

COMIC PERFORMANCE AND THE ARTICULATION OF HYBRID IDENTITY

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Abstract

This article describes how comedians and radio professionals in Corsica draw on a bilingual linguistic and metalinguistic cultural repertoire. In the context of Corsica's history of language domination, language shift, and linguistic revitalization efforts, many of the products of language contact - mixed codes and competences - are socially stigmatized. In the logic of dominant language ideologies, these mixed codes do not 'count as' language and depreciate individual speakers and collective identities. Comic performances, it is argued, derive part of their tension and effect from the dominant view of languages as fixed and bounded codes which index single identities. Yet at the same time, performers make use of bilingual repertoires in ways that validate mixed language practices and identities. They do so by making maximal use of fluidity and indeterminacy in speaker stances towards mixed codes and identities. Bilingual comic performance also validates mixed codes and identities by evoking an 'expert' bilingual audience.

Keywords: Performance, Corsica, humor, hybridity

1. Introduction

In places like Corsica, the process of culture contact and language shift produces complex, blended and multilayered linguistic and cultural identities and practices. In this paper, I explore a particular kind of verbal art: Public bilingual comic media interactions and performances. In these performances, I examine two kinds of communicative strategies. First, there is the way that media professionals and performers in these contexts manipulate, for creative purposes, conventional (dominant) ideologies of language in which languages are viewed as fixed and bounded codes which directly index equally bounded identities. I draw greater attention, however, to a second strategy, in which performers implicitly undercut this logic of clear-cut boundaries, by making use of the bilingual repertoire in ways that validate mixed language practices and identities.

2. Language choice, alternation and identity: Theoretical orientations

My approach to relationship between language and identity in this analysis is drawn from a variety of linguistic subdisciplines and research traditions. One of its key components is

elegantly encapsulated in Le Page and Tabouret-Keller's (1985) characterization of utterances as "acts of identity." That is, talking requires speakers to make linguistic choices, and through these choices, speakers simultaneously lay claims to social identities and symbolically align with or distance themselves from their interlocutors or audiences. This view of the speaking subject is consistent with performance-centered approaches to language use, since it does not see language as a simple expression of a single, unified identity that preexists the act of speaking, but rather, sees speaking as a fundamental way in which identities and social relationships are constituted in interaction. This general approach has been extremely influential in contemporary linguistic anthropology (see for example Hanks 1996).

2.1. *Performance*

Theories of performance also emphasize speakers' orientations towards real or presumed audiences, as do concepts from sociolinguistics like "referee design" (Bell 1991). Such responses to the audience can be essentially "reactive" the speaker shifts some aspect of her language towards the language of member(s) of her audience.¹ That audience, as research in pragmatics has emphasized, can include, in addition to addressees, overhearers, imagined or secondary audiences etc. (Verschueren 1998: 82-83). Audience response can also be what Bell calls "initiative"; where the speaker "adopts a style, or even a language, which is not just a response to the situation...but which actually defines the situation as something different" (1991: 7). This is glossed by Bauman's early work as the "emergent" quality of performance (1977). This "defining of the situation" can take a number of forms. For example, it can set the tone (or "key") of the event (as formal, informal etc.). It can foreground a particular facet of the speaker's identity such that a speaker can send messages like, "now I'm speaking to you as your aunt, not your teacher". It can also, as I will explore below, propose or highlight or even constitute speaker-audience relationships and identities.² In other words, language choices "perform" both speaker and audience identity(s) and relationships.

2.2. *Codeswitching*

This "shifting" in speech can deploy any socially significant linguistic variable. In this paper, I am going to focus on codeswitching between languages (Corsican and French) and the use of contact-induced codes in which Corsican and French are intermingled. While I am not able to do justice to the huge literature on these phenomena, let me just point to some of my key assumptions about the practices involved and the linguistic labels that have

¹ This is the fundamental premise of "accommodation theory" (see seminal work by Giles and Smith 1979).

² Here, there has been extensive work, particularly on such things as honorific language and terms of address. Among many others, Duranti (1994), Hill and Hill (1980), Irvine (1989) and Hanks (1996) have been influential in this domain.

been attached to them. First of all, the very term “codeswitching” implies that there are two completely discrete linguistic codes, whose boundaries are transparent to social actors and/or to the researcher. This is clearly not the case, and numerous works have demonstrated the problems associated with trying to distinguish “interference” or “loan words” from codeswitching (Gardner-Chloros 1995) and more generally, with the interpretation of speaker consciousness and intentionality with regard to their own processes of language alternation. This is explicit in Stroud (1992) and in Meeuwis’ and Blommaert’s critique of Myers-Scotton’s markedness model (1994) and is illustrated in sociolinguistic studies like Finlayson and Slabbert (1997), in which the authors argue that what looks like codeswitching from the outside is actually, from the speakers’ perspective, a new, “merged” language variety in which “matrix” and “embedded” languages are no longer conceptually distinct.³ Woolard makes another slightly different argument: That bilinguals do not just manipulate the contrast between two codes, they also make creative use of linguistic phenomena that the two codes have in common (1999). In other words, in the wide range of phenomena that have been loosely grouped under the rubric of “codeswitching,” the salience of linguistic contrast cannot be taken for granted; it must be discovered empirically.

This sort of work departs from a long tradition in the sociolinguistic analysis of codeswitching, in which one language is associated with one identity or one function. Applying this traditional approach to the Corsican context, speaking (and switching to) Corsican would be seen as reflecting or laying claim to Corsican identity, and/or (because it is a minority language) as a reflection of or claim on intimacy or solidarity. Speaking/switching to French, conversely, would amount to a claim on French identity or the power, status or distance associated with that dominant language. This model accounts for some instances of codeswitching in Corsica (and other similar sociolinguistic contexts), but it is ill-equipped to handle the complex and sometimes ambiguous ways in which multiple identities are proposed and responded to in bilingual conversation. The function of codeswitches are multiple, complex and, as Auer points out, not predictable. He treats codeswitches as a subset of the larger category of linguistic and paralinguistic contextualization cues. Such cues can have a variety of social and discursive functions, from marking discursive or narrative segments to signaling a change of speaker footing etc. that cannot be known in advance, but have to be interpreted in specific circumstances (Auer 1995: 123).

Within Auer’s conversational analytic approach, interpretation of these meanings is restricted to the interaction itself. In contrast, my analysis of media performances, below, considers the ways that the “macro” level of language ideologies shapes the micro-level context. This macro-level, as Meeuwis and Blommaert emphasize, includes conventional, culturally specific, historically based ideas about language and its relationship to identity (1997: 412; see also Heller 1995 and Woolard 1999). On Corsica, the historical context

³ The title of this article, “We just switch” alludes to another important dimension of bilingual practice: People do not necessarily or always intend or attribute meaning to individual moments of alternation, and switching language does not necessarily have any social effects. This kind of switching has been documented in many bilingual contexts, to greater or lesser extents. Zentella, for example, develops an extensive typology of codeswitching types and their social and discursive meanings in New York Puerto Rican speech. Yet she has a large residual category of data to which she cannot and does not attribute specific meanings (Zentella 1997: 98).

includes the strong influence of French language ideology (embodied and transmitted in the schools) and its monolingual, monocultural ideal or norm (“homogeneism” in Meeuwis and Blommaert’s terms). In this “one language - one people” equation, languages (and language varieties) are seen as bounded, autonomous codes which index equally bounded autonomous cultural identities (Handler 1989; Gal 1989). These dominant views of language and identity penetrate the local, and in local context, people act on the basis of these language ideologies, thereby “making real” a view of the relationship between language and identity that does not adequately describe the range of language practices observable in a particular community.

When people speak, they draw on these idealized, stereotypical visions of language and identity as resources for the production and interpretation of meaning. But these are not the only resources they have at their disposal. They also draw on their knowledge of practice. And here, codeswitching itself - rather than the a particular shift to a particular language at a particular point in a stretch of speech - can index bilingual, bicultural community and intimacy and shared identity (see Finlayson and Slabbert 1997; Gal 1989; Woolard 1987).

In this paper, I look at the interplay of these communicative resources in a particular kind of speech situation: Comic (or lighthearted) performances on the radio. Such performances have a number of characteristics which attenuate some of the problems of ascribing meaning to codeswitching. First of all, all performance involves a heightened attention to audience reception. Secondly, there is the issue of “voice.” In three of the four examples below, the “speakers” are comedians who have invented - scripted - a monologue. In two cases, the comedians take on the voice of a comic persona. Even in the two examples in which this is not the case, we can argue that the speaker is still playing a professional role (as comedian or DJ). They are, therefore, not just speaking “as themselves,” but consciously inhabiting a role for which they must devise and monitor a voice. This voice must be recognizable to their audience; in other words, it must be conventional (stereotyped in some way) and linguistically indexed in conventional ways. In these cases, therefore, we can assume with relative safety that code switches are intentional, that they index identities and relationships, and that they are audience-oriented. This audience-orientation is both specific and general. The general principle of audience design is a fair guarantee that performers’ language use is intelligible to their audience - and that it reflects (albeit in some exaggerated ways) everyday patterns of interaction and interpretive strategies. For some of the segments I discuss, I also have data from interviews with radio listeners which explore these principles. Finally, I consider how the bracketing-off of performance from everyday interaction and the use of humor affect the way in which performers propose images of identity - their own, their personas’, their addressees’, their listening audiences’ and ultimately, Corsicans’ in general.

3. Mixed codes and identity: Language shift and revitalization

So far, I have talked in general terms about the interpretation of mixed codes. Here, I will briefly describe the wider social and historical context and how it has shaped my interest in this kind of language practice.

Over the last eighty years, there has been a dramatic language shift on the island of

Corsica from Corsican (a minority language) to French, a dominant language. Today, the majority of Corsican speakers are older than forty, and there are many Corsicans who either do not speak the language or who do not speak it well (minority language “semi-speakers”). The contact between the dominant and the minority language has also resulted in a variety of contact-induced linguistic forms and practices. The Corsican linguist Filippi identifies and labels two such “mixed” codes: *Le Français Régionale de Corse* ‘Regional French of Corsica’ (abbreviated as FRC), and *Francorse* ‘Franco-corsican.’ The matrix language of both of these varieties is French. The difference is one of degree: FRC is a nonstandard form of French that bears the traces of Corsican phonetics, phonology, morphology vocabulary and syntax. *Francorse*, on the other hand, is closer to codeswitching in that it involves the transformation (rather than the translation) of Corsican words or morphemes into new non-French words. In some cases, as Filippi points out, the judgment of whether these lexical adaptations are hybrids or codeswitches is arbitrary (1992: 200). Both of these varieties illustrate the influence of Corsican on French, and are a product of language contact and the early phases of language shift. In contemporary usage, there is also gallicized Corsican. These labels, it should be recognized, are somewhat arbitrary, and could equally well be glossed as “interference” “borrowing” or even “codeswitching” (which, as Gardner-Chloros points out, are not necessarily analytically distinct). These are issues that go beyond the scope of this paper, which is concerned with two things: The fact of mixed practice, and the social awareness and interpretation of direction of linguistic influence (Corsican→French vs. French→Corsican). The latter takes place within the dominant language ideological framework I have sketched above. This framework defines all language mixing or alternation as violations of linguistic and cultural boundaries. Such violations delegitimize either the status of the language in question or call into question the competence or authenticity of the boundary-crossing speakers.

This delegitimation has taken place in two historical contexts. In the early phases of language shift on Corsica, Corsican influences in spoken and written French stigmatized the speaker as backward and uneducated. Today, those influences are fewer, and more subtle than they were when the first generation of Corsicans learned French, but there is still a recognizable Corsican variety of French that is devalued. Since the seventies, Corsican language planners have struggled to reverse language shift towards French, and have devoted a lot of energy to the linguistic legitimation of Corsican. Writing has played a key role in that work of legitimation: In addition to their practical applications, Corsican grammars, school books, and literary works have symbolized the bounded, systematic, rule-governed nature of Corsican (this is all “corpus planning”). Today, in contrast to language attitudes only ten or fifteen years ago, few Corsicans contest Corsican’s status as a language. In the contemporary cultural and political context, speaking Corsican is generally valued, and is an important (if not a key) symbol of cultural “authenticity.”

This new climate, however, still stigmatizes mixed codes. Now that Corsican’s status as a language is accepted, French influences on Corsican are sanctioned because they violate the image of the language as a bounded code. Defenders of Corsican transfer the ideology that stigmatized corsicanisms in French as “bad French,” and label gallicisms in Corsican as “bad Corsican.” Codeswitching is still often seen as a problem of competence, as a reflection of codeswitchers’ inability to express themselves in one code. The value on speaking Corsican in the contemporary sociolinguistic climate has made competence in Corsican a cultural and political issue, and the Corsican “semi-speaker” may be judged as

not fully Corsican. Even relatively competent Corsican speakers express doubts about the “purity” of their language. In other words, language planning has created new forms of linguistic insecurity (see Jaffe 1999). Today, as in the past, the hybrid communicative practices that characterize much everyday interaction on Corsica are devalued. Speaking Corsican and speaking French, being Corsican and being French are represented as mutually exclusive, oppositional practices and identities.

4. Performance and the appreciation of the hybrid

This remainder of this paper explores the way that Corsican bilingual comic performance valorizes hybrid identities. First, I argue, comedy routines put mixed forms of language and culture on stage. I take this public expression of mixed codes and identities to be in itself a form of legitimation. This legitimation has a lot to do with the way that performances play to, define and create the audience’s shared experiences, knowledge and identities. Put another way, performance emphasizes the way that the hybrid defines the audience as a community of practice. Performance becomes a site where the “we” is expressed through shared enjoyment of a mixed codes. The public performance is also a valued esthetic experience - it links the hybrid with pure pleasure.

I explore these general themes through the analysis of how specific linguistic and discursive strategies employed in performances create participation frameworks which mediate the tensions associated with mixed codes and mixed competencies. I look at the “esthetic” as both a kind of experience in which boundary-making is temporarily suspended, and a kind of participation framework that legitimizes the local, contextual forms of cultural capital owned by the audience. I also focus on the way that performance enables the simultaneous coexistence of multiple, competing complex stances, identities and meanings for both the performer and the audience. This is linked to the reflexive qualities of performance, and the potential it offers for “double voicing.”

5. The general framework: The intimacy of mixed codes on stage

The following transcript is taken from a corpus of about twenty such sketches recorded in 1994-5. These sketches were a regular feature on the regional radio station, RCFM. It is important to know that RCFM defines itself as a “*radio de proximité*” (a radio of intimacy) and has a strong regional and local orientation in its programming. The comedian is a man whose character, Angèle Mozziconacci, is an older woman from Ajaccio (one of the two main cities on the island of Corsica) whose sketches always address an imaginary neighbor/listener (addressed by the generic familiar vocative “Coco” in the signature opening line of the sketches: “*Coco ça va ?*” (“How are you doing Coco?”)). This opening line circulated in everyday speech for a summer or two, and the popularity of these sketches led the comedian to turn his radio performance into a live show which he put on several times in the summer of 1995. This habitual vocative at the beginning of the sketch effectively frames the comedian’s monologue as a dialogue in which the listening audience takes the place of the “absent” Coco. This sort of presumed or virtual intimacy indexes another significant aspect of these performances: Understanding Mme. Mozziconacci’s

monologues requires a great deal of local cultural and linguistic knowledge. Sociolinguistic knowledge identifies her “accent,” which has a certain humorous cachet for speakers from other parts of the island. Her style of speaking is also recognizable as a type or stereotype, which I will discuss below. And finally, the topics, and references of her commentaries are highly specific and local, and are not always understood by people from other parts of the island.

In all the following transcripts, boldface marks a codeswitch from the initial language of the example.

(1): The TV Program

- 1 *Coco ça va ?*
Coco, **how are you?**
- Posa posa ! mi, ié. L'hà guardata st'emissioni l'altra sera ?*
Sit down, sit down! Look, yes. Did you watch that show the other night?
- A sà sogu stata fini à tardu ié, u vè t'avia u sognu è bè aghju guardatu listessu,*
You know, I watched until late, yes, you know, you are all sleepy and well I watched anyhow,
- hà dittu aghju da vedi si coco hà da guardà.*
I said to myself, I'll have to see if coco is going to watch it.
- 5 *ié s'hè missu nantu u futoghju ùn busgiava,*
Yes, he sat himself down on the chair and didn't budge
- mì, dopu a sà cosa hà fattu hà vistu ch'ciu guardava hà avutu a vargogna*
Look, afterwards do you know what he did, he saw that I was watching and he got embarrassed
- s'hè missu in stanza hà dittu 'je vais me lire un livre,' s'hè leghju un SAS⁴*
He went into the room he said '**I'm going to read myself a book,**' he read himself an SAS
- un libru d'espionnage a sà ié, è bè aghju guardatu sur la madame Claude, hà vistu un pocu,*
a **spy** book you know yes, so well I watched about Madame Claude, he saw a little bit
- è bè quand même, u vedi issi donni, pà mè ùn sò mica putani, no, era puliti, vè,*
and well, **anyway**, you see these women, for me they aren't whores, no, they were clean, see
- 10 *così cusì moi je les tolère, piuttosto ch' tutti sti puzzicheddi ch' fànu sans contrôle, u vedi ?*
as they are, **me, I tolerate them**, more so than all of these rotten types who do it **willy nilly**, you know?
- Ancu quì on peut pas dire era cuntrulatu, è po ùn era micca n'importu à quali ch'andava.*
Even here **you can't say** that it was always controlled, and it wasn't just anyone who did it.
- Hà parlatu, hà vistu cosa dittu, à un mumentu datu, ci era una donna, elle était filmé de dos,*
She spoke, she saw what was said, and at a certain point, there was a woman, **she was filmed from behind**

⁴ novel of espionnage

hà dittu moi je peux vous parler de ... hà parlatu di un tippu di l'Assemblé Nationale
 She said, **me, I can tell you about...** she talked about a type from **the National Assembly**,

m'hà dittu les noms les noms l'aghju dittu, il paraît ch'è un tippu vinia è régulièrement
 She said the names, the names I said **it seems** that one guy came there and **regularly**

15 *faccia u gallu, il paraît ch'eddu si facia metta una piuma, ùn so induva,*
 he made like a rooster, **it seems** that he put had a feather put on him, I don't know where,

ùn aghju induvinata è facia u gallu u tippu, après il s'en allait content,
 I didn't figure it out, and this guy plays the rooster, **and then he'd leave, contented,**

pagava i soldi, i furtuni, lé parce que a sà, aghju cunisciutu dinò,
 he'd pay money, fortunes! and **because** you know, I learned as well,

Here, codeswitching appears as a performative resource in two ways. First of all, it is one of a number of linguistic variables that establishes the comic persona: An older bilingual woman from a distinct dialect area of Corsica. These variables also include catch phrases (like “Coco” to address the hearer; and the constant punctuation of the monologue with *mì* ‘see’ and *iè* ‘yes’, long, exaggerated “oohs” “ahhs” and breath intake, and verb forms and pronunciations typical of Ajaccio. The amount of intrasentential codeswitching is particularly noticeable (see lines 10, 13 and 14 for example), but it is not in and of itself particularly funny or exaggerated. Rather, it is consistent with a character whose overall delivery and content is funny. In fact, it is the “Ajaccienness” of the character’s speech that is identified by most Corsicans as the salient linguistic feature of these sketches. In fact, in one interview, my respondent denied that this character ever codeswitched, insisting against my protests that Mme. Moziconacci spoke nothing but Corsican. Writing about similar phenomena in Catalonia, Woolard points out that part of the appeal of this kind of codeswitching is that “the actual use of both languages...is an important denial of the boundary identifying force of the two languages” (1987: 70). Put another way, the production and interpretation of bilingual humor depends on the ability to “operate in both frames simultaneously”; its force is “derived precisely from [participants] ability to move across different linguistic and cultural frames” (Heller 1994: 167). In this creative framework, the dramatization of difference (the opposition of the two codes) does not necessarily highlight their inequality. Rather, difference seems to be exploited in the articulation of a hybrid identity.

In this respect, it is important that this sketch was one of a long-running series, broadcast every day over a period of months. As I have mentioned, all of the sketches are framed as conversations between the character, “Angèle Moziconacci” and a friend. What this comic series publically dramatizes is the link between codeswitching and intimacy. The codeswitching not only portrays intimacy (with the fictional friend Angèle addresses) but also creates intimacy with the listening audience, which is invited to either stand in as “Coco” or to “overhear” the conversation as though it were taking place between neighbors or other familiars.⁵

⁵ See references to Coupland 1985 and Selting 1983 in Bell (1991: 129) on the use of nonstandard language forms on the radio as a linguistic strategy oriented towards ingroup solidarity.

6. Simultaneous closeness and distance: Stances to stigmatized codes

The next transcript is a short excerpt from a longer radio sketch. It was only performed one time, during the summer of 1991, as part of a daily comedic parody of Horoscope predictions. Once again, it is a male comedian taking on the voice of an older woman, who is giving a recipe.

(2) Radio sketch: The recipe

- 1 *Se vo ùn sapete ciò ch'è vo avete à manghjà oghje, v'aghju à dà un'idea.*
 If you don't know what you're going to eat today, I'm going to give you an idea.
- Allora, fatevi piuttosto duie canneloni à la brousse. Allora, v'aghju à spiegà.*
 Ok, why not make yourself a couple of canneloni **with ricotta**. Ok, I'll tell you how.
- Vous faites une daube.** Cum'è vo fate d'abitudine un tianu in **daube**, cu essu*
You make a stew. Like you usually make a stew in **stew**, with that
- alivu *démailloté, cu i so champignons, fate rivene, **vous faites une daube et vous laisser***
***pitted** olive, with its mushrooms, you saute all this, **you make a stew and you let it**
- 5 ***consommer. Vous prenez un café. Alors, ensuite, vous prenez votre brousse et vous***
reduce. You have a coffee. So next, you take your ricotta, and you
- l'écrasez, et vous le mélangez avec les épinards.** Pigliate a carne macinata, **vous***
mash it up, and you mix it with the spinach. You take the ground beef, **you**
- *machinez bien votre viande avec ses olives *démaillotées, ùn ci hè più nocciu...***
***grind up your meat well with its *pitted olives, there aren't any more pits...**

In this sketch, both the comic persona and the humor of the whole piece are built in large part on linguistic and paralinguistic performance variables. The high pitch and creaky voice quality immediately establishes the persona as an older woman. A number of other linguistic features portray her as a Corsican-dominant bilingual. In lines 2 and 5, she pronounces the /r/s in *brousse* 'cheese' and *prenez* 'take' as a flapped /ʀ/ rather than the standard French uvular /R/. The asterisked verb *démailloter* on lines 4 and 7 is a malapropism which sounds like the French *dénoyer* (to pit something) but literally translates as "to remove the bathing suit." The other asterisked form is the verb *machiner* on line 7. It contrasts with the standard French verb *hacher* 'to chop', and is a direct calque of the Corsican verb *macinà* 'chop' that appears in the previous line. Finally, there is her constant codeswitching, which includes single word, inter and intrasentential switches.

7. Audience reactions and evaluations: The esthetic vs. the analytical

This sketch is one that I have played to over 30 Corsican speakers, in the context of an interview in which they listened to and evaluated a number of different radio recordings. Every single respondent identified the persona in the sketch as an older woman who "mangled" French. She represents, in other words, the stigmatized speech patterns

characteristic of the early phase of language shift.

One of the things that this audience reaction research shows is that the esthetic judgments that are invoked in comic uses of language are different in a fundamental way from the kinds of analytic judgments prompted by sociolinguistic interviews. Almost everyone I played this recording to thought it was funny; they smiled, or laughed out loud. (The joke about the olives without bathing suits even circulated for a few days among some of the older women I had interviewed in the village where I lived). When I asked them about the mixed forms of language represented in the recording, however, almost all my respondents identified them with deficiencies of competence (although they varied considerably in the extent to which they identified with the persona, and how harshly they judged those failures of competence).

It is not just that the sociolinguistic interview focused their attention on language and the sketch did not. Arguably, the sketch itself was very much “about” language, and manipulated linguistic forms for comic effect. But the interview questions shifted the framework for evaluation (and hence, the location of authority, and the role of the audience) in a significant way from the original act of listening.

One of the key features of performance is that it “puts the act of speaking on display - objectifies it, lifts it to a degree from its interactional setting and opens it to scrutiny by an audience” (Bauman and Briggs 1990: 73). In the sense that the performer is “accountable” to an audience, there is by definition an audience that is competent and entitled to judge performance in some way.⁶ In effect, a comedy routine like the one above addresses hearers who are expert witnesses. Their expertise can involve a wide range of cultural and communicative competencies, including the ability to recognize the connection of particular linguistic forms with particular (stereotypical) personae. In other words, even though performances are lifted out of the everyday, esthetic appreciation and evaluation is grounded in, and foregrounds, locally contextualized connections between linguistic forms and social meanings.

In the media performances discussed here, audiences are both “addressed by” the performance and hold a privileged status as esthetic judges of the performance. These participant roles shift in the sociolinguistic interview, which is a kind of entextualization. As Haviland and Urban (both 1996) show in their analyses of how people turn talk into text, entextualization involves reframing the linguistic event for the interviewer (me), a person who is not part of the original audience (even though I demonstrate a certain level of familiarity or audience competence). The conversation with me about the language of the sketch, also brought other “shadow audiences” into the participant structure; no longer were the listeners sole judges. In their responses, people I interviewed held the language of the performance accountable to outside, rather than local standards of judgment. The very questions I asked about linguistic usage (What kind of language is this? Who speaks like this? Is it funny? What do you think about it?) rhetorically decontextualized language and language practices (as objects of discussion). It is no surprise, therefore that in their responses to these questions, people tended to focus their evaluation on language as a bounded system, and drew on notions of linguistic “correctness,” authenticity and purity. Some respondents did not necessarily endorse those outside standards, but were forced by

⁶ Although, as Dell Hymes has pointed out to me, it is possible to attend a performance without being a member of the competent audience being addressed.

the interview frame to recognize their definitional power. I could see this on the faces of many of the highly educated and pro-Corsican people as I watched them listen to this excerpt. At the outset, their expressions were neutral. The first few lines sometimes brought a frown; invariably the olives without bathing suits brought a smile, but that smile was often wrested out of a grimace and sometimes followed by a sigh. One person described what was going on succinctly: “I wish I could just laugh,” she said, “but I can’t.” The reason she could not “just laugh” was because she didn’t just hear the sketch as a member of an “inside” audience; she heard it through someone else’s ears. She heard the stigma that would have been (was still?) attached to the speaker of such mixed codes. She heard French domination; she heard Corsican losing ground, she (and others) heard the beginning of the end. “Maybe that’s all that’s left of Corsican,” they said sadly.

8. Performance/comedy: Complex, multiple, simultaneous meanings, stances and identities.

To return to my distinction between the esthetic and analytical frame, I think that out of the interview context, my respondent above probably could have just laughed. This brings us to another important difference between the experience of performance and the act of evaluation. In this particular performance, the comedian’s stance towards the voice he animates is complex and potentially ambiguous.

On the one hand, he has a certain amount of “role distance” from his character’s voice (a distance that may be intensified by the fact he is a man playing a woman). The character is, after all, a fictional one he has invented. He will be held accountable in his professional role, as the author of his character’s speech, but he will not be personally implicated and identified with it. Inhabiting a comic persona is, in effect, a form of reported speech, which, as Irvine points out, “insulates the pragmatic speaker from personal responsibility for the spoken words” (1996: 149). The use of humor has a significant role, for as Goffman pointed out long ago, “by introducing an unserious style, the individual can project the claim that nothing happening at the moment to him or through him should be taken as a direct reflection of him, but rather of the person-in-situation he is mimicking” (1961: 105). This humor lies, in part, in the use of exaggeration - a strategy which also serves to distance the performer from his persona’s utterances. This exaggeration is manifested in raised pitch, extra strong primary stress (which entails some vowel lengthening as on ‘idea’ and consonant length on the /s/ of *brousse*), accentuation of the Corsican /r/ mentioned above and a breathless delivery pattern with marked changes in speed. Another contextualization cue of exaggeration is the repetition of the “then you have a coffee” of line 5 at least 4 more times in the rest of the sketch.

At the same time, there is what Irvine calls “leakage” from the participation framework of reported speech into the participation framework of the act of reporting. That is, the “insulation” of animating a persona is not absolute: Some of the meanings of the language used do stick to the animator; the words of the character come out of his mouth.⁷

⁷ See for example Hill, who describes an interview in which a woman reports an obscenity uttered by someone else and then apologizes for it: “... even though the obscenity is assigned to a third party, the speaker has still uttered it in her own voice; in Goffman’s terms, she has “animated” the utterance. Yet she

The particular genre of humor reflected in Example (2) also makes that “leakage” possible. Part of the comic’s rights to this performance include an intimate connection with the kind of Corsican speaker he portrays. This is an insider, doing something funny for an inside audience. Their mutual recognition of the kind of character is itself a kind of intimacy. Performer and audience are collectively implicated by the sketch: If it is funny, it is also because it is “them.” And here, I can add that even though I perceived the performance as highly exaggerated, I had several informants who did not view it as a comic routine at all, and told me, “It’s a lady giving a recipe.” To the extent that it was exaggerated, performer and audience could distance themselves from the language of the performance; to the extent that it was not pure caricature, they could identify with it. Again, we may return profitably to Goffman, who notes that because society understands the individual to be a multiple role-performer, and because there are conventionalized ways of expressing role distance, role distance is a more “typical” than “deviant” dimension of role than one might imagine, and that “It is right here, in manifestations of role distance, that the individual’s personal style is to be found” (1961: 142).

I maintain that in the original act of listening, the fluidity and ambiguity of the performer’s relationship with the language forms in the performance were transferred to the audience. Like the performer, the audience could both identify and not identify. This is particularly important for comic performances like this one, that involve insider play with stereotypes that are often also used by outsiders. The power of such comedy is also its danger: It is only the maintenance of frame that allows people to laugh at things that would be offensive if said by an outsider. The outsider’s critical eye and voice are temporarily silenced in the performance, but they are never completely gone.

And of course, “outside” values are also part of the insider culture and attitudes. Gelo, describing humorous Native American “emcee patter,” sees such performances (and the larger events - powwows - in which they are embedded as exploiting and mediating “the paradoxical relationship between power and solidarity...[which] replicates other salient paradoxes in Indian society, namely the tension between communal and individualistic tendencies and the contrast between egalitarianism and rank” (1999: 54).

So it is very important for the audience to identify as insiders at the moment of the performance. Performances have the potential to create a “we”; it is this “we” that keeps outsiders out or, as Gelo puts it, places the minority culture’s ways “in a central or superior position” (1999: 48). At the same time, the performance also brackets itself as out-of-the-ordinary. It draws attention to itself - it invites esthetic scrutiny - but that scrutiny is directed out *from* the audience, not *at* the audience. In a sense, comedic performance allows/helps the audience to exempt itself from critique, even in the case of social satire. The audience is constituted as the judge, not the judged.

9. Codeswitching and the dedramatization of issues of competence

Examples (1) and (2) show how the comic, performative frame can mediate tensions between idealized images of language as a bounded code and the reality of mixed practice

clearly does not see herself as morally neutral in this role; she must ask God’s forgiveness for the obscenity, even though it is not ‘hers’” (1993: 13).

(and identity). Codeswitching in these examples is one of the primary ways in which characters are produced. Example (2) also deals with problems of French language competence in the “first generation” of language shift.

The transcripts which follow address the more contemporary problem of semi-speakers of Corsican. The use of codeswitching in examples (3) and (4) does not build fictive personae or characters as it did in (1) and (2). Rather, it is deployed as a way of establishing participant frameworks between performer and addressee/audience in which issues of Corsican language competence are dedramatized.

Example (3) is public, but it is not framed explicitly as a comic performance. It is an interaction between a DJ and a listener who called in to make a song request. I include it here because the use of humor plays a significant role in the way the DJ discursively establishes a participant framework, and because it shows a kind of interactional codeswitching which we will see “on stage” in the monologue in Example (4).

(3): The Song Request

- 1 DJ: *Avemu subitu Marilou. Marilou bonjour. Vous allez bien?*
We have Marilou coming **up quickly**. Hello Marilou. How are you doing?
- M: *Très bien, et vous même?*
 Very well, and yourself?
- DJ: *Oui oui, avec le soleil ça va toujours bien.*
 Yes, yes, it's always great when it's sunny out.
Marilou, d'où vous appelez?
 Marilou, where are you calling from?
- 5 M: *De Migliacciaru.*
 From Migliacciaru.
- DJ: *Migliacciaru. A Migliacciaru il y a du soleil?*
 Migliacciaru. Is it sunny in Migliacciaru?
- M: *Iè, iè*
Yes, yes.
- DJ: *Sicuru. Hè in u Fiumorbu, Migliacciaru?*
Sure. It's in the Fiumorbu, Migliacciaru?
- M: *Voilà, in Fiumorbu, oui.*
 Yes, in [the] Fiumorbu, yes.
- 10 DJ: *Bè, ci hè u sole in u Fiumorbu.*
Well, it's sunny in the Fiumorbu.
- M: *Oui.*
 Yes.
- DJ: *Allora, tuttu va bè. Migliacciaru, c'est en plaine. Voilà, voilà, c'est très [cre] bien.*
So, everything is fine. Migliacciaru, it's on the plain. So, so, good, great.
- Chì vulete sente voi?*

What do you want to hear?

- M: *Queen. Le groupe Queen.*
Queen, the group Queen.
- 15 DJ: *Po po po po, Queen. Vous êtes dans le vent, eh?*
Po po po po, Queen. You're in the wind, eh?
- M: *Ah, oui.*
Ah, yes.
- DJ ***Vi piace à Queen.***
You like Queen.
- M: *Domage qu'il soit mort jeune, oui?*
It's a shame he died so early isn't it?
- DJ: ***Ah, ma quessa, c'est la vie, chî vulete?***
Oh but that, that's life, what can you say?
- 20 M: *C'est la vie*
That's life
- DJ: *C'est la vie, on ne peut pas faire autrement [cough]. Pardon, excusez-moi.*
That's life, you can't do anything else [cough]. Pardon, excuse me.
Le titre de la chanson, c'était?
The title of the song, was what?
- M: *Ah, bah, le titre anglais, je ne m'en rappelle plus.*
Ah, bah, the title in English, I don't remember it anymore.
- DJ: *Alors, je vais vous le faire dire. Je le dis, et vous le répétez:*
Ok, I'm going to make you say it. I'll say it and you repeat:
25 *The show must go on.*
- M: *The[də] show must go on.*
- DJ: ***Micca*** “de show”: la langue entre les dents: “the show”.
Not “de show”: the tongue between the teeth: “the show”
- M: *The show*
- DJ: *Must go on [hon].*
- 30 M: *Must go on [hon].*
- DJ: *Voilà, c'est très bien. Allora, vi sbrugliate ancu in inglese ind'è u Fiumorbu!*
There, that's very good. **So, you're also able to get along in English in the Fiumorbu!**
- M: ***Iè, iè. Merci alors.***
Yes, Yes. Thanks then.
- DJ: *Non, merci à voi d'avè chjamatu. Vi sentimu subito?*
No, thank **you for calling.** Will we hear from you soon?

- M: *Iè. Allez.. Bonne journée.*
Yes. Ok. Have a nice day.
- 35 DJ: *Bonne journée. Avvedeci O Marilou.*
 Have a nice day. **Goodbye O** Marilou.

I also used this excerpt in my radio evaluation interviews. My original reading of the interaction was that the DJ was ignoring the fact that Marilou did not speak Corsican. After all, the only Corsican word she ever uttered was “*iè*” [yes]. I saw the conversation as a potential violation of an oft-invoked form of linguistic etiquette that requires people to switch into their interlocutor’s language of preference. I recognized that there were many conversations (particularly among relatively balanced bilinguals) in which there was no obvious preferred language. But usually, among strangers, repeated failures to pick up on Corsican are interpreted as competence problems and responded to by a switch to French (this can be seen as a form of referee design related to the value on comprehension and smooth conversational flow).

However, I was forced to reevaluate my initial categorization of the conversation because a considerable number of respondents did not hear it as a non-reciprocal one. Several people characterized Marilou as a corsophone, and answered my general question about the desirability of the DJ’s switching with “Sure it’s ok, he knew he could do it because the lady speaks Corsican.”

If we look at the transcript closely, we can understand how they arrived at these assessments. The very first use of Corsican in the transcript is the DJ’s, in line 1. This utterance lies somewhat outside the interaction proper, since it is part of the introductory routine that accompanies on-air talk. It identifies Marilou as the caller to the listening audience. At the same time, it also acts as a turn-allocation device, signaling to Marilou that she is on the air and will be talking next. It is quite common for these openings to be conducted at least partly in Corsican. DJs have told me that they sometimes do this on purpose, to signal the potential for Corsican talk to the caller. However, the DJ does not actually address Marilou in Corsican directly, and asks his first question to her in French. She replies in French. The first switch to Corsican is initiated by Marilou, who on line 7, responds to a French question about the weather with *Iè, iè* ‘Yes, yes’. The DJ responds to this initiative by speaking Corsican to her in his next two turns, on lines 8 and 10, and by switching between Corsican and French on lines 12 and 13. Marilou does not take up his offer of Corsican, and responds consistently in French.

If we look at the content of these, and his subsequent Corsican utterances, we can see that they are extremely easy to decode, often because they are highly predictable or redundant (see Nelson (1992) on the similar use of other-language elements in English-language novels). In line 8, the DJ asks a confirmation question (to which he probably knows the answer) about the region (the Fiumorbu) where her village is located. Line 10 repeats the information about the sunny weather established in lines 6 and 7. This turn is not even inflected as a question: It is a statement. Marilou simply ratifies it, in French. Line 12 is in both Corsican and French; it is essentially repetitive DJ chatter about where she lives. On line 13, he poses the only question he ever asks Marilou in Corsican that requires more than a yes or no answer: “What do you want to hear?” This question can also be considered highly predictable, since she has in fact called to request a song and they have finished with a set of social preliminaries: It is the next logical interactional move.

In line 17, he makes another confirmation statement Corsican, “You like Queen,” a restatement of the obvious. Her next turn demonstrates the fact that this sort of utterance requires no explicit acknowledgment: On 18, Marilou simply pursues the topic (the group Queen) with a new commentary, that it is a shame one of the singers died so young. In 19, the DJ brackets the kernel of his response “*c’est la vie*” [that’s life] with two peripheral Corsican phrases that do not require decoding. In 20, Marilou echoes back the kernel phrase in French.

In effect, the DJ’s redundant and predictable use of Corsican to make statements rather than ask questions frames the conversation as a bilingual one without ever demanding that Marilou know a lot of Corsican. His use of Corsican masks her potential lack of competence. Or, looked at another way, her passive competence is allowed to count as a sufficient return in the intimacy of bilingual exchange.

Beginning on line 23, the DJ begins a humorous exchange with Marilou about the song title, which he makes her repeat in English. The comic focus on pronunciation is actually prefigured by his pronunciation of *très* ‘very’ as [čre] on line 13. This palatalization of /t/ does not have any clear social indexing function, it simply announces the possibility of language play. Taken as a whole, the segment on the English song title focuses metalinguistic attention onto English as the shared “foreign” language. The issue of standards is completely non-threatening and non-serious: Everyone knows that no one really cares how she says this title. In other words, the play in English creates a participation framework in which the DJ, Marilou (and the listening audience) are cast as bilingual (Corsican/French) speakers. This is dramatized by the (false and humorous) assertion in line 31 that in the Fiumorbu, people can “also” get along in English. The “also” has to be understood as “in addition to the language(s) being spoken in this conversation.”

To return to some of my listeners’ judgments that Marilou was a corsophone, we can see that they were picking up on the DJ’s metalinguistic construction of her identity rather than on her actual performance. Others did in fact notice her very limited use of Corsican. Here too, there were a number of different evaluations. Some people said that it was clear that she understood, and that the DJ’s use of Corsican was perfectly polite and hearer-oriented. A few agreed with my initial impression that the DJ was failing to accommodate to a non-speaker. This wide range of listener assessments of Marilou’s competence is a function of the Corsican sociolinguistic landscape. In much everyday interaction, people do not make quick assumptions about speaker competence, both because there are many semi-speakers who can engage in a minimal exchange of greetings but can go no further, and because in a brief exchange, even competent speakers may happily pursue non-reciprocal conversations using the two languages. Given the brevity of the on-air interaction in Marilou’s case, there is no infallible way for anyone, including the DJ, to know how competent Marilou was. What the interchange reveals is that there are strategies for leaving this issue ambiguous. Humor is one of them, and the use of linguistic formulae, redundancy and predictability are others.

The final example returns us to the stage, to a piece by *Teatru Mascone*, stage name of the comedian Dominique Maraninchi. Mascone has been an extremely successful performer on the island since at least 1980. His humor has always been bilingual and bicultural. Some of his stock characters resemble (or are resembled by) the personae in sketches (1) and (2), above. French has always been part of his repertoire, and he has been

quite explicit in the past about his view that Corsican culture and language are mixed and should be represented and valued as such. Nevertheless, his performances, like examples (1) and (2) above, have always been implicitly directed at an audience with a high level of passive competence in Corsican. Most of his performances are concentrated in the summer, when many Corsicans who live “on the [French] continent” return to the island for their vacations. Effectively, his audiences have been self-selected corsophone ones.

This changed in the Spring of 1998, when Mascone was the opening show for the Muvrini, a popular musical group, which played at a large Parisian venue (Bercy). He could count on a large Corsican presence at this concert (there are approximately 150,000 Corsicans, roughly half the number of Corsican living on the island, who live in the Parisian region). But he could not speak only to them; he had to also speak to non-Corsicans.

The following transcript is a short segment from his summer (post-Bercy) 1998 show. In this particular performance, he was playing very close to his home town, and there were numerous local references sprinkled throughout the show. But a significant amount of material was developed for Bercy; including this opening sketch.

(4): Mascone: Clones

- 1 *Pourquoi vous applaudissez? Vous croyez que c'est Mascone?*
Why are you applauding? You think it's Mascone?
[unintelligible; in Corsican]

Non, je ne suis pas son sosi. Je suis son clone [laughter] *Ridite. Un cuminciate micca, eh.*
Non, I'm not his sosi. I am his clone. [laughter] **You laugh. Don't start, eh.**

Les défenseurs de l'éthique de la Balagne. Quelli chì sò cultivate chì stanu à sente
The ethics committee of the Balagne. **Cultivated people who listen**

- 5 *L'infurmazione. C'est pa.. parce que la télé vous a dit que le premier clone c'était Dolly.*
the news. It's because the TV told you that the first clone was Dolly.

A pecura.. E Marguerite a vitella. Que des clones humains n'existent pas.
The sheep. And Marguerite the calf. That human clones don't exist.

Parce que la presse ne vous la pas dit, moi je vous dis, attention,
Because the press hasn't told you, I'm telling you, watch out,

Un clone, ùn he più nulla. C'est au point depuis la fin de la deuxième guerre mondiale.
A clone, **it is nothing** [for them to do]. It's been perfected since then end of WWII,

Basta.ils prennent une particule, un pezzu di nunda,
All it takes....they take a particle, **a piece of nothing,**

- 10 *eh, et ils font une copie parfaite. Vous savez pour me faire moi de Mascone,*
eh, and they make a perfect copy. You know, to make me out of Mascone,

ce qu'ils ont pris? Un cheveu. Iè. Ils en voulaient deux, ma hà dettu
what they took? A hair. **Yes.** They wanted two, **but he said**

“Non non non, que un.” Hà ragione, ùn ne hà micca assai, il faut l'implant, eh.

“No no no, just one.” **He’s right, he doesn’t have too many**, he needs an implant, eh.

Eh bè. Hanu messu u capellu dans l’agitateur, l’agitateur,
Eh so. They put the hair in the agitator, the agitator,

face cum’è ‘sh sh sh sh’ l’agitateur, dopu u mettenu ind’è un grande fornù,
it goes “sh, sh, sh sh” the agitator, then they put it into a big oven,

- 15 *genre four micro ondes, chî c’hè due lumi, l’unu hè negru, l’unu hè rossu,*
 a sort of microwave, **it has two lights, one black and the other red,**

que la lumière passe au vert au bout de 45 minutes, ba ba, ils ont le clone, mî.
 when the light goes green after 45 minutes, bam! they’ve got the clone, **mî.**

Oh ghjente, vous, vous riez, vous riez, mais les clones, comme je vous,
Oh people, you laugh, you laugh, but clones, I [tell] you,

nous sommes les esclaves des temps modernes. Et le pire c’est que nous n’avons pas
 we are modern slaves. And the worst is that we don’t have

d’existence légal. On n’a aucune légalité devant rien. Non, j’ai pas de papiers.
 a legal existence. We have no legal rights in any context. No, I don’t have any papers.

- 20 *Si je veux des papiers, ch’aghju da fâ, eiu? Eh, aghju à andà ind’è à a meria di*
 If I want papers, **what am I supposed to do? Eh, I’m off to the town hall of**

Calenzana, qu’est qu’ils vont me mettre, sur les papiers? Maraninchi Dominique bis?
Calenzana, what are they going to put on my papers? Marianinchi Dominique the copy?

One of the remarkable features of this monologue is that, like the DJ’s responses to Marilou, above, it includes a significant amount of Corsican, but makes very few linguistic demands on the audience. Being a “semi-speaker” of Corsican myself, there were several places in the transcript where I was unable to decipher what was said in Corsican (see line 2, for example). These gaps, however, did not interfere with my ability to follow the main track of the narrative. A look at the rest of the transcript tells us why. What we see is that Mascone maintains a high degree of discursive coherence across the (matrix) French language sections of his monologue. The Corsican phrase that begins at the end of line 4, for example, merely amplifies the description of the people who are the subjects of the French phrase at the beginning of the line. The same is true of the phrase *a pecura* ‘the sheep’ that begins line 6 - it sits in apposition to “Dolly,” the cloned sheep. At first glance, the Corsican on line 8 seems less redundant and more central; it is the subject of what Mascone announces he’s going to tell the audience in the previous line. Yet, in effect, the French sentence that follows it largely recapitulates the main point: Cloning is easy to do these days. In line 9, we see a codeswitch that is completely redundant: A “particle” [said in French] is a “piece of nothing” [said in Corsican]. In line 11, “he said” is uttered in Corsican, but the utterance follows (in line 12) in French, and the speaker of that utterance is contextually unambiguous. The following sentence has an embedded codeswitch, but each part of the sentence logically entails the other; this entailment makes the codeswitch redundant. Line 13 uses Corsican to introduce an imitation of a machine’s noise that in effect, could have been performed and understood with no introduction. At the end of line 13 and the beginning of line 14, we see a now familiar pattern: A proposition is introduced

in one language (in this case, Corsican) and repeated in the other.

In effect, what we have in this skit is the cohabitation of two parallel discourses, one Corsican and one French. These parallel discourses simultaneously index and address several different audiences - Corsican-speaking Corsicans, Corsican semi-speakers and non-Corsicans - without making an issue of differences in their linguistic competence. The monologue resembles what Gelo has characterized as 'this is our way' speech in emcee patter in an Indian powwow in that it teaches (and reaches) everyone who is in the audience and does not really differentiate between audience members on the basis of knowledge, since the audiences' knowledge remains hidden (1999: 48). As Woolard points out, such multivalent performances can be read differently by different sectors of the audience with different linguistic identities (1999: 21). For the non-Corsican, the presence of the Corsican language framed the performance as distinctly and authentically Corsican without stopping them from understanding. At the same time, what Mascone said in Corsican was sufficiently different from what he said in French to not sound redundant. In fact, Mascone used changes of pitch and stress to highlight the Corsican segments of the skit, and it is possible that they constituted a piquant supplement of intimacy for his corsophone listeners.

10. Conclusions

In my analysis of these performances, I have been focusing on the identities and relationships that are established by specific linguistic choices and strategies in the course of the speech event. I have argued that performances do not simply address an audience; they also define and constitute an audience (who counts as an audience) as well as that audience's esthetic and cultural authority. In examples (1) and (2), members of the audience's bilingual competence allows them to recognize and decode the performances. That competence is multifaceted. It involves knowledge of stereotypical associations between codes (presumed to be bounded) and social identities. It also includes shared knowledge of patterns of language alternation and mixing in everyday speech, which is actually a necessary precondition for the comic's exploitation of indeterminacy in example (2). In (3) and (4), the performers use their bilingual competence to evoke the intimacy and value of a shared bicultural identity without making linguistic competence a litmus test of belonging.

In the Corsican context, one of the most important aspects of performance is that it multiplies the potential for "indeterminacy of participant roles," and allows "multiple deictic fields or participation frames [to be] superimposed, as it were, on one another" (Irvine 1996: 143). These simultaneous frames allow multiple identities—and even multiple ideologies of identity and value - to coexist in a single event or experience. Like metaphor or ritual, comic performance expresses and plays with linguistic and cultural tensions without demanding that these tensions be resolved (see Woolard 1999: 5). In a way, comic performances can be seen as validating plural or hybrid identities because they constitute living examples of how a hybrid community of practice can recognize and celebrate itself. Another salient aspect of these performances is that they allow participants the freedom to position themselves in various ways vis-à-vis the performance and the linguistic and cultural images it evokes. They can distance, or identify or, just as importantly, not decide on any single position.

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