

Sociolinguistic Aspects and Language Contact, Lexical Consequences in Francoprovençal Settings

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Abstract : In Italy the coexistence of standard language, its varieties and different minority languages - historical and migration languages - has been a way to study language contact in different directions; the focus of most of the studies is either the relations among the languages of the social repertoire, or the study of contact phenomena occurring in a particular structural level. However, studies on contact facts in relation to a given sociolinguistic situation of the speech community are still not present in literature. As regard the language level to investigate from the perspective of contact, it is commonly claimed that the lexicon is the most volatile part of language and most likely to undergo change due to superstrate influence, indeed first lexical features are borrowed, then, under long term cultural pressure, structural features may also be borrowed. The aim of this paper is to analyse language contact in two historical minority communities where Francoprovençal is spoken, in relation to their sociolinguistic situation. In this perspective, firstly lexical borrowings present in speakers' speech production will be examined, trying to find a possible correlation between this part of the lexicon and informants' sociolinguistic variables; secondly a possible correlation between a particular community sociolinguistic situation and lexical borrowing will be found. Methods used to collect data are based on the results obtained from 24 speakers in both the villages; the speaker group in the two communities consisted of 3 males and 3 females in each of four age groups, ranging in age from 9 to 85, and then divided into five groups according to their occupations. Speakers were asked to describe a sequence of pictures naming common objects and then describing scenes when they used these objects: they are common objects, frequently pronounced and belonging to semantic areas which are usually resistant and which are thought to survive. A subset of this task, involving 19 items with Italian source is examined here: in order to determine the significance of the independent variables (social factors) on the dependent variable (lexical variation) the statistical package SPSS, particularly the linear regression, was used.

Keywords : borrowing, Francoprovençal, language change, lexicon

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