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Language diversity in a Mediterranean mediascape

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ABSTRACT

The article analyses a particular form of linguistic and cultural diversity performed in two radio magazines, *Kantara* and *Mediterradio*, produced as part of transnational media cooperation in the Mediterranean region. The analysis focuses on the interplay between language, discourse and journalistic practices, rooted in a specific journalistic and civic culture that aims at constructing a shared public sphere in opposition to mainstream media reports about the Mediterranean. The results demonstrate a particular polycentrism and mobility of media production, observable in language, discourse and journalistic features, in which localities traditionally considered “at the periphery” of global media flows, such as the Western Mediterranean islands Sicily, Sardinia and Corsica, constitute crucial points. The article approaches the resulting multilayered transculturality by grasping the specific culture inspiring the work of the network, and the multiple identities related to it. To this aim, a transdisciplinary approach integrating sociolinguistics, discourse, media and cultural studies with a specific focus on mediatized transcultural communication is developed.

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1. Introduction: Research question and background

The article examines the media production of a transnational media network (COPEAM) operating in the Mediterranean by focusing on two radio news magazines, *Kantara* and *Mediterradio*, characterized by original ways of handling multilingualism with the purpose of constructing a shared Mediterranean public sphere without distinguishing between single language communities. The media makers cooperating in these magazines engage in the development of a specific journalistic culture, which they see as a shared Mediterranean one, in dialogue with but also in opposition to either the so-called global or glocal news, or the respective national media production.

The principle aim of this paper is to explore the peculiarity of this media production, by grasping the specific culture inspiring it and the resulting linguistic, journalistic and discursive practices, which are then analyzed from a transdisciplinary perspective integrating sociolinguistics, discourse, media and cultural studies. A particular focus of the analysis regards the multiple ways in which the media makers, by reporting and discussing about current news, handle multilingualism without blending linguistic and cultural

differences but, on the contrary, by highlighting and using them as semiotic resources in the performance and in the communicative construction of a specific Mediterranean culture. This approach to linguistic and cultural diversity, consisting in broadcasting in a multilingual environment without translating from one language into another, is not common and represents a challenge, especially in the context of news programs. The widespread expectation of audiences to understand every word of the news leads most broadcasters, even those who define themselves as multilingual, to offer the same media product translated or dubbed into different languages. This is the case, for example, for *Euronews*, a European news channel that has been offering, since its launch in 1993, 12 editions of television world news in 12 respective languages (Arabic, English, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Persian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish). This manner of handling multilingualism in the public sphere has been described as “parallel monolingualism” (Heller, 1999) or “pluralised monolingualism” (Makoni and Pennycook, 2007), two terms that stress the link between those practices and an ideology of cultural homogeneity, which regards multilingualism as the co-existence of single monolingual speech communities. It has been observed that “parallel” monolingualism, together with current discourses representing monolingualism as normal and multilingualism as an exception (Kelly-Holmes and Milani, 2011, Irvine and Gal, 2000), reinforces ideological “homogenism”, resulting in monocultural attitudes and practices even in contexts in which cultural diversity

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and anti-racism are, at least formally, pursued (Blommaert and Verschueren, 1998). An unquestioned strong nexus between one specific geographic territory and its respective, allegedly homogeneous, cultural community is at the core of a specific concept of diversity, based on the parallel coexistence of different cultural systems. This assumption inspires media practices with respect not only to language choices, but also to specific journalistic features, such as “glocal news”, which can be observed, at the discourse level, in the following statement regarding the recent launch of a new “glocal” service by Euronews:

“As a media with a strong multicultural DNA, Euronews is a unique bridge between diverse and diverging point of views. As a result, its coverage is naturally balanced, richer and more varied than any other international media. Since May 2017, Euronews is the world’s first Glocal news brand which means, the first global media that adapts itself to the expectation of its multiple local audience. **euronews** replaced its model that has been at the core of its offers since its inception by the launch of 12 distinct premium cross platforms editions. The different editions enable **euronews** to deliver tailored content that makes sense to each audience”.¹

The particular transculturality of global media products has been studied from the perspective of media and cultural studies by concentrating on its regulation, production and consumption, as well as on the transformation of contents and formats by their crossing of national and cultural boundaries (for an overview s. Hepp, 2015). Much less attention has been paid to the role played by multilingualism in the processes of producing, circulating and consuming transcultural media products, although linguistic diversity is acknowledged to be an important criterion – not seldom regarded as an obstacle – for the transnationalization of public spheres. On the other hand, the outstanding work conducted in linguistics on multilingualism in the media has mainly focused on media and language politics, media representations of multilingualism as well as multilingual interaction in different forms of media communication,² that is, with a sharper focus on language and speech communities than on transcultural media production in mediated public spheres. The present work benefits from the results of both these fields of research (transcultural media communication and multilingualism in the media) and builds on them by methodologically combining their perspectives. In Section 2, for example, the synoptic analysis of linguistic and journalistic features highlights a particular polycentrism characterizing both language and media practices, which distinguishes *Kantara* and *Mediterradio* from other transnational media products. Moreover, Section 3 concentrates on discourse practices indicating how the media makers reflect upon their experiences and work ethics: here the negotiation of identities, belongings and values stressed by the discourse analysis reveals the individual perspectives of the journalists on the process of constructing a transnational, specifically Mediterranean, public sphere. The analyzed corpus consists of sixteen shows (eight of *Kantara* and eight of *Mediterradio*) broadcast between January 2016 and January 2017 (approximately 12 h of recording including music), which have been deliberately chosen because of their thematic relevance for the topics of the current research. Most of *Kantara*’s shows are available online,³ whereas only selected shows of *Mediterradio* are kept accessible through the online archives of Rai

and France Bleu. A telephone conversation with Thomas Brunelli, who works as anchor in both *Kantara* and *Mediterradio*, as well as several e-mail exchanges with Guillaume Ortiou-Campion, member of COPEAM’s Radio Commission, helped me compare my analytical results with the targets and the perspectives of the media makers.

From this theoretical perspective the analysis subscribes to interdisciplinary research on globalization (Appadurai, 1996, Tomlinson, 1999, Morley and Robins, 2004) and superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007). Multilingual communication is addressed in the context of global flows of people and resources⁴ and approached by concentrating on the sound – that is, voice and music, if the latter is contextually relevant – as a whole semiotic resource (Blommaert, 2010: 47). Moreover, following Androutsopoulos (2007: 225) the linguistic diversity of the media productions is conceptualized as:

“a set of processes by which institutional and vernacular media actors draw on linguistic resources from their own inheritance, their social environment, and the wider semiotic flows they have access to, in order to construct textures and voices that mediate and balance between immediate communicative exigencies, market expectations and loyalties to local and imagined communities”.

The main focus, then, is not on single languages conceived as systems, but on the perception of the media makers about what Corsican, Algerian, Sicilian or Mediterranean languages are, and on the ways in which the whole soundscape (including the music) of the shows contributes to the formation of collective identities and belongings. Such a constructivist approach matches the particular nature of radio, in which, more than in daily interaction or in audiovisual media, the spatial dimension of communication completely relies on sound. The “molding force” (Hepp, 2012a) of the media is addressed by referring to mediated, instead of mediating, communication, in order to stress the specific shaping power of electronic media, including the institutions and the whole organizational structure involved in media production.⁵ The space of communication is regarded from two perspectives: on the one hand as a mediascape, by following Appadurai’s (1996) conceptualization of global media flows crossing national boundaries and articulating themselves in an asymmetrical, polycentric geometry of networks; on the other, as part of the public sphere, in order to grasp the shared space of publicity that the media makers aim at developing, with the purpose of strengthening the mutual understanding and a sense of fraternity in the Mediterranean. The concept of public sphere is used, thus, not in a normative sense (Habermas, 2009), but as a set of practices of “doing publics” in a transnational context (Schmitt and Vonderau, 2014: 11–12), that is, in the case of *Kantara* and *Mediterradio*, by generating moments of shared publicity with respect to issues that are perceived to be relevant for a Mediterranean audience. It is not, therefore, to be read as static or structural, but as a dynamic category subject to negotiation processes, since the questioning of dominant mediascapes, such as the global or the national ones, is central to the media makers working at *Kantara* and *Mediterraneo*.

The focus on multilingualism draws on the observations by Kelly-Holmes (2012: 343) regarding the potential of multilingual media communication in representing and stimulating social imaginaries:

“Media are a key site of multilingualism: a place where national and regional policies in relation to multilingualism are enacted, where speech communities are constituted, represented, fragmented and reconstituted, where the speech community expe-

¹ <http://de.euronews.com/about>, accessed on 3 November 2017, bold type in original text, italics by the author.

² For an overview to the mentioned *foci* s. Blommaert et al. (2009), Johnson and Ensslin (2007), Busch (2004), Kelly-Holmes and Milani (2011), Androutsopoulos and Juffermans (2014).

³ s. COPEAM’s Soundcloud: <https://soundcloud.com/copeam>, accessed on 3 November.

⁴ Blommaert et al., 2009 and 2011, Coupland, 2010, Jacquemet, 2005.

⁵ s. Lundby (2009) for an overview of the concept of mediatization and its use in various fields of media research.

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