

Students' Attitudes and Opinions in a Context of Bilingualism with a Minority Language

Italian and Sardinian Compared

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Abstract In this chapter, the results of an investigation on language attitudes towards Italian and Sardinian are presented. Attitudes are crucial in contexts of bilingualism or bilectalism, as they affect the possibilities of a minority language to survive. Students' attitudes in Sardinia were studied with a direct method, i.e., a written questionnaire: participants had to express their degree of agreement on a Likert scale with statements concerning Italian and Sardinian. Results show that Italian is seen as the most prestigious language. Students gave generally favourable opinions on Sardinian and its private and public use as well, but they acknowledged its little instrumental importance. Proficiency and frequent use of Sardinian proved to relate with positive attitudes towards that language. Furthermore, high school students turned out to be more interested in the benefits of the majority language than students in the early adolescence. The implications of these findings are discussed.

Keywords Language attitudes. Language opinions. Direct method. Sardinian. Italian. Likert scale.

Summary 1 Sociolinguistic Framework. – 2 Methodology. – 2.1 Participants. – 2.2 Questionnaire. – 3 Results. – 4 Discussion. – 5 Conclusions.

1 Sociolinguistic Framework

Research on language attitudes often focused on contexts of bidialectalism, bilectalism (Rowe, Grohmann 2013) or bilingualism with local languages. Studying language attitudes in such contexts is particularly important. Language attitudes are well known to be a key factor in processes of language decline, language shift and, in the most extreme cases, language death.¹ Economic, social and political pressure may push speakers to perceive the local language negatively and assign more prestige to a more widely spoken language. A consequence of this is a gradual shrinkage in the functions and domains of use of the minority language, which in turn might lead to more negative attitudes towards it and the interruption of its intergenerational transmission (Sasse 1992; Wolfram 2002; Thomason 2015). At the same time though, attitudes are also a fundamental factor in processes of maintenance or revitalisation of endangered languages.² A mixture of political, symbolic and identity-related reasons, along with economic ones in some cases, might lead to an increase in the prestige of a minority language or to a renewed interest in it (Sasse 1992; Thomason 2015), which in turn can push people to use it again, to pass it on to new generations or even to learn it from scratch as an L2 (O'Rourke 2011; 2018). Moreover, language attitudes are crucial for a successful implementation of language policies that safeguard endangered languages: top-down interventions need to take into account the attitudes of society, although policy-makers often try to modify them (cf. Spolsky 2009; Garrett 2010; Kircher, Zipp 2022). In sum, the importance of attitudes for languages can be summarised by the following comparison:

a positive attitude to healthy eating and exercise may increase life expectancy. In the life of a language, attitudes to that language appear to be important in language restoration, preservation, decay or death. (Baker 1992, 9)

For the reasons just described, the sociolinguistic situation of Sardinian is particularly suited to investigations on language attitudes. Sardinian is a romance language spoken on the island of Sardinia, Italy. In the vast majority of the island, Italian and Sardinian are spoken and co-exist in a condition of unbalanced bilingualism, with the former having a clearly prevailing role in essentially all domains of language use (Schjerve 2017; Marongiu 2019). This situation is

¹ Cf. Baker 1992; Sasse 1992; Sallabank 2013; Kircher, Zipp 2022.

² Cf. Baker 1992; Sasse 1992; Bradley 2002; Brenzinger et al. 2003; Sallabank 2013; Thomason 2015; Kircher, Zipp 2022.

part of a more general phenomenon found in Italy. Indeed, the relationship between Italian and any regional local language is characterised by a condition of *dilalia* (Berruto 1987), namely a functional overlap limited to informal contexts, as both codes are used in ordinary spoken conversation, with the national language being in many areas the most frequent means of communication in those contexts too (Istat 2017; Berruto 2018). Such a condition is the result of a decline in the use of the local languages in favour of a more generalised use of Italian that has taken place all over Italy since soon after World War II, although the impact and the rate of the Italianisation of speech communities exhibits regional differences (Berruto 2018). Within this general context, Sardinia went through a process of language shift in the second half of the twentieth century, with the local language not only overlooked in public domains, but also progressively replaced by Italian as the language of primary socialisation of children and in other private domains (Schjerve 2017; Mereu 2021). As can be said for many situations in other parts of Italy, this process can be regarded as both a cause and a consequence of negative attitudes towards the local language spread across speakers until a few decades ago (Nelde, Strubell, Williams 1996; Tufi 2013). Italian was seen as the language of social mobility, while the local language was considered as helpless or even damaging for such socio-economic progress (Nelde, Strubell, Williams 1996; Tufi 2013; Calaresu, Pisano 2017). In other terms, Sardinian was surrounded by generally unfavourable attitudes and it was often openly stigmatised, especially in school contexts.³ Measures of language policy and planning were therefore regarded as necessary for the safeguarding of the local language. The Autonomous Region of Sardinia approved Act no. 26 in 1997 (Regione Autonoma della Sardegna 1997), which was subsequently replaced in 2018 by Act no 22 (BURAS 2018). Moreover, the Regional Administration occasionally released multi-year language planning documents to give guidelines for future uses of Sardinian (Regione Autonoma della Sardegna 2011; 2020). Despite some differences among these language policy and planning measures, it is not difficult to notice their similarities in terms of goals and objectives. First of all, there is an attempt to start a process that should lead to societal bilingualism, by making Sardinian a language used regularly in different domains of the public sphere (Lai 2018; Mura 2019; Mereu 2021). Moreover, these top-down initiatives aimed at improving the way Sardinian is perceived by the community, namely at the enhancement of its prestige (Mura 2019; Mereu 2021). The most important difference with other similar situations in Italy is the fact that Sardinian has been officially accorded the status of minority language

3 Nelde, Strubell, Williams 1996; Viridis 2003; Calaresu, Pisano 2017; Mongili 2017.

by the Italian Parliament, with the National Act no. 482 (Parlamento Italiano 1999). This Act has contributed to a growing (albeit still marginal) presence of Sardinian in public contexts from which it was traditionally excluded or very scarcely present, such as the web, administrative documents, mass media, toponymy and school (cf. Marra 2012; Mereu 2019; Mura, Santulli 2023).

In the new century, a more positive orientation towards the minority language seems to be spreading across the island, as Sardinian is increasingly seen as an important part of Sardinians' identity.⁴ As Pinto (2013) and Mereu (2021) already noted, a growing favourable disposition towards the local language can also be inferred by participants' overestimation of their own competences in Sardinian observed in various sociolinguistic studies conducted in the last 20 years (Oppo 2007; Lavinio, Lanero 2008; Paulis, Pinto, Putzu 2013). Such a positive orientation towards Sardinian should be considered within a general renewed appreciation of local varieties in Italy (Beruto 2018) and, even more generally, in many parts of Western Europe (see Lasagabaster, Huguet 2007; Sallabank 2013). Nevertheless, as often happens when looking at attitudes at different levels of specificity (Baker 1992), while an abstract idea of Sardinian generally raises a widely shared positive mental disposition, its public use in certain contexts, for example as a skill in the job market or as a medium of instruction in schools and universities, is still very controversial (Valdes 2007; Brau 2010; Mura 2019). This is due to the prevailing role of Italian, and partially English, for such functions, and to the risk of going against individual rights if a relatively scarcely spoken local language is publicly used in the modern, global and multicultural society (Mura 2019).

In this chapter, I will present the results of part of a larger research project on students' language attitudes in Sardinia. Here, the focus will be put on the data emerged from a direct method (Garrett 2010), i.e., a written questionnaire. This type of methodology has already been adopted in studies conducted in Sardinia.⁵ In this case, however, to collect attitudinal data, an adaptation of surveys that have been widely used internationally in contexts of bilingualism with minority languages – but, to the best of my knowledge, never in Sardinia – was chosen. Thanks to this tool, opinions on Sardinian will be directly compared with those on Italian, as the questions referring to Sardinian were the same (or very similar) as the questions referring to Italian (see Section 2). Furthermore, as opinions were asked on different aspects concerning language attitudes, participants' orientation towards both abstract ideas and specific uses

⁴ Valdes 2007; Brau 2010; Gargiulo 2014; Deiana 2016; Mura 2019.

⁵ Valdes 2007; Brau 2010; Gargiulo 2014; Deiana 2016; Mura 2019.

of languages will be examined. The data presented here will help researchers and policy-makers to understand whether the relatively positive attitudes towards Sardinian shown in the studies conducted over the last 20 years also concern the younger generations and whether there are differences within them according to sociodemographic and sociolinguistic profiles. Since similar versions of the questionnaire have been already adopted in numerous studies conducted in several European regions, the results presented here can also contribute to cross-context comparisons of attitudinal tendencies in situations of bilingualism with a minority language.

2 Methodology

2.1 Participants

303 participants, who were, at the time of the administration, school or university students, took part in the study. Students were recruited with the collaboration of schools' principals and professors.

Two educational institutions comprising primary and secondary schools were involved (henceforth *Istituto/i Comprensivo/i*), as well as two high schools and two universities. Half of the schools/universities are located in the southern half of the island, where Campidanese Sardinian is spoken (Blasco Ferrer 1984), while the other half are located in the northern half of the island, where Logudorese Sardinian is spoken (Blasco Ferrer 1984). The *Istituto Comprensivo* in the Campidanese area is located in a town with around 25,000 inhabitants (Iglesias), the *Istituto Comprensivo* in the Logudorese area is located in two towns with approximately 2,000 inhabitants (Irgoli and Galtelli). The two high schools in the Campidanese and Logudorese areas are located in two towns with respectively around 11,000 (Guspini) and 7,500 (Bosa) inhabitants. The two universities are located in the cities of Cagliari and Sassari. Efforts were made to balance the size of the towns where the schools involved are located. Due to the difficulties in finding schools that were willing to collaborate, especially during Covid times, it was not possible to do so for the two *Istituti Comprensivi*, while the goal was achieved for the high schools and the universities. However, in the high school of the Logudorese area, it was possible to also work with two classes of the first two years, whereas it was not possible to do so with the high school of the Campidanese area. More in general, it was difficult to balance the number of participants in the different age groups, although attempts were made in this sense.

In sum, of the 303 participants who took part in the study, 145 (47.85%) were female, and 158 (52.15%) were male. 122 (40.26%) were from the Campidanese-speaking area, 162 (53.47%) from the

Logudorese-speaking area, and 19 (6.27%) from alloglot areas where a non-Sardinian variety is spoken (Algherese and Sassarese areas, cf. Spiga 2007, 65). 89 participants (29.37%) belonged to the 9- to 12-year age group (students attending an *Istituto Comprensivo*), 24 participants (7.92%) to the 14- to 15-year age group (students attending one of the first two-years of high school), 146 participants (48.18%) to the 18- to 19-year age group (students attending the last year of high school), 44 participants (14.52%) had 20 years of age or more (students attending university).

2.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire used to collect attitudinal data is a free adaptation of two surveys conducted in Wales, Sharp et al. (1973), and Baker (1992). More specifically, the sections where participants were required to express their degree of agreement with given statements (such as “It is nice to hear Language X being spoken”) were adapted. These sections of the questionnaires have been frequently used for studies conducted in contexts of bilingualism with minority languages. Sharp et al.’ survey has been adapted for the Catalan situation by the Catalan Education Service (SEDEC 1983) and it has been recently used by several studies, primarily in Iberic contexts (e.g., Ianos et al. 2017; Ubalde, Alarcón, Lapresta 2017). Similarly, Baker’ survey has been adapted and used in studies across Europe in bilectal contexts (e.g., Lasagabaster, Huguet 2007; Falomir 2014). The surveys have been mostly administered in school settings to students of different ages, as those involved in my study.

I created a set of 12 questions per language (see Appendix), by translating to Italian, and adapting some of the sentences present in Sharp et al. (1973) and Baker (1992) and their subsequent renditions. More precisely, I chose sentences that were able to elicit data on important attitudinal aspects already highlighted by Ianos et al. (2017): perceived aesthetic value and beauty of the languages, willingness to use and transmit them, their potential uses at school, their importance. For a more fine-grained analysis and in order to cover further elements that were likely salient in the Sardinian context, the sentences concerning languages’ importance were divided into those concerning the instrumental importance and those concerning the integrative importance, following Gardner, Lambert (1972). The sentences dealing with the perceived importance of the two languages were taken from a different section of Baker’s questionnaire, named “use, value and status” (Baker 1992, 55). Finally, sentences related to the connection between language and identity were also included; one of these sentences (see ‘Identity (1)’ in the Appendix) was taken from the survey administered in Sardinia by Valdes (2007).

In sum, 6 different topics were covered by the set of sentences: aesthetic value, use and transmission, use at school, instrumental importance, integrative importance, identity. Two questions for each topic were selected, for a total of 12 sentences per language. For a more reliable comparison, the statements referring to Italian and those referring to Sardinian were kept as similar to each other as possible. In some cases, the different sociolinguistic conditions of the two languages (e.g., concerning the use of them in the school context) made it impossible to use the same statement for both (see 'School (2)' in the Appendix).

Participants had to express their degree of agreement on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (= 'totally disagree') to 6 (= 'totally agree').⁶ The sentences had different polarities to avoid participants from being constantly presented with the same viewpoint (e.g., compare 'Aesthetic value (1)' and 'Aesthetic value (2)' in the Appendix). Clearly, reverse scoring was applied for sentences with negative polarity.

Students were first asked to fill out a questionnaire which asked for demographic data (gender and age), information on their experiences of school activities/lectures carried out in Sardinian, and their general linguistic profile: more specifically, questions on past language habits, current language habits, and a self-evaluation of language proficiency contributed to generate a cumulative score and assign participants a level of bilingualism based on their self-reports. This section of the questionnaire was a translation and adaptation of parts of the survey used in the BALED project (2012-15).⁷ In addition, a short picture-naming task was included: students were presented with a series of 20 images and required to write, in both Italian and Sardinian, the name of each depicted object. The images were taken from Snodgrass, Vanderwart (1980) and the level of difficulty in naming them in Sardinian was based on normative data on age of acquisition, familiarity and concept agreement preliminarily collected (Mura, Lebani 2022). This task made it possible to measure a separate score of participants' degree of bilingualism, which did not rely on their self-reports but was based on the proportion of accurate responses.⁸

6 A 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (= 'totally disagree') to 6 (= 'totally agree'), was chosen in order to be consistent with other attitudinal data eliciting tools used in the project (but not discussed in this chapter). Pilot testing was conducted with 7-point questionnaires: however, in the indirect methodology participants tended to excessively rely on the neutral point, so that it was removed to force participants to take a stance.

7 BALED Bilingualism and Bilingual Education: the development of linguistic and cognitive abilities in different types of bilinguals [MIS 377313]. P.I.: Prof. Ianthi Maria Tsimpli.

8 As the proportion of accurate responses in Italian was very often at ceiling (or nearly), it was decided to consider the proportion of accurate responses in Sardinian as a

The anonymity of the participants was ensured in all parts of the questionnaire. The survey was administered during regular school or academic time, with teachers/professors present in the classroom. As the data collection took place during Covid time in the spring of 2021, high school and university classes were conducted online via computer platforms. More specifically, the survey was administered through the software *Qualtrics*.⁹ As for the *Istituti Comprensivi*, classes were in person, and thus, a paper version of the questionnaire was administered.

3 Results

Table 1 presents the mean,¹⁰ standard deviation and median for the entire set of 12 statements on Italian and Sardinian. Since on a scale from 1 to 6 the midpoint is 3.5, both languages received evaluations that fall into the positive side of the spectrum. However, the favourable disposition towards Italian is generally stronger than that towards Sardinian, as the higher mean and median emerged from the statements on Italian suggest.

Table 1 Mean, standard deviation and median emerged from the whole set of 12 statements on Italian and Sardinian

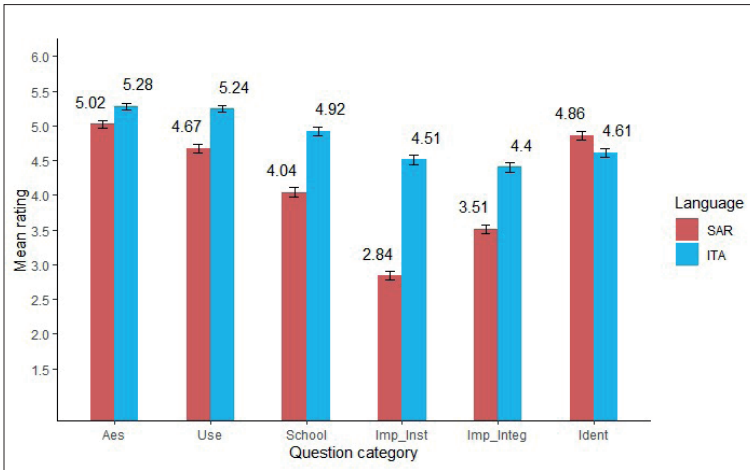
| | Mean | (St. Dev.) | Median |
|-------------------------|------|------------|--------|
| Statements on Italian | 4.82 | (0.57) | 5.10 |
| Statements on Sardinian | 4.16 | (0.88) | 4.59 |

Since participants had to express their opinion on 12 sentences concerning six different attitudinal components, a visual representation of the average evaluations received by each language in each component is reported [graph 1]. The only question category where Sardinian received more favourable evaluations than Italian was the one concerning the connection between language and identity. In all the other cases, the majority language (Italian) was rated higher than

measure of participants' degree of bilingualism.

⁹ <https://www.qualtrics.com/>.

¹⁰ The use of the mean and parametric statistics is not without controversy for data derived from Likert scales. Nonetheless, following recent studies that show the reliability of parametric measures even for Likert or Likert-type scales (especially when considering more items on aggregate and when the scale is made up of more than five points, Norman 2010; Brown 2011; Gibson, Piantadosi, Fedorenko 2011; Boone, Boone 2012; Kizach 2014; Harpe 2015), such measures were adopted in this work and their main results are reported in this chapter.



Graph 1 Mean evaluation received by Sardinian and Italian in each question category. Note. Aes = aesthetic value; Use = use and transmission; School = potential uses at school; Imp_Inst = instrumental importance; Imp_Integ = integrative importance; Ident = identity

the minority language (Sardinian). However, Sardinian obtained relatively positive evaluations on the statements about the perceived aesthetic value of the language, the willingness to use and transmit it, and – albeit to a lesser extent – its potential uses in the school context. In all those questions, the evaluations for Italian were almost at ceiling. The largest gap between the evaluations on Italian and the evaluations on Sardinian emerged from the statements referring to the importance of the languages. Positive evaluations emerged on average when those statements concerned Italian, whereas a mean evaluation very close to the midpoint of the scale resulted from the statements referring to the integrative importance of Sardinian, and a mean evaluation that clearly falls into the negative side of the rating scale resulted from the statements referring to its instrumental importance. Thus, the largest difference between the ratings received by Italian and Sardinian was observed when participants had to express their perceptions on the instrumental usefulness of the two languages.

Table 2 allows for a more fine-grained look of the results, as it reports the mean, median and mode, as well as the percentage of agreement, for each single statement. The percentage of agreement is the proportion of participants who responded with one of the three options of agreement (hence, the percentage of disagreement can be derived from it, namely the proportion of participants who selected one of the three options of disagreement).

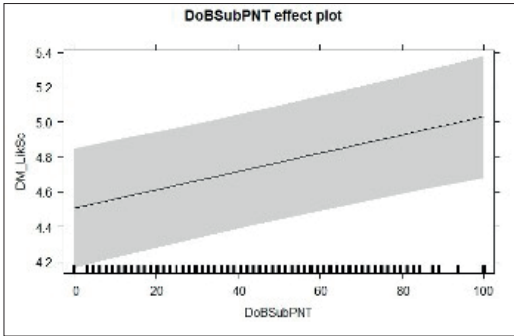
Table 2 Measures of central tendency and agreement percentage concerning each of the 12 statements on Italian and Sardinian

| Statement | Mean | | Median | | Mode | | Agreement percentage | |
|-------------|---------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|
| | Italian | Sardinian | Italian | Sardinian | Italian | Sardinian | Italian | Sardinian |
| Aes.1 | 5.37 | 5.11 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 91.4 | 84.8 |
| Aes.2 | 5.17 | 4.95 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 92.7 | 85.8 |
| Use1 | 5.27 | 4.63 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 88.4 | 74.9 |
| Use2 | 5.17 | 4.73 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 86.5 | 83.8 |
| School1 | 5.30 | 4.63 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 88.7 | 77.4 |
| School2 | 4.50 | 3.47 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 1 | 71 | 51 |
| Imp.Inst.1 | 5.28 | 2.67 | 6 | 3 | 6 | 1 | 92 | 25.6 |
| Imp.Inst.2 | 3.73 | 2.97 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 56.3 | 37.3 |
| Imp.Integ.1 | 4.75 | 3.80 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 84 | 63.8 |
| Imp.Integ.2 | 4.05 | 3.21 | 4 | 3 | 6 | 2 | 64.3 | 39.2 |
| Identity1 | 5.03 | 5.17 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 88.6 | 91.3 |
| Identity2 | 4.16 | 4.54 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 67.6 | 79.7 |

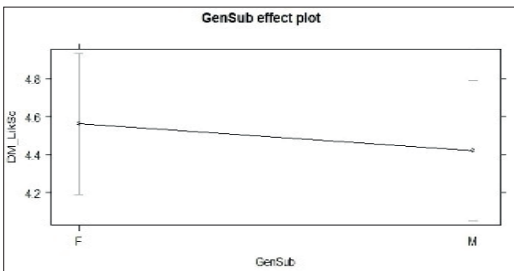
To understand how participants with different sociolinguistic profiles answered the questions, a mixed-effect linear model was run using the *R* package *lme4* (Bates et al. 2015). As the same participant responded to more than one question and the same question was responded to by more than one participant, the observations from the same participant and referring to the same question were not independent among one another. Thus, it was appropriate to put subjects and items as random intercepts of the model (cf. Winter 2020; Brown 2021). The language to which the statements referred was used as the random slope of the two random intercepts for two reasons: (I) the effect of the language to which the statements referred was most likely not the same for all participants and for all statements, (II) due to the theoretical importance of such a variable in this study.

As for the fixed effects, a stepwise backwards elimination procedure was carried out through the Likelihood Ratio Test (Barr et al. 2013; Winter 2020). Firstly, the relevance of the interaction between each participant-related variable and the language to which the statements referred was measured. If the interaction did not significantly improve the predictive power of the model, the relevance of the participant-related variable with no interaction was measured. All variables that did not significantly improve the model were excluded.

The final model retained the following fixed effects: subjects' degree of bilingualism measured through the picture-naming task (DoBSubPNT), subjects' gender (GenSub), the interaction between subjects' degree of bilingualism measured through self-reports and the language to which the Likert-scale statements referred (DoBSubSR * LikScLanguage), and the interaction between subjects' age and the language to which the Likert-scale statements referred (AgeSub * LikScLanguage).

**Graph 2**

Graph showing the effect of the degree of bilingualism measured through the picture-naming task on the evaluations. Note. The y-axis shows a part of the six-point evaluation scale adopted in the direct method with Likert-scales (DM_LikSc); the x-axis shows the degree of bilingualism measured as the proportion of correct answers given in the picture-naming task

**Graph 3**

Graph showing the effect of the participants' gender on the evaluations. Note. The y-axis shows a part of the six-point evaluation scale. On the x-axis: F = female participants, M = male participants

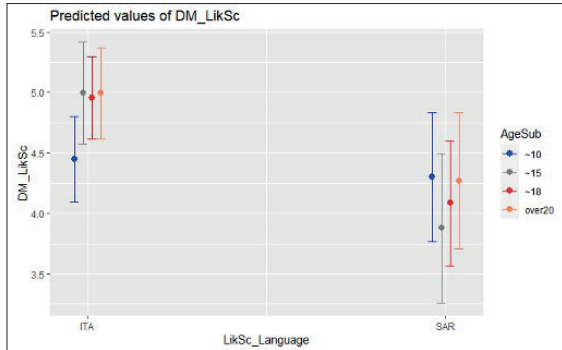
The effect of subjects' degree of bilingualism measured through the picture naming task was statistically significant with $p = 0.004$. It is possible to see that the better participants' performances in the picture naming task, the more positive their evaluations, regardless of the language to which the statements referred [graph 2].

The effect of participants' gender - with no interaction with language - turned out to be statistically significant with $p = 0.018$. Hence, this variable was significant only at the 95% confidence level and not at the 99% level. Moreover, although the difference between male and female participants did not seem to be due to chance, such a difference was not large in absolute value [graph 3]. Female participants were slightly more generous in their evaluations than male participants, regardless of the language to which the statements referred.

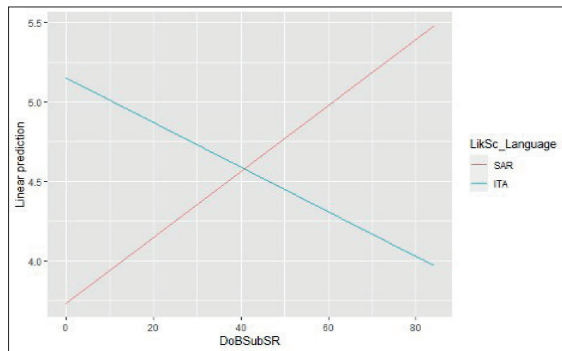
As for the interactions, it was necessary to run post-hoc analyses to understand their actual effect on the evaluations given. Thus, I resorted to estimated marginal means and pairwise comparisons, measured with the R package *emmeans* (Lenth 2022). The younger age group tended to give less favourable opinions when the statements referred to Italian and more favourable opinions when the statements referred to Sardinian [graph 4]. The other three age groups gave very similar opinions when the statements referred to Italian, while the high school

Graph 4

Interaction between participants' age and language to which the statements referred. Note. The y-axis shows a part of the six-point evaluation scale. On the x-axis: ITA = statements referred to Italian, SAR = statements referred to Sardinian

**Graph 5**

Interaction between participants' self-reported degree of bilingualism and language to which the statements referred. Note. The y-axis shows a part of the six-point evaluation scale; the x-axis shows the degree of bilingualism based on participants' self-reports and measured as a percentage



students tended to give less favourable opinions than university students when the statements referred to Sardinian. Nonetheless, the pairwise comparisons of the estimated marginal means reveal that, as far as the Sardinian language was concerned, none of the comparisons between age groups was statistically significant. As for the Italian language, the comparison between students around 10 years of age and students around 18 years of age was the only one that reached the significance level: ITA~10 vs. ITA~18 → estimate = -0.3318; SE = 0.098; z ratio = -3.384; **p value = 0.0164**. This comparison is particularly important as it involves the two numerically largest age groups.

As the other interaction included a continuous variable (i.e., the degree of bilingualism measured through self-reports), in order to calculate its effect I resorted to the estimated marginal means of linear trends. The interaction turned out to have a statistically significant effect with $p < 0.001$, and [graph 5] clarifies the type of effect. The more participants declared to know and use Sardinian alongside Italian, the more their evaluations on Sardinian got positive (trend = +0.0208; SE = 0.00293) and their evaluations on Italian got negative (trend = -0.0141; SE = 0.00242).

4 Discussion

The most striking result is the difference between the responses on Sardinian given to the statements about its importance and those given to the statements about all the other topics. Therefore, it is possible to identify two macro-components in the answers, which might be labelled as 'general opinions' and 'perceived importance'. The fact that the questions on the 'perceived importance' of the languages constitute a sort of separate dimension is not entirely surprising. Indeed, they come from a separate section of Baker's questionnaire (1992) and call for an acknowledgment of the actual sociolinguistic situation rather than pure opinions. For this reason, Sharp et al. (1973) did not include these types of questions in their questionnaire, as they did not capture mere attitudes. However, the perception of instrumental and integrative importance of a language might be influenced by speakers' attitudes, and more importantly, it is likely to influence speakers' linguistic behaviours (Gardner, Lambert 1972; Gardner 1985; Gardner, MacIntyre 1991). In this respect, the results of this study show a worrying situation for Sardinian, which is not considered very useful by the younger generations and clearly less useful than the national majority language. The less than positive results obtained by the minority language in terms of integrative importance are somewhat surprising. In part, they can be explained by the fact that Italian is increasingly being used even in private and colloquial contexts. Furthermore, the overall results on Sardinian integrative importance derive from quite distant figures emerging from the two single statements related to this topic. The first statement claimed that Sardinian 'helps' in building and consolidating social relationships, while the second statement claimed that Sardinian 'is necessary' in this respect. As can be read in Table 2, the average score for the first question was 3.8, the median was 4, the most frequently selected value was 4 (= 'I partially agree'); moreover, 63.7% of participants selected an option of agreement with the statement [tab. 2]. For the second question, the average score was 3.21, the median was 3 and the most frequently selected value was 2 (= 'I disagree'); finally, only 39.2% of participants selected an option of agreement with the statement. In sum, Sardinian is deemed helpful but not necessary for social relationships. Regarding the statements on instrumental importance, the negative evaluations on Sardinian cannot be considered unexpected, given its sociolinguistic role and its function in today's society. Nevertheless, the large gap between Sardinian and Italian in terms of perceived instrumental importance might constitute an obstacle for the future vitality of the minority language. Therefore, an increase in Sardinian's instrumental usefulness is probably crucial, and policy-makers should take this factor into careful consideration. Attempts at increasing the utilitarian

importance of the minority language can also take advantage of the general positive orientation towards this language that seems to be widespread across speakers' communities on the island.

Indeed, very different results from the ones concerning languages' importance emerged from the other statements, those that elicited the 'general opinions' of participants. Students expressed overall positive evaluations on both languages. In this respect though, it should be borne in mind that a written questionnaire with Likert-scale statements constitutes a direct method of investigation of participants' language attitudes. Direct methods suffer from the well-known problems of the social desirability bias and acquiescence bias (Garrett 2010). Participants could have been influenced in their responses by their perceptions of what was socially appropriate to express and what the researcher wanted them to express. When assessing the results of this study, caution should be exercised due to these potential biases. Even though previous research was potentially affected by the same issue, the accumulation of evidence coming from previous studies¹¹ and from the present one seems to confirm Sardinians' general favourable disposition towards the island's local language. The strong identity value of Sardinian – even stronger than that of Italian – was confirmed by the results of this survey. Compared to other studies involving adults (e.g., Valdes 2007; Mura 2019), an important finding of this research is that the favourable disposition towards Sardinian seems to be generalised among the younger generations as well.

In this regard, since the study was carried out with students, it was especially interesting to understand their opinions on potential uses of the languages at school. The prevailing role of Italian in the educational context is by no means controversial or disputed by students. As for Sardinian, the overall results derive again from very different data emerged from the two single statements. The first school-related statement refers to the opportunity of teaching Sardinian in general, while the second refers to the opportunity of employing Sardinian as a medium of instruction. The first statement generated a much higher consensus, as more than 3 participants out of 4 selected an option of agreement and the most frequently selected value was 6 (= 'I completely agree'). The second statement engendered more controversial answers: the most frequently selected value was 1 (= 'I completely disagree'), but at the same time 51% of participants selected an option of agreement and 49% an option of disagreement. These results clearly suggest that the possibility of teaching Sardinian at school is very favourably seen, in line with previous research findings (Valdes 2007; Brau 2010; Mura 2019). The use of the minority language as

¹¹ Oppo 2007; Valdes 2007; Lavinio, Lanero 2008; Brau 2010; Deiana 2016; Mura 2019.

a medium of instruction alongside Italian is, instead, very divisive. Hence, a structural introduction of Sardinian at school with such a function seems still hardly reachable, at least in the short term. However, compared to both Valdes (2007) and Brau (2010), where similar questions were asked, there was a more widespread consensus over the possibility of using Sardinian as a medium of instruction. Indeed, in those studies only less than 15% of participants declared to agree with such a possibility, while in this study one participant out of two expressed a favourable position. A trajectory of increasing agreement can be hypothesised in this respect, but further studies are needed to confirm this impression. Interestingly, the high school students proved to be less positively inclined towards the use of Sardinian as medium of instruction (mean score \rightarrow \sim 15 y.o. = 2.91; \sim 18 y.o. = 3.10) compared to the university students (mean score \rightarrow over 20 y.o. = 3.86) and especially compared to the primary/secondary school students (mean score \rightarrow \sim 10 y.o. = 4.05).

This result is in line with more general findings concerning the attitudes expressed by the different age groups in this study. The younger students, those around 10 years of age, seem to be more fascinated by the minority language and considerably less fascinated by the national majority language than students who attend high school. Probably, factors such as those highlighted by Baker (1992) in accounting for a similar result in Wales, like the distance from working and parental age or the fact that children generally go to school in less urban contexts, contributed to make younger participants less sensitive to the socio-economic value of the national language and more affectively inclined towards the local language. On the contrary, high school students are likely to cognitively reflect on the socio-economic power of Italian and be more sceptical towards Sardinian (cf. Sharpe et al. 1973; Baker 1992; Ubalde, Alarcón, Lapresta 2017). The results concerning university students in this respect must be taken with much caution: adults are probably very much aware of the public debate around the valorisation of Sardinian, and this might have partially influenced their responses in a direct method like a questionnaire. Moreover, most of the university students involved in this study also attended courses on Sardinian literature and culture, which may have created a bias within participants aged 20 or older. In any case, the relatively low number of participants in this age group does not allow for in-depth considerations, much less generalisations.

The results concerning participants' gender suggest that Sardinian has nowadays overt prestige or at least is not subject to overt social stigma. Classic sociolinguistics showed that women tend to adhere more than men to the standard variety and tend to bestow more social stigma on sub-standard varieties (Labov 1990). On the contrary, in this study, both male and female students gave generally positive evaluations to the minority language, and female students were

even slightly more generous in their ratings. Thus, the traditional overt social stigma on the minority language seems to have largely disappeared, probably also because of the official provisions for the safeguard of the language taken by national and regional institutions in the last decades (see Section 1). Indeed, in contexts where there is strong institutional support for the local language, women have been found to have positive attitudes towards that language, often even more positive than men (Ubalde, Alarcón, Lapresta 2017; Price, Tamburelli 2020). By contrast, where institutional support is lacking, social stigma is more likely to occur, as shown by a recent study on Ligurian (Licata 2019), in which participants, especially women, proved to be negatively disposed towards the local variety.

The role of the degree of bilingualism in affecting the evaluations on languages is not entirely clear from the data. It seems that students who know and use both Sardinian and Italian tend to be more favourably oriented towards the local language. However, those who performed well in the picture-naming task tended to evaluate both languages better, while this was not the case when considering those who declared a high degree of bilingualism in the self-reports. This fact suggests that self-reports on language competence and use are at least partially made up of ideological and attitudinal content (cf. Pinto 2013). Those who declared to know and use Sardinian sided with Sardinian in the evaluative activity, also going against the language with which Sardinian is in contact and with which Sardinian was put in comparison in the activity, i.e., Italian. It is probably a mechanism engendered by feelings of language loyalty and language protection from socio-economically powerful neighbours (O'Laoire 2007). Nonetheless, the self-reports cannot be seen solely as disguised language attitudes and language ideologies, especially because they were very detailed in asking about participants' past and present language habits in different contexts and with different interlocutors. Therefore, the positive evaluations given to Sardinian by self-declared bilingual students also suggest that a strong background related to a local minority language and the habit of using it in different contexts often helps to have positive attitudes towards that language. This finding is not surprising, as it has been already observed in many previous studies and theoretical models, such as Gardner (1985), Baker (1992), Lasagabaster, Huguët (2007), Priestly, McKinnie, Hunter (2009), Kircher, Fox (2019), Li, Wei (2022). Clearly, it is possible to assume that favourable attitudes towards a minority language may in turn foster processes of language use, learning and consolidation. Attitudes – as Gardner (1985) and Garrett (2010) claim – can then be seen as both inputs and outputs of sociolinguistic processes.

5 Conclusions

In this study, students of different ages and located in different areas of Sardinia expressed their opinions on different aspects concerning the Italian and the Sardinian language. Italian confirmed its role as the most prestigious language, uncontroversially entitled to several public roles, for example in the school context, and thus instrumentally very important. Sardinian is seen as a language with a strong identity value, and the possibility of increasingly using this language in private and public domains generates a relatively high level of consensus, probably partially due to the public debate around its valorisation and the recent language policy and planning provisions taken by official actors. Nonetheless, students consider the local language not very useful in today's society, and this is likely affecting their actual language behaviours, keeping Sardinian in a condition of serious endangerment.

In sum, this study showed that general attitudes towards Sardinian seem to be rather positive, in line with previous research findings. However, such language attitudes often do not coincide with language behaviours, probably by virtue of the scarce instrumental importance of the language. Thus, future language policies might want to focus on measures that are potentially able to increase the integrative and utilitarian value of Sardinian, and that are consequently able to affect the actual language practices of the communities across the island.

The results of this study also suggest that, in contexts where the non-standard language has institutional support, overt social stigma is less likely to be attached to that language by both the male and female population. In line with the findings of previous studies conducted in similar contexts of bilingualism with a minority language, the positive orientation of the early adolescents towards the local language seem to decline in the mid- and late adolescence, as students tend to be increasingly more interested in the advantages offered by the national majority language. Finally, language background, use and ability confirm their crucial role in affecting speakers' language attitudes.

This study has some limitations, and its findings should be looked at with caution. First of all, the sample was unbalanced with respect to some sociolinguistic variables that were taken into consideration, particularly in terms of age. Age groups that are numerically more similar are certainly desirable in future research. A clearer division between participants from an urban context and those from a rural context can be interesting, as people with a rural provenance tend to preserve the local language more (Oppo 2007) and this might also affect their attitudes. In this study, the availability of students, teachers, and principals during the pandemic had to be taken into

account, and schools could not be perfectly divided in terms of their collocation in urban and rural contexts. Finally, the results presented in this chapter come from a direct method of investigating language attitudes. As other previous studies conducted in Sardinia with the same methodology, the results found here may have been conditioned by the social desirability and acquiescence bias. To investigate more private, latent irrational and less cognitively elaborated attitudes, an indirect method such as the matched-guise technique is beneficial. As a matter of fact, this kind of investigation was conducted as part of this research project but could not be described in this chapter.

Despite these limitations, the results presented here can contribute to sociolinguistic studies in Sardinia, and, more generally, to the knowledge of the determinants and dynamics involved when it comes to language attitudes in contexts of bilingualism with a minority language.

Appendix

Statements about Italian and Sardinian with which participants were required to express their degree of agreement on a 6-point Likert scale:

- Italian / Sardinian is an ugly language to hear → Aesthetic value (1)
- It is nice to hear Italian / Sardinian being spoken → Aesthetic value (2)
- I do not like speaking Italian / Sardinian → Use and transmission (1)
- I would like my children to speak Italian / Sardinian → Use and transmission (2)
- In Sardinia, Italian / Sardinian should be taught at school to all students → School (1)
- I would prefer that all subjects at school (apart from foreign languages) were taught in Italian / I would prefer that some subjects at school were taught in Sardinian → School (2)
- In order to get a good job, it is important to know Italian / Sardinian well → Instrumental importance (1)
- To be able to earn a lot of money, it is not important to know Italian / Sardinian → Instrumental importance (2)
- In the village or town where I live, using Italian / Sardinian helps you to make friends → Integrative importance (1)
- Knowing how to speak Italian / Sardinian is not necessary to be fully integrated in the social life of the village or town where I live → Integrative importance (2)
- It is important to value the Italian / Sardinian language because it is part of our identity → Identity (1)
- Being Italians / Sardinians, we should strive to speak more Italian / Sardinian → Identity (2)

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