German and Romance varieties in contact in northeastern Italy

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Abstract: Northeastern Italy offers several sites where a variety of German is in contact with Italian, Italo-Romance, or Rhaeto-Romance: All of these contact situations vary according to sociolinguistic and extralinguistic factors, such as the composition of the speech community, structure of linguistic repertoires, language status, standardization, and demography. These factors combine into more or less coherent speech community types that, in turn, constrain the typology of contact linguistic phenomena that can be observed. In this contribution, based on the trilingual region of South Tyrol, a few emblematic case studies will be discussed focusing on insertional mechanisms that occur in speech. Based on the outcomes of a larger research project and drawing on various corpora of conversational data, quantitative and qualitative aspects of this contact situation will be explored in more detail.

1. Introduction

The fact that political and administrative, as well as physical, borders do not always correspond with language borders causes wider overlapping areas in which more than one language is used according to different patterns that depend on the sociolinguistic structure of the speech communities that are involved. This usually results in asymmetrical relations between communities and, consequently, between languages and language varieties; this is expected and particularly marked in the case of linguistic enclaves and, more generally, of minority languages, but it is less expected in the case of larger contact areas where standard languages are also involved. For this reason, the careful study of linguistic repertoires, i.e., the set of languages available to speech communities and their hierarchization and organization according to the domains of use and identity choices of speakers, constitutes a useful window through which one can observe social groups and thus systematically account for diversities and similarities between speech communities.[1]

Because of the multiple crossings of different language groups and of language varieties characterized by different sociolinguistic statuses, northeastern Italy is a good field test to explore variation in language contact within a relatively small area. This paper focuses, in particular, on the Romance-Germanic language border and, more specifically, on the intersection between Italo-Romance (Trentino and Italian), German (Standard German and Tyrolean dialects), and Rhaeto-Romance (Ladin varieties) in the Alpine region of South Tyrol, a region that became part of Italy in 1919, after World War I, as a consequence of the Treaty of Versailles.

There has been a long-lasting debate in the field of anthropology (particularly stimulating as regards Alpine anthropology; cf. the classical Cole & Wolf 1974) about the notions (and the corresponding linguistic labels) of "border", "boundary", and "frontier" (Viazzo & Fassio 2012) that cannot be resumed here except for the distinction between border (or boundary), meaning the line neatly dividing two areas, and frontier, meaning the area crossed by boundaries where two (or more) communities, cultures, societies come into contact. As the Italian anthropologist Ugo Fabietti puts it, the notion of a frontier is paradoxical because it implies a line (real or imaginary) that separates and unites at the same time (Fabietti 1998: 105). In this sense, we can speak for the phenomena dealt with here as originating from a linguistic "frontier" (rather than from a linguistic border) where different languages are interwoven in diverse ways and come in contact exactly there where a separation line

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keeps them apart.

2. Speech communities and language contact: Italian and German in South Tyrol

South Tyrol, corresponding to the autonomous province of Bolzano[2], is considered a paradigmatic case of *de jure* institutional bilingualism where both Italian and German enjoy co-official status and are used in all public contexts (also reflected in the top-down linguistic landscape; cf. Dal Negro 2009).[3] In addition, parallel school systems ensure education in the first language (German or Italian) and the teaching of the second language throughout the entire school career. *De facto*, however, what is guaranteed is the right to use one's own language (and this applies particularly to German, which is a minority language at the national level) in all administrative, public, cultural, and educational contexts, while bilingualism itself has never been particularly encouraged; as a result, these two main speech communities live side by side rather than forming a composite multilingual unity.

In addition, these two speech communities are sociolinguistically quite different. On the one hand, the German-speaking community is traditionally diglossic, and Standard German coexists, functionally separated, with a range of Tyrolean dialects that constitute the actual we-code for the local population and that are still vital because of the natural and cultural organization of the territory. On the other hand, the local Italian-speaking community is mostly the result of a massive Italianization process that took place especially in the (few) urban centers during the fascist time and of successive migration waves in the second half of the 20th century: Its dialectological composite nature has very quickly led to the abandonment of home dialects and to a language shift toward a regional variety of Italian characterized by koineization features (Vietti 2017). Fig. 1 graphically represents the combination of the two main linguistic repertoires of South Tyrol.
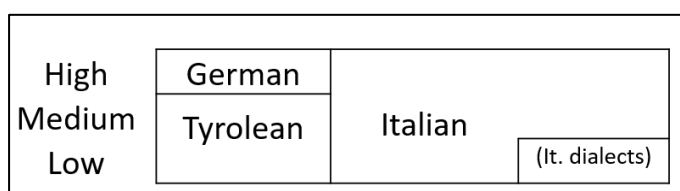

Fig. 1: Linguistic repertoires in South Tyrol.

Partly because of the societal organization (most social, institutional, and cultural activities are separately organized for each community) and partly because of the diglossic structure of the German speech community, the local Italian community has very limited possibilities to interact in German on a daily basis: Italian speakers have virtually no access to Tyrolean dialects since Standard German only is taught at school as a second language; on the other hand, Standard German is not used in informal communication by local Tyroleans. Conversely, the German-speaking population can easily come into contact with Italian, especially in urban centers, because Italian is the main language of communication for the Italian community, both written and oral, formal and informal, and it is the language taught at school as a second language. From the point of view of language contact, this creates a clear case of asymmetry because code-switching is more likely to take place when Tyrolean German is the main language of interaction rather than vice versa; as a result, the direction of contact goes from Italian to Tyrolean German and not the other way round. This may appear quite paradoxical if one thinks that the German speech community outnumbers the Italian one at a rate of 6:2 (ASTAT

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[2] Actually, the official name would be Bolzano/Bozen. However, for the sake of brevity, only Italian names will be used for all toponyms that are referred to in the rest of this text.

[3] The special status of the third official language in the region, Ladin, is not considered in this section, but cf. Iannàccaro et al. (2020) and § 4.

2012), although this ratio is geographically much differentiated. This situation leads to another asymmetry in the relationship between the two communities: German speakers usually bear the "burden" of bilingualism much more than Italian native speakers do, and in the case of outgroup communication, the switch to Italian is usually the unmarked choice.

This general picture is only partly confirmed by the empirical research conducted by Vietti (2008) based on an experimental investigation of anonymous requests for street directions in Italian and German elicited by local and nonlocal investigators in the towns of Bolzano and Bressanone. Apparently, both languages have a similar likelihood of being employed in such neutral situations, all other factors being equal; more specifically, passers-by tend to accommodate the language of their requestors (be it German or Italian). On the other hand, local varieties (especially local German varieties) partly disfavor linguistic accommodation on the side of casual respondents because the latter take for granted that (German speaking) interlocutors are bilingual precisely because they sound local. However, a correct interpretation of these results needs to be verified by a thorough analysis of single interactions to detect conversational and accommodation strategies, as the author (Vietti 2008) also suggests. For instance, if we consider the interaction in (1), a series of linguistic indices present in A's request, the most obvious of which being the dialectal rendering of [st] as [ʃt] or [ʃ] must have led interlocutor B to infer that A is a member of the local German speech community, hence a shift to Italian (clearly her preferred language) would be sociolinguistically acceptable, since local Germans are supposed to be perfectly able to interact in Italian, whereas the reverse is not necessarily true.

(1) A: *wissen sie wo die nächschte volksbank isch?* (Bressanone 2005)
    '*do you know where the nearest people's bank is?*'
 B: quale banca?
    'which bank?'
 A: banca popolar
    'people's bank'
 B: devi andare qui in fondo, e dopo c'è quell'arco così, gira, ma su questo orario è già chiusa
    'you have to go down here at the bottom, and after that there's that arch like this, turn, but at this time is closed already'
 A: ma okay è lo stesso
    'well, okay, never mind'

If we split Fig. 1 into the two separate repertoires corresponding to the Italian (Fig. 2) and the German (Fig. 3) speech communities, we can focus on patterns of language contact from the two opposite perspectives. The Italian speech community is basically monolingual, apart from a limited and superficial influence from (Standard) German with regard to topics that are related to the local German community (food, alpine culture, local traditions); in those situations in which Italo-Romance dialects are preserved, their relation to Italian is that of *dilalìa* (Berruto 1989) with possible bidirectional interferences, though limited to low and family domains. From the perspective of the German speech community, more possibilities of contact are available to speakers (Fig. 3). First, because of its wider range of language use domains, Italian may exert its influence both on Standard German (as regards formal and written domains) and on Tyrolean in oral and informal interactions. All cases mentioned thus far, related to both Fig. 2 and Fig. 3, fall within the first scenario described by Thomason & Kaufman (1988), that is, that of borrowing in a situation of language maintenance; in Fig. 3, however, a further case is represented, that of Tyrolean (or, generally, German) influence on Italian: Here, the scenario is that of interference through shift (via imperfect acquisition) since it deals with German native speakers' use of Italian.[4]

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[4] As a reviewer correctly suggested, one should also consider the case of German varieties spoken by Italian native
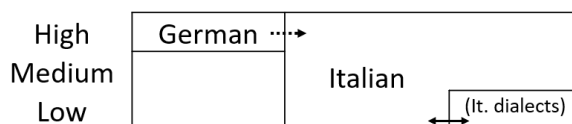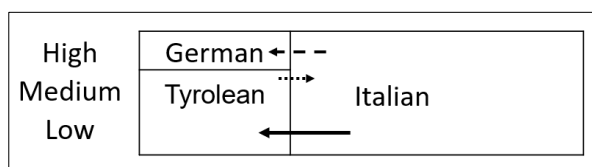
Fig. 2: Italian speech community.

Fig. 3: German speech community.

The different structures of these linguistic repertoires have an impact on the amount and type of borrowings and insertional code mixing that occur in speech. In a corpus of semispontaneous (native) Italian elicited in Bolzano (DIA corpus, Mereu & Vietti 2021), only a few lexical borrowings (exclusively nouns) could be found (see here examples (2)-(3)): In all cases, they are cultural borrowings, either from German or from Tyrolean (as in example (2)), that are inserted in speech to denote culturally or locally connotated referents; the use of a borrowed word can also receive explicit flagging or glossing, as in (2), where an explicit reference to the German cultural world is made, regarded as distant as their (i.e., the speakers') own.

(2) no son più nel mondo tedesco poi le feste così il *kirtog* # così ma è una cosa che noi non ## non ci riguarda [DIA_01_F47]
'no, they are more in the German world, then festivities like that, like *kirtog* [i.e., church country festival], so but it is something that we, we are not involved'

(3) beh penso che durante quel periodo della ih della storia anche le scuole abbiano sofferto tantissimo se pensi alle *katakombenschulen* # e alla lingua tedesca come è stata- [DIA_03_F21]
'well, I think that during that historical period [i.e., fascism] also schools have suffered a lot, if you think of *Katakombenschulen* [i.e., secret schools organized by local parishes to keep the German language alive during fascism] and how the German language has been-'

The same DIA corpus includes a collection of interactions in Italian elicited by bilingual, German-dominant speakers: a slightly artificial situation that is, however, not totally unlikely in South Tyrol. In this subcorpus, the rate of German or Tyrolean words increases, but what is more interesting is the fact that a greater variety of lexical and functional types occurs. Specifically, the most represented category is that of discourse markers: Quite differently from the "flagged" insertions of Italian native speakers seen above, these speakers do not seem to be aware of such insertions which, in the case of *net* 'isn't it', *ja* 'yes', and *schau* 'look' seem to be rather systematic across the corpus. The excerpt in (4) is such an example:

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speakers (for example shop assistants or civil servants where bilingual competencies are required). Unfortunately, this phenomenon has not been the object of systematic investigation so far.

(4) bellissimo perché butti dentro tutto lasci lì [LAUGHING] praticamente *net* l'ombrello tu- tutto quanto lasci dentro quello che ti serve per questo giro lo prendi *net* vedi ben *net* [DIA_20_F58]
'very nice because you throw everything inside [the bus] and leave everything there, *isn't it*, the umbrella, you leave everything inside and you take with you what you need for this tour, *isn't it*, you see well, *isn't it*'

Regarding lexical single-word insertions, they are not necessarily linked to specific cultural domains (as in the cases of examples (2) and (3)), but they rather fill lexical gaps or represent instances of interference between cognate words, such as the doublet *criminalità*/*Kriminalität*, 'crime' in (5). As with discourse markers, in the case of lexical insertions, there is no expressive function in resorting to the other language; in contrast, they rather attest to speakers' (momentary) difficulty in keeping the two languages apart.

(5) no no *kriminalität* zero # proprio zero [DIA_20_F58]
'no, no, zero *crime*, just zero'

Considering the same German-speaking population, but from the point of view of their (more common) interactions in Tyrolean (as attested by the corpus KONTATTO; cf. Ciccolone & Dal Negro 2021), the rate of single-word insertions increases even more, and again, the category that is attested most is that of discourse markers with a remarkable concentration on a few lexical types (*ma* 'but, well', *dai* 'come on' and *magari* 'perhaps', among the most frequent ones), including derogatory and blasphemous terms that are very frequent in low varieties Italian, such as *cazzo* 'fuck', *diocane* 'damn' and others. Content words from Italian are remarkably rare in terms of tokens and disperse in terms of types, since they depend on the actual communication context and vary accordingly. The following two examples extracted from spontaneous conversations between young South Tyroleans represent these two different phenomena: the insertion of a discourse marker in (6) and the insertion of a content word in (7). In the latter example, the noun *ragioneria* 'accounting' is inserted to specifically refer to a university exam that the speaker has just taken (most likely in Italian).[5]

(6) *dai* gia=mår an kaffe trinkn suscht wärt des haint nix [KONTATTO_03]
'*come on*, let's go and drink a coffee otherwise we won't be able to do anything today'

(7) wänn mir *ragioneria* gmåcht hobm hån i gmuant i bin im ka zet [KONTATTO_08]
'when we took *accounting* I thought I was in a concentration camp'

3. Language contact on the border
Quite a different situation from the one sketched above can be found in the area south of Bolzano, approaching the administrative (and linguistic) border with the Trentino province. Here, for historical reasons, the contact between Trentino, Italian and Tyrolean German has been longer and more intense than elsewhere, preceding the annexation of South Tyrol to Italy by about two centuries. From the sociolinguistic point of view, the historical-geographical peculiarities of this area have meant that the plurality of coexisting communities, with their respective linguistic repertoires, have had the time and conditions to come effectively in contact (and not simply "at" contact; cf. Berruto 2009: 7), thus fostering the emergence of a community of bilingual speakers proportionally greater than in the rest of the region. It is precisely on the Romance front that this area, called *Bassa Atesina* in Italian and *Unterland* in German, differs clearly from the rest of South Tyrol: Here (and only here), in fact, is

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[5] Speakers recorded in (6) and (7) attend trilingual BA and MA programmes at the Free University of Bolzano, this means that each course (such as "Accounting") is held in one of the three official languages (German, Italian or English).

concentrated to this day the deep-rooted presence of an Italo-Romance dialect belonging to the Central Trentino type that forms part of the identity of the local community and that is not limited to individual families as is the case with the other dialects "imported" during the 20th century, together with the Italianization waves mentioned above.

In large villages, such as Laives or Salorno (the latter located exactly on the administrative border with Trentino), the traditional population masters four different linguistic codes (Italian, German, Trentino, and Tyrolean). Unfortunately, however, this endogenous multilingualism is deemed to dissolve soon and be substituted by more simplified repertoires (see Dal Negro & Tartarotti 2019): In particular, the Trentino dialect is less and less used by the younger generations, whereas Italian is expanding together with newcomers from Bolzano looking for cheaper housing in these peri-urban areas. Hence, paradoxically, the Trentino dialect is currently still part of the repertoire of the local speech community that culturally (and linguistically) recognizes itself in the German community (for example, attending German schools and taking part in German cultural activities), whereas the (more recent) Italian community tends toward monolingualism or to the official German-Italian bilingualism that is expected in the region. This rather complex situation is summarized by one of our informants in (8) and is sketched in Fig. 4 below.

(8) italienischen dialäkt redn aigentlich di daitschn […] dialäkt kännän aigenlich lai di richtigän
laivesotti de urschprünglich daitsch sain […] de wos haitzutåg in laifars italienar sain, di säl sain raine italienar jå unt di säm redn italiensch [KONTATTO_48]
'the Italian dialect is actually spoken by (local) Germans […] only the proper *Laives inhabitants* know the [Italian] dialect and they are originally German […] those who nowadays are Italians in Laives, those are pure Italians, yes, and they speak Italian'
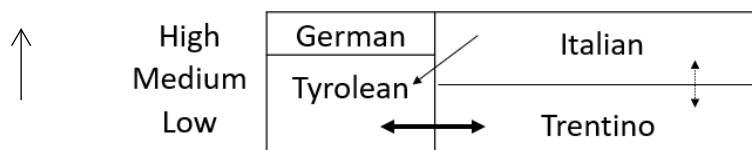

Fig. 4: Multilingualism in the *Bassa Atesina* area.

The scheme in Fig. 4 attempts to represent the reciprocal status of the four languages and dialects available to the local speech community, as well as the dynamics of language contact. Apart from the reciprocal contact between Italian and Trentino and the asymmetrical connection between Italian and Tyrolean German, what is most striking is the intense (darker line) and bidirectional contact between the two dialects. This symmetrical relationship is because both dialects are we-codes for the local community that can thus be regarded as a bilingual speech community *de facto* and not as the juxtaposition of two virtually monolingual speech communities, as is the case for the majority of the South Tyrolean population. This situation creates more opportunities for language contact, both in the form of single-word insertions and in the form of code-switching. However, since the Trentino dialect is losing ground as a language for everyday use, it is less common to find interactions in Trentino characterized by insertions from Tyrolean than the other way round. In fact, if we consider conversational data elicited in this geographical area (a subcorpus of KONTATTO; cf. Ciccolone & Dal Negro 2021), again, insertions and instances of code mixing go mostly in one direction, namely, from Italian or Trentino to Tyrolean German and much more rarely vice versa. One such example can be seen in (9), extracted from a Map Task[6] dialogue between two female friends from Laives: In this

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[6] See Ciccolone & Dal Negro (2021: 36-45) for a thorough description of the KONTATTO corpus and of elicitation

case, it is the German word *Ziel* 'target', that triggers a switch from Trentino into Tyrolean German.

(9) e basta e t=arivi zo e dopo gh=è el tabachin *zil bai mir geats grod or unt bisch afn zil do bam*
     tabachin [KONTATTO_46B_S2]
     'and stop, you arrive to the bottom and then you have the tobacconist's, *target, in my* [map] *it
     goes straight down and you are at the target there at the* tobacconist's'

Finally, one should not forget the effect of Tyrolean on Standard German, which, in this special
context, means that Tyrolean also becomes the vehicle of Italian and Trentino insertions.

      Overall, this conversational subcorpus elicited in the Bassa Atesina area is characterized by a
much larger proportion of insertions and code-mixing instances than can be found in all other datasets
considered thus far. In addition, regarding single-word insertions, the proportion of discourse markers
is lower than in the case of Tyrolean spoken elsewhere in the region (though higher in absolute
numbers). This is because a larger proportion of referential nonce borrowings occurs in speech since
both Italian and Tyrolean are generally activated in discourse, and speakers may resort to either of
them depending on the context or on speakers' lexical competencies or preferences, as is probably
the case in (10).

(10)   är håt di *magliette* übår ebay beschtellt   [KONTATTO_13_S1]
        'he has ordered the *t-shirts* with ebay'

In any case, a variety of formally and functionally different insertion types can be observed: discourse
markers (11), where the inserted item occurs in fixed positions (here introducing an interrogative
utterance), similar to what can be found in other varieties of South Tyrol, the fixed recurrence of
which resembles that of loanwords; integration of nonce borrowings (in particular verbs, as in (12))
following borrowing routines (cf. Heath 1984 and Poplack 2018: 129-131); insertion of nonadapted
content words that refer to items contextually mentioned in discourse, typically nouns ((13) and the
already mentioned case in (10)), but also other parts of speech (14).

(11)   *ma* tusch du grod aufneemän?   [KONTATTO_13_S2]
        '*but* are you recording now?'

(12)   des foto *tschentriirt* nichts   [KONTATTO_14_S2]
        'that picture *has nothing to do with* it' (cf. Italian *c'entrare* 'to have to do')

(13)   du gäa mål dainä *multa* zooln   [KONTATTO_13_S1]
        'you go and pay your *fine*'

(14)   di mami unt di sabine worn *convinte*   [KONTATTO_17_S2]
        'Mum and Sabine were *convinced* (F.PL)'

As expected, code-switching proper is also well represented here. In these cases, the border between
languages and speech communities enters the utterance and is exploited as a resource because of its
communicative markedness (Auer (1999: 310) speaks of a "locally meaningful event"). By virtue of
its potential to create a gap from the basic level of discourse, code-switching works to keep the
different enunciative planes separate. The most emblematic case, in this sense, is reported speech and,

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    techniques (also cf. Dal Negro & Ciccolone 2020).

in particular, direct speech[7]: Code-switching first provides the quoting frame in the absence of other explicit markers; in addition, it contributes to creating a "polyphonic" effect in discourse where different voices, opinions, and comments can be kept separate. The example in (15) is precisely a case in point. The reported speech generalizable to "what the teachers told us in (German-speaking) high school" triggers the transition from Trentino to Tyrolean German; however, the mimicry is only partial since we assume that such comments by teachers were in Standard German and not in dialect, in addition to the fact that, clearly, it is not a matter here of *verbatim* reporting of a speech actually uttered but of synthetically resuming a widespread linguistic attitude.

(15)   perché anche da noi i diseva sempre nelle *obarschuln "öh es laiferer känts nit gschait daitsch känts nit gschait italienisch"*   [KONTATTO_48A_S1]
        'because also by us they always said in the *highschools "oh you from Laifers, you can't speak well either German or Italian"*'

On a more abstract level, code-switching contributes to unravelling the structure of the text into informational blocks, which coincide with the macrosyntactic structure of the sentence. The case in (16) is particularly emblematic in this regard. In constructing his argument, the speaker uses a structure that is repeated (at least) twice: The hypothesis, which constitutes the background information, appears in Tyrolean German, while the logical consequence, corresponding to the foreground information, is in a mix of Trentino and Italian, as is the short parenthetic *non so* 'I do not know', inserted in the second of the two subordinates. In short, each information block corresponds to a language according to an abstract pattern, recurring in other similar examples that can be found in the corpus (see Ciccolone & Dal Negro 2021: 106-110).

(16)   äh # wänn radl foorn gäasch *te compri* # *na bici da* # wänn # *non so* # wänn go_kart foorn gäasch *te devi comprar en go_kart*   [KONTATTO_22_S1]
        'eh if you go cycling *you buy a bike*, if, *I don't know*, if you want to drive a go-cart, *you have to buy a go-cart*'

Cases such as (16) are possible only in the case of bilingual linguistic repertoires that are shared within an extensive bilingual speech community. Interestingly, no flagging or glossing can be found at the switch points between the languages since no cultural or conversational meaning seems to be conveyed either by each language or by the switch itself; what emerges is rather an abstract bilingual pattern.

4. The Ladin speech community
In addition to Italians and Germans, at least a third (officially recognized) speech community belongs to the region, that is, the Ladin (though the extension of the Ladin community goes far beyond South Tyrol).[8] In comparison with German and Italian, Ladin is clearly a minority language, and members of the Ladin community have a reputation for being multilingual; as a matter of fact, in the linguistic repertoire of a Ladin speaker, the sociolinguistically weakest language might indeed be Ladin because of its profile (more restricted use domains in general terms, lower elaboration, dialectal fragmentation), despite the considerable efforts in language policy and planning to secure Ladin the status as a standard and official language (cf. Iannàccaro et al. 2020). In addition, by sketching the

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[7] A well-known phenomenon in many bilingual communities. As regards the Italian context, see, for example, Alfonzetti (1998).

[8] For a wider picture of the Ladin language from a sociolinguistic point of view cf. Belardi (1991). More recently, on language contact in the Ladin valleys, cf. Fiorentini (2020).

sociolinguistic profile of the community one cannot overlook the fact that individual variation in language use and in language competences is comparatively higher here than in larger speech communities. Specifically, the fact of believing oneself to be a member of the Ladin linguistic community, and declaring this with conviction in the context of official censuses, does not mean that one actually uses the language or is a fully proficient speaker (see for instance Dell'Aquila & Iannàccaro 2006 and Verra 2007).

Fig. 5 tries to represent the complex repertoire of one of the Ladin speech communities, that of the Gardena valley, where the impact of German (and Tyrolean) is stronger than elsewhere (and stronger than that of Italian). As one can see, the notion of asymmetry is especially manifest here: Although Ladin is potentially available in all domains of the communicative space (if one considers the context of the local community only), the presence of Italian and German in high and medium domains and of Tyrolean in medium and low domains exerts a very strong influence on Ladin both in terms of language choice and as regards the interference in discourse. Remarkably, Tyrolean is in turn influenced by Italian, and it is in this form that it eventually enters Ladin discourse. Finally, the direct influence of Ladin on the other languages in contact is generally limited to cultural borrowings.
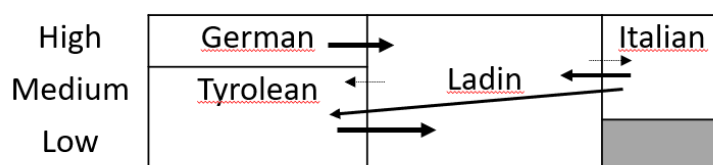

Fig. 5: Multilingual dynamics in the Ladin speech community of Gardena.

A typical feature of these asymmetrical relations is that in individuals' linguistic repertoires, one can find a series of implications related to languages (also see Dal Negro 2017): The knowledge and use of Ladin implies the knowledge and use of Tyrolean, which implies German and, finally, Italian, whereas the inverse implications do not apply, since (adult) native speakers of Italian need not, in principle, speak anything other than their first language and a Tyrolean speaker needs to know Italian and German but not necessarily Ladin.

In this context, the study of insertions in spontaneous speech and of their directionality can be particularly revealing. In order to observe this, I rely on a case study, a BA thesis based on three family conversations that are characterized by participant-related language alternation (Mahlknecht 2009): Although all speakers have at least a passive knowledge of all three languages, two participants out of five do not actively speak Ladin. Fig. 6 (adapted from Mahlknecht 2009) cross-tabulates the languages that are mostly used during these three conversations (and, more generally, by these family members with each other). As one can see, the result is that Ladin is used only between parents and between the mother and her elder daughter (a young woman in her early 20s), whereas the younger daughter (aged 12) and the other participant never use Ladin and, thus, increase the overall presence of German in speech. Most striking is the fact that the elder daughter and her father speak German with each other, despite the fact that both speak Ladin with their mother/wife. Finally, Italian is only apparently absent from this family's repertoire: On the contrary, it emerges quite often in the form of insertions both into Ladin and into Tyrolean German but never on its own.

	Mother	Father	Daughter1	Daughter2	Daughter1's boyfriend
Mother	-	Ladin	Ladin	German	German
Father	Ladin	-	German	German	German
Daughter1	Ladin	German	-	German	German
Daughter2	German	German	German	-	German
Daughter1's boyfriend	German	German	German	German	-

Fig. 6: Language choice in family interactions (adapted from Mahlknecht 2009).

Hence, the case study documented by Mahlknecht (2009) shows that within a single family a variety of individual linguistic repertoires can be found with varied access to the three languages at stake, which makes any general account oversimplified. This said, some of the predictions derived from the asymmetries that describe the Ladin linguistic repertoire at a community level seem to be confirmed. First of all, the role of Italian in these three conversations is marginal but in the few utterances in Italian that can be found, no insertions from either German or Ladin occur; conversely, Italian penetrates into both Ladin and Tyrolean German with a high proportion of discourse and interactional markers (see examples in (17) and (18)), paralleling what happens more generally in German speakers' interactions.[9] As for German, it penetrates into Ladin even more intensely than Italian, involving both vocabulary and "sentence grammar" (besides so-called "thetical grammar"; see Kaltenböck et al. 2011 for this distinction), as seen in underlined insertions in (18) and in (19), both produced by the father addressing his wife.

(17)   *dai*, i konn net sogn
        '*come on*, I can't say'

(18)   *ma* chësc *sugo* chësc à <u>gonz dergebn</u> # ie é mé metù ite un n tel de ch- <u>dings</u> de
        vellutata
        '*but* this *sauce*, this has <u>quite filled</u>, I have put inside only one of these <u>things</u>, of *veloute*'

(19)   y scno? ## <u>olls oke</u> sun scola?
        'and else? <u>everything ok</u> at school?'

Finally, Ladin is only marginally the source of insertions, and if so, it is mainly for words endowed with very specific referential content, either cultural (as in food names) or in the case of near naming usages (such as *lava*, 'grandmother', ex. (20)) or with playful functions (cf. ex. (21)). Both examples ((20)-(21)) are produced by the 12-year-old girl, who could be defined a semispeaker as regards Ladin, a language circumscribed to a (very limited) lexical basin from which she can resort to for expressive functions but is probably unable to use productively, a fate similar to that of many Italo-Romance dialects in Italy (cf. Berruto 2006). The word *cajin* in (21) is an adaptation of the Italian *casino* 'mess' and occurs in Ladin in the expression *fé cajin* 'to make a mess', a calque from the

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[9] And, as a matter of fact, the speaker in (17) is the younger daughter who is *de facto* a native speaker of (Tyrolean) German.

Italian *fare casino*; here, the speaker creates (or more probably reuses) a construction in Tyrolean in which the Italian *fare* or Ladin *fé* are substituted by the (dialect) German *mochn* 'make'.

(20)   kommt di *lava* bold?
         'does the *grandmother* come?'

(21)   i find=s folle lustig *cajin* zu mochn
         'I find it very funny to make a *mess*'

5. Concluding remarks

Trying to summarize these various observations deriving from a range of contact situations that are located across the Romance-Germanic language border in northeastern Italy, a few constants can be highlighted.

First, in all observed contexts, the contact situation is asymmetrical, which is probably a sociolinguistic truism (cf. Matras 2020: 47); when more than two languages (or dialects) are involved, languages are ordered along an implicational chain, as was observed in particular in the case of Ladin. As a first consequence, this means that living in an area where more than one language is spoken (though all languages are local and officially recognized) does not result in a community of balanced bi- or multilingual speakers. Second, this areal bi- or multilingualism does not imply that interferences and other contact phenomena are multidirectional and that all languages have the same chances to be the source and the target of borrowings and insertional code-mixing (to recall the two phenomena that were mostly considered in this contribution); quite on the contrary, mostly unidirectional and predictable paths of language contact were detected. Taking into account conversational data, one finds extremely few German insertions in a corpus of Italian speakers from Bolzano speaking in their first language (Italian), whereas in the reverse situation (German dominant speakers speaking Tyrolean German), Italian insertions in speech are more frequent and different in kind (both lexical and functional); moreover, the incidence of these phenomena increases considerably for those German speakers living near the language border.

Second, if we take it for granted that the frequency of contact phenomena occurring in speech strongly depends on the degree of bilingualism of a speech community, the variety of phenomena that can be found relates much more to specific features characterizing the structure of linguistic repertoires. In particular, for functional insertions to occur in speech, languages need to be in contact in the low, oral domains of the communicative space. The more asymmetrical the relation between the languages that are in contact, the more functional insertions filter into sentence grammar; otherwise, they dominate in the so-called thetical grammar, that is, in the domain of discourse markers, especially as regards interactional functions. For lexical insertions, their presence is more dependent on contextual factors that relate to the speech situation, both as regards register variation (formal registers being less sensitive to contact than informal ones) and the degree of referentiality in speech; specialized topics (school matters, local institutions, food) require a specialized lexicon that is often dependent on contact languages, whereas small talk tends to be more immune from lexical insertions (but not so from functional ones).

Finally, standard languages create a stronger barrier to contact at the level of discourse than nonstandard (such as Tyrolean German) or "less" standard (such as Ladin) languages. That of standardization is actually part of the larger issue of sociolinguistic asymmetries within bi- or multilingual speech communities, but it contributes to shedding light on it and explaining some anomalies, such as the fact that the Italian language is (almost) always the source and (almost) never the target of insertions and borrowings in all language contact combinations in South Tyrol, despite the fact that the Italian-speaking community is numerically much smaller than the German-speaking community. The fact that the languages that are actually in contact are Italian (a standard language)

and Tyrolean (a nonstandard group of dialects) is part of the explanation, as is the fact that Standard German is almost immune to superficial contact phenomena (at least to those coming from Italian).

In sum, this bordering area, *de facto* a frontier in anthropological terms, is crossed by different linguistic and sociolinguistic boundaries in the sense that the various speech communities that inhabit it have different access to and make different use of coexisting languages.

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