

## Sociolinguistics of unhappiness: The display of emotions in a multilingual migrants' community

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### Abstract.

This contribution aims at analyzing the communicative expression of emotions among Senegalese migrants in Pescara (Abruzzo, Southern Italy). These individuals find their own 'selves' at the junction of their subjective well-being and two cultures, creating a sort of intercultural and interlingual personal experience which shapes their relationships with both their own community and the host community. Recent studies (Sevinç, 2020, among others) have argued that a better understanding of the concept of subjective 'emotion' (*contra* that of 'attitude') and its role in immigrant contexts is key to enlighten the connection between intercultural communication and possible outcomes of language contact settings. This qualitative study considers the language of first-generation migrants that have been living in Pescara for a minimum of eight years, looking at their linguistic choices when it comes to expressing feelings of discontent with respect to their role in the Italian environment and their integration in the host community.

**Keywords:** Senegalese community; immigrant context; emotions; code-switching; Italian; Wolof.

**Abstract.** *Sociolinguistica del 'malcontento': L'espressione delle emozioni in una comunità di migranti plurilingui*

Il presente contributo si propone di analizzare l'espressione comunicativa delle emozioni tra migranti senegalesi a Pescara (Abruzzo, Italia meridionale). Questi individui trovano 'loro stessi' a cavallo tra il loro benessere soggettivo e due culture, creando una sorta di esperienza personale interculturale e interlinguistica, la quale modella le loro relazioni sia all'interno della propria comunità sia con quella ospitante. Recenti studi (Sevinç, 2020, tra gli altri) affermano che una migliore comprensione del concetto di 'emozione' soggettiva (contrariamente a quella di 'atteggiamento') e il suo ruolo in contesti migratori è la chiave per far luce sul legame tra comunicazione interculturale e i possibili esiti in situazioni di contatto. Questo studio qualitativo considera i codici di migranti di prima generazione che vivono a Pescara da almeno otto anni, guardando alle scelte linguistiche nell'espressione del malcontento, rispetto al loro ruolo nel contesto italiano e il loro livello di integrazione nella comunità ospitante.

**Parole chiave:** comunità senegalese; immigrazione; emozioni; code-switching; italiano; wolof.

**Resum.** *Sociolingüística de la infelicitat: la manifestació d'emocions en una comunitat de migrants multilingües*

Aquest treball pretén analitzar l'expressió comunicativa de les emocions entre els migrants senegalesos de Pescara (els Abruços, sud d'Itàlia). Aquests individus troben el seu propi "jo" en la confluència del seu benestar subjectiu i dues cultures, amb la qual cosa creen una mena d'experiència personal intercultural i interlingüística que conforma les seves relacions tant amb la seva comunitat com amb la d'acollida. Estudis recents (Sevinç, 2020, entre d'altres) han argumentat que una millor comprensió del concepte d'emoció subjectiva (en contraposició al d'actitud) i el seu paper en contextos d'immigració és clau per aclarir la connexió entre la comunicació intercultural i els possibles resultats dels escenaris de contacte lingüístic. Aquest estudi qualitatiu se centra en el llenguatge dels migrants de primera generació, que porten vivint a Pescara un mínim de vuit anys, i examina les seves eleccions lingüístiques a l'hora d'expressar sentiments de descontent pel que fa al seu paper en l'entorn italià i a la seva integració en la comunitat d'acollida.

**Paraules clau:** comunitat senegalesa; context immigrant; emocions; canvi de codi; italià; wolof.

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

Dewaele (2010, p. 1) points out that “[E]motions play a crucial part in the lives of monolinguals and multilinguals”. These emotions can be expressed in a variety of different ways, ranging from gesture to language. However, when it comes to plurilingual speakers, it is worth remembering that the concepts of ‘happiness’ and ‘unhappiness’ may vary across languages and cultures, and in fact the single inverted commas around the words aim at indicating that the English terms are used as collective labels which comprise the wide range of meanings and hints represented in each language and culture considered in the present study. Consequently, plurilingual speakers have their own way of expressing emotions and each language in their repertoire may play an important role in the conversation, often leading to contact phenomena such as code-switching.

While the above-mentioned switching phenomena and plurilingualism in new ‘immigrant minority communities’<sup>2</sup> in Italy have been looked at from both structural and socio-functional perspectives, especially with reference to discourse-related and participant-related switching (Guerini, 2006), ‘we-code’ vs ‘they-code’ (Iezzi, 2020), as well as contact phenomena and attrition during the acquisition of the host language (Giacalone Ramat, 2003; Vedovelli, 2002; Vietti, 2005), we are not aware of studies that have focused on the functional analysis of switching denoting emotional functions in multilingual communities already settled in the Italian territory.

This contribution explicitly addresses the language usage of first-generation Senegalese migrants who have been living in Pescara for at least eight years, looking at their linguistic choices when it comes to expressing negative feelings (such as unhappiness, sadness, anger, disappointment), considering their role in the Italian-speaking environment and their degree of integration in the host community (European Science Foundation, 1988; Hannerz, 1990; Lüdi, 1990).

In particular, the bilingual code-switching between Urban Wolof (L1), an urban variety resulting from the mixing of Wolof and French<sup>3</sup>, and Italian

1. While the authors have equally contributed to all parts of this work, dr. Laura Tramutoli is responsible for writing sections 2, 4, and 5, whereas Luca Iezzi has written sections 1, 3, and 6.
2. For further details, see, among others, Chini (2004) and Oksaar (1982).
3. The urban variety of Wolof, the *Urban Wolof* (sometimes referred to as *Dakar Wolof*), involves contact between mainly Wolof and French, with additional influence from English and Sereer. The variety arose in the late 1980s in the capital city of Dakar and is linked to urban popular culture, since it worked as an *ingroup* code for young citizens, mostly men, of mid-lower social class; it was mainly used in informal situations, such as colloquial conversations among colleagues at work or during leisure activities, where neither French nor pure Wolof was considered appropriate. Urban Wolof speakers’ first language is not necessarily Wolof, but they are surely all proficient in Wolof, while only speakers with a degree of education have a competence in standard French. Urban Wolof linguistic literature

(L2) is analyzed, focusing on its emotive and expressive function in speech events regarding the 'work' domain. As mentioned in Tramutoli (2019, 2021), topics such as job search or work environment are closely connected with both a high rate of code-switching instances and an emotional type of interaction, and reasonably so. As within most migrant communities, work is surely an urgent topic: migration from Senegal to Europe and Italy is usually economically motivated, hence the priority for most migrants is to find a job and to settle in the new economic reality. Such a personal and social necessity favours and enhances the expression of positive and negative emotions (satisfaction, pride, excitement as well as disillusionment, bitterness, fear) in all the languages of the repertoire, and that the language choices and the switching phenomena are often associated with the languages' other social functions in the context.

## 2. The emotive function of communication

Before delving into data from the Senegalese migrants' speech, a fundamental theoretical issue needs to be set out: why is the communication of emotions linked to a sociolinguistic functionality and how does this process trigger code-switching in plurilingual speakers?

We generally refer to code-switching as to the bilingual speakers' practice of alternating between two or more languages within the same speech event (Myers-Scotton, 1993). Notably, researchers have identified several factors that motivate the use of code-switching, among which the cognitive control of a bilingual mind (Green & Wei, 2014), the convey of social and identity roles (Gumperz, 1982), the improving of communication in a conversation (Gafaranga, 2009), the display of perlocutionary acts (Gardner-Chloros, 2009).

Indeed, the expression of emotions is not only one situational determinant strongly connected to code-switching, but also it activates each of the functions listed above (Pavlenko, 2005, 2012). From the cognitive control point of view, the rise of an emotional context is a disrupter of the cooperative control by which bilingual speakers plan their conversations, selecting the most appropriate language in a particular context. The surfacing of emotions, especially negative ones such as rage, disappointment, frustration, etc., lowers the threshold of control process during speech output and increases the chances that a freer and uncontrolled range of code-switching is performed (Tottenham, Hare, & Casey, 2011).

Conversely, code-switching can be used as a pragmatic tool to strategically regulate the outcome of emotions in speech. According to Pavlenko (2005, 2012), bilinguals may switch from their L1 to their L2 to go from

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mainly includes Eastman (1992), Legendre e Schindler (2010), McLaughlin (2008, 2009), Ngom (1999) and Swigart (1992). On the mixing of Urban Wolof and Italian, cfr. Tramutoli (2021).

communicating more intense emotions (up-regulate) to less intense ones (down-regulate). It appears that the use of L2 is associated with more neutral domains and situations, where a weak emotional response is expected, while that of L1 is associated with a higher pitch of emotions in casual and intimate domains.

Emotions are also linked to socio-cultural patterns. Bilinguals can switch between languages if the expression of a feeling or emotion is bound to a specific cultural frame, and consequently to the language associated (*emotional frame switching* for Panayiotou (2004)). For instance, words or expressions indicating emotions might often be non-equivalent in different languages; in such cases, a bilingual speaker will resort to the most fitting expressions from the language (and culture) available to their knowledge that congruently match their feelings. An example comes from Pavlenko (2005, pp. 45-46), who introduces the culture-specific Japanese expression *morai-naki*, which denotes the empathic feeling of being sad and wanting to cry when one sees someone else crying. Since there is no English expression or word that denotes this precise culturally encoded emotion, the featuring of such an entity in discourse will most surely give rise to code switching (towards Japanese) in a Japanese/English bilingual mind.

In our analysis, we are especially concerned with the social functions of both emotions and languages in a bilingual community in a migratory context. Given the assumption that in the repertoire of a (Senegalese) immigrant each language has typically a clear-cut (social and communicative) role, we will inquire whether the display of emotions in a multi-faceted and complex cultural and social context, as well as in the psychologically challenging experience of migration, can disrupt the expected linguistic separation of functions or not.

### 3. Code-switching and emotions in plurilingual speakers

As highlighted before, research on multilingualism and expression of emotions is a recent field and its study does present numerous issues, especially related to cultural values and their linguistic outcomes in different contexts.

Pavlenko (2005, pp. 113-114) points out how research on emotions has been carried out by deploying two paradigms, the communication of emotions (language usage and emotions being two separate phenomena) and the discursive construction of emotions (rhetoric alternatives and speakers' communicative intentions), that are not, of course, watertight compartments, but can be compatible and utilized at the same time. Falling into the above-mentioned paradigms is also the study of meaning in emotions, namely referential (logical and propositional content of the utterances), social (the way the speakers

position themselves within society), and affective (the way the speakers use to convey feelings).

Among the studies which focused on multilingualism and emotions, some are worth mentioning in order to understand the methodologies and outcomes that have been seen so far, before we move on to the analysis of our data.

Panayiotou (2004) undertook a qualitative study on ten bilinguals (five Greek-English and five English-Greek), based on metalinguistic comments and code-switching in response to stories told in English and Greek. She concluded that some concepts related to emotions are more pervasive in some situations, and the deployment of code-switching suggests that speakers make use of all the resources in their linguistic and cultural repertoire.

Analysing the behaviour of a Portuguese-French bilingual girl, and focusing on identity issues, Koven (2004) found out how speakers may exhibit different affective styles while using the different languages in their repertoires, and this might be caused by a distinct socialisation pattern in each language ('double selves').

Through the usage of quantitative and qualitative analyses based on web questionnaires, both Pavlenko (2004) and Dewaele (2004) highlighted that various factors play a crucial role in the choice of a particular language of the repertoire over another, such as competence, prestige, L1 background, context, etc., and they both agreed that language emotionality and cross-linguistic affectiveness have a strong influence on language usage when expressing feelings.

Acuña Ferreira (2017) in her study on Spanish-Galician bilinguals brought up the relevance of both languages in showing both positive and negative emotions, highlighting how the dominant language, Spanish, is more neutral when it comes to displaying emotions, while Galician, the less dominant language, is utilised to convey particular communicative or affective intentions, and this leads to code-switching phenomena. Aligning with this view, Iezzi (2020), looking at authentic conversations between Pakistani migrants settled in refugee centres in Italy, came across the usage of Italian (L4 or L5 for the informants) to curse or to express disappointment or anger. This may be due to the fact that Punjabi or Urdu taboo or swearwords are perceived as offensive because related to religion (Islam) and using them would be morally disrespectful and sinful, while the Italian ones are somewhat more direct and emotional.

#### 4. The Senegalese community, their language, and the data

The data employed for this study document spontaneous interactions among some members of the Senegalese community in the city of Pescara, an industrial site, and a harbour on the coast of the Abruzzi region, in

mid-southern Italy. The community numbers around five hundred stable members: a rather small number compared to those of more industrialized cities in northern Italy. However, it is one of the most dynamic communities in the area and plays an important role in the ethnic landscape of the city.

The collaboration of six male informants from Dakar, aged twenty-nine to forty-five, all residents in the city of Pescara or in the surrounding districts of Montesilvano and Francavilla, has been particularly crucial to data collection, considering that they gave access to a larger group of speakers, all men and of the same age range, and who interacted through Urban Wolof. Speakers were recorded as they interacted spontaneously with other members of the community down the street, in public transports, at bars or during other leisure activities, and the recordings add up to a total of 12 hours.

The social profile of the selected informants corresponds to the average first-generation migrants (young men who left Dakar for Europe for economic reasons), and, in contrast to some results drawn from a social self-perception survey (where the community would be described as close and non-integrated), they belong to a rather well-integrated circle, with good relationship with locals and who are positively keen on cooperation: they have been living legally in town for between eight and sixteen years, they managed to create a steady working routine and sometimes they also cooperate with immigration institutions, an attitude which has certainly had an impact on their learning of Italian, of which all of them can speak a fluent learner-variety.

Among them, the main code for interaction is Urban Wolof, an urban contact variety of Wolof, given by the continuous and fluid Wolof/French switching (Swigart, 1992; McLaughlin, 2008, 2009). Of course, this does not imply that all members of the community in Pescara use Urban Wolof instead of pure Wolof or other Senegalese languages to communicate, but the recording taken within a restricted group of acquaintances, friends, and relatives, show that Urban Wolof is the preferred language of communication.

Italian is acquired mainly through direct contact with native speakers, and barely through institutions. It certainly has a role of prestige due to its pragmatic value (it is linked to the possibility of social advancement), but it is predominantly learnt and used orally. On the contrary, French is the language of schooling in Senegal, and its prestige is drawn from a legacy of post-colonial social and cultural predominance, placing the endogenous languages at a lower level.

## 5. Emotion expressions/words in the speech of the Senegalese migrants

The understanding of the biographical, ethnic, economic, and social conditions that have motivated and shaped the migration experience in the Italian territory for all the consulted migrants (as individuals and as a

community) is pivotal in framing the complex set of emotions they display in everyday life, and consequently how they choose to organize language about them.

### *The feelings of first-generation migrants*

Senegal is a country with a great tradition of migration abroad. 3.5% of the population leaves the country yearly and this exodus is usually economically motivated, since it concerns mainly young men affected by the lack of job opportunities. About 48.6% of migrants head to Europe, and Italy receives a tenth of them in total. As a matter of fact, among the Sub-Saharan nationalities settled in the Italian territory, the Senegalese one is third in number after the Ghanaian and the Nigerian ones. Nevertheless, this massive migration is seldom intended as definitive, and the concept of leaving and coming back is so widely spread that it has gained its official Wolof motto *demal te niew*<sup>4</sup>, literally 'go and come back'.

According to the results of the research project 'Partire e ritornare' signed by the Centro Studi e Ricerche IDOS and launched in 2017, which aimed at mapping extensively the Senegalese migration towards the European countries, at least 90% of the interviewees know a compatriot that has left the country, and 70% value migration as positive, and think of it as a strong and safe economic resource. In fact, while migration of young male individuals is often conceived as a mean of investment for the families, who will gain from the commissions that will eventually be sent back home, it is also of interest for the whole country economy, since, by working in more developed systems, migrants will (ideally) learn advanced skills and competences that they will put to good use once they return to Senegal.

As for the six informants that took part in this study, none of them comes from a background of severe poverty, and, of course, they are not refugees from wars or persecutions. In Senegal, they grew up in an urban environment, where they had access to at least basic education and came to Europe with a structured plan of relocation, legally and in safe conditions; often, they reach relatives or friends that have already settled down in France, Germany, and Italy, and that can help them find a job and housing, and financially support them. For Senegalese people, the social net is considered a true guarantee of success, and so it is for migrants at the start of their new life in another country. Unmarried and childless young men are sent abroad, so that their focus remains the job, and can dislocate rapidly in different cities or countries if needed.

However, the migration experience is a major life event and a challenging one from various aspects, with many psychological effects.

4. Here's the link for an interesting documentary in Italian language explaining the concept: <https://speciali.espresso.repubblica.it/interattivi-2016/va-e-torna/index.html#Titolo>

### 5.1. *Feelings of disappointment and distress*

Complaints expressing disappointment and distress are often recorded in spontaneous interaction, and they can be mainly seen when conversations concern the work environment or job-related situations, which can easily turn into a source of frustration for a migrant.

It is interesting to notice that generally the whole job-related lexicon is linked to the Italian language for first-generation Senegalese migrants, and many are the Italian insertion instances (Muysken, 2000) in a Wolof template that refer to more and less specific objects or entities whose common knowledge is acquired by sharing a working experience (as it can also be observed in example 1. below). Similarly, when the emotive function is activated in connection with the job domain, Italian idiomatic and phraseological expressions associated with positive or, more frequently and unfortunately, negative common feelings abound.

In the following excerpt of a conversation between S<sub>1</sub> and S<sub>2</sub>, the two migrants discuss the possibility of starting a business of Italian luxury clothes-retailing in Senegal, and S<sub>1</sub> tries to convince S<sub>2</sub> by deprecating the Italian job market and environment.

(1)

S<sub>1</sub>: **Cento paia**; am na possibilité am ko fi maay liggéey.

Dama ci bëgg boole ay **scarpe**, ay *sac*, ay jeans pour xale bu jiguéen, ay **maglie** Lacos...mais bu ma lako duggaale ci *container* bi, di-na def normalment fukuki fane. Danga may bàayyi ak **tuò numero di telefono**, comme ça jox la genn wàll bi.

(One hundred pairs; there is a chance to (we might) take them where I work.

If I gather shoes, purses, jeans for girls, Lacoste t-shirts, and then I put them into a container, it should arrive in ten days. Then, you should give me your telephone number, too, so I can give you half of it.)

S<sub>2</sub>: **EH! L'ITALIA ORMAI, ...SÌ**, // dafa jeex.

(Alas! Italy now...yes...it's over).

S<sub>1</sub>: **ADESSO PER TROVARTI UN LAVORO TI FAI UN CULO COSÌ!**

(Nowadays, you work your socks off to find a job) S<sub>2</sub>: **EH, BRAVO!**

(Yes, I agree)

In excerpt (1) we can observe both frequent noun insertions of clothing items, with which S<sub>1</sub> usually works, being himself a warehouse worker in a designer clothes shop in Pescara; an example of alternational code mixing from Wolof to Italian that contains an expression about the difficulties to find a job (“Adesso per trovarti un lavoro ti fai un culo così!”), occurs in the last two speech turns, and it has a clear intensive and depreciative connotation,



triggering overall a very informal register. Here, when the emotive function is activated and in connection with the job domain, Italian idiomatic (coarse language) and phraseologic expressions of frustration and anger arise. Both S1 and S2 chose Italian in the conversation to resort two sentences that have probably been widely utilised in casual conversation with L1 Italian speakers, and that have been learnt and picked up as habitual *slogans* to complain about the work situation, and the choice of Italian over Wolof is indicative of the social environment towards which the complaint is addressed.

These sentences are, most often, highly rhetorical, as their totally generic meaning and recursive use shows. Also, besides the locutionary function of expressing a feeling of distress, other purposes can be observed in the bilingual discourse: on the one hand, they fulfil the pragmatic-communicative function filling turns of communication that bridge two topics of conversation, obtaining flow and connection of discourse, which, by the way, supports the rhetorical effect of those sentences. On the other hand, Italian might be for S1 a conscious choice to validate a negotiation strategy: in order to convince S2 to endorse his plan, the language that he selects to convey negative feelings towards the host social environment is exactly that of the host language, probably hoping that a comradely feeling of support arouses in S2, who will support S1 viewpoint.

More idiomatic expressions resorted to express feelings of anger and resentment are easily found in the corpus, especially those containing strongly-identitary locutions from Italian, such as “che cazzo vuoi” in the following example.

(2)

Dangamay juger, lutax ngamay wax: “**CHE CAZZO RIDI? CHE CAZZO VUOI?**” (He was judging me, and so I told him: “what the f\*\*k is there to laugh?”)

Although the last two sentences are uttered in Italian because the speaker is reporting a direct speech (the excerpt is cut from a monologue of a speaker who was telling how he got bullied at work in a racist act, and how he furiously reacted to that), and this can definitely be the pivot element to cause code-switching, having them a high cultural and identity potential in the host language raises their chances to be picked as marked expressions and used more frequently in code-switching.

Examples of feelings of distress conveyed by switching from Wolof to Italian frequently used expressions can also be easily found elsewhere in our data. In extract (3), for instance, the words that express hopelessness in wolof *amu ñu yaakar* (lit. they have hope’) are repeated in the following turn after the Italian ‘sono disperato!’ (I’m desperate):

(3)

S<sub>3</sub>. Koon dangay xalaat *que* nitt yi amu ñu yaakar, maanaam? (So, you think that people are desperate, then).

S<sub>2</sub>: EH, BRAVISSIMA! SONO DISPERATO! Dëk bi daffa riss riss rii-issss, wantè ñoom mēnuñu laal sax tuti tuti si alal ji pour dundë bu bax, pour dimballi wadiour yi. Ñun dañu liggèey pour dimballi sunuy wadiur.

(Indeed! They are desperate! But they are very very rich. They are not able to save even a bit (of money) to live decently, to help their parents. We work to help our parents).

The expression of such feeling surfaces in a conversation where S<sub>2</sub> is talking about the concern of those who have migrated to send money back to Senegal to help their parents and relatives. The speaker is explaining that migrants are eager (desperate, actually) to send all the money to the family, to the point that, although they get good jobs and gain good money in Europe, they forward all remittances to Africa, putting their own well-being and stability at risk.

The choice to turn to Italian in this very step of conversation undoubtedly has to do with the change of the communicative function, which suddenly turns to the emotive one. When his interlocutor asks the question, anticipating S<sub>2</sub>'s thought, he opens his own speech turn with a raise of emphasis which conveys excitement for the interlocutor's insight towards his intentions and meanings in the conversations. As a matter of fact, the switch happens at a point where both emphasis and a repetition, which works as a reinforcement or confirmation of a thought, are present, and, notably, the utterance of repetitions are another plausible trigger for a bilingual to slide from one language to another.

Extract (4) shows a piece of a monologue by S<sub>4</sub>, who is talking about his life in Senegal. This is another example of activation of code-switching from Wolof to Italian when emotions are pitching. After plainly starting off to narrate about his job, the speaker suddenly turns to the memory of his brothers, whom he lost in two accidents. The tone of the conversation inevitably becomes more dramatic, and a crescendo of emotions accompanies the story-telling, until, just when the speaker gets to the point of telling about the fatal accident, most probably relieving a painful memory with sorrow and embarrassment, he hesitates and, in Italian, he first warns the interlocutor that he is about to tell something disturbing (bad) “è brutto, è brutto” and then he tries to smooth out his embarrassment and suffering by pausing and looking for the best words “non so come spiegare” (I don't know how to explain). It is clear that Italian is brought into the conversation as a device of diversion from the most painful recollection of memories, that might serve to the speaker to take distance and avoid dealing with a tragic story-telling.

(4)

S4: Waa-Waaw, bïssness, comerss, comme lima waxoon, dama doon yobbu ay auto, ay dall, ay bagass dall. Yooyu yèpp daffa dall mann. Dama ñakk ñaary mak foofu. Kèen ki moo mak mann juromi att, kèenèn ki been att. Ki njèk daffa def accident, daffa doon ligèey ñitelu ètass, daanu, ndigg bi damm, moom dèe hopital. Kèenèn ki tamit daffa doon ligèey, comme dafa tangoon ci biir nèeggam, moom wax que: “mann, damay yèegg si kaw pour nêlaw tuti, après damay wacc lèegi”. Comme moom, dama sonnoon di nêlaw. Et bimu jogè pour wac ci suf..., **È BRUTTO, BRUTTO....NON LO SO COME ESPLIGARE...** Comme si dafa doon gèent daffa diaxassè escaliers ak balcon, daanu ci bopp bi.

(Yes, yes, business, trade, as I said elsewhere, I brought many cars (to Senegal), many shoes, a great deal of shoes. All these things with the shoes. Something happened to me...I lost two brothers ther...so...they are dead... one was five years older than me, the other one 1 year older. The first was caught in an accident, he was working on the third floor, he fell and broke his back, went to the hospital and died there. The other one was working, too, he was sleeping; it was hot in his room, and so he said “I am going to sleep upstairs, I’m taking the mattress, I am coming down soon”. He was sleepy and tired when he woke up, he took the stairs to go down...it’s bad...I don’t know how to explain it...it’s like he was dreaming, maybe, but he exchanged the stairs and the balcony, and he threw himself).

Excerpt (5) shows part of a monologue where a speaker (S5) talks about his bad experience with an agent and a lawyer, after participating in an open competition for immigrants to start their own company. The agent and lawyer are supposed to work as support staff for immigrants to help them navigate through the complex administrative system of public calls of the Italian government.

In actual facts, immigrants are often scammed by those who should in fact benefit them and favour the process of their integration, but instead exploit their potential and take advantage in times of necessity.

(5)

Mann dama amoon béen directeur de projet bouma doon toppeu, moom waxma : damalay wann sama diabar, moom awoka leu bou liggéy ak immigrés yi. Mann jébbélko ko projet bi si ay loxoom, cartes yi, xaaliss bi, lépp luma amoon. Warumawoon woolu, ndaxté administrateur bi daffa wooté naan: li nékkoul, wannma li,li,li...**A ME M’È PRESO UN COLPO!** ma daddi jéem léeral mbir yi ak ñoom.

(There was this project director who was following my practice; he tells me: “Here’s my wife, she also works with immigrants”. I committed to them all the projects, the papers, the money, everything I had. I shouldn’t have trusted them, because the project manager called me and told me: there’s

something missing here. I got a fright! I tried to be as precise as possible with them).

Equally to example (3), the speaker resorts to Italian when the expression of his own emotions is displayed. After an emotionally neutral narration of events, the perception of fright, anxiety, disbelief that he recalls feeling in the moment that he realises that he had been frauded is told in Italian, through an idiomatic expression which gives the idea of all these feelings hitting hard (lit. I had a (heart) stroke!)

Lastly, in (6) is a one-sentence excerpt from a monologue of S2, where a rare instance of alternational code-mixing (Muysken, 2000) is present, coinciding with the display of an emotion (nostalgia or home sickness).

(6)

Wannté nammel bi LA SOFFRO.

But home-sickness DEF. it(/her) I.suffer (But I do feel homesick).

The second half of this sentence has indeed the structure of the comment-predication of an independent Italian cleft clause, where the pronoun *la* is anaphoric of a feminine noun expressed in a previous clause (for instance *la nostalgia*). Although the wolof noun *nammel* is clearly not compatible with Italian in terms of morphological inflection (no feminine or masculine gender defines noun classes), here the speaker has the wolof noun agree with the Italian anaphoric pronoun in the Italian half of the sentence, probably given the interference of the Italian word *nostalgia*.

## 6. Conclusions

This contribution analyses the relationship between negative emotions and code-switching in first-generation multilingual speakers from Senegal settled in the city of Pescara, southern Abruzzo. In general, these individuals make wide use of the Italian languages and of the Urban Wolof variety in their everyday life, and contact phenomena in their conversations have become the norm, while monolingual turns are the marked strategy.

As pointed out in previous studies regarding other communities (Acuña Ferreira, 2017; Pavlenko, 2004; Panayiotou, 2004), emotions are strictly connected to language and culture, but they are also experienced differently by multilingual speakers, so even easily translatable feelings might have different outcomes in different communities or individuals.

Specifically, our study looked at the linguistic expression of negative feelings (such as anger, disappointment, nostalgia) performed by a limited but qualitative sample of speakers of the above-mentioned community. Our findings show that it is the Italian language the code which is most activated while handling negative emotions. The excerpts illustrate that code-switching from Wolof to Italian occurs more frequently in emotional segments of

conversation concerning job issues (namely extracts (1), (3), and (5)), anger (extract (2)) or quite unhappy memories and nostalgia (extracts (4) and (6)). This circumstance might align with the time of crisis that Italy is experiencing in terms of job and society, and the emotions bound to these issues might trigger the use of Italian as the unmarked language in negative situations.

This contribution represents only a first step in understanding the different roles that languages in a multilingual repertoire play when dealing with emotions. Our specific findings on negative emotions indicate that code-switching is a signal of emotional intensity, where speakers rely on a different resource at their disposal (in our case Italian) that might seem marked, and instead it is used to emphasize a situation, or distance themselves from it, or to relate a particular context to the language in which they experienced it.

The limitations of the present work concern the specificity of the community and the small sample of individuals considered here. However, the findings proposed are expected to be useful and of relevance for further research in the same community as well as other investigations in different environments.

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