Speech play with code-mixing as a means of identity shaping in the internet discourse of Russian speakers living in Italy

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In the last few decades an increase in the number of immigrants from post-Soviet countries to Italy lead to the formation of a Russian speaking conglomerate (Perotto 2010, 2013). Italian influence on colloquial Russian leads to code-mixing, generating a new code in which "elements from the two languages are incorporated into a structurally definable pattern" (Maschler 1998: 125). In colloquial speech, code-mixing often fulfils an expressive function emphasizing the speakers' mixed identity (Perotto 2009, Nikolaeva 2014).

In computer mediated communication (CMC), expressive code-mixing is often used in *speech play (SP)* (Dezi 2018), i.e. a creative manipulation at any level of language deliberately used with different aesthetic and pragmatic purposes (Sannikov 2002: 15–23; Sherzer & Webster 2015). SP generated by code mixing appears in playful internet comments reporting immigrants' experience with the surrounding linguo-cultural environment and its effects on their everyday language practices. Code-mixing occurs on the level of morpho-syntax, e.g. calques of Italian lexical chunks (It. *non vedo l'ora* 'I cannot wait', lit. meaning 'I don't see the hour' vs. Ru. *nedoždus'* 'I cannot wait'; It. *prendere il treno* 'take the train' vs. Ru. *exat' na poezde* 'travel by train'), cf. (1), and hybridization e.g. *po-chiama-ju* (It. *chiamare* 'call' + Ru. *po-zvon-ju* 'pfx-call-prs.1sg'), cf. (2).

(1) *Ne   vižu   časa   vzjat'   poezd   na   jug.*
    NEG   see.PRS.1SG   hour.ACC   take.INF   train   on   south

    'I don't see the hour to take the train to the south'.

(2) *Ja   tebe   po-**CHIAMA**-ju   v   **DOMENIC**-u*
    1SG   2SG.DAT   PFX-call-PRS.1SG   in   Sunday-ACC.F

    'I will call you on Sunday'.

In this talk, I analyse instances of SP generated by different code-mixing strategies in the data collected from social network sites. The choice of the material is motivated by the fact that interaction on social networks facilitates "the conceptualization of what it means to be a 'Russian' (a post-Soviet migrant, a Russian-speaker) in a specific national environment" (Morgunova & Zinnurov 2019: 215). Previous research on the CMC of Russian speaking diaspora has already shown that jokes and humour occasionally including SP reveal complex dynamics of group auto- and hetero-stereotypes and are a way of 'domesticating' the new environment (Elenskaya 2009: 270–273). Thus, combining discourse and semasiological approaches, I demonstrate how SP generated by code-mixing serves the following-purposes: (i) poking fun at specific linguo-cultural practices, (ii) domesticating the new environment, (iii)

emphasizing mixed identity. In addition, I point out the main code-mixing strategies and tendencies that lead to SP formation.

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