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Anita Skelin Horvat  
Vesna Muhvić-Dimanovski  
University of Zagreb

*My mother tongue ...*  
*Croatian, Istrian, Local, ... Depends where I am –*  
**The perception of mother tongue in multilingual settings**

Mother tongue is very often seen as bipartite, i.e. that it is indicated on two levels, the level of the individual and the level of the collective. Such ambiguity of the notion can cause certain tensions manifested as the tension between the individual speaker and his/her community, but also within the speaker (Škiljan 1992). On the other hand, today it is accepted that individual speakers can have more than one mother tongue. This is in accordance with the possibility to choose between different identities expressed through language and the use of variants, by mixing idioms and languages, through bilingualism, etc.

In the present paper the notion of mother tongue is analysed on both levels and in the specific context of a multilingual area. We tried to see how the notion of mother tongue is used and understood by its users, and how it is perceived and changed depending on e.g. the community, education, and personal life history. As the source for the analysis of the individual perception of mother tongue in-depth interviews conducted in Istria in spring of 2007 were used. Such an analysis is contextualised within the definition of the notion of mother tongue by officials and official documents, e.g. the authorities' documents about language issues.

**Key words:** mother tongue; Istria; language and identity; multilingualism.



## 1. Mother tongue

The analysis in this paper focuses on some features of the rather complex notion of mother tongue, specifically on how mother tongue is being perceived in bilingual/multilingual settings and how it is perceived by its users. The focus of the analysis is thus put on the emic or “insider” perspective of the term. Even though mother tongue is a term used very frequently and in rather different contexts, as well as by different users, it is not easy to define it. According to Lepšchy (2002: 4) the notion of mother tongue and native speaker “still remains elusive and hazy and its history difficult to ascertain.” Usually it is understood as the first language somebody learns, the “native language” or the language of socialization. Mother tongue is mostly the language of the homeland and the language of the group to which a person belongs, so very often both ethnic or national identities, as well as regional ones, are strongly connected with the mother tongue. Mother tongue is seen as “one’s own” language, inseparable from personal identity (cf. LaDousa 2010). All these ideas about the mother tongue have mostly been founded by romantic ideas of belonging and descent. Such a “romantic” idea of mother tongue was also expressed by one of our interviewees who said that it was important to keep the mother tongue when you leave your birth place because “it is your mother tongue, it is your root, it is a kind of link with the place of your origin, of your family’s origin, some people from the past, and because it is a huge treasure; (it is a...) kind of your root.”<sup>1</sup>

Because of strong connotations the term mother tongue is sometimes replaced with others, like first language (L1), language of home or family, homeland language, native language, etc. Škiljan (1992: 9, 10) defines it as “the language that a child learns in its closest surrounding in processes of the basic and primary socialization, in processes which in our societies and civilization are symbolized by one’s mother.” Škiljan also theorizes that mother tongue is bipartite because it is indicated on two levels, the individual one (as the language of a person), and the collective one (as the language of the language community). The language community is thus defined by its mother tongue and as a community of speakers with the same mother tongue. On the other hand, as a language of a community and an individual, mother tongue cannot be easily defined because these two levels do not necessarily correlate – it is more common that they do not correlate.

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<sup>1</sup> This citation is from the corpus of interviews we used for analysis in this paper, which is elaborated later in the text.



This kind of tension can be seen in the notion of mother tongue as understood for the needs of a country's census. In the census only languages are recognized as mother tongues, never the dialects. Even if a person states that one or another regional or local variety is his/her mother tongue the census will admit only the language and it is very often the language of the community or the official language of the country. The language of the language community is usually identified as the standard language, whereas the "real" mother tongue is not the same as this standard language. The latter is usually learned at school, and can be interpreted as the first learned second language, and in rather rare situations it is used as the first language. However, for the needs of official documents the standard or official or national language is usually proclaimed to be the mother tongue of the community and its members. On the other hand, the census does not accept the possibility that some of the members of the community have two mother tongues, because only one language has to be chosen.<sup>2</sup>

As it has already been mentioned we analyse this notion in a multilingual community that makes the concept of mother tongue even more problematic because the idea behind this concept is the idea of one's "native" language; the speakers in multilingual communities, on the other hand, use more than one language from their birth on. Many case studies have shown that for certain minority groups the mother tongue is a dialect while the standard is something to be studied in school (even that is not always the case). The situation can get even more complex if such a minority group lives in another country where a different language is spoken.<sup>3</sup> Such minority groups face an even more difficult situation as they have to learn their own standard language beside the one of the majority group.

Ansaldo (2010: 617) suggests the dropping of the notion of mother tongue in such multilingual settings because "the related notions of expertise, inheritance and affiliation do not adequately identify sociolinguistic situations and that it is inaccurate to view people as belonging to only one social group." Instead of such identification of people with only one group he suggests that identification should be with linguistic pluralism, and "not necessarily with a specific code. In such linguistically and culturally hybrid communities, it seems, the notion of mother tongue is at best significantly weakened, if not irrelevant, since mother and father tongues may in fact be different and equally important, and where a

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<sup>2</sup> For more details about the problem of one or more mother tongues and the political consequences of the question see, for example Pennycook (2002).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Weisgerber (1990).



third linguistic code may also be fundamental to the identity of community members” (Ansaldo 2010: 621). In our paper we try to exemplify the way in which speakers in multilingual settings relate their identity/identities with more than one code, showing that for them mother tongue is constituted from different and equally important codes and that – what was rather new – in some situations the mother tongue changed (which more or less corresponds to ideas by Ansaldo mentioned above).

## 2. Istria as a multilingual, multicultural and multiethnic region

Istria is a region whose larger part belongs to Croatia; smaller parts are in Slovenia and in Italy. Due to a rather turbulent history it is a region of great language and ethnic diversity. Languages spoken in this region belong to two language families: that of South-Slavic and that of Romance languages. Slavic languages spoken here are Slovenian in the Slovenian part, Croatian in the part that belongs to Croatia and Montenegrin in the small village of Peroj (Croatian part), spoken by a small group of descendants of ten families who settled there in 1657. The dialects of Slovenian spoken in the northern part are: *šavrinsko* and *brkinsko/istrsko*. The Croatian dialects of Istria are: Čakavian, Štokavian, Cakavian and some mixed or hybrid forms. The Romance languages and dialects used in Istria are: Istro-Venetian, a variant of the Venetian language, akin and similar to Italian, mainly spoken in towns at the north-western coast; Istro-romanian, spoken in some villages on the Mount Čićarija, akin to Romanian; Istriot, the only autochthonous Romance language on the peninsula, which once may have formed an integral part of the post vulgar Latin diasystem, and finally standard Italian as the language of education in Italian minority schools and as a L2 in other schools in Istria.

According to the 2001 census, the number of members of Italian national minority in Croatia was 19,636 (0.44 percent), although the number of speakers claiming Italian as their mother tongue was somewhat higher (20,521 or 0.46 percent). The greatest part of the Italian National Community lives on the Istrian peninsula, while the number of members of the Italian minority in other parts of Croatia is very small.<sup>4</sup> The Italian National Community (*Comunità Nazionale*

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<sup>4</sup> Other minority communities recognized in Istria are: Serbs (3.2 percent), Bosnians (1.5 percent), Albanians and Slovenians (1 percent), Montenegrins and Roma (0.3 percent) ([www.istra-istria.hr](http://www.istra-istria.hr)). In our research we included some members of other minorities besides Italians, but their number is rather small comparing to the number of included members of the



*Italiana*; CNI) in Croatia and Slovenia is organized in some 50 basic units – Italian Communities (*Comunità degli Italiani – Zajednice Talijana*). All the Italian Communities are associated with the Italian Union (*Unione Italiana – Talijanska unija*), their umbrella organization, based in Rijeka and having as its primary objectives exercising of minority rights and meeting the needs and interests of its members. The main activities of the institutions and organizations belonging to Italian Communities are publishing the daily newspaper, magazines and books in Italian; they have an organization for studies and research, and Italian primary and secondary schools in Istria.

The legal rights of the Italian minority in Istria are defined by laws and protected on international, national and local levels. The 1992 European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML) and the 1995 Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities have both been implemented in Croatia. The Italian minority is also protected by the Treaty between the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Italy concerning minority rights signed in Zagreb in 1996. At the level of local and regional government the Italian minority rights are protected by the Statute of the Istrian Region (*Statut Istarske županije*).

According to the Statute of the Istrian Region, Istria is a multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual community where “the Croatian and the Italian language are in equal official use in the work of the Regional committees in the self-governing domain.”<sup>5</sup> The Statute recognizes the right of the Italian minority to nurture national and cultural identity through different organizations and education, e.g. through the right of elementary, secondary and university education in their own language according to special programmes including minority history, culture, science and the right to use national emblems.<sup>6</sup> In the Statute the idea of multiculturalism is related to its regional traditional identity saying that “the Istrian Region fosters Istrianism as the traditional expression of regional affiliation of the Istrian multiethnos.” (Article 23)

Analysing the main documents of the Istrian Region it is noticeable that bilingualism and equal use of both languages (Croatian and Italian) are regulated on

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Italian community and that is the main reason, along with the fact that official bilingualism includes Croatian and Italian, why we discuss here only the rights of the Italian minority.

<sup>5</sup> Article 6 in Statute of Istria Region, [www.istra-istria.hr](http://www.istra-istria.hr).

<sup>6</sup> This is according to the Article 27 from Statute.



different levels. For instance, the work of the Assembly and the Government in the region is carried out in both languages (Article 25). In a few places in the Statute the equal position of these two languages is expressed, as well as the guarantee for the members of Italian minority that they can use their language in public and that the Region is providing for the bilingual speakers through submitting materials for the session of the Regional Assembly or Regional Government, writing minutes and publishing conclusions, publishing official notifications and invitations of the representative, executive, and administrative bodies of the Region, as well as other materials in both languages (Article 25).

From these legal documents it is evident that the rights of the Italian minority are guaranteed, including its bilingualism, which is even fostered through, for example, the provision of learning the other language.<sup>7</sup>

### 3. Data

The analysis was based on qualitative data collected by means of the sociolinguistic interview<sup>8</sup> and (auto)biographical accounts as a source of information on different aspects of a person's life, specifically those on the language use as reflected in their perception of identity. These biographical data can be considered as language biographies which, according to Nekvapil (2003: 63), are "a biographical account in which the narrator makes the language, or rather languages, the topic of his or her narrative – in particular the issue of how the language was acquired and how it was used. The biographical method is (...) a sociolinguistic method that provides a means of understanding language situations." These recorded conversations and dialogues are transcribed and analyzed by using some elements of content and narrative analysis. Relevant official documents are being analyzed as well.

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<sup>7</sup> Article 30 states: "Municipalities and towns with statutory regulation of bilingualism for students of school institutions with education in the Croatian language will provide for and especially encourage the study of the Italian language as a language of social environment."

<sup>8</sup> The interviews were conducted in Istria, during the spring 2007 within the project LINEE – Languages in a Network of Excellence, founded by European Commission 6<sup>th</sup> FP (CIT4-2006-28388). There were 81 semi structured interviews with 99 persons (between 12 and 83 years old) included.



#### 4. Bilingualism/multilingualism vs. monolingualism in Istria

Very often a speech community is identified with a single language, even when it is characterized as multiethnic and multilingual (Ansaldo 2010). The presumptions that the language communities are usually monolingual and that the members of the community have only one mother tongue, easily defined and recognized, are usually accepted as quite obvious. The same happens in Istria where, even though the Statute regulates bilingualism and defines the region as a multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual community, the two main ethnic and language communities are identified by one language (and not dialect) and belonging to only one ethnic and cultural group. On the other hand, in linguistics such ideas about monolingual situations and defining the community through only one language are being challenged (cf. Kravchenko 2010).<sup>9</sup>

In the Statute the awareness of the complex language setting is shown by stating in Article 21 that “the Istrian Region promotes Istrian national customs, marking national holidays, protection of autochthonous toponyms, and the preservation of local dialects (Chakavian, Cakavian, Cokavian, Cekavian, Kajkavian, Istriotian, Istro-Venetian, Istro-Romanian, and other) through education about the homeland and other contents”. As can be seen this article mentions both Croatian and Italian dialects which reflects the real situation in the region. It has to be pointed out that it is the only region in Croatia that has included this aspect in its Statute.<sup>10</sup>

The recognition of the importance of regional language varieties and their connection with regional identity of the community by Istrian authorities is in accordance with the research done by Šakić and Kotrla (2007) about the importance of knowing the mother tongue for social identity. In their research they

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Lehman 1998:104, about the idea of replacing the rigidly bounded culture by “more open and mutable one in which the spaces *between* languages and countries become sites of new creation rather than marginality.” She is discussing the situation of the migrants but it could be applied for the multicultural and multilingual regions, as Istria, as well. In such multicultural regions the boundaries between languages and dialects are less rigid in a sense that people are aware of the mixing codes and code-switching, and they themselves defined (in some situations) as belonging to two cultures and two languages.

<sup>10</sup> Also, one of the leading political parties of the region, the IDS (Istrian Democratic Party), is very much in favour of the preservation of Istrian dialects and in one of its documents it says that Istria has a rather complex language repertory where dialects are related to the values of local cultural tradition and as such should be kept protected [www.ids-ddi.com](http://www.ids-ddi.com).



have shown that in four of eleven different regions in Croatia the knowledge of mother tongue (and the importance of language as one element of social identity) was highly estimated by the examinees. One of these four regions that consider language to be an important element of identity was Istria.

The reality is even more complex: besides the use of different languages and dialects, it includes code switching, mixing, and use of different linguistic repertoires. Besides, it includes also different attitudes of its speakers toward their codes and different understanding of their own language repertoires. As mentioned before, we are primarily interested in the notion of mother tongue and its perception by speakers in a multilingual setting. The speakers themselves are rather aware of the complexity of the situation which can be seen in some of their comments about their mother tongue being not one language, but two, (and they mostly see themselves as bilingual speakers, estimating that they have two mother tongues) as e.g. in:

Q: So, what is your mother tongue? Croatian or Italian?

AT: Well, almost both. I understand them, I understand them, so, both. My wife, however, talks more in Croatian. But in Italian too. For us that doesn't matter, the way we start the talk so we finish it.

Q: What is your mother tongue?

MG: Eh, listen, it would be more Italian than Croatian, but while we are here in Istria, we have a mixed language; we have Italian and Croatian words. I manage more, so to say, in Italian than in Croatian. Istrian language is mixed, (...) Here it is Italian, Italian-Croatian. Istrian, that is a kind of mix. Mixture of everything, people and languages, and I think, culture, ways of life, ways of cooking. And so.

Q: And which is your mother tongue?

MR: Croatian and Italian. (...) I'm sorry for the expression, Croatian and Italian. (...)

MR: Roughly equal, for me it is completely the same; (...) maybe Croatian, but it is not really Italian, it is Istro-Venetian.

These examples show how the idea of being bilingual and having two different languages as mother tongue is clearly expressed by bilingual persons. In these situations the interviewees estimated that two languages are equally important and that they use both languages for communication. Not only do they use two languages but they also “produce” a new code or a kind of mixture of the languages what could be seen in the light of Ansaldo (2010) where he argues that in multilingual communities speakers use multilingualism and mixing practices as important elements for cultural identification.



The definition of bilingualism can be broadened and every person speaking two dialects could be seen as bilingual; sometimes the person speaking a local or regional variety (acquired at home) and the standard variety (thought at school) could be defined as bilingual. Some of our interviewees defined their mother tongue as a mixture of two dialects or as a bilingual use of two or even more dialects of both main languages:

Q: What is your mother tongue?

SB: Well, OK, I'm a kind of "mixed-blood". In Rijeka, in school Croatian literary language of course, the way it is learned in school, here at my work the same. Only a few people, let's say, use official Croatian, and with patients (I speak) as they understand. That means that the whole life you mix something, the whole life you mix.

Q: And that's your mother tongue?

SB: But we don't have it, that's why I say that with mum we speak Hercegovinian, and with dad Istrian, and that's it. (...) in our family we have two dialects ... which we use.

Q: At home? This first vernacular, it is Italian, you said. I suppose it isn't standard Italian.

CR: No, no, no. Standard Italian you start in kindergarten and then through elementary school. At home, here, mostly not, but those whose mother tongue is Italian, it is the Veneto dialect.

Q: How do you call it, that dialect?

CR: We call it *dialetto*, and that's it. We don't make any difference.

Members of such multilingual and multicultural communities are aware of the differences between various dialects, and their attitudes toward bilingualism or multilingualism are rather positive. Very often they consider the use of two or more dialects, or languages as their own cultural wealth and as an important element of their individual and collective identity. As our aim here is not to analyze the attitudes toward bilingualism and its consequences we will not discuss them in detail.<sup>11</sup>

These examples could be seen in light of the theories of language and identity. When discussing the notion of identity it is important to stress that this term has a rather broad meaning and use, and as such it is rather vague. The complexity of the term identity is partly due to the fact that it is used for "that" which is spe-

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<sup>11</sup> However, the positive evaluation of the bilingual situation in Istria can be illustrated by the following example:

RB: Eh, that I feel strongly. I'm very sensitive about my two cultures, as a matter of fact, three: Italian, Croatian and Istrian.



cific for a person or a group and makes him/her/them different from others but at the same time it is used for “that” which makes a person similar to others and a member of a group. The changeability of identity and the possibility to choose between different identities or to construct them in interaction is its dynamism; this suggests that identity is a process not a property (Kalogjera 2006; Joseph 2004).

The fact that identity is constructed or negotiated in interaction makes language an important element in its processing, construction and performance (cf. Tabouret-Keller 1997; Coulmas 2005; Thornborrow 2004). In order to perform different identities code-switching, code-mixing, borrowing and other strategies are used. The possibility to choose one’s identity, and to choose different languages, dialects or language elements to express these different identities is in opposition to the idea that mother tongue is the main element of a person’s identity and that one person can have only one mother tongue. The use of different varieties, languages, their mixing and switching, as well as bilingualism show that multiple mother tongues are as possible as multiple identities (cf. Kalogjera 2006).

## **5. The notion of mother tongue and identity in multilingual community**

Multiple linguistic identities affect the dynamics of perception of mother tongue as extended beyond one particular language thus making “people move between languages with the patterns of identities changing under various social psychological conditions” (Mohanty 2006: 264). This connection between mother tongue (or, mother tongues) and identity/ies is rather complex, vague, hybrid, and changing in the same way as language itself. On the other hand, identity is also flexible and changeable, multiple and dynamic, meaning that it is constructed in communication, dependent on the situation and context, and “becoming rather than being” (Skutnabb-Kangas 2004: 10). The connection of individual and collective identity with language and the change of the perception of mother tongue in accordance with the change of personal or collective identity of speakers (e.g. their personal life history, education, attitudes toward social and political questions, local and national belonging, etc.) is of special interest here.

Analysing the interviews we were able to notice a kind of language and identity shifting between different codes which community members have at their



disposal. They change the codes according to time and place, participants in communication, formality or non-formality of the situation, and other elements of context. An important element influencing the use of language and the attitudes toward it is language education. The notion of mother tongue varied according to elements mentioned above. In the following example such variation of the mother tongue/s is rather clearly expressed.

Q: What is your mother tongue? Vernacular?

GM: Well, ... Croatian, Istrian, home (local)... depends where I am. Sometimes it is... (...)

GM: Sometimes it is ..the Čakavian dialect, sometimes. In an environment where it is not official, and when it is official then Croatian, normally.

(...) When we go to visit the relatives, then it is more home (local). Čakavian.

S: My father's side speaks Čakavian, but his sister is married across (the border). So, Italian too. And my mum's side, that's Italian Istro-Venetian. Not pure, that is.

Q: Which one is your mother tongue?

S: All three. Depends to whom I talk to, Italian and Čakavian.

In the first example the person varied his codes depending on different situations, here between formal (official) one and the family setting as informal one. In the second example the switching between three dialects/languages depends on the interlocutors who are members of the family. It is typical multilingual code-switching within a family where persons use one language or dialect with some members of the family, and another with other family members.

The following example shows a somewhat more complex situation of using different codes for expressing the ethnic and regional identity (their own or that of the family members) and the shifting between different mother tongues in connection with the political and social situation in the community.

Q: Which one is your mother tongue?

(...)

I: At home we used to speak Croatian.

Q: Standard, or?

I: Standard. Well, my dad is D.O. who writes... (...)

I: He writes in dialect, but at home he used to speak the standard language. So, he spoke to me always in Croatian and to everybody else the Croatian literary standard language, but he writes in dialect.

Q: Did he teach you the dialect?

I: No.

Q: Did he try to teach you?



I: No. Then that was ... it wasn't what it is today. Well, I was born in 1971, and then there was no Istrianity, nothing. It was to try to talk Croatian as much as possible, but grandma, his mum, grandma F. (...) she spoke in dialect only, Istrian...

This example shows how the attitude toward mother tongue influenced the use of one rather than another dialect in family situations. Such attitudes are connected with the social and political situation in Istria where a strong regional identification did not occur before the 1990s (a rather turbulent period for whole of Croatia). It was expressed through a more frequent use of regional and local varieties in the public sphere while before that time local varieties were used mainly in the privacy of home and family.

In the following example the connection of mother tongue and the person's ethnic identity is rather clearly expressed. Another interesting issue here is connecting the mother tongue and the ethnicity with the ethnic identity of the person's mother and grandmother, although she herself claimed the local Italian variety which is her father's language to be her first language. The choice of one language instead of the other as mother tongue (and the identification with one instead of another ethnic group) in this case might be the result of education. The interviewee attended Croatian and not Italian schools, and the reason for such a choice of her parents is rather interesting, namely, her father even though obviously a member of Italian minority considered Croatian school as a better option, because they lived in Croatia.

MF: At home, we spoke not Italian, but one dialect spoken here, we call it Istro-Venetian. It is very similar to the dialect spoken, let's say, in Veneto or in Friuli. It is some kind of mixture of that. But then through the time, with moving of Slavonic people, the language got mixed up, so we also use Croatian words. So, that's very cute.

Q: Would you say that your mother tongue is Croatian or...

MF: Yes, yes, my mum always declared herself as Croatian. My grandma already during Italy, and her folks, they went to the first Croatian school in Vinkuran.

Q: What was your first language?

MF: Italian. But this Italian, this dialect. Later I knew really Italian, real Italian. But because I live in town, I don't have some Istrian roots, you know, where that pure Čakavian is used, my parents were progressive, and they put me in kindergarten when I was three years old and I've learned Croatian, from the first days I learned to speak Croatian. (...) in our house you could speak whatever language you wanted. And with dad Italian always.

Q: And you went to Croatian schools?

MF: I have finished all in Croatian. Because my dad, when it was time to decide to opt for Italy, to leave or not, he didn't want to go, absolutely not and he said that I (...) no need, we live here and why should I go to an Italian school.



The example that follows shows how all these different situations and contexts, identifications as well as the political and social situation in the region influence the choice of mother tongue. In this excerpt we can notice quite a difference in comparison to the previous example. Namely, the interviewee here feels both languages (Croatian and Italian) as mother tongues but she identifies with Italian culture and feels to be a member of Italian minority. In her case the education again had a strong influence on such identification (she finished Italian schools). What is rather interesting is that while in the previous example the father of the examinee was a member of Italian minority, the father of this person is Croatian having a strong identification with the Italian minority by his choice (as it is explained by the interviewee). In both these situations there is a similar kind of choosing of the mother tongue and ethnic identity, namely, both of them prefer and choose one over the other language and culture to identify with. The family and the education in one instead in the other language strongly influenced identity in both examples.

KF: (...) my mother tongue is Italian, and Croatian also. My mum is from Vojvodina, (...) so with her I never speak Italian, but with dad I always speak Italian, and I have finished all Italian schools, kindergarten, elementary, secondary and so on. So, I feel, personally, as a member of the Italian national minority because that is my personal..., the development of my personality was in contact with that culture and that people.

(...)

Q: How do your parents speak?

KF: Croatian, since ever. Because, in principle, my father is not really from an Italian speech region, well he is and he's not, because he was born in Istria and he spoke Croatian at that time, namely Istrian. But, then it was Italy, he was born under Italy, he went to Italian schools, because he chose so, (...) he feels as the member of that culture, too. But, you know, this is a problem in Istria, not for us, but for others, it is not possible in a discussion, or a book, or through one generation to explain what it means to be Istrian, (...)

Q: What do you use when speaking to your dad?

KF: Both.

Q: Dialect...

KF: No, we talk. With some people I speak in dialect, with some in a language. With him in Italian language.

Q: Standard? How?

KF: Maybe because in school they always said: don't use the dialect. But, OK, we use the dialect, too, it depends, from time to time and what we talk about. If we talk more about things like culture, politics, in some kind of discussions we use Italian, if not, then we use the dialect.

Q: So, in your repertoire you have two languages and two dialects at least.



KF: Yes, there is one Istrian Čakavian, one Istro-Venetian, sometimes called Istriot (*sic!*)<sup>12</sup> as dialect.

Q: What did you feel about this kind of code-switching?

KF: I have no idea. I don't have such memories. For me, in my head, it is not some kind of experience. For me it's my natural status.

In this excerpt another important issue has been touched on, namely the use of different languages and dialects according to the theme or topic of the conversation. So, the theme is recognized as an important element influencing the choice of the preferred language for one situation, along with other elements like place, collocutors, context, etc.

The importance of language education and its influence on somebody's mother tongue and attitudes towards it or influence of the education on the choice of one dialect or language as mother tongue instead of some other is stressed in many excerpts presented here. From the previous examples it is noticeable that some of interviewees considered themselves to be bilinguals (using two different languages or dialects) while others considered themselves to be monolinguals but the mother tongue has changed. This idea of changing the mother tongue from the local or regional variety (which was the first language used) to the standard/literary variety taught in the school is rather frequent. In some cases interviewees did not see themselves as being bilingual in a way that they would use either languages or both varieties at the same time and from the beginning but they rather considered themselves as changing the language repertoire under the influence of the educational system. During school time one of the languages or varieties was felt to be "stronger" and as such it was mother tongue for them, while the other was "weaker" and considered to be the second language/dialect. This brings another problem in defining bilingualism, that of the level of language proficiency in second language needed in order to be bilingual. According to different theorists that level can be from rather low until almost equal proficiency in both languages (cf. Romaine 1998). Such kind of changing or replacing the mother tongue (language, not dialect) is rather clearly stated in following example.

Q: What would you say, what is your mother tongue?

ST: Eh, that is what I wanted to comment. While my brother studied in Zagreb, and I went to Croatian school, we talked mostly Croatian, this regional Croatian

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<sup>12</sup> The label (*sic!*) refers to the confusion with these two idioms; namely, Istro-Venetian and Istriot are two different idioms even though some of our interviewees wrongly assumed that they are the same idiom with two names.



variant. When I started to go to the Italian school and hang around with the kids who, I don't know, are from Italian families, who spoke Istro-Venetian, I spoke Istrio-Venetian all the time. And then they (the parents) with me. So, one period of elementary school we spoke Istro-Venetian all the time. (...) And in high school less. Mixing. And at the faculty, the talk was rather different. (...)

Q: So, what would you say, which one is your mother tongue?

ST: Oh, yes. While I was in the Italian school, or elementary or, let's say, in high school, then my mother tongue was Italian. Because we learned everything in Italian and I really didn't know how to say in Croatian what I learned in Italian. I didn't have that sameness of the languages. And then, after the faculty, at the faculty Italian was still my mother tongue. More dominant. And after the faculty, Croatian. And now if somebody asks me I say: My mother tongue is Croatian.

Q: You think that it has changed in different periods? It is not one for the whole life?

ST: No, no. Even though I am convinced that mother tongue is the one you learn in the first years of your life. I certainly didn't learn Italian then, but Croatian.

On the other hand, this example can also show how the education in the mother tongue can influence the feeling for it, and even can influence the identification with one instead of another mother tongue by a bilingual person. This brings us to another related problem, the education in the mother tongue. As we do not discuss it in this paper we will not quote more examples about it, but this already shows how education in the mother tongue can affect other language issues.<sup>13</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

This kind of rather complex switching between different codes (languages/dialects) can be analysed within the theory of identity alignment and negotiation. According to Lim and Ansaldo (2007) in multilingual communities the speakers have at their disposal the possibility to use different codes in order to align their identity according to changing times and environments. On the other hand, Ansaldo (2010) argues that in multilingual communities speakers use multilingualism and mixing practices as important elements for cultural identification and they identify themselves with linguistic pluralism and not with a specific code. We believe that our analysis has shown how speakers through multilin-

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<sup>13</sup> For Croatian bilingual education and education in the mother tongue for minorities see more in Kovačević, Pavličević-Franić (2002) and Pavličević-Franić, Kovačević (2003).



gualism and mixing practices identify themselves within their multilingual /multiethnic/multicultural setting.

The possibility to acquire and use more than one language shapes the linguistic identity of speakers in a multilingual community and makes them bilingual/multilingual. In our analysis it was shown that some of the members of such multilingual and multicultural community consider themselves to be bilingual and bicultural, but the others consider themselves to be monolingual because one language was acquired before the other or one is stronger. Still, we can argue that the pluralism of languages and cultures influence their identity and make them rather aware of such complex multilingual situations. Thus, they use different codes as kind of identity alignment according to contexts, situations, collocutors, community. We can assume that they use languages or dialects and switch between them according to different identities they construct/negotiate in different situations.

The patterns of code-mixing occur in our analysis rather often; namely, the interviewees stated that they use different varieties and mixed varieties, and as one of the main characteristics of their codes is the mixing of dialects and languages. Such mixed codes, according to Ansaldo (2010) are a creative hybridization process or process of language creation involved in identity alignment which is part of cultural identification that involves intra-group focussing and inter-group differentiation which in multilingual and multicultural settings allow contact between different groups, not segregation. Here it is possible to argue that the mixed codes used by our interviewees are innovative language creation used for identification with the multicultural and multilingual community. The idea of negotiating the identity in multilingual settings states that “language choice and attitudes are inseparable from political arrangements, relations of power, language ideologies, and interlocutors’ views of their own and others” identities. Ongoing social, economic, and political changes affect these constellations, modifying identity options offered to individuals at a given moment in history and ideologies that legitimize and value particular identities more than others” (Pavlenko, Blackledge 2004: 1). This was rather well seen in the examples where interviewees connected their mother tongue with their national or ethnic identity, as well as in the example which shows how the complex situation in the region – due to the fact that many of the interviewees expressed also their regional belonging – influences the feelings about the mother tongue and the person’s choice of it.



The example that follows, on the other hand, is in accordance with Škiljan's idea about the dual meaning of the term mother tongue, especially in the part where the interviewee explains that his mother tongue is the literary language even though he uses dialect: "Croatian. Croatian... So. ... It is not the literary, but it is the home(language). That means, Istrian, well, the dialect is Istrian, but the literary Croatian language is my mother tongue."

We can conclude that from our data it can be seen how in different situations, places, contexts, and under the influence of different political and social circumstances in society the speakers identify themselves with one or another language/dialect and use them according to their own self-image and for creating certain identity. Language, of course, is not only the marker of identity, but also the place of creating, negotiating and expressing identity/identities. So, we can also say that different settings, contexts, collocutors, themes of conversation and other elements of the communication act can influence which identity will be created or negotiated in a certain situation. The presented data along with the arguments referred to in this paper might be a good basis for the future research of the perception of the mother tongue in complex multilingual settings.

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**Authors' address:**

Institute for Linguistics  
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities  
University of Zagreb  
I. Lučića 3  
10 000 Zagreb  
askelin@ffzg.hr; vesna.muhtic-dimanovski@ffzg.hr

***MOJ MATERINSKI ... HRVATSKI, ISTARSKI, DOMAĆI ... OVISI DI SE NALAZIM –  
PERCEPCIJA MATERINSKOGA JEZIKA U VIŠEJEZIČNOM OKRUŽENJU***

Materinski se jezik često promatra kao višestruk, tj. na razini pojedinca i razini zajednice. Takva višeznačnost samoga koncepta može prouzročiti određene napetosti između pojedinoga govornika i njegove/njezine zajednice, ali i unutar samoga govornika (Škiljan 1992). S druge strane, danas je sasvim prihvatljiva ideja da pojedinac može imati više od jednoga materinskoga govora/jezika što je u skladu s mogućnošću biranja između različitih identiteta iskazanih jezikom, različitim varijantama, ili pak miješanjem jezika i idioma te kroz dvojezičnost. U ovom se tekstu koncept materinskoga jezika analizira na objema razinama u specifičnom kontekstu višejezične sredine. Nastojali smo pokazati kako pojam materinskoga jezika razumiju i upotrebljavaju njegovi govornici, te kako se on mijenja i različito percipira ovisno o npr. zajednici, obrazovanju, osobnoj povijesti. Korpus za analizu sačinjen je od dubinskih polustrukturiranih intervjua sakupljenih u Istri 2007.

**Ključne riječi:** materinski jezik; Istra; jezik i identitet; višejezičnost.