line 125, ‘*But shut up!*’, line 129; ‘*Go inside, go inside!*’, line 131) and running short of words more frequently than is convenient (cf. line 127: ‘*If someone says something you will not be able to explain, [you say] pòta ma, pòta ma!*’).

A closer look at extract 5 reveals another important difference between code-switching a language crossing: both conversational practices involve a switching into a language differing from the one used up to that point of the interaction, but while code-switching can be either *situational* or *metaphorical*, according to Gumperz’s (1982) well-known distinction, crossing is *always* metaphorical, since the purpose of

introducing another language into the conversation is to express the speaker's disaffiliation from the social and/or ethnic group traditionally associated with the language itself.

A few turns later, as the interviewer asks Iulie whether she can tell the difference between Italian and the local Italo-romance dialect, language crossing is carried out again and, quite curiously, the *Bergamasco* dialect is compared to a tone language ('*that language they use has a huge tone*', line 142), a prosodic feature, the presence of lexically and/or grammatically contrastive tones, which is actually typical of many of the Niger-Congo languages spoken in Ghana, including Akan, Iulie's native language:

[Extract 7]

- 139 \Int\ =THE LOCAL PEOPLE ONLY SPEAK ITALIAN WITH YOU, I SEE ... BUT CAN YOU  
140 TELL THE DIFFERENCE [BETWEEN ITALIAN AND THE LOCAL Bergamasco DIALECT]?
- 141 \N YES, YES ... Bergamasco IS/ THEY/ THAT LANGUAGE THEY USE HAS A HUGE TONE,  
142 YOU KNOW, *mangià polénta, mangià polénta!* [laughing] *ete se mpoanofoo!*  
'... eat *polenta*, eat *polenta!* It sounds like [the language spoken by] those living  
around the seaside!'<sup>7</sup>
- 143 \N *Waye adee, waye adee!*  
'You are right, you are right!'
- 144 \N THEY SPEAK LIKE THAT, OH! ...
- 145 \N *Mente, mente!*  
'I don't understand, I don't understand [the dialect]!'

In this case, the linguistic portrayal of the dialect-speaker is achieved not only through the insertion of a stereotyped utterance in *Bergamasco* (line 142, '*Eat polenta, eat polenta!*'), but also by drawing a parallel between the local dialect and a tone language ostensibly spoken by '*those living around the seaside*', presumably, in Ghana. The soundness of this analogy is ratified by Lydia ('*You are right, you are right!*', line 143), who however acknowledges her lack of competence (line 145). Here the dialect is explicitly depicted as a exogenous code

<sup>7</sup> *Polenta* is the name of a local staple made from maize flour and water, which – especially in the past – represented the main nutritional alternative for people too poor to afford bread.

(‘*Bergamasco is/ they/ that language they use ...*’, line 141; ‘*They speak like that*’, line 144), i.e. as a language extraneous to the Ghanaian community. And, at the same time, the distance between *Bergamasco* and Italian is also implicitly asserted. Bailey (2007) views this pervasive emphasis on differences and commonalities as a crucial component of identity work:

One’s own identity and ways of speaking are generally treated as normal, natural and unmarked, so it can be difficult to call attention to them. Identities [...] are constituted through meaningful opposition to other identities, so it is through the highlighting of boundaries – through naming and disparaging of an Other or *exaggeration of linguistic features seen as emblematic of other identities* – that one’s own identities and associated ways of speaking are constituted as distinct and discrete. (Bailey 2007: 355, my emphasis)

By exaggerating some of the linguistic features that she views as emblematic of the local dialect-speaking community, Iulie positions herself outside it. By underlining the distance separating the local dialect from the Italian language, she asserts, by implication, the difference existing between the minority of traditionalist, conservative locals who use the dialect as their primary (or only) means of in-group communication, from the wider Italian-speaking community, whose linguistic orientation does not exclude immigrants, like her, from its potential interlocutors.

#### 4. *Conclusive remarks*

In this paper I have argued that, like the members of other immigrant communities in Europe, Ghanaian immigrants in Bergamo and the surrounding territory creatively draw on the various languages included in their linguistic repertoire in order to organize the on-going conversation, to display their language preferences and to express their alignment with or disaffiliation from the social and/or ethnic groups which they perceive as the “prototypical” users of a given language.

Special attention was devoted to the use of code-switching in order

to mark portions of quoted speech and set them off from the surrounding talk or from the main flow of a narrative episode. I have attempted to show that code-switching is an extremely frequent and unmarked conversational practice, especially in informal, spontaneous speech, where a few words or phrases involving a switch into a language different from the one employed up to that point of the conversation enable competent speakers to contextualise the utterances pronounced in previous interactive episodes, without the explicit recourse to *verba dicendi* or other quotation devices. The meaning of the individual code-switching occurrences has been shown to be highly context-dependent, i.e. related to the specific interactional context in which the single occurrences are actually embedded. Accordingly, the choice of Akan in order to contextualise a portion of quoted speech should not be automatically interpreted as an attempt to index a Ghanaian identity, though in most occasions such a correlation (Akan – Ghanaian identity) actually turns out to be correct.

Another important point that has emerged during the analysis is that code-switching may also involve language varieties in which the speaker is only scarcely proficient, and that are perceived as ‘belonging’ to social or ethnic groups other than the speaker’s. In my sample, this conversational strategy – that I described as *language crossing*, following Rampton (1995) – takes the form of mocking switches into the local *Bergamasco* dialect, a language variety which is not included in the community linguistic repertoire (since most Ghanaian immigrants have been able to attain only a limited, fragmentary competence in the dialect), but that is generally perceived as a crucial component of the linguistic identity of the host community and is thus resorted to in order to evoke (and, at the same time, to disaffiliated from) that very identity.

In the light of these observations, a closer analysis of the attitudes towards the local Italo-romance dialects displayed by the various immigrant groups who have recently settled in Italy emerges as an area of much-needed research, which may represent a fruitful source of information about the immigrants’ linguistic behaviour in a number of communicative settings.

*Transcription conventions*

,	short break without pause
.	short pause within the same turn
...	long pause within the same turn
((pause))	pause lasting longer than 3 seconds
:	lengthening (of a vowel sound)
?	interrogative intonation
!	sentence final exclamatory intonation
-	break off, unfinished sentence
CAPITAL LETTERS	emphasis
/	self-corrections
‘ ... ’	English translation of Italian or Akan utterances
& ... &	overlapping stretches of talk
=	latching (i.e. no interval between adjacent turns)
% ... %	words or syllables spoken with a low voice
(x x x)	unintelligible speech
[...]	omissions
[between square brackets]	comments and descriptions of the speakers’ paralinguistic behaviour

Note: the languages alternating within the extracts have been transcribed using the following conventions:

Italian	(Roman)
ENGLISH	(Small capitals)
<i>Akan</i>	(Italics)
<b><i>Bergamasco dialect</i></b>	(Bold italics)



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