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Code-Switching or Code-Mixing?

1. From a methodological point of view, the analysis of linguistic variation has to be adapted to the nature of this variation in each particular case.¹ In a community where one is dealing with two or more substantially different languages in alternation it is possible, as a rule, to work on a MACROLINGUISTIC level. In such cases it makes sense to ask members of the community which language they would use in certain specified situations and, with a reasonable knowledge of the different languages, an observer has little difficulty in deciding in which speech variety a certain speaker is expressing himself at any given instant. According to this model, the speech repertoire falls into discrete (which does not exclude some portion of common features) and locally recognized varieties, codes, or systems.

In communities that are traditionally monolingual, linguistic variation is also prevalent and a number of investigations over the last few years have demonstrated how this variation is socially structured and, from a functional point of view, analogous to a shift between markedly different languages. For settings of this later type, however, it has usually been felt more proper to apply a MICROLINGUISTIC approach. It is true that mention is sometimes made of sociolects, registers or styles, as if they were distinct systems of the repertoire, but at the same time the researcher often contents himself with pointing at a correlation of single linguistic variables with social strata or contexts. In many cases the awareness of this kind of variation is slight on the part of the speakers themselves.

Due probably to an increase in geographical and social mobility in recent years and to an explosive development of mass communication, linguistic situations are now gradually emerging for which neither of these two models for description can be automatically accepted. Neutralizing between existing varieties must be expected to take place, and the consciousness among the speakers of a discrete opposition between different varieties will become blurred as a cause or result of this process. A macrolinguistic view may then seem overpretentious whereas a micro-