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Language contact in online settings. The case of Dolomitic Ladin

This paper aims to investigate contact-induced phenomena in the context of WhatsApp conversations, focusing on Dolomitic Ladin. In recent years, a number of studies have taken into account online uses of different regional and minority languages spoken in Italy (cf. Fiorentino 2006; Miola 2013, 2015; Gheno 2015). These studies have underlined a growing tendency towards multilingualism in online settings, with different functions (e.g. identity construction function; Fiorentino 2006). Today, Internet is “more multilingual than ever” (Miola 2013: 6) and allows regional and minority languages to be accessible to a wide audience. Therefore, the study of language contact phenomena in online settings and social media can be very fruitful. This is especially true for traditionally multilingual contexts. The case of Dolomitic Ladin is particularly interesting, although studies dealing extensively with this topic are still lacking (Videsott, in print). Ladin is a minority language spoken by ca. 34,000 people in Fassa, Badia, Gardena, Fodom and Ampezzo valleys. These five valleys display some differences, as for instance the administrative and geographical context, since Fassa, Badia and Gardena belong to the officially trilingual (Italian, German, and Ladin) region of Trentino-South Tyrol (Italy), whereas Fodom and Ampezzo are situated in the region of Veneto. Furthermore, the presence of German in Badia and Gardena has led to different sociolinguistic profiles and degrees of language contact, as well as different repertoires (cf. Fiorentini 2017).

The analysis will be based on a corpus of WhatsApp conversations produced by 125 bi- and trilingual Ladin speakers (20–40 years old), collected between 2014 and 2019 in the valleys of Fassa, Badia and Gardena. The data present a wide range of contact-induced phenomena (example 1, Badia Ladin-German-Italian), such as tag-switching, code-mixing, code-switching, as well as structural convergence, which reflect the linguistic and socio-linguistic aspects of informal conversations as well as the speakers’ ability to benefit from communicative strategies typical of a multilingual context:

- (1) S2_VF: [Messun sostegní e mne inant la]_{LAD} [Globalisierung]_{TED} [di]_{LAD} [diritti umani]_{IT}
‘We have to support and carry on the globalization of human rights’

The analysis will show how, thanks to the complexity of their repertoire, Ladin writers seem to implement a wider range of strategies than monolingual writers, fully exploiting the characteristics of the medium. The aim of this paper is therefore to highlight how these uses show the effective vitality of Dolomitic Ladin, with a special focus on the communicative functions (cf. Fiorentino 2005) that are emerging.

References:

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