

## MACRO-POLICY VS. MICRO-POLICY: A STUDY ON TWO ITALIAN-SARDINIAN WEBSITES<sup>[\*]</sup>

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*Abstract:* The present study aims at investigating the relationship between language policies at macro- and micro-level. Drawing on Baldauf's conceptualisation (2006), language choices at the micro-level can be considered either as a micro-implementation of a macro-policy or as an autonomous micro-policy. These dynamics have been explored in two Italian-Sardinian bilingual websites, whose language practices have been measured against the precepts and spirit of the macro-policy of the Regional Administration of Sardinia.

*Keywords:* language macro-policy; language micro-policy; websites; Italian; Sardinian

### Theoretical background

Language policy and planning has been traditionally seen as an activity composed of various stages that have to be thoroughly programmed at an institutional, macro level (Karam, 1974: 106). However, Kaplan & Baldauf (2003: 201–202) acknowledged that the success of an institutional macro-policy is strongly related to the help it receives from more local levels. Baldauf (2006) indeed, stated that language policies should be studied not only at the macro level but also at the micro one. He proposed to distinguish cases of micro-implementation of a macro-policy and cases of independent micro-policy. In the former type, an organisation at a local level tries to put into practice, often with various difficulties, the guidelines present in the macro-policy of the region or nation to which that organisation belongs (Baldauf, 2006). In the latter type, a micro-level organisation of any type decides to carry out an autonomous language policy in order to fulfil its own necessities (Baldauf, 2006). The distinction between these two types of language policy are sometimes quite clear: DeLorme (1999) presented an investigation of the attempts made by the Kazakh government to revitalise the ethnic language of the nation, and the ways in which a particular school complied with the governmental guidelines in implementing the macro-policy. In other cases, it is not straightforward to understand whether language practices in local contexts are pure implementations of a macro-policy or independent micro-policies. From his study on language-education policy in Australia, Breen (2002) reported that what the teachers are required to do according to the macro-policy often has to deal with practical needs and with the peculiarities of specific local communities. Li (2010) described a similar situation in China in regards to teaching English as a foreign language: the teachers could not really implement the national cur-

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riculum, they had to adapt it to the necessities of the students. Although such teachers perceived themselves just as implementers of a policy which had been decided by political leaders or experts, the author argued that they are in fact policy-makers as much as those at the institutional levels (Li, 2010). The problem of agency in establishing if certain language choices can be defined as micro-policies or micro-implementations of a macro-policy has been addressed also by Gafaranga, Niyomugabo and Uwizeyimana (2013). Despite an important discrepancy between the spirit of the language policy in the Rwandan Constitution and some articles in the rules of procedure of the Rwandan Parliament, the members of such Parliament thought to be implementing the policy as it is written in the Constitution. The authors claimed that, even though agency was not claimed in this case, it is hardly appropriate to consider the articles of the Parliament just as a case of mismatch between the macro-policy and its implementation; those articles constitute an independent micro-policy of the Rwandan Parliament (Gafaranga et al., 2013).

At this point, it is opportune to clarify that language policies at every level are composed of multiple dimensions; in this respect, Spolsky (2004) stated that:

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).

In regard to the first component, Bonacina (2010) argued that language practices are language policies themselves, namely language practices contain a policy in them. In view of these considerations, the relationship between macro-policy and language practices cannot always be reduced to the dichotomy implementation vs. micro-policy, but more subtle interactions may exist (Blommaert, Kelly-Holmes, Lane, Leppänen, Moriarty, Pietikäinen & Piirainen-Marsh, 2009; Kelly-Holmes, Moriarty & Pietikäinen, 2009; Gafaranga, 2015). Gafaranga (2015), in his study of translinguistic appositions in a trilingual website in Rwanda, noted that a macro-policy can often be regarded as the context in which language practices are embedded. Namely, the macro-policy is relevant in accounting for micro-level language choices, since it shapes them; at the same time however, those language choices put into being the macro-policy and make it be relevant (Gafaranga, 2015).

The complex relations between declared, governmental policy and language practices at lower levels can be profitably investigated by looking at what happens in the media (Blommaert et al., 2009). For example, the role of television in reinforcing the different status and prestige that the Swedish society accords to the various languages of its repertoire has been highlighted by Hult (2010). Kelly-Holmes et al. (2009) illustrated the relation between macro-policies aimed at revitalising minority languages in the Basque Country, in Ireland and in Finland, and the language practices of some traditional media of those countries. More recently, Kelly-Holmes (2015: 130–131) suggested to look at new media, such as the web, as a suitable place to investigate the relationship between top-down and bottom-up language policies and to focus on local language practices and their interaction with declared macro-policies.

In this paper indeed, the language choices of two Sardinian-Italian websites have been examined, putting particular attention on how they can be related to the macro-policy of the

Sardinian Regional Administration. It is important to specify, however, that there seems to be no easy way to know with certainty the level of interrelationship between those micro-level language practices and that declared macro-policy, and this limits the strength of the conclusions reached in this article. Interviewing directly the people who are in charge of such linguistic practices would probably have been helpful, but it would not have erased this shortcoming: indeed, as Gafaranga et al. (2013) showed, even when the people who make the language choices feel that they are putting into being a macro-policy, this might not be the case, and vice versa. Examining the degree of correlation between micro-level linguistic choices and macro-level language policy remains, at least in part, a matter of interpretation. Nevertheless, there are certain aspects that should be looked at carefully, in order to make the interpretation more solid and grounded on facts: first, if there is correspondence between the languages employed at the micro-level and the languages involved in the policy; secondly, if the linguistic problem seems to be something on which the micro-level organisation has reflected upon to obtain results linked to the sociolinguistic context in which it is embedded, or to get results of different nature; thirdly, if the grass-roots entity and the macro-policy show commonality of intentions, i.e. if they share spirit, goals and strategies to achieve such goals. These factors, then, have been taken into great consideration in the rest of this article.

### **The Sardinian context**

Schjerve (1993: 271–272) illustrated that the Sardinian language is experiencing a process of language shift, since it is being replaced by Italian in an increasingly number of contexts. According to the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger (2010), Sardinian's vitality is definitely endangered. In apparent contrast with such definitions, the sociolinguistic research conducted by Oppo (2007) put in evidence that 68.4% of people in Sardinia declared to have some kind of active competence in a local variety. However, in commenting these results in the same research report, Lupinu (2007) pointed out that Sardinian is often neglected in domains such as family, which are fundamental for the intergenerational transmission of a language (Fishman, 1991: 67). Moreover, the lack of prestige that Sardinian faces, and its very limited use in public spaces and institutional contexts, has been clearly highlighted in the introduction of the sociolinguistic research report (Oppo, 2007). Focusing on the notion of language ideology and beliefs about language (Spolsky, 2004: 5), on the one hand, the Sardinian language is perceived as an important part of the identity of the islanders (Depau & Ghimenton, 2009: 222). On the other hand, it has often been seen as a barrier for socio-economic progress (Tufi, 2013). In view of this, the overall language practices, which include the exclusion of Sardinian from prestigious contexts, cannot be considered as surprising.

Spolsky (2004: 14) stated that language management – a concept which is close to that of declared language policy (Shohamy, 2006: 59) – is often intended to modify the language beliefs and practices of a community. The declared language policy of the Sardinian Regional Administration indeed, probably aims to change the sociolinguistic situation that has just been described. The Regional Bill n°26, approved in 1997, grants the Sardinian language “same dignity as Italian” (Regione Autonoma de Sardigna; my translation). This generic

claim has been better specified in following years. In 2011, the Regional Administration approved a three-year plan for the enhancement of the Sardinian language (Regione Autonoma de Sardigna). This was intended to encourage the use of the minority language in various sectors of society and to enhance its prestige. For example, the use of Sardinian in the media was promoted: Sardinian programs concerning folklore, local traditions, and similar, were discouraged to avoid the association of Sardinian with the past. In contrast, it was urged that “the programs produced should be of high professional value and related to current issues” (Regione Autonoma de Sardigna, 2011: 43; my translation).

In this research I have investigated the language practices of two websites that make use of both Sardinian and Italian. In this way it has been possible to see how two micro-level organisations fit or challenge their sociolinguistic surroundings. Moreover, the aim of this study has been to examine whether or not the language practices of these sites, namely their “de facto” language policies (Shohamy, 2006: XV), comply with the declared policies of the Regional Administration; in other words, the research question wondered if such declared policies have, at least in part, shaped the language choices of the sites and, if so, how these sites have interpreted and put into practice the claims present in the macro-policy.

## **Methods to collect and analyse data**

The present research has been conducted on two websites, which are carried out bilingually in Italian and Sardinian: EjaTV.com and Lâcanas.it. The two websites are publicly available and do not require user’s registration to access. EjaTV.com is an online television, divided in channels and subsections within channels; the data collected consist of both the written parts of the site and its videos. Because of time constraints, it has not been possible to analyse every single video present in the website. It has been decided to take into account, going backwards from April 2018, the most recent 10 videos of every subsection of each channel (or all the videos if there are fewer than 10). In total, 407 videos have been considered. Lâcanas.it instead, is an online newspaper, divided in various thematic sections. Therefore, only written data have been collected; precisely, the most recent 10 articles of each section (or all the articles if there are fewer than 10) have been taken into account – again going backwards from April 2018 – leading to a total of 127 articles. The collection of the data has been carried out through a practice that Kelly-Holmes (2015: 134) defined as “lurking and observing”: namely, constantly monitoring the sites, without participating actively, with the purpose of identifying their language choices. Following the recommendations of Kelly-Holmes (2015: 134) concerning the analysis of language policies and practices in new media, the attention of the research has been focused on verifying the language options that are available in the websites. In particular, the total amount of linguistic-space (Sebba, 2013) dedicated to each language has been taken into consideration, as well as the language choices in every section of the two sites. As further suggested by Kelly-Holmes (2015: 134), the functions that the two languages fulfil when they are employed have been carefully examined. More specifically, it has been recorded which language is used to discuss which topic or subject. Moreover, the language choices in the sites have been considered in view of the sociolinguistic circumstances (Spolsky, 2004; Sebba, 2013) and the language policy (Blommaert et al., 2009; Kelly-Holmes, 2012; 2015; Gafaranga, 2015) of the regional territory to which those sites belong.

## Results

### *EjaTV.com*

EjaTV.com is a Sardinian website which contains an online television. First of all, it is important to say that the user is given the possibility to select the language of the website: the options available are two, Sardinian and Italian. Based on which language the user selects, various writings of the website change their form: for example, the writing to access the contact information section could be “*contatti*”, if the selected language is Italian, or “*cun-tatos*”, if it is Sardinian (EjaTV.com, no date). Therefore, the approach the site seems to adopt, at least for its written parts, is bilingualism with parallel texts (Sebba, 2013). Sebba (2013) defined them as written texts in which the two languages have symmetrical space, the content expressed in the two languages is the same and there is no language alternation, the linguistic mixing type is monolingual. However, this approach is not carried out constantly in EjaTV.com. In the section dedicated to the different channels of the television, while the names of such channels are mostly in Sardinian, their descriptions are available only in Italian, regardless of the language selected. Thus, among the written components of the website, there are also instances of complementary texts (Sebba, 2013). As Sebba explained (2013), in complementary texts, the space dedicated to the two languages is asymmetrical, the content is different and the linguistic mixing type can vary, in this case being again monolingual, with no language alternation. It is therefore evident that the site contains sections with all the peculiarities of parallel texts, and other sections whose characteristics are more similar to those of complementary texts. Another aspect of the website’s written components deserves particular attention. The text contained in the contact information section, as well as the text concerning legal information on respect for privacy, are available only in Italian. In general, as far as the written components of the site are concerned, more space is given to Italian and more content is expressed in that language. In particular, except for some proper names of channels and programs, there is no piece of content that is expressed in Sardinian and not in Italian, while there are Italian texts which are not available in Sardinian.

In regard to the numerous programs and videos, Sardinian and Italian are more clearly used in complementary distribution. Except from sporadic cases in which both languages are employed, yet in different parts of the videos and to say different things, in all the videos either Sardinian or Italian is used; none of the Italian videos has a Sardinian version or vice versa. Moreover, apart from one exception, none of the Italian videos has subtitles in Sardinian or vice versa. As pointed out by Sebba (2013) and Gafaranga (2015), this type of complementary bilingualism assumes that the audience has competence in both the languages used, since a message is conveyed only once and only in one language. Nevertheless, the extent to which the two languages are employed is significantly different: indeed 77.9% of the 407 analysed videos are in Italian, only 14.7% in Sardinian; Italian is the predominant language in 10 channels out of 12 (see Table 1). There is also little space for sporadic videos in foreign languages (3.9%). Italian and Sardinian seem to differ also in terms of contents conveyed; Sardinian is very often excluded from modern and prestigious topics. For example, the channel “*Astros*” is described as “the channel of science and technology” (EjaTV.com, no date; my translation): 96.7% of the videos of this channel are in Italian. By

contrast, a program such as “*Biddas*”, which is intended to talk about the traditional culture of Sardinia’s villages, is completely carried out in Sardinian. In terms of functions and contents, Italian and Sardinian seem to be represented in a diglossic relationship (Ferguson, 1959), with Sardinian being the low language. This pattern of language practices is at odds with the heading of the channels section: “EjaTV is the television of Sardinia’s languages” (EjaTV.com, no date; my translation). This declared care for the local languages is, at least in part, contradicted by the language practices found in the website.

<i>Name of channels</i>	<i>N° of videos in Italian</i>	<i>N° of videos in Sardinian</i>	<i>N° of videos in Ital. and Sard.</i>	<i>N° of videos in other languages</i>	<i>Total n° of videos</i>
Sardegna Teatro	9 (90%)	0 (0%)	1 (10%)	0 (0%)	10 (100%)
Cagliari Calcio	10 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	10 (100%)
Innovas	59 (88%)	3 (4.4%)	4 (5.9%)	1 (1.4%)	67 (100%)
Cinema	15 (75%)	2 (10%)	0 (0%)	3 (15%)	20 (100%)
Siendas	19 (95%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	20 (100%)
Astros	59 (96.7%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.3%)	0 (0%)	61 (100%)
Terra	44 (75.8%)	11 (18.9%)	2 (3.4%)	1 (1.7%)	58 (100%)
Lugore	1 (25%)	3 (75%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (100%)
Sonos	8 (27.5%)	12 (41.3%)	2 (6.8%)	7 (24.1)	29 (100%)
Entula	43 (72.8%)	13 (22%)	2 (3.3%)	1 (1.7%)	59 (100%)
Novas	24 (82.7%)	2 (6.8%)	1 (3.4%)	2 (6.8%)	29 (100%)
Sport	26 (65%)	13 (32.5%)	0 (0%)	1 (2.5%)	40 (100%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>317 (77.9%)</b>	<b>60 (14.7%)</b>	<b>14 (3.4%)</b>	<b>16 (3.9%)</b>	<b>407 (100%)</b>

Table 1: Languages used in the videos of the 12 channels of EjaTV.com

### *Làcanas.it*

Làcanas.it is a Sardinian website related to a namesake magazine, whose subtitle is “bilingual magazine of the identities” (Pillonca, 2003 to present; my translation). In view of the identity value that Sardinian has on the island (Depau & Ghimenton, 2009: 222), it is not difficult to see in that subtitle an interest both in writing the magazine in two languages and valorising the role of Sardinian. The website is a sort of online newspaper, with a news bulletin, which is daily updated, and different thematic sections. In contrast with EjaTV.com, it is not possible to select the language of the website, the settings are exclusively in Italian. The articles instead, are written either in Italian or in Sardinian. The two languages are alternative, no Italian article has its Sardinian correspondent and vice versa. Taken together therefore, those articles are complementary texts in which the mixing type is monolingual (Sebba, 2013). As said above, this implies that the readership is assumed to be competent in both languages (Sebba, 2013; Gafaranga, 2015). Looking at the degree of use of the two languages, it seems that the intentions implicitly declared in the subtitle of the magazine have been put into practice in the website’s articles. Indeed, considering the most recent 10 articles of each section, it can be found that the two languages are employed in an almost symmetrical way: 55.9% of the articles are in Italian, 44.1% in Sardinian (see Table 2), a

much more balanced percentage than that of EjaTV.com. It has to be specified that the various sections cannot be given the same relevance; the section of the news bulletin, “*Bacheca*”, is by far the most active one, being updated on a daily basis. To better understand, let us consider these numbers: none of the articles in the other sections has been published in April 2018, all of them are less recent. On the other hand, within the timespan from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> of April 2018, 23 articles have been posted in the news bulletin, more than one a day, on average. Considering that the news bulletin is written exclusively in Sardinian, it can be said that the role of the minority language is predominant in Làcanas.it. Moreover, Sardinian is used to write about every kind of subject, from music (as in the section “*Musica*”) to more prestigious topics, such as technology (as in the section “*Multimedia*”) or politics (as in “*Bacheca*”). The same can be said for Italian, which is employed, for example, to write about local culture in the section “*Tradizioni*” (Traditions), and about scientific contents in the section “*Archeologia*” (Archaeology). In the articles of this website, the two languages do not have a diglossic relation (Ferguson, 1959).

<i>Name of the sections</i>	<i>N° of articles in Italian</i>	<i>N° of articles in Sardinian</i>	<i>Total n° of articles</i>
Tradizioni	8 (80%)	2 (20%)	10 (100%)
Multimedia	0 (0%)	3 (100%)	3 (100%)
Storia	9 (90%)	1 (10%)	10 (100%)
Cinema	8 (80%)	2 (20%)	10 (100%)
Subra su palcu	0 (0%)	10 (100%)	10 (100%)
Ventanas	0 (0%)	10 (100%)	10 (100%)
No profit	4 (100%)	0 (0%)	4 (100%)
In bidda	10 (100%)	0 (0%)	10 (100%)
Ervas	10 (100%)	0 (0%)	10 (100%)
Musica	0 (0%)	10 (100%)	10 (100%)
Archeologia	10 (100%)	0 (0%)	10 (100%)
Cronaca	4 (40%)	6 (60%)	10 (100%)
Focus	8 (80%)	2 (20%)	10 (100%)
Bacheca	0 (0%)	10 (100%)	10 (100%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>71 (55.9%)</b>	<b>56 (44.1%)</b>	<b>127 (100%)</b>

Table 2: languages used in the most recent 10 articles of each section of Làcanas.it

## Discussion

Gafaranga (2015) claimed that macro language policies can shape the language choices of micro-level organisations. The cases analysed fit quite well in this description, since the languages used by the two websites are the ones mentioned in the macro-policy of Sardinia’s Regional Administration, namely Sardinian and Italian. The goal of that macro-policy is to give “same dignity” to those two languages (Regione Autonoma de Sardigna, 1997; my translation). When EjaTV.com declares to be “the television of Sardinia’s languages” (EjaTV.com, no date; my translation), it seems to comply with the purposes of the macro-

policy. Nonetheless, the actual language practices of that site show only a tokenistic engagement (Kelly-Holmes et al., 2009) to the minority language. The sociolinguistic status quo is not really challenged, in contrast with the agenda of the Regional policy. As Spolsky (2004: 14) pointed out, and as it is the case in Sardinia, language planning may try to modify common language practices. Instead, the almost total exclusion of Sardinian from prestigious topics in EjaTV.com, seems more to accommodate the sociolinguistic situation of the island and it is not even in accordance with the exhortation of the Regional Administration to use Sardinian to talk about modern contents (Regione Autonoma de Sardinia, 2011). Moreover, the use, albeit rare, of foreign languages has little to do with the Regional policy. It is worth specifying that one of the EjaTV's Italian programs, called "*Tg migranti*" (Migrants' newscast), makes constant use of English subtitles; this choice is justified by the nature of the program, which is addressed to migrants, namely native speakers of neither Italian nor Sardinian. Thus, such linguistic choice responds to a particular communicative necessity of the website. Following Baldauf (2006), this is exactly what characterises an independent micro-policy. On the other hand, the aforementioned statement "EjaTV is the television of Sardinia's languages" (EjaTV.com, no date; my translation) may suggest that the people in charge of EjaTV.com perceive that they are taking linguistic choices in line with the macro-policy. Nevertheless, as Gafaranga et al. (2013) proposed, if the discrepancies between the macro-policy and what happens in a specific organisation are significant, it is warranted to consider the linguistic choices of that organisation as a micro-policy on its own, even if there is no agency claimed in that direction.

As far as Lâcanas.it is concerned, its language practices are much more closer to the concept of equal dignity between Sardinian and Italian (Regione Autonoma de Sardinia, 1997). The decision to employ Sardinian to write about modern and current issues is clearly in line with the agenda of the macro-policy, namely enhancing the prestige of the minority language. According to Kaplan & Baldauf (2003: 222) "prestige planning consists of those image or prestige-related goals that need to be met to promote and intellectualise a language". By discussing about technology or foreign affairs in Sardinian, Lâcanas.it is attempting to intellectualise the language and improve its image, in total compliance with the spirit of the Regional macro-policy. In view of all this, the language practices of Lâcanas.it could be seen as a micro-implementation of the macro-policy. However, in the website no explicit reference to the latter is made and therefore, we cannot be sure about the agency involved in such language choices. Based on the concepts developed by Gafaranga (2015), what seems safer to claim is that the Region's macro-policy is a context that frames the language choices of this site and that helps their interpretation. On the other hand, the language practices at such a micro-level write into being the macro-policy (Gafaranga, 2015). The two levels therefore, are strictly interrelated.

Slightly moving away from these issues, it is worth making a final remark. If the purpose of the people in charge of Lâcanas.it is, as it appears, the promotion of the image of Sardinian, they may want to pay more attention on the settings of the website. As explained by Cunliffe & Herring (2005) and Kelly-Holmes (2012: 340), the fact that the software, the housekeeping, or the settings of a website are in the majority language can negatively affect, in "visual and paralinguistic terms" (Kelly-Holmes, 2012: 340), the image of the minority language.



## Conclusion

By analysing the language choices of two Sardinian-Italian websites, it has been possible to compare language practices at micro-level with declared, institutional macro-policies, like the ones of the Sardinian Regional Administration. It has been found that, in spite of explicit claims and potential perceptions of the agents, when the language choices of an organisation at a local level have profound divergences with the macro-policy of its territory, it is appropriate to refer to those choices as constituting an autonomous micro-policy. On the other hand, it has also been found that new media, such as websites, can contribute to a macro-policy, by putting it into being, challenging the sociolinguistic status quo of a community and promoting the use and prestige of a minority language. When macro- and micro-level have this type of convergence, the two levels should be seen as interacting with each other. Nonetheless, it is appropriate to acknowledge that such conclusions have been reached not only looking at figures and percentages, but also through a subjective interpretation of the meaning of certain language usages and of their association with the precepts of the Sardinian macro-policy. The shortage of completely objective evidence in support of the findings represents a limitation of the analysis presented. This study and similar ones that will be done in the future should consider to involve the people who are responsible for the linguistic choices of the sites and ask them for clarifications on the relationship between such choices and the macro-level language policy of the relevant territory. Nevertheless, it has been seen that such solution may not be enough, since the people in charge may believe that there is a strong connection between their linguistic choices and the official policy, although the facts show a significant distance between those two levels. Therefore, a certain degree of interpretation seems to be almost inevitable in these types of examinations, but in order to make the conclusions cogent, it is fundamental to analyse thoroughly as many pieces of institutional language policy as possible and try to understand their agenda, their priorities and the suggested ways to get to them. Then, a search for commonalities and differences between the micro-level organisation and those pieces of institutional policy in terms of languages involved, importance given to the sociolinguistic surroundings and strategies to obtain specific sociolinguistic goals should follow. When the differences prevail, it seems better to talk of micro-level language policy independent from the macro-level one; when the commonalities are predominant, it seems reasonable to talk of two correlated forces, pushing towards the same direction.

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