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Switching Identity in Multicultural Canadian Literature:
Codeswitching as a Discursive Strategy and a Marker of Identity Construction

Abstract

In this paper, I investigate how the discourse on multicultural and multilingual Canadian identity is represented and encoded in contemporary literary works. I focus in particular on the phenomenon of codeswitching as a negotiation of social and personal identity and as a discursive strategy. After outlining the sociolinguistic approach taken from Gumperz, Poplack, Myers-Scotton, and Heller, according to which the functions of language are markers of the choices the speakers make to convey personal identity and to establish their social role, I consider some examples from Nino Ricci's trilogy on the Italian immigrant experience in Canada (*Lives of the Saints,* 1990, *In a Glass House,* 1993, and *Where She Has Gone,* 1997), paying particular attention to the grammatical structures and the sociolinguistic functions of the switched parts of the texts, where codeswitching performs also as a narrative strategy adopted in order to introduce a discourse on Italian-Canadian identity and on Canadianness as the space of multiculturalism and multilingualism.

Résumé

Dans cet article j'analyse comment le discours sur l'identité multiculturelle et plurilingue au Canada est représenté et codifié dans des œuvres littéraires contemporaines en faisant particulière attention au phénomène du codeswitching (l'alternance codique) comme négociation de l'identité sociale et personnelle et comme stratégie discursive. Après avoir défini la méthodologie sociolinguistique de Gumperz, Poplack, Myers-Scotton et Heller, selon laquelle les fonctions du langage sont des marques linguistiques pour souligner l'identité personnelle et le rôle social de ceux qui parlent, je prends des exemples de la trilogie par Nino Ricci sur l'expérience migrante des italiens au Canada (*Lives of the Saints,* 1990, *In a Glass House,* 1993 et *Where She Has Gone,* 1997) en me focalisant surtout sur les structures grammaticales et sur les fonctions sociolinguistiques des parties du texte en italien, de sorte que le codeswitching est encadré aussi comme stratégie narrative utilisée pour introduire un discours sur l'identité italo-canadienne et sur le concept de « Canadianness » comme espace du multiculturalisme et du plurilinguisme.

What does it mean to be Canadian when one's identity is metaphorically described as a piece of a colourful mosaic where it is possible to reduce multiplicity to unity? Defining Canadian identity is a very complex issue which is still at the centre of the academic debate on Canadian studies. In my opinion, every relevant field of study related to Canada, be it literary, linguistic, political or sociological, should, sooner or later, deal with the topic of Canadianness, i.e. what

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culturally differentiates Canada from other countries. The debate on what is specifically Canadian reached a climax especially after the 1960s when the linguistic and cultural heterogeneity of the country, which depended also on the massive process of immigration of the post-war period, started influencing Canadian policies on linguistic and ethnic rights. Moreover, the rise of Quebecois nationalism increased the need for a cultural policy which could grant visibility to the 'invisible' minorities, i.e. francophones in Quebec and the First Nations and the immigrant communities all over the country.[1] In order to shape a new Canadian identity and to differentiate it from the cultural influence of the United States of America, the concept of multiculturalism as the basis of national social cohesion was formulated in the 1980s with the support of politicians and intellectuals, in particular its promoter Pierre Trudeau, the then Prime Minister, who believed in a country where many cultures could be equally represented.

Together with the awakening of the cultural awareness of each ethnic community, the issue of language rights was further developed in an officially bilingual frame defined by the 1969 Official Languages Act, amended in 1988, and by the 1988 Canadian Multiculturalism Act which "preserve[s] and enhance[s] the use of languages other than English and French, while strengthening the status and use of the official languages of Canada" (Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1988, (1)(i)). Since bilingualism and multilingualism are two fundamental keywords to understand the complexity of contemporary Canadian identity, in this paper I follow the sociolinguistic approach to analyse social identity as a linguistically biased construction and to investigate how Canadian multicultural identities are voiced through multilingualism, i.e. the use of more than one language to negotiate social roles and to establish a linguistic link between culture and identity. The first part of this paper is dedicated to the definition of literary codeswitching, while the second one focuses on some examples taken from Nino Ricci's trilogy, a corpus of novels where contemporary Canadian identity is portrayed and constructed and where the discourse on Canadian multiculturalism is fostered through codeswitching, i.e. "the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems" (Gumperz, 1982, 59), or more generally as "the alternation of *multiword* fragments of [...] two languages." (Poplack, Walkers and Malcomson, 2006, 209).

We can refer to these definitions also in the case of literary codeswitching, i.e. parts of texts written in more than one language, even though they are not as spontaneous as everyday conversations but, on the contrary, rhetorically constructed by the writer. Nevertheless, if we compare codeswitching in conversational and in literary corpora, we have to acknowledge that their structure is the same, i.e. the grammatical constraints that control the switch from one language to the other work in the same way. Let us consider for example:

(1) The three old ones spoke nothing but Spanish. Nothing but Spanish. *No hablaban ingles* [they did not speak English]. (Gumperz, 1982, 78)

(2) It was after having received his letter from Toronto that Titina, at the last minute, made up her mind to join Giovanni. '*Si vive bene in Canada*. Life is good in Canada.' (D'Alfonso, 1995, 39)

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1) As a matter of fact, many critics have stated that the multicultural policy of Trudeau was a way to solve the political instability given by the separatist movement in Quebec (for further details see Bissoondath 2002).

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The first example is taken from *Discourse Strategies* (1982) by John Gumperz and illustrates an instance of codeswitching that the sociolinguist recorded and transcribed from spontaneous conversations. The second quote is taken from *Fabrizio's Passion* (1995), a novel by Antonio D'Alfonso, an Italian-Canadian writer and publisher. Both are cases of reiteration of something that has been said in another language and the main difference is the conventional use of markers such as inverted commas, which in literary texts enclose the dialogues, or the presence of introductory sentences before the reported speech such as "He said" or "She answered". However, if we concentrate exclusively on the grammatical structure of the switched parts of the utterances, we see that they are basically the same: here we have two instances of intersentential code switching[2] where the sentences in English are a translation or a reiteration of what is said in Italian and Spanish with the specific purpose of simultaneously stressing a concept and translating it to the addressee. The same can be said of intrasentential codeswitching where the morphology and the syntax of the two codes are mixed.[3]

Thus, which is the difference between conversational or spontaneous codeswitching and literary ones? They differ in their function since literary texts are the result of discursive and rhetoric strategies that imply poetic and ideological patterns, whereas conversation usually is more spontaneous and linguistic switches are explainable on the basis of psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic theory. Moreover, the functional role of conversational codeswitching stands as a marker of linguistic identity:

> Codeswitching is seen as a boundary-levelling or boundary-maintaining strategy, which contributes, as a result, to the definition of roles and role relationships at a number of levels, to the extent that interlocutors bear multiple role relationships to each other. It is an important part of social mechanism of negotiating and definition of social roles, networks and boundaries. (Heller, 1988 a, 1)

I believe that the function of literary codeswitching in Canadian multicultural literature is not only that of stressing the negotiation of social roles among the characters, but also that of constructing a discourse on multilingualism and multicultural identities in Canada, using more than one code (when traditionally only one is chosen) and employing codeswitching as a narrative strategy. The disruptive role of codeswitching in identity negotiation and representation is provided by what Heller (1988) and Myers-Scotton (1988) define as unmarked or marked linguistic choices, where unmarked means conventional and marked means the unexpected and violative use of language. In particular, "[w]hen participants are bilingual peers, the unmarked choice may be switching with no changes at all in the situation" (Myers-Scotton, 1988, 161) and their motivations for doing so lie in the multiple social identities that they want to exhibit using two (or more) linguistic varieties accepted in their community. On the

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2) According to Appel and Muysken (1987), we define intersentential codeswitching the switches that occur between two utterances, whereas we define intrasentential codeswitching (or codemixing) the switches that occur inside the sentences at the morpho-syntactical level.

3) Carol Myers-Scotton (1993, 2006) has developed the Matrix Language Frame Model which tries to explain how the languages involved in the switch actually mix at the morpho-syntactic level. Very briefly, whenever the speaker switches, the main language (the Matrix Language) is inhibited so that it is possible for the other code (the Embedded Language) to replace its morpho-syntactical structures.

contrary "switching away from the unmarked choice in a conventionalized exchange signals that the speaker is trying to negotiate a different rights and obligations balance as salient in place of the unmarked one [...]." (Myers-Scotton, 1988, 166-167)[4] Whereas unmarked choices in literary texts correspond to the subsequent translation of the switched parts, marked choices are given by untranslated codeswitching, which breaks the linearity of the English syntax and stands for a multilingual self.

Gumperz, who has introduced the functional approach in discourse analysis, which "proliferated amongst students of the school of 'interactionist sociolinguistics'" (Poplack, 1988, 229), has focused on codeswitching motivation, which allows to shift from grammatical constraints to sociolinguistic and to discursive functions since it "seems to be stylistic and metaphorical rather than grammatical. The process by which meaning is conveyed must be studied in terms of the stylistic interrelationship of sentences, of phrases within the passage as a whole, not in terms of the internal structure of particular sentences" (Gumperz, 1982, 72). Relying on discourse analysis and on the knowledge of cultural values and social factors affecting language use, Gumperz isolates some conversational functions of codeswitching such as quotation (direct quotation or reported speech), addressee specification (in order to direct the message to one of several possible addressees), interjection (to stress an interjection or a sentence filler), reiteration (repetition of the message in another code, either literally or in a modified form) and message qualification (highlighting some grammatical construction of the sentence such as noun phrases or predicates following a copula) (Gumperz, 1982, 75-81). As we can see from Gumperz' study, placing codeswitching into the sociolinguistic theoretical frame allows us to define its functions both as a linguistic strategy and as a socially meaningful act through which identity is not only represented but also constructed.[5]

In her study about language contact in Ottawa-Hull, Shana Poplack (1988, 225) lists some functions of codeswitching as well and notices that in the culturally and linguistically split Canadian capital city codeswitching at turn boundary and inter- and intra-sentential codeswitching are particularly scarce – especially if compared to the data of her case study about Puerto Ricans in East Harlem, New York. Whereas she considers functions such as those referring to meta-linguistic commentary, particular English expressions, reiteration, reported

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4) The marked or unmarked use of codeswitching also refers to what Gumperz and Blom (1972) have called situational and metaphorical codeswitching, where the former "is rooted in a social separation of activities" and comes to "symbolize the social situations, roles and statutes and their attendant rights and obligations, expectations and assumptions", and the latter is related to the "use of each variety in unconventional contexts [which] has the effect of calling into play all the meaning associated with the variety in situations where normally other frames of reference are operative." (Heller, 1988 a, 5)

5) Monica Heller considers codeswitching as a conversational strategy speakers can adopt in order to convey anger, attract the addressee's attention, include a third party, mitigate the swearing and comment on the nature of the relationship between the speaker and the person s/he talking about. (Heller, 1988 b, 77-80) Furthermore, she proposes three levels of meaning, in particular, a first level which derives "from the social organization of language use in the community", a second one which comes from "the interpersonal relationship between speakers in the particular context of the activity in which they are engaged" and a third level which is "the semantic content of specific instances of switching" (Heller, 1988 b, 81). Heller affirms that codeswitching creates ambiguity, especially at the first two levels, and it is due to this ambiguity that "codeswitching offers opportunities for the interpretation of social action that would otherwise be unavailable." (Heller, 1988 b, 81)

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speech, proper name, changed interlocutor and false start or self correction as stylistic or discursive functions, only inter- and intra-codeswitching are seen as true switches i.e. creative language use or what Auer defines as 'mixed code' (Auer, 1998, 15-16). In other words, true codeswitching is produced where the speaker's identity is really multicultural – sometimes at such an extent that codeswitching resembles a new (mixed) language (Franceschini, 1998, 57). This is the reason why in Ottawa-Hull, where French and English cultural antagonism is epitomized, those speakers who do not feel bicultural rarely produce intra- or intersentential codeswitching.

Poplack's analysis reiterates conversational codeswitching as it has been introduced by Gumperz: "to be sure, code switching occurs in conditions of change, where group boundaries are diffuse, norms and standards of evaluation vary, and where speakers' ethnic identities and social backgrounds are not matters of common agreement." (Gumperz, 1982, 70) In fact, Poplack shows how in the Puerto Rican community speakers perceive themselves as bicultural and, for this reason, consider codeswitching as part of their (mixed) language and the way by which they express themselves, whereas francophones and anglophones living in Ottawa-Hull "draw attention to their code-switches by repetition, hesitation, intonational highlighting, explicit metalinguistic commentary, etc. and use the contrast between the codes to underline the rhetorical appropriateness of their speech." (Poplack, 1988, 230) Thus, codeswitching is something more complex than the simple "use of two or more linguistic varieties in the same conversation, without prominent phonological assimilation of one variety to the other" (Myers-Scotton, 1988, 157), since it is also a way to express the speaker's identity and the way of representing her/himself and interact with other people, which appears in literary texts as well.

A way of approaching literary codeswitching is that of applying sociolinguistic functions to written texts. A problematic issue of such an approach, however, is the gap between spontaneous conversation, from which the functions are derived, and literary works, which not always reproduce realistic communicative situations but rather represent them in a fictional way. In other words, can we say, for example, that codeswitching in a novel has the role of addressee specification as in everyday bilingual conversations? Since the language of fiction has a poetic function which contributes to the codification of a specific discourse (in this case that on Canadian multicultural identities) and which is not usually a feature of the language of spontaneous conversations, and since a mere comparison of codeswitching in literary and conversational corpora would not be useful to investigate codeswitching as a discursive strategy to shape Canadian identity, I would like to propose a double level of analysis: first, we have to consider codeswitching in its fictional context, i.e. as a linguistic phenomenon produced by the characters of the novel or the poetic persona that speaks in a poem, and, secondly, as a narrative strategy used by the writer to represent *that* context and formulate a discourse on multilingual and multicultural identities.

In order to study literary codeswitching, I believe that we should look at it at least from three perspectives:

1. from a psycholinguistic point of view, i.e. the analysis of grammatical structures and constraints;

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2. from a sociolinguistic point of view, i.e. the functions of codeswitching in the specific fictional context;
3. as a discursive strategy which is developed both reproducing realistic codeswitching (which obey grammatical constraints and which have a sociolinguistic function), and unrealistic ones, i.e. those alternations which do not have a mimetic function but a purely discursive one.

This classification has been drawn according to the data in Nino Ricci's trilogy and in other novels by Italian-Canadian writers such as *Under My Skin* (1994) and *Tenor of Love* (2004) by Mary di Michele and *Fabrizio's Passion* (1995) by Antonio D'Alfonso where the discourse on identity in multicultural communities is carried in two languages. In these texts there are at least three types of literary codeswitching:

1. codeswitching produced by the narrative voice;
2. codeswitching produced by a character who would switch also in the real situation, i.e. real world and fictional world coincide;
3. codeswitching produced by a character who would never switch in the real situation, i.e. the communicative situation is not realistic.

Whereas codeswitching by the narrative voice is a discursive strategy, those uttered by the characters can be seen as a mimetic device used to reproduce a real communicative situation, even though in the case of codeswitching which would never occur in the fictional world we can speak of a discursive strategy codified in the dialogues. In my opinion, the three above mentioned perspectives are particularly useful when we consider the third type of codeswitching, which allows us to analyse the morpho-syntactic structures, the sociolinguistic functions and the discursive implications of the use of two languages in the same text. In order to understand the difference between the two types of codeswitching, we need to contextualise them. If we consider the 'internal function' of fictional codeswitching, i.e. the function they have inside the novel, as that of conversational codeswitching, it is nevertheless more interesting for the purpose of this paper to analyse their 'external function', i.e. their role in relation to the reader. Let us consider, for example, the fact that in order to produce codeswitching, speakers have to acknowledge their shared linguistic background. Otherwise, it would be impossible for them to switch from one language to the other, no matter what the function or the purpose of the switch may be. Can we say the same for literary codeswitching? In other words, must the reader understand every codeswitching created by the writer and uttered by the narrative voice and/or by the characters or is the discursive aim attained in any case?

When talking about multicultural and multilingual Canada, we have to distinguish between two levels: on the one hand, we investigate how individual identity is shaped according to the languages spoken by people from different cultural backgrounds, and, on the other hand, we focus on how the discourse on national identity, which, as we have seen, is based on official bilingualism and multicultural policies, is developed and constantly put to the test. This is why interdisciplinary approaches are welcomed, especially sociolinguistics combined with discourse analysis, so that the former frames the study on how language is used in order to mark

one's social identity (Heller 1988 a), while the latter deconstructs the strategies employed in the discourses on Canadianness. The study of codeswitching in literary texts is particularly enriching because both levels are investigated: through the alternation of two, or more, codes, the writer portrays the multilingual features of Canadian multicultural communities and simultaneously enhances the discourse on official bilingualism and multilingualism in Canada. Literary works are but one of the possible sources to be chosen in order to develop such an analysis, but, in my opinion, they are particularly relevant since they combine a rhetorically structured body of texts with the representation of language use (in this case that of codeswitching), intertwining the sociolinguistic study of language phenomena and that of the discursive strategies adopted to articulate a debate on Canadian identity. In other words, such texts allow to carry on a parallel analysis of codeswitching as a micro-sociolinguistic phenomenon, which involves community identity representation, as well as a macro-linguistic strategy in the discourses on Canadianness.

In order to better understand the dynamics of representation of Canadian identity through language, I think that we have to focus on those examples that are the result of the hybridisation of cultures among the Canadian social landscape. Since Canada is a 'hyphenated country' where the majority of the population claims to have more than one ethnic, and thus cultural, origin, in this paper I work on a hyphenated community, the Italian-Canadian one, that is linguistically closer to my experience and knowledge. The data I refer to in this case study are taken from Nino Ricci's trilogy on the Italian immigrant experience in Canada: *Lives of the Saints* (1990), *In a Glass House* (1993) and *Where She Has Gone* (1997). The three novels follow the life of Vittorio Innocente, the protagonist and narrative voice of the story, from his childhood in a small village in the Abruzzi region in Southern Italy to his trip to Canada with his mother as a child; from the first years on a farm in Ontario with his father and his stepsister (his mother had died on the ship giving birth to a baby girl conceived with another man in Italy, the reason why she was forced to migrate to Canada) to the youth spent at the university in Toronto and a final trip to the Italian village of his family where he deals with his past and comes to terms with his multicultural identity. Codeswitching between English and Italian occurs throughout the trilogy but is more frequent when the story focuses on the Italian setting (Vittorio's childhood in the small village of his ancestors and the trip to the very same places as a young man) or on the small Italian-Canadian community in the Ontarian countryside.

The switched parts consist mostly of single words or short expressions which are translated or paraphrased into English so that the average English reader – who is often monolingual – can easily understand. If we consider the classification of bilingual literary works proposed by Christian Lagarde (2001), according to which they can either be an exotic portrait of a distant culture or a collision of languages where the hegemonic culture is challenged,[6] Ricci's trilogy should be placed in between the two, since Italian words are scarce (in some sections of the trilogy there are none, although in other parts they are very frequent) and the reader can easily understand their meaning from the context. However, the bilingual description of the

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6) Lagarde's classification into three types of bilingual writing (*couleur locale, donner à connaître* and *lutte de langues*) is based on the focalization of the narrative voice, the percentage of hegemonic language compared to the L2, the reader's linguistic skills, the role of otherness in the story and the position of the writer. (Lagarde, 2001, 58)

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immigrant experience is not merely exotic but rather a reflection on Canadian multicultural identity. Codeswitching in Ricci's trilogy, therefore, is a means to evoke another world, that of the lost place of birth, and to codify a discourse on multicultural Canada.

Let us consider the following cases:

(3)   [...] though my own mother had got as far as *la terza media* in Rocca Secca, and I'd sometimes heard her talking with merchants in an Italian more rounded and precise than *la maestra*'s [the teacher's]. (Ricci, 1990, 45)

(4)   '*Ma* [but] Andò,' my grandfather said, '*per l'amore di Dio* [for God's sake], just let her get in the car and let's go.' (Ricci, 1990, 12)

(5)   But there was a saying in Valle del Sole, '*Do' l'orgoglio sta, la serpe se neva* [sic],' – where pride is the snake goes – [...]. (Ricci 1990: 5)

(6)   [...] and the inscription 'Al valore militare' [for military valour]. (Ricci 1990: 181)

(7)   Ah, so that's it, isn't it? *Che cretino*! [What an idiot!]. (Ricci 1990: 97)

(8)   He lit a cigarette, then offered the pack to me.
      "*Fumi*?" [Do you smoke?]
      "*Sì. Grazie*" [Yes, thank you.]
      (Ricci, 1997, 168)

(9)   'Tell me, Antonio, *quante persone ci sono in Dio* [how many persons are in God]?'
      Always an easy question to begin.
      'Three persons, Don Nicola.'
      '*Tre persone, giusto* [three persons, correct]. And what are they called, these three persons?'
      '*Il Padre, il Figlio, e lo Spirito Santo* [the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit].'
      '*Bene, Antonio, molto bene* [Good, Antonio, very good]. You are truly a theologian, a Jesuit even.'
      (Ricci, 1990, 41)

(10) 'Anyway, it doesn't matter to me,' he said. 'You don't have to know *matematica* [mathematics] to stick a seed in the ground, my father says. *E quella maestra* [and that teacher] – Fabrizio bloated his cheeks and lifted out his arms, making a jogging motion like a fat person walking – *quella maestra* [that teacher]gave me a pain in the ass. "Fabrizio" – taking on the teacher's falsetto – tell me, Fabrizio, ma chi sono le tre persone in Dio? [which are then the three persons in God]" Addio, quella porca! [Damn it, that bitch!] (Ricci 1990: 173)

I would like to consider both the grammatical constraints and the sociolinguistic functions of these ten examples taken from the trilogy by Ricci and show how this can support the concept of codeswitching as a discursive strategy adopted in order to shape Canadian multicul-

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tural and multilingual identity. In (3) we find a culture-bound word, *la terza media*, which refers to the Italian education system and which has not an equivalent in English: literally it is the third and last year of middle school, attended by 13-year-old students. Culture-bound words are very frequent in codeswitching since they fill a lexical lacuna due to the cultural specificity of the expression. Unlike borrowings, however, they are not part of the vocabulary of the host language and they are one of the features of intercultural communication whenever there are cultural gaps in the two languages. Moreover, in (3) the portion of the sentence in the L2, *la maestra*, behaves morphologically as an English noun since it takes the Saxon Genitive. According to the Matrix Language Frame Model theorised by Myers-Scotton, this is a morphological mixing between the Matrix Language and the Embedded Language. The switched noun phrase includes the Italian article as well, even though this is not a constraint since elsewhere we can find codeswitching with the Saxon Genitive and the article in English.[7]

Many of these examples illustrate the sociolinguistic functions of codeswitching: we have a quotation, as in (6), about the inscription on a medal for the military valour; a translation, as in (5), where a saying is literally translated into English,[8] interjections as in (4) and cursing as in (7). In these cases, the switched part follows the rules of conversational codeswitching and we can tell that they are taken from a novel thanks to the introductory markers which characterise dialogues in fictional works. The last two examples present many types of codeswitching and show that, although single words are the majority of switched parts of text, we can have whole paragraphs written alternating two codes.[9] In (10), we have a single word, *matematica*, which behaves like the English equivalent, mathematics, and does not have the article, whereas in Italian the indefinite article is needed. Furthermore, we have a sort of addressee specification since the speaker talks about the teacher naming her in Italian. At the end of the paragraph, the same happens followed by a curse, while "tell me, Fabrizio, ma chi sono le tre persone in Dio?" is an intrasentential codeswitching.

In (9) the dialogue is formed by a series of questions and answers about the Holy Trinity and each answer from the pupil is followed by a repetition from the teacher, so that every codeswitching is translated and the monolingual reader can understand what the oral test is about. In (8), on the contrary, the two sentences in Italian are not translated or paraphrased and the reader who does not know Italian has to derive the meaning from the context. Whereas *sì* and *grazie* are two international words that the average monolingual English reader can easily understand, the question "Fumi?" must be linked to the previous sentence where the character lights a cigarette and offers the packet to the protagonist.

In these ten examples we have some of the features that characterise codeswitching, both from sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic standpoints: we can identify some of the functions which are common to conversations and the fictional world created on literary pages and we can also focus on the morpho-syntactic structure of the switches. As I have previously sug-

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7) For example, see Mary di Michele's novel, *Tenor of Love* (2004), where we have "the *professore*'s wife." (di Michele, 2004, 209)

8) Sometimes we can find Italian sayings directly translated into English: in D'Alfonso's *Fabrizio's Passion* (1995), for example, we have "When in Rome do as the Romans." (D'Alfonso, 1995, 62)

9) There are some short texts which are extremely experimental and are written continuously alternating two or more languages. They can be found in literary journals such as the feminist journal *TESSERA*.

gested, however, both approaches can be combined when considering literary codeswitching as a discursive strategy which multicultural writers, such as Ricci, adopt in order to evoke a multicultural setting and develop a discourse on multilingualism as a marker of identity construction. This is possible because codeswitching in multilingual texts on multicultural identity in Canada is not only a language contact phenomenon per se but also a form of discourse on Canada. As a matter of fact, considering codeswitching as a narrative strategy allows to read multilingual texts as a discourse both on individual and collective Canadian identities, i.e. how languages and cultures shape one's prismatic self and how they contribute to the debate on Canadianness. Finally, the trilogy by Nino Ricci is not only a *Bildungsroman* about the Italian immigration to Canada in the post-war period, but also an investigation into the processes that shape Vittorio Innocente's hybrid identity, which is linguistically achieved through the dissemination of Italian words and phrases into the English text and which stands for a discourse on multicultural Canada. Thus, it is my opinion that in order to understand contemporary Canadian identity, which is multicultural and multilingual, we need to consider also the linguistic perspective in which codeswitching plays a fundamental role in displaying these attributes.

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