Multilingual Manchester

Report

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An analysis of multilingualism in two Manchester branches of restaurant P

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Introduction and Research Questions

Our research project is focused on language skills in Manchester businesses. As previously stated, this interested us as we have all had first-hand experience working in the multilingual nature of ethnic restaurant chains. The restaurant we have chosen to look at, we will refer to as Restaurant P for anonymity reasons. It is an Italian restaurant chain that has branches spread throughout the country. We have decided to look at 2 branches in the Manchester region – one in the city centre and one in Didsbury. Our research questions look at if and how employers at restaurant P strategically use their multilingual skills to enhance the 'authenticity' of the restaurant. We decided to focus predominantly on 3 aims:

Our first aim looks at if and how language is used as a marketing strategy in restaurant P.

Our second is focused on the customers and whether or not the language used by the staff affects their dining experience.

Our third aim looks at any issues that may arise between staff and customers; we will also look at how these issues are overcome.

This idea of authenticity seems to be at the centre of all customer recollection. There has been much debate over the actual definition of *authentic* and the idea has raised many issues. For example, for an ethnic environment to be authentic, does its servers also have to be ethnically appropriate?

The generic definition of *authentic* is something that is 'made or done in the traditional or original way or in a way that faithfully resembles an original' (Oxford Dictionary, Language Matters, 2012). In regards to restaurant P, our aims and research questions will focus on the marketing strategies used by the restaurant and whether or not this helps to create, from a customer point of view, an *authentic* Italian environment.

We used several methods in order to deduce whether this authenticity is conscious or simply a result of coincidence. Our methods included questionnaire elicitation, observation, narrative interviews and analysis of trip advisor reviews. Below we will concentrate on all four of these methods and look to answer our research questions and hopefully come to a conclusive statement based on the language skills used in restaurant P.

Findings

To obtain the data needed to answer our many multilingual based questions, we carried out four research methods including the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data. These were; questionnaire elicitation, narrative interviews, observation and looking at Trip Advisor reviews of the restaurants.

Questionnaire Elicitation

We decided to collect questionnaires in order to answer our research questions: "Does the style of language used help to create an authentic atmosphere for customers in the restaurant?" and "Does the language used by staff have a positive effect on the customer?" We first envisaged collecting questionnaire data by leaving questionnaires at the each Manchester branch of P, which could then be passed onto willing customers to fill out and return. However, the head office of P weren't keen on this idea as they thought it could impact negatively on the customer's enjoyment and cause annoyance. Therefore we used our contingency method and gave our questionnaires to friends, family and colleagues who had previously visited the branches of restaurant P we are interested. This provided us with more than enough data to conduct our study.

An example of the questionnaire which was handed out can be seen in field project one. From our data collection we can conclude the following:

- 94% of our participants were addressed in both Italian and English
- 94% of our participants believed this helped to create an authentic Italian atmosphere.
- 100% of our participants didn't believe there to be a language barrier with the staff of restaurant P.
- 89% of our participants believed their visit was enhanced due to usage of Italian.
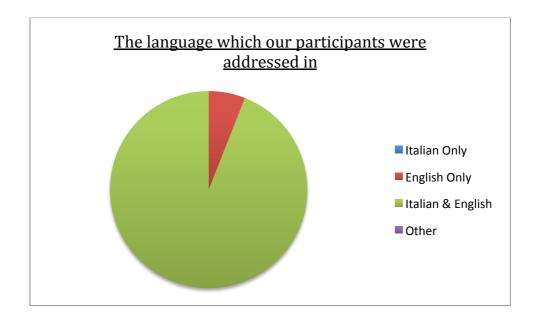
Chart One

The language which our participants were addressed in

- Italian Only
- English Only
- Italian & English
- Other

Chart Two

Whether our participants thought the use of Italian helped to create an authentic Italian atmosphere

- yes
- no

Chart Three

Whether or not our participants thought the use of Italian created a language barrier

- yes
- no

Chart Four

Whether or not our participants believed the use of Italian enchanced their visit

yes ■ no ■

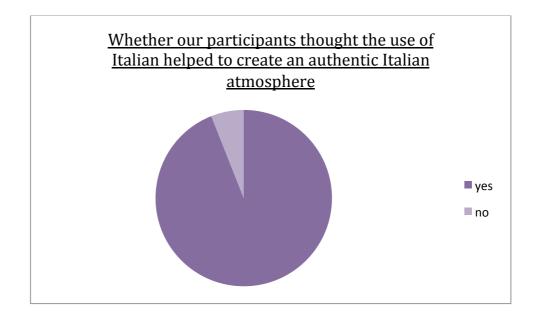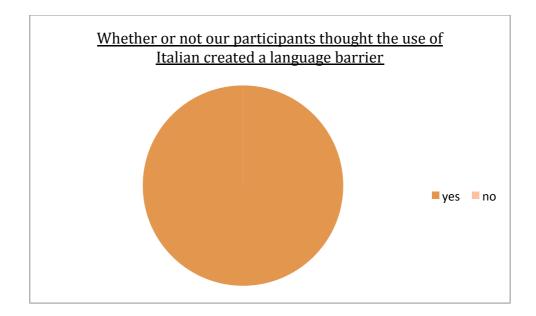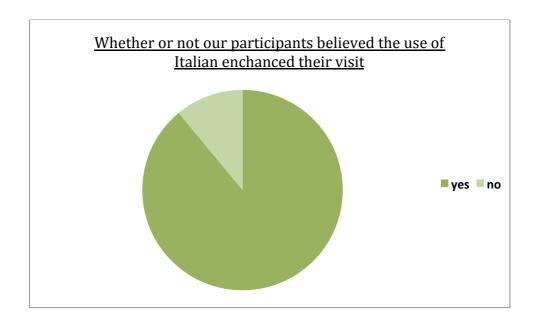## Analysis of the Questionnaire results

These results suggest that the style of language used does indeed help to create an authentic atmosphere for customers. As 94% of our participants were spoken to in both Italian and English, we believe this may suggest that the use of Italian is done strategically as it can be seen across both branches of restaurant P, which are located in Manchester. Furthermore, we also believe it may be possible that the use of Italian is the main factor in helping to create an authentic Italian atmosphere for the customers. As both Italian and English were used, this suggests the use of code-switching and this is defined as 'switching between different languages as well as between different styles or varieties of one language' (Holmes & Stubbe. 2004:134). Code-switching can be done for stylistic effect and we believe this may be the phenomenon seen in restaurant P.
This type of code-switching is done for social reasons, in particular to help construct an identity.

This is relevant to restaurant P as we propose the waiters are either trying to construct an Italian identity or to portray their identity to the customers. This use of social code-switching can be found often, for example 'Both Maori and Samoan New-Zealanders use language to signal and enact their ethnic identities... and reinforce good relationships with members of their own ethnic group in the workplace' (Holmes & Stubbe. 2004:140). This suggests that code-switching may be a tactic that is rather wide-spread. We believe the use of social code-switching at restaurant P helps to create the authentic atmosphere they desire.

In terms of whether the language used has a positive effect on the customers, we can see from our results that 89% of our participants believed their visit was enhanced due to the use of Italian. For this research question we also collected qualitative data. Most of the responses were positive; however a small number of participants didn't agree and stated their enjoyment wasn't enhanced due to the use of Italian. For example one customer commented saying: 'the use of Italian appeared false, especially when the person did not look Italian and clearly wasn't from Italy'.

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Another added that the multilingual nature of restaurant P 'didn't add or detract to their enjoyment'. Therefore, although we believe that on the whole participants' enjoyment was enhanced by the language and nature of restaurant P's employees, this wasn't the case for all customers. In fact some believed that the use of Italian, which they perceived as false, actually reduced their enjoyment.

Narrative Interviews

Carrying out narrative interviews, as a way of collecting information and research, allows an interviewee to feel comfortable in a relaxed environment which will encourage them to provide useful material. Narrative interviews are a qualitative research method where 'the interviewer is advised to carefully avoid imposing any form of language not used by the informant during the interview'. (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000:4) This technique is therefore ideal for our research project as we do not want to *put words into the interviewee's mouth;* we require truthful responses and don't want to influence the information we receive.

We originally envisaged carrying out interviews with managerial staff and several other members of staff to truly get an idea of if and how language is used in restaurant P. However when we approached the managers in order to organise the interviews, both branches would only allow us to interview managerial staff as they believed carrying out interviews with other members of staff would impose upon the running of the restaurant. Encountering this problem could not have been avoided but since we were still allowed to interview the managers of both branches we would at least be able to collect some qualitative data from narrative interviews.

Although with narrative interviews the interviewee is simply prompted to talk about a certain topic, in this case multilingualism within the restaurant P, prior to carrying out our interviews we came up with several questions in which we hoped to get answers to.

1) Is language used as a marketing strategy within your branch of P?
2) Are there any specific language requirements for working at P? If so, how do these rank in relation to other requirements?
3) Do those members of staff who speak Italian always communicate to one another in Italian? If so, does this happen in front of customers? And if so, do employees at P code-switch during a single conversation.
4) If Italian & English speaking customers come into the restaurant, which language do employees speak to them in?
5) Are any languages (other than Italian and English) spoken in P by employees?
6) Do employees greet customers in Italian?
7) Do any issues arise because the restaurant is a multilingual environment? If so, what issues? If so, how are these issues resolved?

Two group members attended an informal meeting with the manager of the Manchester City Centre branch of P in order to gain our data. The manager, who wished not to be named in this study, was extremely talkative and helpful: providing us with lots of useful information.

Although he didn't seem it fit to be recorded, as it was such an informal situation, he did allow us to talk notes and was very accommodating. We allowed the manager to inform us about the multilingual aspects of the working environment and retell stories about his experiences, and then when he paused we prompted a response by asking our questions.

Analysis of the Narrative interviews

The manager first explained just how many languages were spoken in his branch of P and the varying nationalities of his workforce. The languages spoken within his restaurant are: Italian, English, Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, Polish, and Sicilian – however all members of staff speak English to some degree. He explained that, although it is preferable that staff can speak Italian and English, he focuses on the experience of staff when it comes to hiring them. When several members of staff started work at the restaurant, their communication skills in English were quite poor and so started out working in the kitchen or as food runners as these jobs required little interaction with the customers. Those members of staff who can communicate best to the customers are front of house staff, barmen and waitressing staff. This presents the idea that language is used to create an authentic Italian atmosphere as the staff that can speak both of these languages are the staff that communicate with customers. The manager then explained that many members of staff's English greatly improves on the job and so are moved up to the jobs which require interaction. It seems that at this branch, English is the most important language to speak, as the manager likes the staff to be able to interact and joke with the customers in order to create a nice, relaxing Italian atmosphere for the customers. The manager told us that one girl, who spoke both Italian and English, left the restaurant of her own accord after only a few months on the job as she found it hard to communicate with the English customers. This suggests that the multilingual nature of restaurant P can cause some complications for the staff, which might then cause problems for the customers if the staff don't understand them properly.

We then prompted the manager to inform us about what language the staff talk to each other in and how staff communicate with other nationalities that come into the restaurant. He explained that Italian waiters and waitresses speak to each other in Italian as this is the norm and seems to be a lot easier. The noise levels of the restaurant seemed to play a key role in what language staff spoke to each other in. The manager told us that at busy times the restaurant can be quite noisy and therefore staff need to be clear and so usually speak in their native tongue – Italian – to ensure they get the customer's orders correct. We believe that this may cause some confusion to those members of staff that aren't fluent in Italian and could therefore impact the customers experience negatively; however it seemed that clear direction and instructions were given to all members of staff in their native language. The manager told us that he carries out staff meetings and briefings in English as this is the language that all staff can understand to some degree, but will translate information if the instructions were not fully understood. Therefore he suggested that the multilingual nature of the restaurant didn't cause languages barriers or complications.

In terms of greeting customers, staff do this in both Italian and English. We suggest that this example of code-switching is done as 'most linguistic communication these days is instantaneous' (Aronin & Singleton, 2007: 5) and therefore staff greet customers in whichever language they feel is appropriate at that moment in time. The manager believes that usually when customers come to a traditional Italian restaurant they expect to be served by Italian waiters and therefore he ensures that it is the Italian staff that can communicate in English that interact with the customers. He believes it creates a theatrical and authentic environment. This suggests that, whether it is subconscious or not, restaurant P use their multilingual nature to their advantage and in order to create an authentic Italian restaurant. In terms of other customer nationalities, usually the Italian customers that dine at the restaurant are known by the staff and therefore are spoken to in Italian. The manager explained that when a German family came to the restaurant, he spoke to them in German. He said he communicated to them in their vernacular, even though they could all speak English, because it provides a sense of warmth and inclusion. This suggests that the manager uses multilingualism as a marketing strategy, in order to allow customers to have a relaxed experience at this branch of P.

We also carried out an interview with the manager of the Didsbury branch. However he wasn't as cooperative as the manager of the Manchester City Centre branch and his responses to our questions consisted more of yes and no answers without any extra information added. He did inform us that he hires his staff based mainly on experience and said that if they can speak English and Italian then this is a bonus.

Overall, from the results of our narrative interviews it could be suggested that the managers do use the multilingual nature of restaurant P to create an authentic atmosphere for the customers. Although, several problems have arisen in the past & there are no language specifications in the job description, it seems that the managers of these branches of P see the multilingual nature of their restaurants as a positive thing and use it to their advantage.

Observation

Labov (1972) stated that 'the aim of linguistic research in the community must be to find out how people talk when they are not being systematically observed; yet we can only obtain this data by systematic observation' (Labov, 1972:209). This is a problem we knew we had to overcome when observing the employees at restaurant P as we wanted to ensure we received maximum accuracy in our results. An observation position was taken in restaurant P at both the Manchester city centre branch and Didsbury branch. However, we didn't want to create an Observers Paradox as this would affect the outcome of our results so we kept the reason for our visit unknown. Thankfully we achieved this and our results can be considered reliable, correctly showing the natural interaction of the staff's vernacular at restaurant P.

As prearranged all members of our team visited both branches of restaurant P, we chose to visit each restaurant on a Thursday evening, one week apart. This was to ensure we experienced each restaurant on similar business scales, as a busy Friday night compared to a Monday lunchtime could present different results. Two of us were sat at the bar, examining the whole restaurant's ambience, focusing mainly on how the staff interact with each other and the other two group members were seated at a different table, closely observing the style of language the staff use with the customers.

The data we collected from this fieldwork technique mainly focused on answering the following research questions:

1. Does the style of language used help create an authentic atmosphere for the customers in the restaurant?
2. Is the Italian language used specifically to create a genuine Italian atmosphere, or is it just subconscious?
3. Do the multilingual staff tend to code-switch between the languages they speak in a single conversation, if so is it transactional or for social reasons?

Analysis of our Observations

1) From analysing our results it could be suggested that the style of language used within restaurants P is used to create an authentic atmosphere for the customers. One reason we draw this conclusion is because, during observations at both branches, we witnessed Italian customers dining at the restaurant.

Unsure of whether these customers were Italians on holiday or Italians living in England, we judged that they potentially chose to dine at restaurant P due to the authentic atmosphere present allowing them to feel more welcome and at home. Furthermore, during our visit to the Didsbury branch, it was a customer's birthday. The staff sung a birthday song in Italian. It comprised of a similar tune and rhythm to the English birthday song but contained Italian words. This element also obviously helps create an authentic feel to the extent that the customer could be enjoying their birthday on holiday in Italy.

2) We observed that Italian was spoken between staff, even when it was unlikely any of the customers could hear them. We thought that this perhaps shows speaking in Italian isn't necessarily used just to create a genuine Italian atmosphere but the staff speak in Italian to each other purely because it is their vernacular. We noted that at times when the restaurant was at its busiest Italian was spoken; perhaps implying they used their native tongue in order to be clear as they were rushed. Furthermore, an interesting aspect that was prominent was that the wide range of nationalities working at the restaurant meant that several languages including Portuguese and Spanish were spoken. These minority languages spoken in restaurant P were only used towards fellow staff of that particular nationality, again showing the range of languages spoken was just because it was their native tongue, not so much a marketing strategy.

We did however note that on entrance to and exit from the restaurant, staff greeted us and the other customers in Italian. This may be done to create an Italian ambience from the offset which will then allow the customers to leave feeling like they had a true Italian dining experience. Moreover, it could be proposed that greeting customers in Italian may not be a subconscious way of speech, but purposely used as a way to welcome them out of the UK and into their Italian restaurant. However, on the other hand, we understood that these Italian greetings could just be simply subconscious as Italian is many of the P staff's first language.

3) Code switching was apparent constantly throughout the visits at both branches. We noted that some staff spoke with a strong Italian accent but spoke in English towards English customers and Italian was used towards Italian customers. *Multilingualism as a New Linguistic Dispensation* by Aronin & Singleton recognises the 'increasingly deep and broad' use of multilingualism in this century. (Aronin & Singleton, 2007: 1). This is reflected in our results by the constant use of code switching, suggesting that during the process of hiring staff, being able to speak Italian and English is preferred. Moreover, multilingualism is recognised to bring 'even more mobility and flux than society in general." (Aronin & Singleton, 2007: 6); perhaps suggesting that code switching is used for transactional purposes and to achieve an authentic feel which will not only attract English customers but customers from all nationalities.

Another interesting aspect of restaurant P we noticed during our observation was that a table next to us complained about their food. The young Italian waitress was dealing with the problem and then called her manager over to the table to help her deal with the situation. Both members of staff spoke to the customers in English but, when they walked away from the table, they communicated in Italian. This perhaps implies the two members of staff didn't want the English customers to overhear what they were saying about the situation. However it could have also been because both of their vernacular way of speaking was in Italian. Holmes and Stubbe (2004) carried out a study looking at 'Strategic code-switching in New Zealand workplaces'. They focused their study on switching between Samoan and English and switching between different varieties of New Zealand English within a factory environment. (Holmes & Stubbe. 2004:135). During their study they noticed that code-switching could also take the form of style-switching in order to convey a special effect. This relates to our study, as we believe the variation in language across the restaurant is used to help create an Italian atmosphere, not just because it is the staff's native tongue.

Trip Advisor Reviews

Trip Advisor is a travel website that presents us with unbiased views of hotels, restaurants and locations. There is an interactive forum in which customers or potential customers can ask questions and gain a considerable amount of insight into the pros and cons of a particular destination.

This chosen method is particularly useful when attempting to determine how multilingualism is used in restaurant P – we can reliably review customer's opinions and thoughts without having to directly source anyone from the restaurant.

We found a considerable amount of information concerning multilingualism and if or how language affected the dining experience of the customers. In the discussion to follow regarding the reviews, we have decided to keep the reviewers names anonymous in order to protect the identity and overcome any publishing issues.

One aspect of the dining experience that interested us in our research was whether or not the 'Italian' accent created a certain ambience in the restaurant. This refers back to our aims in which we focus on whether the Italian language is used to create a genuine Italian atmosphere, or whether or not the use of this language was simply subconscious.

Restaurant P: Manchester City Centre

If we look firstly at the Manchester City Centre branch, many of the reviews talk about how the staff played a considerable role creating a welcoming and buzzing atmosphere, below are a few quotes taken from some of the positive reviews:

 "The real wow-factor of the evening was our waiter, this Italian gent who know how to make customers feel like a million bucks"

"*The staff are lovely and mainly authentically Italian. There is always a decent atmosphere."*

"Not only did it look very appealing and inviting but from the moment we walked in the whole evening was really delivered – first class service, attention to detail and nice ambience."

"It feels authentic"

"Our waiter, Lorenzo, was particularly nice, I loved his accent. The place can be a bit loud for some but this is an Italian restaurant and they are like this – it's part of the game!"

It seems that a lot of the customers picked up on the idea that the Italian accent and language helps in creating a much more authentic environment. Another of our aims was focussed on the idea that the staff that work in restaurant P consciously alter their language in order to enhance the restaurants reputation. From the trip advisor reviews it is difficult to propose any reasonable research based on this idea given that the customers are just as unaware as we are – but what we can say is that if it is a conscious effort that restaurant P use language to enhance the customer's experience, to a certain extent it is effective. This particular aim will be further developed through our other methods such as narrative interviews with the staff and branch managers.

Obviously the reviews were not all positive; many of the customers picked up on how language was a barrier and talked about how this difference in language affected their dining experience negatively.

Below are some examples of how language can have a negative effect:

"The waiter spoke very fast and with his accent we found it a bit of a challenge to understand him"

"We asked the waiter to describe some of the dishes for us and it may have been down to the language barrier but what he described certainly wasn't what was served on the plate"

"Food was lovely but the waiters were too loud when they spoke to each other in Italian"

We can relate a lot of the ideas above put forward by the customers to the article written by Larissa Aronin and David Singleton "Multilingualism as a New Linguistic Dispensation". A major theme of the article focuses on the idea of personal identity and to what extent people modify and change their language in order to adhere to the needs of another. Obviously we cannot state it conclusively, but it seems many of the waiters attempt to preserve their personal identity – Italian has a particularly distinct, loud, fast-paced interactional style that seems to be reflected even in their English.

Restaurant P: West Didsbury

If we now look at the reviews that focus on the branch in West Didsbury, we can attempt to reach a definite answer as to whether or not language is used as a positive marketing strategy. Below are examples of some of the positive reviews from the West Didsbury branch:

"Always a good night here, love the atmosphere and service and meet many Italian people here; it's just an exceptional place"

"The food is great – the place has a good Italian flare"

"This is a very attractive restaurant with Italian staff and a busy sociable atmosphere"

"Bustling venue – you could be in Italy!!!"

"Let's face it, after traditional English chippies run by Chinese ladies and popular Italian restaurants where waiters and cooks are British one has to make a notice of place where it all suddenly comes together: Italian food – Italian staff"

Again we are seeing very similar ideas come through in the customer's reviews. The authenticity of the place is further enhanced through the use of the Italian language. A problem we faced when looking at online reviews is that the data we want is not always available to us. We did not manage to find many reviews that looked at language as a barrier in the West Didsbury branch, although the one we found did provide us with some help:

"The Italian waiters seemed very confused with our orders and could not deliver our meals to us accurately"

It seems both restaurants have very similar themed reviews that reflect how language is used by the waiters to create an authentic feel, but also how language can also be problematic – especially in a business situation where staff are dealing with a range of languages given the multicultural nature of language.

It is somewhat paradoxical; what seems to be a positive marketing strategy is also seen as a barrier in communication. It seems restaurant P has chosen to preserve the authenticity of the atmosphere rather than build on a clear communicative style. This statement, however, can only be conclusive if we consider our other methods and build on the results we have already gained through this method of analysis.

Discussion

Our first aim was to look at how language is used as a marketing strategy within the restaurant. After carrying out our research we believe the use of language isn't necessarily a conscious strategic marketing tool but is still beneficial to the establishment. We came to this conclusion after interviewing the manager of the city centre branch of restaurant P. He said he would employ experience over language skills, therefore proving good service is more important than everyone speaking Italian. Although the manager does believe language skills in an employee are an added bonus.

The second aim we focused on was directed at P customers and whether or not the language used by the staff affected their dining experience. The methods we used to determine customer opinion on language use in P were: Questionnaire elicitation and analysing Trip Advisor reviews. After reviewing the answers we were given to the Questionnaires the general trend was predominantly positive as many customers thought that language enhanced their dining experience.

Our third aim looked at whether or not multilingualism raised any issues within the restaurant between both staff and customers. From the customer's point of view, Trip Advisor found both positive and negative reviews regarding the use of language in restaurant P. This suggests that although some people believe the use of Italian creates an authentic atmosphere, others however believe it creates communicative problems. During the method of observation, we concluded that the ability to speak Italian and English solved more problems than it created. As mentioned previously, when a problem arose the Italian staff spoke in their native tongue in order to quickly solve the problem.

Conclusion

At the beginning of our research project we set out to specifically investigate whether or not restaurant P used its multilingual nature to its advantage and if the multilingual skills found in restaurant P were consciously used as a marketing strategy. After carrying out several research methods and analysing our results we feel that the multilingual nature of restaurant P is predominantly considered as a

positive aspect of the business by customers and staff alike. Although, some reviewers on Trip Advisor stated that the cross-cultural communication caused problems during their dining experience and the manager stated that he doesn't specifically hire staff on the basis of what languages they speak, we considered the multilingual nature of this business as beneficial. Although during our interviews, the manager of the Manchester City Centre branch of restaurant P didn't specifically state that he uses language as a marketing strategy he did however say that he uses Italian to create a theatrical and authentic environment for the customers. We believe, therefore that he subconsciously uses the multilingual nature of the restaurant as a marketing strategy. We believe the code-switching between Italian and English seen first-hand in restaurant P is done not only to ease communication between the workforce, but also to create that true authentic Italian atmosphere that the manager of P believes an Italian restaurant should have. Aronin & Singleton (2007:1) pointed out how 'increasingly deep and broad' the effects of multilingualism are in the contemporary world. We believe that these 'deep and broad' effects of multilingualism are reflected in the running of the successful multilingual business that is restaurant P.

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