Code-switching into the dominant language in multilingual societies: Pronominal forms as markers of politeness and register

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Politeness expressions are linguistic manifestations of social facework practices (Brown and Levinson 1987), having a transparent social meaning and are typically register markers above the level of awareness. In multilingual speech communities, speakers can code-switch to make use of a different linguistic repertoire in another language. We investigate (i) to what extent is politeness a conditioning factor in code-switching for pronominal forms and (ii) how do the language ideologies of the multilingual speech community affect this type of code-switching. Based on results from the Lang*Reg corpus (Adli et al. 2023) which includes conversations of the same participants across six different situational-functional contexts, we draw on data from three unrelated minority languages that are spoken in multilingual communities: Javanese (Indonesia; Austronesian; in contact with Indonesian), Yucatec Maya (Mexico; Mayan; in contact with Spanish); and Southern Kurdish (Iran; Indo-Iranian; in contact with Persian).

The contact language pairs differ in how politeness is implemented in their pronominal systems: While Yucatec Maya and Kurdish employ less politeness levels compared to their contact languages, politeness marking in Javanese is more complex than in Indonesian. Language ideologies also differ. In Javanese speech, the use of Indonesian indicates social distancing, moving away from former hierarchical distinctions within Javanese speech levels (Nurani 2015). However, initial results show the use of High Javanese pronominal forms in situations beyond the friend dialogue, suggesting that Javanese language ideology remains important. In Kurdish, the most code-switching is found in the most formal situation, raising the question whether the formal Persian form of address is being integrated into the Kurdish pronominal system (unlike for the use of Spanish pronominal forms in Yucatec Maya). We argue that the speakers of these multilingual communities have a single face concept, which they optimally enact either by making use of speech levels as in Javanese, or by strategically employing code-switching to use a pronominal system with politeness distinctions as in Kurdish and Yucatec Maya.

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