

## LANGUAGE POLICY AND LANGUAGE BELIEFS IN SARDINIA: A CASE STUDY<sup>[\*]</sup>

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*Abstract:* The present dissertation investigates the Sardinian language policy, focusing on the language beliefs and attitudes of a specific educational institution's teaching staff. Language policy is considered to be composed of language practices, language beliefs and language management (Spolsky, 2004), and speakers' beliefs and attitudes are thought to be capable of conditioning the success of language management provisions (Baker, 1992; Spolsky, 2009). The language planning initiatives carried out by the Sardinian authorities have been trying to promote the use of Sardinian in various public settings, especially in schools, and therefore, teachers' language ideologies and attitudes might be particularly important for their implementation. The data – obtained from questionnaires and interviews – show that participants see Sardinian positively at a general level, because that language is part of their identity and cultural heritage. Furthermore, teachers acknowledge the importance of a plurilingual education that could include the local language. However, many teachers perceive that Sardinian lacks instrumental value and, being a minority language, it can hardly cover certain public functions without affecting individual rights. Consequently, a deep assimilation of Sardinian in the school context, especially as a medium of instruction, is not unthinkable, but it will probably be a rather controversial process.

*Keywords:* language policy, language beliefs, language attitudes, school context, Sardinian

### 1. Introduction

The present research is a case study, conducted in a Sardinian educational institution called 'Istituto Lugore' (pseudonym), on the beliefs and attitudes of a group of secondary school teachers towards the Sardinian language and towards the institutional language policies carried out in Sardinia, with a particular attention to the ones concerning the school setting.

In Sardinia, a process of language shift is taking place, since the Sardinian language has been largely replaced by Italian in most public and private contexts (Schjerve, 2017: 40). The Regional authorities have been trying to reverse such a process through explicit and official language policies aimed at improving the prestige of the minority language, enhancing its presence in various societal settings and promoting its use in schools within the curricular hours and as a medium of instruction. In this research though, the investigation of language policy is not restricted to the description of institutional rules and laws, but it also

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involves a study on the language beliefs and attitudes of a specific group of speakers. Indeed, language practices, language beliefs or ideologies, and language management are considered as fundamental elements of any language policy (Spolsky, 2004: 5). Language management may be in line or at odds with the language ideologies of a speech community (Spolsky, 2004: 14), and therefore, a case study on the beliefs and attitudes of a group of speakers could give indications on the degree of consonance or discordance between those two levels of language policy. Such indications are particularly important since positive attitudes towards official language policies, especially the ones that deal with endangered languages, have been often regarded as a relevant aspect for their success (Baker, 1992: 9; Garret, 2010: 10–11). Since the Sardinian official policies have often focused on the role of the local language in schools, this study is mainly concerned with language education policies and with the attitudes of potential implementers, i.e. secondary school teachers, towards the adoption of Sardinian in the educational context. Nevertheless, opinions regarding the use of the minority language in other domains were also elicited, in order to explore preliminarily participants' attitudes towards some of the other main points of the Regional institutional policies, and because it is plausible that teachers' beliefs about Sardinian and its perceived adequate uses are connected with their commitment to the introduction of the minority language into the school setting. The results of this research show that participants have contrasting beliefs and attitudes towards Sardinian and towards proposals that are intended to enhance its presence in societal and educational contexts. Teachers view the local language as an important part of Sardinians' identity and culture, and they are positively inclined towards a plurilingual education that involves the local language. Nevertheless, Sardinian is perceived by participants as a minority language with very little instrumental value. Moreover, using the local language in public settings, including schools – especially as a medium of instruction – is seen as problematic because it may create inequalities between those who can speak Sardinian and those who cannot.

In the next section, the Sardinian sociolinguistic situation and official language policies will be illustrated. The theoretical framework of the research will be presented in section 3. In section 4, the choice of participants and the methodologies used will be clarified. Section 5, instead, will be dedicated to the presentation of the results and relevant discussion. Since the results were obtained mainly from interviews extracts, it has been chosen not to separate the presentation of those extracts from the discussion on why they were considered as particularly significant. In the final section, the study will be summarised, in order to draw its conclusions and call for future investigations that can fill the limitations of this research.

## **2. Sociolinguistic context and institutional language policies in Sardinia**

Sardinia is an island situated in the Western Mediterranean; politically, it is an Autonomous Region of the Republic of Italy. Although Italian is the official language of all the Regions of the Republic (Parlamento Italiano, 1999), in Sardinia, a number of minority languages are also spoken: the Sardinian language, the Catalan variety of the city of Alghero, the Ligurian dialect called Tabarchino, and the Italian-Corsican dialects named Sassarese and Gallurese (Spiga, 2007: 65). Sardinian is a Romance language and it is by far the largest of the island's minority languages; it can be divided into several local dialects, whose number varies based

on the classification criteria that linguists use (Molinu & Floricic, 2017: 27–28). For the purposes of this study, it suffices to say that Logudorese and Campidanese are the two main macro-varieties, which are spoken respectively in the northern and in the southern half of the island (Blasco Ferrer, 1984: 195).

According to a sociolinguistic research commissioned by the Sardinian Regional Administration, 68.4% of people who live in Sardinia have an active competence in one of the local varieties that have just been mentioned (Oppo, 2007: 7). However, the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger (2010) defines Sardinian as “definitely endangered”. A language is considered as endangered when it is experiencing a significant reduction in the number of speakers, and when its domains of use are linked to low-prestige contexts and are becoming increasingly limited (Fishman, 1991: 81). Few decades ago, Schjerve (1990: 208; 1993: 278) noticed that, in Sardinia, Italian was becoming predominant in an increasing number of domains and even as the language of primary socialisation in family. The Italian-Sardinian bilingualism was moving from a diglossic condition to a situation of language shift (Schjerve, 1993: 171–172). More recently, Schjerve (2017: 40) highlighted that Sardinian is almost totally excluded from public and official domains, as well as from schools. Even within the families, the vitality of Sardinian is quite limited, and therefore, the intergenerational transmission of the minority language is at risk (Schjerve, 2017: 40).

Spolsky (2004: 14) explained that the linguistic practices of a speech community might be challenged by language management provisions carried out at institutional levels. Indeed, in the last twenty-one years, the Autonomous Region of Sardinia has undertaken multiple language planning initiatives in order to reverse the language shift that has been taking place in the island. The first significant intervention of the Autonomous Region of Sardinia in favour of its local varieties occurred in 1997, with the Regional Law n. 26: Sardinian was declared a language with “same dignity as Italian” (Regione Autonoma de Sardigna, 1997; my translation), although this equality kept being denied by the reality of the Sardinian society (Angioni, 2000). In 1999, the Italian Parliament approved the Law n. 482, designed to protect some of the minority languages within the Italian jurisdiction, including Sardinian. This Law has accorded the possibility of using the minority languages, and of recruiting personnel able to offer services in those languages, to all public offices, except for police stations (Parlamento Italiano, 1999). Moreover, it has allowed to employ the minority languages in nursery, primary and secondary schools of the territories in which those languages are historically spoken; however, the decision on whether and how using the minority language has been left to the individual educational institutions (Parlamento Italiano, 1999).

The National Law n. 482 had mainly status planning goals, i.e. it aimed at increasing the use of certain languages in various societal contexts (Kaplan & Baldauf, 2003: 202). Nevertheless, measures that try to alter the environment in which a language is used lead almost inevitably to attempts to modify and codify the internal structures of that language, namely to corpus planning activities (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997: 28). Indeed, in 2001, a proposal of standardisation for Sardinian, called *Limba Sarda Unificada*, was produced by the Regional Administration, but it was widely rejected because of its proximity exclusively with Logudorese (Tufi, 2013). In 2006, the Regional Administration delivered a second proposal of standardisation, named *Limba Sarda Comuna (LSC)*, which tried to include more elements of Campidanese. In the presentation text, it was specified that this standard variety would have to be experimented by the Regional Administration in its official documents.

However, it was also intended to be a reference point for the gradual creation of a common Sardinian language (Regione Autonoma de Sardigna, 2006). Contrasting reactions have been triggered by this proposal. For example, Corongiu (2006) claimed that the LSC is a valid solution to the problem of standardisation, since it mediates among the different varieties of Sardinian. On the other hand, Calaresu (2008) emphasised that, before tackling the issue of standardisation, which might not even be helpful for the revitalisation of the language, the Regional authority should have investigated the ideologies and beliefs of the community about such an issue (Calaresu, 2008).

A more recent and comprehensive strategy on the part of the Regional Administration was the three-year plan for the enhancement of the Sardinian language, released in 2011. Once again, the main objective of this strategy was to increase the domains of use of the minority language in the society. The use of Sardinian in cultural activities, in the mass media and in religious settings was financially supported (Regione Autonoma de Sardigna, 2011: 34, 41, 63). As far as language education planning is concerned, the document explicitly declared that the introduction of the minority language into schools should be a gradual process, not forced by top-down impositions. Nevertheless, the Regional authority encouraged the use of Sardinian at school, even though the CLIL methodology (Regione Autonoma de Sardigna, 2011: 54–55), which is an acronym for Content and Language Integrated Learning and which is, as García (2009: 46) explained, another name to refer to the notion of bilingual education.

The latest piece of language management of the Autonomous Region of Sardinia is the Law n. 22, entered into force the 3rd of July 2018. First, the Law delegates corpus planning activities to a new entity, called ‘Sardinian language Board’, in charge of developing another proposal of linguistic standard and of defining its domains of application (Consiglio Regionale della Sardegna, 2018a). Moreover, the Law creates the possibility of obtaining certifications that attest the level of proficiency in Sardinian in compliance with the criteria of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Consiglio Regionale della Sardegna, 2018a). This is clearly a prestige planning initiative, namely a provision aimed at improving the image of a language and promoting its intellectualisation (Kaplan & Baldauf, 2003: 222). As far as status planning measures are concerned instead, the Regional Administration becomes responsible for the implementation of the section of the National Law n. 482 regarding the presence, in public offices, of personnel able to deliver services in the minority language (Consiglio Regionale della Sardegna, 2018a). Finally, a good part of Law n. 22 is dedicated to issues related to the use of Sardinian at school. First, a ‘Committee for the Learning of Sardinian’ is instituted, which is in charge of giving general guidelines about the teaching of the minority language to all public educational institutions in Sardinia (Consiglio Regionale della Sardegna, 2018a). Despite that, each single scholastic institution keeps a certain degree of autonomy to decide the methods and timing of use of the local language. Even in accordance with the National Law n. 482, all schools are given the possibility to introduce, at an optional level, the Sardinian language as a subject within the curricular hours and as a medium of instruction of any subject of the curriculum (Consiglio Regionale della Sardegna, 2018a).

The relevance of this dissertation lies also in the fact that it is one of the first studies that takes account of this very recent piece of institutional language policy, and tries to investigate beliefs and attitudes of a group of future implementers towards its main contents. Indeed,

top-down language management efforts, in order to be successful, should take into consideration the language beliefs that are present at lower levels of the speech community (Spolsky, 2009: 7). Similarly, the language attitudes of those who are affected by official language policies are considered as a fundamental element in assessing the likely success of those policies (Baker, 1992: 9). Because of these reasons, in this research, the linguistic beliefs and attitudes of a particular group of speakers, i.e. secondary school teachers, were investigated. The research question, hence, wonders whether the language ideologies, beliefs, opinions and attitudes of the investigated teachers are likely to strengthen or weaken the Sardinian institutional policies, in particular the ones that deal with the school context.

### 3. Theoretical background

#### 3.1 *Language policy, beliefs and attitudes*

Throughout the last decades, language policy (LP) has been studied from different, albeit related, perspectives, which Baldauf (2012) summarised in four main approaches: the classical approach, the language management theory, the domain approach and the critical approach. According to Spolsky (2004: 40–42), the study of LP is most efficiently conducted within the frame of sociolinguistic domains, for instance families, schools, workplaces, or even bigger ones like regional or national governments. Within such a domain approach, Spolsky, alongside other scholars, has proposed that language policy should be understood as a concept composed of multiple dimensions. At first, Spolsky & Shohamy (2000: 2) noticed that it was important to differentiate the language practices of a specific community of speakers, their ideas and beliefs about languages and the explicit language policies that try to impact on those practices and beliefs. Developing from this, Spolsky (2004, 2009) included the notions of practices, beliefs and management as essential components of any language policy:

“a useful first step is to distinguish between the three components of the language policy of a speech community: its language practices – the habitual pattern of selecting among the varieties that make up its linguistic repertoire; its language beliefs or ideology -- the beliefs about language and language use; and any specific efforts to modify or influence that practice by any kind of language intervention, planning or management” (Spolsky, 2004: 5)

Analogously, Shohamy (2006: 54) used the term “de facto language policies” to refer to the actual uses of a language, which Bonacina (2010: 11) then labelled as “practiced language policies”. Shohamy (2006: 54–55) talked of language policies also in terms of ideologies and perceptions, to which Bonacina-Pugh (2012: 215) referred as “perceived language policy”. Finally, Shohamy (2006: 54) proposed the notion of “declared policies” to indicate the explicit, official statements and rules about languages. Less recently, Ball (1993) described LPs as texts and discourses. Language policies are textual documents that try to intervene in the concrete linguistic practices. At the same time, they involve a series of presumptions and ideologies about what it is appropriate to do with certain language varieties in particular contexts (Ball, 1993). In other words, a speech community bestows values on its language varieties and their uses, and this set of values constitutes the language beliefs or ideology of

that community (Spolsky, 2004: 14). It is worth specifying that speakers' language beliefs may not be aligned with top-down language planning provisions (Spolsky, 2004: 14); nonetheless, the success of "centralized language management" might be affected by grass-roots language ideologies (Spolsky, 2009: 7).

Drawing on Spolsky's theoretical framework, Lau & Lin (2017) investigated the opinions and beliefs of 38 international students of a Taiwanese university towards a Mandarin-English bilingual educational policy. The researchers were able to find out that some factors, such as the perception of the increasing economic power of Mandarin Chinese, are slowing down the process of adoption of English as medium of instruction (Lau & Lin, 2017). Kulyk (2011), in his study about the use of Ukrainian and Russian in Ukraine, put in evidence that beliefs about the status and the corpus of a language interact with each other and influence the perception of appropriateness of that language in certain contexts. Indeed, the institutional attempts of raising the status of Ukrainian seem to be partially obstructed by the perceived inferiority of its corpus in comparison to Russian (Kulyk, 2011).

The notion of language beliefs has been very often associated to the concept of language attitudes (Baker, 1992; Garret, 2010). Language beliefs, in effect, and similarly also language opinions, are generally considered as the cognitive element of linguistic attitudes (Baker, 1992: 12–14), although, according to Garret (2010: 31), they cannot be completely separated from the affective component. In any case, a language attitude can be defined as a stance, a position towards certain language varieties and uses and even towards certain language policies (Garret, 2010: 20). The language attitudes of people who are affected by a language policy can be a key factor for the success or failure of that policy (Baker, 1992:9). In particular, speakers' positive attitudes towards endangered languages are considered as essential for a successful implementation of policies aiming at the revitalisation of those languages (Baker, 1992: 21; Garret, 2010: 10–11). In this respect, Bell (2013) claimed that the likely positive or negative disposition of the communities towards certain linguistic uses should be taken into account in planning efforts for the revitalisation of Aboriginal languages in Australia. In regard to the governmental language policies carried out in Wales instead, May (2000) investigated trainee teachers' attitudes towards the Welsh language. The results of that study showed that the minority language received very positive attitudes at a general level, whereas, when participants were asked about the use of Welsh for specific purposes, their opinions were much more contrasting and controversial.

### *3.2 Language education policy*

Language education policy (LEP) is concerned with the acquisition of certain languages by the members of a community and with the development of strategies connected to this goal (Kaplan & Baldauf, 2003: 217). LEP generally looks at the teaching of certain languages, such as national, heritage or foreign languages, in settings like universities and schools (Shohamy, 2006: 76). Since schooling is generally obligatory, according to Shohamy (2006: 90), LEP is one of the most efficient mechanisms that institutions use to create linguistic practices, or de facto policies, suited to their ideologies.

Research has often focused on the linguistic attitudes and beliefs of influential participants of language education policies, such as teachers, students and parents (Spolsky, 2009:

91–94). For example, Griva & Iliadou (2011) investigated students' and teachers' beliefs about the language education policy in Greece, which has been promoting the teaching of two foreign languages in primary and secondary schools. Both students and teachers expressed very positive attitudes towards such a plurilingual approach to education. In particular, teachers emphasised that the knowledge of different national languages provides students with the necessary tools to cross cultural boundaries and to be prepared for a variety of occupational opportunities (Griva & Iliadou, 2011). As far as minority languages are concerned instead, Lee & Oxelson (2006) highlighted that numerous teachers in California showed unresponsive or even negative attitudes towards the maintenance of students' heritage languages, which are often perceived – in opposition to English – just as cultural artefacts rather than necessary instruments for students' future. By contrast, O'Hanlon (2015) put in evidence that the relative success of the Celtic-medium instruction policy in Wales is due to positive ideologies of parents and students towards that kind of education. Welsh as medium of instruction is perceived as a way to renew the cultural heritage of Wales and to take advantage of the benefits of a bilingual education. In addition, parents believe that a proper knowledge of Welsh on the part of their children will enhance their career opportunities in the future (O'Hanlon, 2015).

## **4. Methodology**

### *4.1 Participants*

The present research is a case study aimed at investigating the linguistic beliefs and attitudes of the teaching staff of a Sardinian educational institution. Such a choice of participants has been made because teachers' positions and ideologies towards Sardinian and its appropriate uses may play an important role in the success of the institutional language policies, in particular the ones that aim at introducing the minority language into schools. This is especially true considering that the decision on when and how to implement the language education policies concerning Sardinian is, at least to a certain extent, left to the autonomy of the single schools (Parlamento Italiano, 1999; Consiglio Regionale della Sardegna, 2018a).

The educational institution that has been investigated is called 'Istituto Lugore'; it comprises public secondary schools in four different villages, which are situated in the middle-west coast of Sardinia and which belong to the Oristano's province. Twenty-two teachers of these secondary schools participated in the study; given that participation was clearly on a voluntary basis, not every single member of the teaching staff agreed to collaborate, although the majority did. Since the only criterion for participation was to be member of the secondary schools' teaching staff of the selected institution, the teachers who participated in the study considerably vary in terms of age, subject taught, area of origin, and degree of competence in Sardinian (Appendix A).

### *4.2 Data collection*

Two data collection methods were used in this study, namely written questionnaires and individual semi-structured interviews. More specifically, the questionnaire (Appendix B),

sent to the participants by e-mail, was composed of a series of statements – mainly inspired by May (2000) and Valdes (2007) – with which respondents had to express their degree of agreement on a five-level Likert scale, going from ‘*strongly disagree*’ to ‘*strongly agree*’. The survey was divided into three parts: the first one concerned the attitudes exclusively towards the Sardinian language; the second part was focused on the relation of Sardinian with Italian and other international languages; the third part dealt with the much-debated issue of Sardinian standardisation. Following Baker’s recommendation (1992: 79), attitudes toward a single language have been considered as conceptually distinguished from attitudes toward bilingualism, namely the disposition toward the possibility of co-existence of two or more languages. As Baker (1992: 16) illustrated moreover, attitudes have various degrees of generality or specificity; hence, throughout the survey, a mix of general and specific statements was present. General statements, like ‘*I like hearing the Sardinian language*’, were intended to elicit beliefs about the Sardinian language itself; specific statements, instead, were inserted to gather information on the participants’ attitudes towards the use of Sardinian in particular domains, such as family, mass media, public offices and schools. The questionnaires, therefore, were useful to assess the proportion of agreement or disagreement of participants with certain possible uses of the minority language.

However, in order to explore more thoroughly teachers’ language ideologies and beliefs, the most common method in qualitative research, i.e. individual interviews (Sandelowski, 2002; Nunkoosing, 2005; Lambert & Loiselle, 2008), was also adopted. The interviews conducted in this study (Appendix C) – which took place in one of the schools’ buildings after the administration of the survey – started with a question about the perceived general utility of Sardinian in the modern world. They continued with a question about learning both Sardinian and Italian in family and a question about the possibility of using the minority language in public offices. Then, a series of questions about various possible forms of introduction of Sardinian into schools were asked. Finally, the interviews tried to elicit opinions on the use of a standard variety in educational contexts. Under participants’ consent, the interviews were recorded and later transcribed for comparative reasons (ten Have, 1990). Indeed, the transcriptions of the various interviews have been deeply examined and compared, in order to find recurrent types of answers, which could elucidate – in a more elaborate and detailed way – the results found in the questionnaires, sometimes even partially contradicting them.

Data collection took place in June 2018. Both in the surveys and in the interviews, the questions were connected with the main points of the most recent language policies produced by the Autonomous Region of Sardinia. Even though Law n. 22 has been officially approved shortly after data collection, its text was being discussed in the Sardinian Regional Assembly since several weeks before. I was aware of this fact and, from the beginning of the study, I had access to the draft text of the Law (Consiglio Regionale della Sardegna, 2018b), whose main points and features, despite some modifications, have remained substantially unaltered in the final version. Thus, in structuring questionnaires and interviews, the main contents of that draft document were taken into consideration.



## 5. Results and Discussion

### 5.1 Symbolic vs. instrumental dimension of Sardinian

In the analysis of the general beliefs of participants about Sardinian, a strong dichotomy in the values attached to the minority language can be detected. On the one hand, the interviewed teachers seem to perceive Sardinian as an important part of the islanders' identity and as a way of keeping alive the traditional cultural heritage of the island. Such elements emerge clearly from the questionnaire statement *'It is important to preserve the Sardinian language because it is part of our identity and cultural heritage'*, with which 100% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed. On the other hand, a pattern of responses given in the individual interviews seems to suggest that the perceived practical utility of Sardinian is quite lower than its symbolic value.

**Participant:** "Well, a utility [that Sardinian has] is certainly to hand down the tradition that exists in Sardinia... Thus, from a cultural and identity point of view, I think it is very important. I always have a little doubt about the daily use of Sardinian: because *we are in a globalised world, we are in a European community that is very large, so, in short, it will certainly have a very limited use*"<sup>1</sup> (27/06/2018; my emphasis).

Using the terminology provided by Gardner & Lambert (1972: 3), the motivation for learning Sardinian seems to be completely integrative, namely it is related to matters of identity and membership in a particular cultural community. By contrast, the instrumental orientation, which can be described as the willingness of knowing a language for utilitarian, practical advantages (Gardner & Lambert, 1972: 3), seems to be almost totally absent. Drawing on a different theoretical approach, a language can be thought of as having its own *mojo* (Joseph, 2014); it is possible to define *mojo* metaphorically as "a little bag of charms" (Joseph, 2014: 126), which gives a sort of power or quality to the language that holds it. Participants appear to perceive Sardinian as a language with a strong identity and heritage *mojo* (Joseph, 2014: 126–127): namely, speakers view the local language as a part of who they are and as having a special relation with the past. In many teachers' perception however, Sardinian is devoid of *getting-on* and *modernity* *mojo* (Joseph, 2014: 128): that is, the minority language does not help advance in life and it does not have links with the modern world. Such perceptions, as it will be possible to see, influence teachers' attitudes towards the use of the minority language in particular domains, such as schools.

### 5.2 Sardinian in public settings

A great part of the language management of the Sardinian Region has been focused on efforts to enhance the presence of the minority language in public, societal settings. In line with these efforts, a large majority of participants – 81.8% – declared to disagree with the general assertion *'Sardinian should be limited to private contexts'*. Nonetheless, when asked about their opinions on the use of the local language in specific environments, teachers proved to be much less cohesive. For example, the option *'Neutral/Do not know'* was selected by 45.4% of them

in response to the statement '*Sardinian should be used more in the mass media*'. Similarly, in regard to the assertion '*It would be right to have the possibility of speaking Sardinian in public offices*', a narrow majority of the respondents – 54.5% – agreed or strongly agreed with it, the 31.9% were neutrals and 13.6% disagreed or strongly disagreed. It appears that proposals designed to include Sardinian in public spaces are far to be widely accepted and tend to be divisive, as illustrated by the following contrasting positions.

**Participant:** “Yes, as a communication channel, I think this [using Sardinian in public offices] is necessary for certain types of customers. I think that it would be an advantage from a democratic point of view. I mean to help all people, belonging to all age groups, as much as possible. Thus, I think it would be very useful” (22/06/2018).

**Participant:** “I think Sardinia is very isolated; I would like that, even in practice, you could use Sardinian in public offices. However, at the same time, I am afraid it would be a way to isolate Sardinia further” (23/06/2018).

**Participant:** “In public offices I see it [speaking Sardinian] a bit like forcing things. I am not saying it is ridiculous; however, we are in Italy, we are in Europe, in public offices I would limit the use to Italian” (27/06/2018).

As shown by the second of these extracts, the belief that Sardinian lacks modernity (Joseph, 2014: 128) has a negative impact on some participants' attitudes towards its possible usage in public settings. The third extract exemplifies another pattern of responses that was often found in the interviews: the distinct ideologies and values conferred upon the majority and the minority language. In the aforementioned study on Welsh, May (2000: 121) noted that the majority language is “unproblematically accorded with the ‘benefits’ of national status”, whereas the minority language is “largely excluded from such benefits”. Correspondingly, participants often asserted that Italian is the only language that should be ordinarily used in public contexts.

In addition, it has to be highlighted that in both the National and the Regional language policy, the use of the minority language in public offices is linked to the possibility of having employees with competence in that language (Parlamento Italiano, 1999; Consiglio Regionale della Sardegna, 2018a). The natural consequence of this would be that certain jobs would have to be reserved for people who can speak the local language. Nonetheless, 59.1% of participants disagreed with a similar statement. This is probably explicable by referring to the notion of individual language rights. Many respondents seem to view favourably the bestowal of negative rights to the minority language, that is according all citizens the possibility of speaking the minority language without direct provisions by political authorities (Bruthiaux, 2009). However, positive rights, which instead involve an active intervention by political authorities to assimilate the minority language in public life (Bruthiaux, 2009), are thought to be capable, at least in some cases, of creating inequalities among individual citizens.

**Interviewer:** “If public offices' services were provided in Sardinian, this would imply that some jobs would be reserved for people who can speak Sardinian. How would you see this?”

**Participant:** “Uhm, I do not know. *Because it could be discriminatory against the ones who do not speak Sardinian...* just hiring people who can speak Sardinian, by-passing - let me use this expression - people who do not speak it, who are resident in Sardinia in all respects, but who were not born in Sardinia, and therefore, do not speak the language, I think this would be discriminatory” (23/06/2018; my emphasis).

Hence, the group of participants showed different and contrasting opinions and attitudes towards an enhanced presence of Sardinian in societal settings. Some of the ideologies and beliefs that were detected, such as the perception of Sardinian as a language lacking in modernity mojo (Joseph, 2014: 128) and the different values and statuses attributed to the majority and the minority language (May, 2000), if found to be more generally widespread, could hinder considerably the use of the local language in public domains. Moreover, similar beliefs and opinions – although not necessarily – may also influence negatively teachers’ will to implement the language education policies designed to increase the teaching of Sardinian at school.

### 5.3 Beliefs and ideologies about bilingualism

The questionnaire scale that was intended to elicit beliefs and ideologies about bilingualism revealed that participants, almost unanimously, share the belief that learning, especially from the first years of life, Sardinian and Italian, and even another language, is beneficial for children. Indeed, more than 90% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statements ‘*Knowing both Italian and Sardinian constitutes an intellectual advantage*’ and ‘*It would be positive and not confusing for children to learn Italian, Sardinian and a widespread foreign language (e.g. English)*’. From the interviews, it emerged that teachers strongly believe that the knowledge of more than one language does not create confusion, and, instead, it brings cognitive and linguistic advantages.

**Interviewer:** “In family, in your opinion, would it be an advantage, or would it be confusing to speak both Italian and Sardinian from the first years of life?”

**Participant:** “No, I am absolutely certain that it is not confusing; indeed, studies, obviously not conducted by me, have shown that *children who grow up bilingually have a more elastic brain and a greater ability to learn further languages in the future*” (15/06/2018, my emphasis).

**Participant:** “Our mind, our brain is able to acquire more languages and not to make confusion among them. Therefore, just as there is no confusion, in theory, between English and French (...), there is no confusion even when Sardinian is involved” (15/06/2018).

Positive beliefs about the co-existence of Sardinian with other languages were expressed even when the school context was concerned. Indeed 77.3% of participants disagreed with the assertion ‘*Teaching Italian, Sardinian and a foreign language at school would be confusing for students*’. It seems that teachers would not be worried, from this particular point of view, by the introduction of the local language into schools. Secondary school teachers

though, are a group of speakers with a high-level educational background; if such beliefs about bilingualism are found to be common among other categories, they could constitute a good starting point for the maintenance of the minority language in Sardinia.

### 5.3 Sardinian at school

The Autonomous Region of Sardinia, in its official language policies, has often devoted great space to the issue of teaching Sardinian in educational contexts. In the questionnaire, 77.3% of respondents claimed to agree or strongly agree with the statement '*All schools should give students the opportunity to learn Sardinian*'. As long as it is an optional choice, providing students with the possibility of learning Sardinian is seen by many teachers as a way to preserve the island's identity and traditional heritage.

**Participant:** "An alternative school hour [in which Sardinian is taught] could bring students closer to their own identity" (18/06/2018).

**Participant:** "I find it [learning Sardinian at school] as an in-depth study of our culture; it is a way not to lose our customs and traditions" (19/06/2018).

Once again, the motivation to make students learn Sardinian seems to be, in large part, integrative (Gardner & Lambert, 1972: 3). Nonetheless, teachers proved to have also positive attitudes towards a plurilingual school environment that includes the local language (see 5.3). As noted by Sallabank (2010), a widespread awareness of the importance of the traditional heritage and of the advantages of bilingualism could be essential factors for the inclusion of an endangered minority language in the school context. However, although a high percentage of teachers claimed to be in favour of giving students the chance to learn Sardinian, many of those teachers appear to be inclined to relegate the local language to a quite marginal position, such as to extracurricular hours, i.e. in the afternoon.

**Interviewer:** "As far as Sardinian as an optional subject is concerned, do you imagine it within the curricular hours, i.e. in the morning, or as an afternoon activity?"

**Participant:** "We [teachers] do so many things that we can no longer find the time to do what we are called for, and so, it could probably end up in the afternoon" (15/06/2018).

**Participant:** "Honestly, as they [the students] have to attend that number of curricular hours per week, I do not know which subjects should be reduced to add Sardinian. However, they can attend afternoon projects, there are any kinds of projects after all" (15/06/2018).

A deeper assimilation of Sardinian in the educational environment, as encouraged by the Regional policy (Consiglio Regionale della Sardegna, 2018a), should involve the inclusion of the local language within the curricular hours or its use as a medium of instruction. However, to reach similar targets, it would be probably important to encounter one of the key reasons that has led to the relative success of Celtic-medium education in Wales: the perception of increased job opportunities for students who learn the minority language (O'Hanlon,

2015). As it can be seen in 5.1 and in the following piece of interview, such instrumental value – or getting-on mojo (Joseph, 2014: 128) – does not seem to be attached to Sardinian.

**Participant:** “The problem is globalisation, the problem is that *we tend to teach languages that tomorrow can be useful in the job market: English is one of those and unfortunately Sardinian is not*. Therefore, if I think about my son's future in Italy, I do not see the teaching of Sardinian as a very positive thing. It can be an enrichment, but it is not very useful” (29/06/2018, my emphasis).

In regard specifically to the proposal of using Sardinian as medium of instruction for some subjects, in the survey, 40.9% of participants claimed to be in favour, 31.8% neutral and 27.3% against. Nevertheless, in the interviews, most of the teachers expressed significant reservations about such a possibility, especially as far as secondary schools are concerned. In addition to the perceived lack of utilitarian reasons, it could be noticed again from some teachers' answers that the majority language receives uncritically a series of functions that, instead, are seen problematically for the minority language, including indeed being the language of instruction. As already noted by Lupinu (2007: 104; my translation), “the use [of Sardinian] at school is subordinate to the maintenance of a reassuring ancillary position towards the national language”.

**Participant:** “All subjects must be taught in Italian, the mother tongue. So, all subjects in the Italian language. If there are some of them that can partially be taught in Sardinian, it is fine”

**Interviewer:** “Do you mean all subjects in Italian, with some room for Sardinian?”

**Participant:** “Of course, of course, like that. *In any case, Italian is still the majority language*” (18/06/2018; my emphasis).

Related to this matter, many teachers pointed out that, especially in secondary schools, students who do not speak Sardinian might have serious troubles in keeping up lectures carried out in that language, and this would create inequalities among the members of the class. It seems that participants wanted to highlight again that certain interventions that are intended to increase the presence of the minority language in public or educational domains could potentially encroach upon individual rights.

**Participant:** “I see it [using Sardinian as a medium of instruction] as a little problematic. Because in some subjects it would be difficult to communicate properly and to explain the concepts correctly... Because probably there is a minimum percentage of boys coming from a family in which Sardinian is habitually spoken; therefore, there would be a problem in making the whole class learn.” (27/06/2018).

Besides issues linked to linguistic beliefs and ideologies, also practical problems could hamper the use of Sardinian as a teaching language. Many respondents reported that the implementation of a similar proposal is not very realistic, at least in the near future, because of the lack of competence of the majority of teachers.

**Interviewer:** “Is it realistic that Sardinian will be the medium of instruction of some subjects in the near future?”

**Participant:** “No, if I think of how the Italian school is structured nowadays, it is not... Bear in mind that teachers should also be prepared to teach in Sardinian. This means that they should take courses and learn it, for most of them it would be a second language... It is not something you learn overnight” (19/06/2018).

Even though similar answers do not seem to show a great degree of commitment to the revitalisation of Sardinian, they make potential problems of the institutional language education policy emerge. Issues like lack of preparation of teachers or difficulties for students keeping up the lectures were also identified by Samuelson & Freedman (2010), in regard to the introduction of a new teaching language in Rwanda. Problems of these kinds cannot be neglected; they indicate that some parts of the Sardinian language education policy are probably too ambitious. Therefore, the linguistic ideologies that have been described, together with such practical difficulties, are likely to prevent the teaching staff of the secondary schools of the ‘Istituto Lugore’ from putting into practice the opportunity, provided by the institutional policy, to insert Sardinian within the curricular timetable, and, especially, to employ it regularly as medium of instruction for some subjects.

Finally, it has to be highlighted that the issue that generated more contrasting positions was the one concerning the potential presence of a standard variety of Sardinian at school. Half of the respondents agreed with the questionnaire item about the use of a standard variety in the written form and in teaching materials. Nonetheless, 40.9% of participants declared to be in favour of the use of the various local dialects for the same purposes. On the one hand, a standard variety seems to be often viewed as a way to raise the status and the dignity of Sardinian; thus, as illustrated by Kulyk (2011), the corpus of a language is able to affect its perceived status.

**Participant:** “Well, I would prefer a standard variety... if we want it [Sardinian] to be a language, as English is, as other languages are, there must be a standard” (14/06/2018).

On the other hand, local varieties were usually considered as a better solution by those who emphasised the link between the language and the identity of the speakers.

**Participant:** “Local varieties for everyone. I am sure about this point; students would not accept a standard variety. It would be like making them lose part of their identity” (19/06/2018).

The dichotomy between standard and local varieties should not be underestimated. As some teachers highlighted, the decision on which variety should be used could make school agents refrain from teaching Sardinian in the first place.

**Interviewer:** “In the school setting, how would you see a proposal that would include Sardinian as an optional subject?”

**Participant:** “I see it as a very problematic thing, because there is no one single Sardinian, there are several Sardinian languages... Finding a common language to be taught is not easy at all” (29/06/2018).

The responses gathered in this study suggest that the issue of preferring a standard variety or a local one for educational purposes will remain extremely divisive and controversial.

## 6. Conclusions

In this research, it has been claimed that the study of language policy cannot be limited to the description of official, institutional activities of language planning. Drawing on Spolsky's (2004, 2009) and Shoamy's (2006) theoretical framework, language beliefs, ideologies and perceptions have been included in the notion of language policy. Related to this conceptualisation, it has been asserted that positive attitudes towards a language and its uses are crucial for the successful implementation of official policies, in particular when they deal with endangered minority languages (Baker, 1992; Garret, 2010). Therefore, in this study, it has been decided to include both a description of the language policies carried out at the institutional level in Sardinia, and an investigation of the beliefs and attitudes of an educational institution's teaching staff towards the main points of those policies, with a special focus on the ones regarding the school context. Twenty-two secondary school teachers agreed to fill in a questionnaire and participate in an individual semi-structured interview.

Most respondents feel that the Sardinian language is an important part of their identity and of the cultural heritage of the island. Nonetheless, they perceive Sardinian as a language with little utility in the job market. Moreover, the belief that Sardinian, being a minority language, hardly can cover certain functions that are normally carried out in the majority language, such as being regularly employed in public domains, seems to be quite common among participants. Furthermore, the fact that Sardinian is a minority language appears to incite teachers to call upon the notion of individual rights when asked about the possibility of putting the competence in Sardinian as a requirement for some jobs. Such ideologies, if further studies confirm that they are widespread among various groups of speakers, are capable of reducing the effects of status planning measures that have been designed to enhance the role of Sardinian in public spaces.

By contrast, a clear majority of participants expressed a very favourable disposition towards the idea of teaching two or more languages to children, because of the cognitive and linguistic advantages of bilingualism. In addition, most of the investigated teaching staff declared to be in favour of giving students the chance to learn the local language at school. These positive attitudes, in combination with the newest institutional language policy – the Regional Law n. 22 – may suggest that the introduction of Sardinian into the secondary schools of the 'Istituto Lugore' is not far to come. However, some of the linguistic beliefs and ideologies detected in this study seem to indicate that a systematic and substantial presence of Sardinian in this educational institution will not be easily achieved. Indeed, the perception of Sardinian as a language that is not useful for the career prospects of the students lead many teachers to imagine the presence of the local language in extra-curricular hours, that is in a marginal position. Moreover, the belief that Italian, i.e. the majority language, is

naturally entitled to certain roles, such as being the teaching language at school, and the idea that making Sardinian cover that role would cause a violation of individual rights, could block the investigated secondary schools' teaching staff from deciding to employ Sardinian as a medium of instruction for some subjects. Nonetheless, part of the teachers, especially in the questionnaires, claimed to be in favour of bestowing such a function upon the minority language. Further case studies are certainly needed to have a clearer picture of the more widespread language ideologies and, consequently, of the real possibilities that Sardinian has of becoming a systematic subject within the curricular timetable or even a medium of instruction alongside Italian. It has to be highlighted that the decision of which Sardinian should be taught at school – whether a local variety or an unspecified standard variety – seems to be significantly controversial and may slow down further the process of assimilation of Sardinian within the educational context.

In conclusion, reflecting upon the main language ideologies that emerged in this study, a general consideration appears appropriate. The institutional language policies seem to be dealing with a sort of circular problem, which can hardly be solved in the short term. The perceived lack of instrumental value of Sardinian, which is capable of hindering the implementation of language planning initiatives, is often tackled by interventions that could collide with speakers' ideas about the appropriate functions of a minority language and with their concept of individual language rights. However, Spolsky (2004: 14) observed that language management provisions often aspire to modify the linguistic beliefs and ideologies of a community. It remains, therefore, to be seen if, in the long run, the latest language management initiative, i.e. the Regional Law n. 22, will be able to invert some of the beliefs and perceptions that have been described in this study, or if, vice versa, they will limit the concrete effects of that Law. Future studies, both qualitative and quantitative, are recommended in order to provide information on this question. When future research wants to focus on the school context, it would be opportune to include also other agents that Spolsky (2009: 91–94) identified as involved in language education policy, such as principals, students and parents. Finally, future investigations should look at groups of speakers situated in other areas of Sardinia, to find out whether the language ideologies and beliefs are consistent or diversified throughout the island.

## Notes

- 1 The interviews were conducted and transcribed in Italian. I personally translated the extracts that have been reported in this dissertation into English (similarly, the questionnaires were administered in Italian and, subsequently, I translated their contents into English). I added the phrases in square brackets in the interviews extracts for clarification purposes.

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## Appendices

### A. General characteristics of participants

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Subject taught</b>	<b>Area of origin</b>	<b>Competence in Sardinian</b>
P1	Male	38	Humanities	Oristano	Passive
P2	Female	48	Humanities	Oristano	Passive
P3	Female	34	Maths and Sciences	Oristano	Passive
P4	Female	57	English	Oristano	Active
P5	Female	60	Maths and Sciences	Oristano	Active
P6	Female	41	English	Sassari	Active
P7	Female	43	Art	Sassari	No competence
P8	Female	40	Physical Education	Oristano	Passive
P9	Male	51	Humanities	Outside Sardinia	No competence
P10	Female	47	Humanities	Oristano	Passive
P11	Female	45	Humanities	Oristano	Active
P12	Male	40	English	Outside Sardinia	Active
P13	Female	48	Humanities	Outside Sardinia	Passive
P14	Female	42	Maths and Sciences	Oristano	Active
P15	Female	57	Maths and Sciences	Oristano	Passive
P16	Male	43	Humanities	Oristano	Passive
P17	Female	44	Maths and Sciences	Cagliari	Passive
P18	Male	38	Physical Education	Carbonia-Iglesias	Active
P19	Female	62	Humanities	Oristano	Passive
P20	Male	65	Maths and Sciences	Oristano	Active
P21	Male	45	Physical Education	Cagliari	Active
P22	Female	53	Religion	Oristano	Active

*B. Questionnaire*

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral / Do not know	Agree	Strongly agree
It is important to preserve the Sardinian language because it is part of our culture and cultural heritage					
It would be right to have the possibility of speaking Sardinian in public offices					
It is not worth making efforts and spending money to revitalise Sardinian					
I like hearing the Sardinian language					
It is unnecessary to learn Sardinian since Sardinia is part of an Italian-speaking country (i.e. Italy)					
Sardinian is essential for fully participating in Sardinian society					
Parents should use more Sardinian while talking with their children					
Sardinian should be limited to private contexts					
All schools should give students the opportunity to learn Sardinian					
Sardinian is not a suitable language to be taught in schools					
Sardinian should be taught compulsorily to all pupils in schools					
Schools should provide students with the possibility of being taught in Sardinian in some subjects					
Sardinian is essentially useless in the modern world					
Schools should provide students with the possibility of being taught in Sardinian in all subjects					
Sardinian should be used more in the mass media					
It is better to dedicate more time to the teaching of other subjects (e.g. Maths, History, etc.) or other languages (e.g. English, French) than to the teaching of Sardinian					

All pupils should be compulsorily taught in Sardinian in some subjects					
Certain jobs in Sardinia should be reserved for people who are able to speak Sardinian					
Sardinian is not suitable as a medium of instruction in schools					
Learning both Italian and Sardinian from the first years of age would be confusing for children					
In Sardinia, all public services should be available both in Italian and in Sardinian					
The use of the minority language in family can create problems for children when they enter an Italian-speaking environment, such as school					
Knowing both Italian and Sardinian constitutes an intellectual advantage					
It would be better for children to learn Italian and a widespread foreign language (e.g. English), rather than Italian and Sardinian					
It would be positive and not confusing for children to learn Italian, Sardinian and a widespread foreign language (e.g. English)					
In Sardinia, speaking both Italian and Sardinian should be an advantage in finding employment					
Teaching Italian, Sardinian and a foreign language at school would be confusing for students					
It would be confusing for pupils to be taught some subjects in Italian and some others in Sardinian					
It is important to know how to write in Sardinian					
Formal/official written communication in Sardinian should adopt a Standard variety					
Formal/official written communication in Sardinian should adopt the Standard variety proposed by the Regional Administration (Limba Sarda Comuna)					

Students should be taught to write a Standard variety of Sardinian and teaching materials should be written in that Standard variety					
Students should be taught to write the Standard variety of Sardinian proposed by the Regional Administration (Limba Sarda Comuna) and teaching materials should be written in that Standard variety					
Students should be taught to write in their local variety of Sardinian					

*C. Interview outline*

Is Sardinian useful in the modern world? If yes, why? If no, why not?

Is learning both Italian and Sardinian an intellectual advantage for children, or would it be confusing to learn both those languages in the first years of life?

Would it be right to have the possibility to speak Sardinian in public offices? If yes, why? If no, why not?

Should all schools give students the opportunity to learn Sardinian? If yes, from which age to which age should students be taught Sardinian? If no, elaborate your reasons.

Should Sardinian be taught compulsorily to all students in schools? If yes, why? If no, why not?  
Is teaching Sardinian as a subject in schools realistic in the near future? What difficulties could there be?

Should students have the possibility of being taught in Sardinian in some subjects? If yes, why? If no, why not?

Is giving students the possibility of being taught in Sardinian in some subjects realistic in the near future? What difficulties could there be?

Would it be better to dedicate more time to the teaching of other subjects or other languages than to the teaching of Sardinian? If yes, why? If no, why not?

Given the fact that it is compulsory to learn Italian and English in schools, could it be confusing for students to add the teaching of Sardinian? If yes, why? If no, why not?

Would it be confusing for students to be taught some subjects in Italian and some subjects in Sardinian? If yes, why? If no, why not?

In which variety of Sardinian should students be taught to write? Should students be taught a Standard variety?

Should a Standard variety of Sardinian be used for the teaching materials (e.g. textbooks)? If yes, which Standard variety?

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