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**Vitality of Italian in Switzerland:
Socio-economical Aspects of Languages through the Websites of Swiss Companies**

The paper discusses some methodological aspects concerning the development of an indicator of the presence and use of languages in the websites of Swiss companies, and presents the first results of the survey. The work is part of a larger research project called "Index of vitality of Italian in Switzerland" (Moretti / Pandolfi 2011; Moretti / Pandolfi / Casoni 2011) currently in progress by the Osservatorio linguistico della Svizzera italiana (OLSI), aiming at monitoring the sociolinguistic vitality of the third Swiss national language through a range of factors, among them economic factors and new media related factors. These latest ones are the topic of this paper.

Internet is considered the medium of linguistic globalization as it represents a context of "lingue a contatto" as meant by Berruto (2009: 6), i.e. a context in which a foreign language is somehow present in a community in a side position with the native language. In this sense all languages of the world, or at least a large part of them, are in contact with English nowadays. Internet is a global medium favouring the presence of many languages, and from this point of view it seems particularly interesting surveying the way the Swiss companies communicate through the web in a global economic context (cf. Andres *et al.* 2005 for a description of the Swiss companies relation to their linguistic behaviour and needs).

Italian in Switzerland is a national but a minority language, also from the point of view of the weight and economic role of the speaking community (cf. Ammon 2011: 50). Then, the presence and vitality of Italian in Switzerland are to be investigated from a perspective that considers at the same time the multilingual situation and the economic power relations among Italian, the other national languages and English mainly.

Our goal is to develop a 'web presence' indicator (according to Gerrand's 2007 taxonomy), namely an indicator of the proportion of web pages written in a given language (Italian) in a given country (Switzerland) and in a given context (companies websites). Therefore we need to consider Internet not as a whole linguistic context but as a very specific one, that is consider the companies websites as a corpus for research focused on sociolinguistic aspects of the economy (a different perspective from the economy of language as in Grin / Sfreddo / Vaillancourt, 2010: 28-38).

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Massimo Cerruti, Cristina Onesti (University of Turin)

Style variation in Italian, with particular attention to computer mediated communication

Contemporary Italian is undergoing a restandardization process, which is caused by the mutual interrelation between spoken and written language and consists in the progressive acceptance of (previously non-standard) spoken informal features into the standard variety. Computer mediated communication is recently playing a role in this process. On the basis of recent empirical researches, in this talk we address the problem of distinguishing between two different effects of computer mediated communication practices: on the one hand the appearing of truly new linguistic phenomena and on the other hand the strengthening of formerly attested tendencies, against the backdrop of current sociolinguistic dynamics that characterize style variation in Italian. We also discuss whether it is actually proper to define netspeak as a language variety and, correspondingly, to carve out a space for it within the Italian linguistic repertoire.

Kristin Davidse (KULeuven)

Using Internet data for the study of language change: a comparative study of the grammaticalized uses of English *sort of* and French *genre de* in teenage forum data

This paper sets out to capture language change at its forefront by studying specific data, teenage forum posts, expected to be innovative for many reasons. These data are speech-like, informal exchanges between peers, that is, they have the situational features that most promote change (Halliday 1978, Hopper 1998, Dubois 2003). Moreover, they represent communication from the most innovative age group of language users, teenagers (Golato 2000, Macaulay 2006, Tagliamonte & D'Arcy 2004), on the linguistically 'non-prescriptive' Internet. Importantly, as I will argue, innovation does not entail loss or absence of functional-structural patterns (cf. Boye & Harder 2007).

The topic I will investigate is the grammaticalization of English *sort of* and French *genre de*, as reflected in the synchronic layering (Hopper 1991) of the different constructions they occur in without their full lexical value (De Smedt, Brems & Davidse (2007)). Within the grammaticalized constructions, a distinction is made between **nominal** constructions, in which *sort of* and *genre de*

fulfil a function in NP structure, and **non-nominal** ones in which they serve adverbial, particle and quotative functions. While there is striking functional equivalence between most of these uses in English and French, there are also some differences due to the distinct syntax of the source constructions.

Grammaticalized NP-constructions involve reanalysis of the binominal construction in which *sort/genre* is head and is followed by *of/de* + a second noun. In these reanalyses the TN is demoted from head status and no longer refers to a generic subclass. It becomes part of a pre-head modifier such as the determiner or a descriptive modifier and becomes ancillary to these functions. Three grammaticalized NP-constructions are common to both English and French, viz. **quantifiers**, e.g. *all sorts of*; *tout genre de*, **postdeterminers** as in *these sort of idiocies*; *ces genre de conneries*, and **qualifiers**, e.g. [...] *creating some sort of Central Asian Valhalla over there*; *J'y vois une genre de belle pétition vidéo sur l'état du monde*. By contrast, only English seems to have the descriptive modifier construction in which an adjective or a more complex description is followed by *sort of* (w which may assume features of a semi-suffix, Denison 2002) and then by the noun referring to the entity that is typified by what precedes, e.g. *Apparently, her mother was a keeping-up-with-the-Jones sort of person*. The reason for this probably lies in the fact that adjectives tend to follow rather than precede the head noun in French, which is not conducive to a full-scale shift to 'semi-suffix'-status of *genre*. Arguably, to express comparable functions, French uses predicative or postnominal *du/le genre* prefacing ad hoc typifications, as in *Sont du genre à se foutre de ta gueule quand tu sais pas répondre à une question*; *quant au père, le genre avec des auréoles que je trouve un peu glauque*.

For the **non-nominal** grammaticalized constructions, it is particularly in teenage usage that *genre* can be shown to have equivalents to all the uses documented for *sort of* (Aijmer 2002), viz. **qualifying particle**, e.g. *and they kind of group – put people into kind of categories*; *Au début, je voulais genre faire des fiches sur tout*; **discourse marker**, e.g. *I don't want to, you know, sort of, well, effing badmouth him*; *mouais... genre on laisse couler, ça passera... ou pas. bof bof*, and **quotative**, e.g. *im just being kinda hey i can hear murkin*; *elle était genre, "Oh, mon dieu, c'est mes reins?"*. In contrast with English *sort of*, *genre* is not followed by particle *de* in these uses. In view of this and given the occurrence of predicative/postnominal *du/le genre*, the question has to be investigated whether the qualifying particle and discourse marker uses of *genre* go back to multiple sources, viz. the binominal construction as well as predicative/postnominal *du/le genre*.

The data that will be used for *sort of* were compiled by Kiermeer & Thoelen (2009) from The Student Room (<http://www.thestudentroom.co.uk>) while those for *genre* were gathered by Doyen (2008) from the teenage forum Adojeunz.com.

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Giuliana Fiorentino (University of Molise)

**The 'wild language' on the web:
new writers, old problems and the written code elaboration.**

The contribution focuses on graphic and orthographic aspects of the Italian language on the web and searches for a possible systematization of the rich and complex subject.

Since the beginning of the diffusion of Internet services - e-mails, chat, newsgroups and, more recently, social networks, blog, wiki, forum - scholars of computer-mediated communication from different perspectives (Baron, Bazzanella, Berruto, Crystal, Fiorentino, Herring, Orletti, Pistolesi, Turkle, Violi) put on the floor the problem of the collocation of this language among written and spoken language and made lots of statements about the hybrid nature of this communication and the relative closeness to oral discourse. It has also already been observed that online communication in some special contexts – synchronic, highly interactive, informal, with users generated contents – is characterized by an increasing of non-standard (relaxed) orthography, by a special use of punctuation (expressive punctuation), by an iconic use of letters and punctuation (emoticons) and by a tendency to shorten words. All these features can be defined as the 'allegro' writing system compared to the standard writing system of the language, or can be equated with a sort of young jargon.

Graphic and orthographic choices will be deeply analyzed with special attention paid to

- a) What they reveal about the attitude of the writers towards their web writing (do they consider online communication as closest to oral language or to written language?).
- b) What they reveal about the literacy of the writers.
- c) If it is the case of an emerging coherent graphic system, different from standard Italian orthography, or there is simply a shared conventionalized jargon, especially restricted to young generations, signalling the membership of the online community.
- d) What they reveal about the characteristics of Italian orthographic system.

The contributions shows how the language on the web meets with old problems in the elaboration of the Italian writing system related to some restricted areas.

Susan C. Herring (Indiana University Bloomington, USA)

Special Internet Language Varieties: Culture, Creativity, and Language Change

Internet language is generally thought to be creative and playful, yet here is debate as to how creative Internet language really is, or whether there is even such an entity as Internet language. These debates notwithstanding, varieties of Internet language do exist that are truly creative. Fostered in online subcultures whose *raison d'être* includes language play, *special internet language varieties* (SILVs) such as Leet and Lolspeak can be found across languages and cultures. This talk reports on a study that compares four SILVs based in different linguistic and cultural contexts: the US, Israel, Russia, and China/Taiwan. It asks: What are the characteristics of SILVs, and how similar are SILVs across cultures? If similarities are present, what accounts for them? Finally, to what extent are SILV features incorporated into the languages on which they are based, and what kinds of features tend to be incorporated? The comparison reveals similarities across SILVs involving nonstandard typography and orthography that appear to derive from the exploitation of common principles, such as substitution of letters based on graphical resemblance, with differences conditioned largely by the resources made available by the writing system of each base language and the sociocultural context in which each SILV arose. Anecdotal evidence is also presented that SILV features have spread into wider Internet—and to a lesser extent, offline—use. I conclude by considering the implications of these observations for claims about Internet language, linguistic creativity, and language change.

Adam Kilgarriff (University of Leeds)

So much of everything

The web gives linguists easy access to far, far more data than ever before - data of a very wide range of languages, from Arabic to Zulu, and at least for some of these languages, to a very wide range of language types, from blogs to texts to tweets to film reviews to academic journals. It is an exciting time to be a linguist. But how do we use that potential? I shall demonstrate our tools for building corpora from the web, for different languages and text types. It also focuses our attention on the question, "how do different types of text differ" and I shall present both quantitative and qualitative approaches to that question.

Emanuele Miola (IUSS Pavia)

>9000 volte lo stesso thread: small (Italian) online communities and language change

This contribution tackles the issue of language change in two web communities, namely the users of the firstly founded Italian imageboard, on the one hand, and the West-Lombard (i.e. dialectal) version of wikipedia, on the other.

Imageboards, or *chans, have flourished in the last five years due to the world-wide success of websites such as 4chan.org and 2chan.net, while dialectal wikipedias have been recently created by promoters of several northern Italian dialects in order to preserve and ausbauize these endangered varieties. Although different, both of these web communities can be defined as endocentric: the sites are frequented by a small number of users, but the amount of posts they write and exchange with each other is very high.

I illustrate issues pertaining grammaticalization and other linguistic relevant phenomena and I discuss the (virtual) sociolinguistic situation of both communities.

Andrea Moll (University of Freiburg, Germany)

**Diasporic Cyber-Jamaican:
Sociolinguistic style and the enregisterment of an ethnolinguistic repertoire**

This paper focuses on the linguistic globalization of Jamaican Creole in computer-mediated communication by combining quantitative and qualitative methods in order to examine a large-scale corpus (~ 16.9 million tokens) of discussion forum posts written by more than 2,100 registered users between 2001 and 2008. The discussion forum, which is located on the website www.jamaicans.com, is mostly frequented by diasporic Jamaicans, many of whom regularly code-switch between Standard English and Jamaican Creole. Due to varying degrees of linguistic competence, this involves a range of linguistic styles and stylizations (cf. Coupland 2010), which are characterized by the massive use of non-standard orthography and seem to defy any straightforward categorization along the lines of the creole continuum (cf. Bickerton 1973). This, of course, raises serious questions concerning the “authenticity” of Cyber-Jamaican when compared to varieties of Jamaican Creole in face-to-face communication. While the results of an online survey conducted with Jamaican informants in 2011 helps to gain more insights into the linguistic authenticity of Cyber-Jamaican from a forum-external, the analysis in this paper also focuses on forum-internal processes of dialect enregisterment. Interestingly, the conventionalisation of specific Jamaican Creole features as part of an ethnolinguistic repertoire rather than a well-defined linguistic variety turns out to often coincide with the discursive negotiation of sociolinguistic identity, authenticity and community in the forum.

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Máiréad Moriarty (University of Limerick)

Irish goes viral!: Irish language recovery via new media domains

The majority of the world's endangered languages survive in societies and speech communities that are multilingual and often peripheral, where they fight for survival amongst 'bigger' languages. However, one of the consequences of globalization for so-called 'bigger' languages has been the lessening of their monopoly in domains such as new media and communication technologies. Busch (2004) argues that as a result of the changes in global flows, linguistic diversity has become more visible, societies are more tolerant of linguistic creativity. New media environments offer the possibility for evolution of new identities, which challenge the way in which speakers of endangered languages have understood themselves and been understood in majority-language media. The purposes of this presentation are therefore to discuss new roles for endangered languages in new media domains. Specifically, this paper will examine the potential for language change from the bottom-up given the new roles afforded to minority languages in the global era. Drawing on theoretical notions of orders of indexicality and sociolinguistic scales the aim of this presentation is to discuss how minority languages can get reconfigured thus leading to new values

and functions for such languages with consequences for language planning and policy. In this context the article traces how the role of the Irish language in contemporary Irish society has been re-constructed in recent times due to an increased presence of the language in new media domains. By identifying the potential of new media domains to act as agents of bottom-up language planning this presentation will examine the potential ripple effects of such initiatives for top-down language planning agencies such as the educational domain, thereby pointing to the potential for increased minority language recovery when such languages achieve new values and functions through language mobility.

Mirko Tavosanis (University of Pisa)

Non-standard rules: innovation you *can not* find in the Italian web

The presentation will look at the informal texts published in the Italian web. Those texts are often described as “unruly” and confused; a systematic survey will show instead that their non-standard linguistic features follow many (unwritten) rules. In the field of orthography, for example, the use of *k* instead of *c* is widespread, but the use of *y* or *j* instead of *i* is virtually unknown – and the same rules apply to more complex features.

Christiana Themistocleous (University of Reading)

Writing in Romanised Cypriot Greek: CMC and beyond

Although written language has obvious connections with culture, ethnicity, ideology and identity (Sebba 2007), it has received relatively less attention by sociolinguists, compared to spoken language. In this paper, I investigate dialect writing in Cyprus evident in computer-mediated communication (CMC) and beyond.

Standard Greek (SG) is the official language of the Republic of Cyprus (alongside with Turkish) and the language of administration, education and media. Cypriot Greek (CG), the regional dialect, does not have a standard official orthography and it is rarely used for everyday written purposes. Written CG can be found in regional folk literature, scripts for Greek Cypriot television series, political satires and theatrical and school plays, but these instances are very limited.

Recent research has revealed that with technological advance, written CG is now widely used in text-based CMC. Themistocleous (2008) found that the regional dialect is used on Internet Relay Chat (IRC) and in addition, Sophocleous and Themistocleous (2010) show that written CG is also

evident on Facebook. Both studies indicate that even though both CG and SG are used in informants' writings, CG predominates in most of their written interactions.

Despite the fact that CG is not standardised, Greek Cypriot internet users seem to employ novel ways to represent their native language online, through the use of Roman characters instead of the conventional Greek alphabet (Themistocleous 2010). One question, however, that remained unanswered was whether this new way of writing would spread in off-line modes of communication in the near future. Recent data that had been collected from a group of 16 year-old Greek-Cypriot female students and consist of 'secret' written interactions during class time, demonstrate that Romanised CG emerges not only in the domain of the internet but also in the everyday, off-line writings of young Greek Cypriots (Themistocleous & Sophocleous 2011).

The aim of this paper is to highlight the power of the internet as a tool that can not only promote dialects and non-standard varieties in writing but also change people's written practices.

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Sue Wright (University of Portsmouth)

The recurring trinity: language, technology and society

Human society is built on human beings' ability to communicate. And with each development in communication there have been co-occurring developments in the organisation of society/ies. This paper briefly reviews how writing, printing and audio-visual technologies seemed to enable or to encourage new modes and patterns of group behaviour, before moving to consider e-communication. We cannot yet see the full picture of how real time trans-national communication will change our world but we have indicators, and the communication experiences of the past may help us read them