On the Relation Between Attitudes and Dialect Maintenance (Sicilian and Venetan) in Italy

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Abstract   Despite recent revalorization, Italian dialects are still stigmatized. Our study compares the attitudes towards Sicilian and Venetan and their relation to language use and proficiency. An online survey with 56 Sicilian and 135 Venetan users reveals the importance of the dialect for identity in both groups, but the interaction between attitudes, use and proficiency varies: positive attitudes towards Venetan align with active use, whereas positive attitudes towards Sicilian are stronger in low-proficiency users. We propose that the revalorization of dialects is happening under different circumstances, impacting their future use and maintenance.

Keywords   Bilectalism. Sicilian. Venetan. Attitudes. Use. Proficiency.

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1   Introduction

Language attitudes can be defined as largely unconscious individual attitudes towards a linguistic variety and its speakers (Adler, Plewnia 2018). Within social psychology, language attitudes are seen as a mental construct that comprises three different dimensions. The first dimension, referred as 'cognitive' is associated with individuals' understanding of various aspects of language. It encompasses knowledge of regional and diastratic variation as well as personal experiences of language use. The 'affective' component makes up the second dimension and is strongly related to the emotions that individuals have towards different language varieties and their speakers, including their own language variety. The third dimension is the 'behavioural' one that influences our linguistic behaviour in different situations (Ladegaard 2000). While attitudes towards a language focus on the language itself and its perception, attitudes towards speakers of a language are additionally linked to stereotypes (Schoel et al. 2012), thus comprising also extra-linguistic and societal aspects (Schlieben-Lange 1991). The latter are key to the use of a language and its transmission to the subsequent generation.

Attitudes towards a language can be positive or negative. This has implications for language use because negative attitudes can lead to a decrease of use, while positive attitudes can lead to an increase of use. This is especially evident in contexts where minority languages (often associated with negative attitudes) compete with a majority language (associated with positive attitudes). While for majority languages there is usually a high amount of input, which comes with different qualities (e.g., from many different speakers and in various registers), minority languages are more restricted in domains of use and lack institutional support. If attitudes towards minority languages are negative and linked to discrimination, it is unlikely that they will be used and passed on to the next generation (Murillo, Smith 2011), especially when using the minority language is considered an obstacle to economic success and social mobility (Mohanty 2010). Instead of transmitting the minority language to the forthcoming generations, speakers might pass their traumatising experiences to their children and grandchildren, making it less likely for the minority language to survive (Dołowy-Rybińska, Hornsby 2021).

The impact of negative attitudes on language use and intergenerational transmission can be seen in different types of minority language settings, including indigenous languages, heritage languages and dialects. Brenzinger et al. (2003) have argued that speakers of indigenous languages might see their language (and culture) as an impediment to participating in modern society and, consequently, refrain from transmitting it to the next generation. Heritage speakers often face a similar situation (Zhang, Slaughter-Defoe 2009; Kutlu,

Kirchner 2021). While feeling the pressure to integrate into the host society, they often see their heritage languages as an obstacle and therefore stop using it, which results in fading language proficiencies over generations. Similarly, the use of dialects and regional minority languages highly depends on the attitudes the speakers themselves and others have towards them: positive attitudes towards a dialect will favour its use and negative attitudes will cause its avoidance (Grassi, Sobrero, Telmon 1997). A decline in dialect use and in the number of speakers can cause the loss of linguistic structures and the transfer of structures from the majority language into the dialect so that the dialect loses its value and importance for communication (Moretti 1999). Thus, language attitudes are crucial determinants for the existence of a linguistic variety, especially in the case of minority languages. In such contexts, attitudes towards minority languages can be investigated from the point of view of the 'others' (the majority) as well as from the perspective of the speakers themselves.[1] In this paper, we will examine the latter, focusing on the attitudes that Italian speakers of Sicilian and Venetan have towards their own dialects.

2 Attitudes and Dialects in Italy – Sicilian and Venetan

With Italian and numerous Italo-Romance dialects being spoken in Italy in the past and today, the Italian linguistic landscape provides a good basis for research on regional varieties. The dialects in Italy, just like Italian, have developed independently from Latin, and from a linguistic point of view they must be regarded as independent (regional) languages rather than dialects 'of Italian' (Berruto 1989; Tosi 2004). However, contrary to Italian, the dialects are mostly used as spoken languages and their use is generally restricted to informal situations. By using the term 'dialect', we are thus following the Italian linguistic tradition that captures the difference between Italian (high variety) and the dialects (low variety) from a sociolinguistic point of view (Loporcaro 2009).[2] In the past, the dialect was the common means of communication for all kinds of oral situations and Italian was mostly used for formal and written purposes (de Renzo 2008). This diglossic relationship (Ferguson 1964; Berruto 1987a) changed in the second half of the twentieth century when Italian began to

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1 Baroni 1983; Galli de' Paratesi 1984; Volkart-Rey 1990 and Ruffino 2006 for the Italian context.

2 By contrast, 'regional varieties' are some modern varieties of Italian that have developed from standard Italian under the influence of dialects spoken in those areas (Berruto 2018).

spread and entered the domains of oral communication. Both Italian and dialect were used for informal conversations, resulting in functional overlap between the high and low variety in this domain – a situation referred to as *dilalia* (Berruto 1987b). With this change dialect use not only decreased but also became increasingly stigmatised since dialects were seen as an impediment to learning Italian and to having social and economic success (Cremona, Bates 1977; de Renzo 2008; Rubino 2014). This resulted in the repression of dialects at school as well as in negative attitudes towards dialects more generally, characterised by the hierarchical opposition between the prestigious standard variety and the disdained dialect (Grassi, Sobrero, Telmon 1997).

Language attitudes have been subject to several studies conducted in the 1980s and 1990s. Baroni (1983) investigated the attitudes towards Italian, regional varieties and dialects spoken in Milano, Padova, Bologna and Catania by means of the matched guise technique. Thus, participants were not explicitly asked about their attitudes towards these language varieties, but they heard recorded speech samples and rated them with regard to personal and socioeconomic traits without knowing where the speakers were from. While speakers of Italian received higher ratings than speakers of dialects on socioeconomic dimensions, they received lower ratings on personal dimensions (e.g., solidarity and likeability of a speaker). These results were confirmed by Volkart-Rey (1990), who investigated the attitudes of teachers in Catania and Rome towards accents in Italy. In his study, teachers in both cities listened to a text read by different speakers with varying degrees of dialectal features, ranging on a continuum from a marked Catanese and Roman dialect to a more controlled standard Italian pronunciation. He found that Italian was mostly connected to a high socioeconomic status whereas regional accents were linked to positive personal traits. He further observed that as regional accents moved further along the continuum toward the strong dialectal variant, both their socioeconomic and personal appeal declined.

Volkart-Rey's findings on accent prejudices in Italy have been mirrored by studies in many other national contexts. While speakers of standard languages are mostly associated with a high socioeconomic status and low degrees of solidarity, the situation is inverted for speakers of nonstandard varieties (Giles, Coupland 1991; Giles, Billings 2004). To explain such findings, social scientists have relied on Social Identity Theory (e.g., Tajfel, Turner 1979). Accordingly, we categorise the world and perceive ourselves and others in terms of social groups. Membership in such groups forms part of our social identity, which can be positive or negative, depending on how this group is compared to other groups. Language plays an important role in this process of categorisation and perception of social group members

since it enables persons to intuitively classify a speaker based on the stereotypes that are linked to the specific group he is part of (Brewer 1996). Therefore, in the context of regional variation, a speaker might be assigned to a social group based on his accent and associated with the stereotypes pertaining to this group (Grondelaers, Van Hout 2012). Consequently, linguistic varieties are connected to group stereotypes through the unconscious process of categorising members of different language communities.

In the Italian context, further differences in attitudes appear to persist between southern and northern varieties. In Baroni's (1983) study, speakers of southern varieties generally received more negative ratings compared to speakers of northern varieties. Not only did speakers of other (northern) varieties have negative attitudes towards southern varieties, but speakers of southern varieties themselves also had negative attitudes towards their own dialects. By devaluating their own variety, southern Italians incorporated their inferior status resulting from less economic progress during the 1980s and 1990s, comparing themselves to the privileged and superior North (Baroni 1983, 106). This behaviour can be explained with the social phenomenon known as self-stigmatisation of self-censorship (Bourdieu 2017). A group of people, knowing about the prejudices and stereotypes against them, starts to internalise and project those attributions on themselves (Corrigan, Watson 2002).[3]

Galli de' Paratesi (1984) came to similar findings as Baroni when conducting a study in Milan, Florence and Rome in which she asked the participants directly whether they liked the Italian accent in different parts of Italy (including Milan, Rome, Florence, and the South of Italy) and the Italian variety used by the national broadcasting company RAI. While attitudes towards northern varieties were mostly positive, those towards the Italian used by RAI were ambivalent, i.e., positive from a socioeconomic perspective, while at the same time associated with being cold and unnatural. Again, attitudes towards the southern varieties were mostly negative, especially among the participants with southern origins. In the 1990s, Ruffino (2006) collected data on dialect attitudes among primary school children from all over Italy. Even the children expressed the idea that dialects in general, but especially the southern varieties, were stigmatised. This was especially the case for children living in the southern regions, suggesting that language attitudes start to be internalised from a very early age.

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[3] The term 'self-stigmatisation' is usually used in relation to mental illnesses, but it can also be applied to other contexts in which people suffer from stigmatisation (Bathje, Marston 2014), including that of linguistic minorities.

In a recent account, Berruto (2018) has pointed out that attitudes towards dialects in Italy have changed. They are no more associated with a low socioeconomic status and a low prestige, but instead are seen as an enrichment for individual communication. The detachment of the dialects' stigmatised status in the 1980s and 1990s is a change that Berruto (2018, 506) refers to as "revalorisation of dialects". This trend becomes apparent even in more stigmatised dialects like Sicilian. For example, Sicilian is now used for advertising purposes, e.g., in names of restaurants (D'Agostino, Ruffino 2005). Similarly, Parry (2010, 72) highlights a 'come-back' of dialects. She suggests that it might be the result of higher proficiencies in Italian: Now that most speakers are confident and fluent in Italian, they are no longer 'ashamed of' using the dialect. Furthermore, in the spirit of the 'multilingual turn', it has been pointed out that dialect use neither hinders the development of the standard language (as portrayed in the past), nor does it affect cognitive abilities negatively. Garraffa, Beveridge, Sorace (2015) tested bilingual Sardinian-Italian primary school children in their receptive competence in Italian and executive function. The bilingual children performed on par with monolingual Italian children, and the older bilingual children even outperformed the monolingual controls. The cognitive advantages of being bilingual in the standard language and a dialect have also been found among adults living in the same area (Garraffa, Obregon, Sorace 2017), thus indicating that the positive effects of bilingualism on cognitive abilities (Bialystok 2009) can be extended to cases where one of the languages is a regional minority language.

Despite the decline in the number of dialect speakers in the past decades, for half of the Italian population the dialect is still a part of their linguistic repertoire (Berruto 2018). However, the number of actual dialect speakers is not equally distributed in Italy and largely depends on sociolinguistic factors, such as age, gender, education, context and especially regional origin. Data collection carried out at regular intervals since the 1980s shows that the dialect is mostly spoken by male older persons with lower levels of education and within the family and that the highest numbers of dialect users can be found in the South and in the North-east (Istat 2017). Sicilian (spoken in the South of Italy) and Venetan (spoken in the North-east of Italy) are two of the dialects that are spoken in these regions. Both are considered to be amongst the most vital dialects in Italy. There are about 4.7 Mio. speakers of Sicilian (Eberhard, Simons, Fennig 2022) and about 7.8 Mio. speakers of Venetan (International Commission of European Citizens 2022) in Italy and worldwide.[4] Berruto

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[4] Another number reported in an online article by Fitzgerald-Crozier (2011) is 20 million, but we suspect that this is an overestimation. https://unicoac.org/sicilian-americans-have-something-to-say-in-sicilian/.

(2018, 503, based on Istat 2014) estimates that 72% of the Sicilian population (3.5 million) and 70% of the Venetan population (4.2 million) uses the dialect actively for their communication. Sicilian and Venetan are both recognised as languages on a local level. Nevertheless, like most of the other Italo-Romance dialects, they are not mentioned in the law 482/99 that was established to protect the linguistic minorities in Italy (Van der Jeught 2016; Ganfi, Simoniello 2021). What makes the comparison between Sicilian and Venetan particularly interesting is that although both are amongst the most widely spoken dialects in Italy, the attitudes towards them differ drastically. As Berruto (2018) points out, paradoxically, negative attitudes towards the dialect are found especially in those regions that have the highest numbers of dialect users, i.e., primarily the Southern Italy ones, whereas positive attitudes are connected to regions with low degrees of dialect use, especially those spoken in the North-West.[5] Following the Italian linguistic tradition, we refer to Sicilian and Venetan as 'dialects', and will consequently speak of "bilectalism" (Rowe, Grohmann 2013) to refer to the linguistic situation of (most) Sicilians and Venetans. In this respect, 'bilectals' are a specific group of bilinguals that have two varieties of different sociolinguistic statuses in their linguistic repertoire.

3 Research Questions and Hypotheses

This paper investigates attitudes towards Sicilian and Venetan by looking at the relationship between dialect attitudes, use and proficiency in these two dialects. More specifically, we ask:

RQ1 What attitudes do Sicilians and Venetans have towards their dialect(s)?
RQ2 How do these attitudes relate to their (self-reported) language use?
RQ3 How do self-reported language use and attitudes relate to objective proficiency in Italian and in the dialect?
RQ4 How do dialect attitudes towards Sicilian and Venetan differ?

First, concerning RQ1, we assume that speakers' attitudes towards their own dialects are determined by the different status of the dialect and Italian. As has been pointed out by Baroni (1983), Galli de' Paratesi (1984) and Volkart-Rey (1990) in the Italian context and by Giles, Billings (2004) more generally, we expect that speakers will

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[5] This seems to reflect the Sicilian case well. Attitudes towards Venetan, by contrast, are not predominantly negative. Although Venetan has a high number of speakers, it is perceived to be an important part of the regional identity that its speakers are proud of (Perrino 2019).

attribute a higher prestige to the standard variety compared to the non-standard variety. We further assume that speakers will be aware of the functional distinction between the two varieties and will therefore associate Italian with a higher status. However, this does not mean that dialect attitudes will be negative. Following Parry (2010) and Berruto (2018), we can assume that speaking a dialect today is no more linked to negative attitudes but rather as an opportunity to develop one's identity and preserve cultural heritage.

With regard to the relationship between attitudes and (self-reported) language use (RQ2), we are considering Berruto's (2018) observation that negative attitudes are mostly found in regions with high dialect use. By looking at language use within and outside the family in two regions with high degrees of dialect use we aim to investigate whether these two regions show the same patterns in the interaction between attitudes and language use. Unlike in the past, today's Italian population is proficient in Italian and no longer dependent on the use of the dialect for the purpose of communication, although half of the Italian population still uses it (Berruto 2018). In this respect, language use is a "matter of choice" that, on the one hand, is influenced by social variables and attitudes and, on the other hand, is left to the speakers' decisions which variety to use in a specific situation (Parry 2010). Since dialect use is determined by social variables (Berruto 2018), we investigate how age and education influence language choices. Moreover, given diminishing numbers of dialect users, albeit a shift towards more positive attitudes, we assume that especially age will affect dialect use and dialect attitudes. We therefore expect older speakers to use more dialect while displaying more negative attitudes, while younger speakers might entertain more positive attitudes. Furthermore, we focus on education and dialect to see whether we can confirm the link between lower education and higher dialect use, as indicated by previous research (Istat 2017; Berruto 2018; D'Agostino, Paternostro 2018). It has been shown previously that attitudes are key to the use and transmission of heritage languages and indigenous languages (Brenzinger et al. 2003; Zhang, Slaughter-Defoe 2009; Kutlu, Kirchner 2021). Herein, we apply these ideas to the context of dialects.

We further hypothesise (RQ3) that positive attitudes correlate with high degrees of language use (as pointed out in RQ2) and with higher dialect proficiency. Especially in research on bilingualism, language use has been shown to be an important factor that affects proficiency in the minority language (e.g., Lloyd-Smith, Einfeldt, Kupisch 2020; Vorobyeva, Bel 2021). Moreover, we assume that higher dialect proficiencies will correlate with higher proficiencies in Italian, as has been shown for Italian-Sardinian speakers (Garraffa, Beveridge, Sorace 2015; Garraffa, Obregon, Sorace 2017). By looking at vocabulary proficiency, we thus expect dialect proficiency to be positively correlated with proficiency in the standard language.

Finally, comparing the attitudes towards Sicilian and Venetan (RQ4), we expect that speakers of Sicilian will show more negative attitudes towards their dialect compared to Venetan speakers. Given the unequal economic development of different parts of the country, southern varieties (and, by extension their speakers) tended to be attributed a low social status, at least in the past. Facing negative stereotypes and stigmatisation from others, Southern Italians might have internalised this view. By contrast, speakers of northern varieties have faced this kind of stigma more rarely because their regions and (by extension) varieties have always been associated with economic progress.[6] Following Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, Turner 1979), we can assume that membership in a group of dialect speakers is part of identity-building and consequently affects the attitudes that speakers have towards their dialects. Although we know from the literature that all dialects in Italy underwent a process of revalorisation, there can be remaining differences in attitudes towards dialects, which may be reflected in the comparison of Sicilians and Venetans.

4   Method

4.1   Procedure

Two surveys were carried out online using SoSci Survey (Leiner 2014): One survey on Sicilian and one survey on Venetan. The survey on Sicilian was carried out in the summer of 2022 and the one on Venetan in the Spring of 2023. Participants were recruited through personal contacts, flyers in universities and social media.

In order to address the questions on attitudes, use and proficiency, a questionnaire with an in-built vocabulary task was designed. The procedure started with an introduction to the tasks. After giving their consent, the participants were asked for biographical data on age, education, place of birth, place of residence and gender. The second part consisted of a Yes-No vocabulary task modelled after the Dialang battery (Alderson 2005) to assess objective dialect proficiency. The third part focused on dialect use in different contexts. These questions were presented using a Likert scale ranging from 0 (= only Italian) to 4 (= only dialect). Herein, we focus on the fourth part, which asked about attitudes towards the dialect using Likert scales and single-choice questions which will be reported in

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6   Baroni 1983; Galli de' Paratesi 1984; Grassi, Sobrero, Telmon 1997; Ruffino 2006.

detail in the result section. The Sicilian questionnaire was developed earlier and the findings were used to improve the subsequent Venetan version. Therefore, some questions were changed and/or added.[7] The last part assessed proficiency in Italian using the Italian version of the Dialang. The entire questionnaire took about 40 minutes to complete.

The two lexical tasks on vocabulary knowledge in Sicilian and Venetan (henceforth, LexSIC and LexVEN) consisted of real Sicilian/Venetan verbs and pseudo-verbs. The analysis of participants' proficiency was carried out on 75 items: 50 real verbs and 25 pseudo-verbs that were selected through an IRT analysis performed with the *RM* function from the eRm package in R (Mair, Hatzinger, Maier 2021). For further details on the item assessment criteria and the creation of LexVEN and LexSIC see Kupisch et al. (2023) and Ferin et al. (2023). Following Brysbart (2013) and Amenta, Badan, Brysbaert (2021), we calculated the test score for both the LexSIC and LexVEN as in (1). This formula helps penalise test-takers when answering 'yes' to a pseudoword, as well as guessing behaviours (Izura, Cuetos, Brysbaert 2014, Kupisch et al. 2023). The maximum possible score of both tests is 50, which can only be obtained by accepting all the real verbs and rejecting all pseudo-verbs. The same formula was used to assess the DIALANG placement test scores.

(1)   LexSIC/LexVEN Score = **N** yes to words – 2 * **N** yes to nonwords

4.2   Participants

199 participants from Sicily (n=63) and Veneto (n=136) took part in the survey. Nine participants were excluded because of guessing behaviour in the lexical tasks, eight from Sicily and one from Veneto. The final dataset included 56 Sicilian participants (age range: 18-69, *M*=35.6, SD=11.51; gender: 41 female, 14 male, 1 rather not say) and 135 Venetan participants (age range: 18-78, *M*=37.3, SD=15.7; gender: 98 female, 37 male).

The participants of both groups had diverse provinces of origin: for Venetan speakers, Vicenza (n=48), Padova (n=32), Treviso (n=17), Venezia (n=15), Verona (n=14), Rovigo (n=6) and Belluno (n=2); one participant did not answer. For Sicilian speakers, Palermo (n=22), Messina (n=13), Caltanissetta (n=7), Catania (n=7), Agrigento (n=2),

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[7]   The questions of both versions are successively presented in 5.1. The version in the appendix only includes the questions that we propose for future use and does therefore not fully correspond with the questions listed in 5.1.

Ragusa (n=1) and Trapani (n=1); three participants did not answer. Education was collected on a scale from 1 (no formal education) to 7 (PhD). In short, 33 Sicilian speakers (52%) reported a university degree, 19 a high school diploma and three a lower title; one participant did not respond. Similarly, among Venetan speakers, 67 (49%) had a university degree, 45 a high school diploma and 23 a lower title.

5 Results

To investigate Sicilian and Venetan speakers' attitudes towards their respective dialects, we start by analysing their answers to selected questions descriptively and discuss them in light of the existing literature on attitudes and beliefs towards dialect speakers. Our analysis takes into account the differences between the two versions of the questionnaire. Likert plots were obtained with the *plot_likert* function from the R package *sjPlot* (Lüdecke 2022). In Figures 1 through 4, answers within the green range indicate positive attitudes, while answers within the brown range indicate negative attitudes (grey being neutral) **[figs 1-4]**. For statements asking for participants' degree of agreement, we indicate 'T-F', where 'T' (true) is associated with the left of the scale and 'F' (false) with the right. For example, in Figure 1 answers to the statement 'Sicilian is spoken by old people' were given on a 4-point scale. 'True' answers were coded as 0 (dark brown) or 1 (light brown), and appear on the left side of the bar, indicating negative attitudes. Neutral answers were coded as 2 (grey). Conversely, 'false' answers were coded as 3 (light green) or 4 (dark green), and appear on the right side of the bar, indicating positive attitudes.

5.1 Attitudes

Figures 1 and 2 show the Sicilians' attitudes towards their dialects. In line with Guedri Giacalone (2016), speakers are divided in terms of whether they consider Sicilian a dialect (48.2%) or a language (51.8%). As for prestige, most participants give neutral answers (58.9%), indicating no difference in prestige between the two varieties, which underlines the revalorisation of the dialects (Berruto 2018; Parry 2010). At the same time, those Sicilians who express a biased view, are more inclined to see Italian as the variety with more prestige (37.5%), which is expected due to the negative attitudes that have been prevailing at least in the past and may have been passed on to subsequent generations. These perceptions of prestige are also expected given Social Identity Theory (Giles, Billings 2004), according
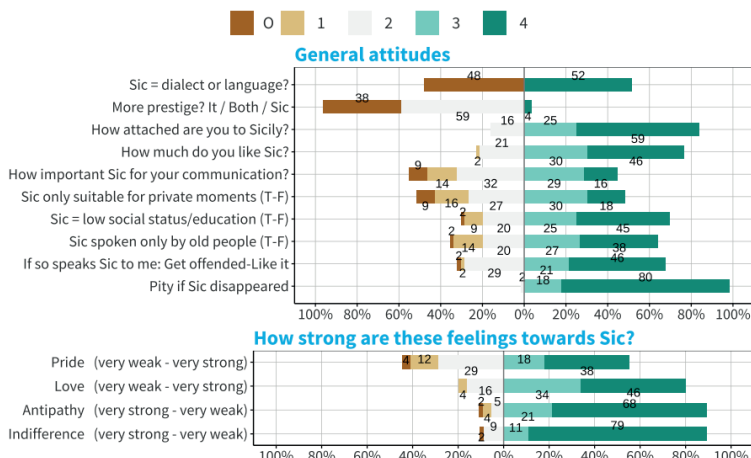
Figure 1 Attitudes towards Sicilian

to which standard varieties are generally viewed as being more pres-
tigious because they are used in formal contexts, including in educa-
tional contexts **[figs 1-2]**.

Questions concerning personal opinions (e.g., "How much do you
like Sicilian?") and personal attachment to Sicily reveal mostly pos-
itive attitudes, again potentially underlining the ongoing revalorisa-
tion process pointed out above, a strong attachment and solidarity
with the region as well as a sense of 'ethnic belonging'. Related-
ly, participants strongly agree that it would be a pity if Sicilian dis-
appeared, which might be interpreted as underlining the feeling of
ethnic belonging, since the dialect is part of their culture, traditions
and identity, which are to be protected. Participants' direct expres-
sions of feelings associated with Sicilian **[fig. 1]** confirm these trends,
as the majority links Sicilian to love (80.3%) and pride (55.4%), while
only a small minority does not have these associations. By contrast,
participants reject indifference (89.3%) and antipathy (89.3%) as as-
sociations to their dialect. In a similar vein, Sicilian participants re-
ject negative stereotypes, supporting Berruto's (2018, 506) claim that
the dialect today is no longer perceived as "the language of the low-
er socio-educational classes". Only a small minority (10.7%) believes
that the dialect is an indicator of a low social class or that it is spo-
ken only by elderly people (16.1%), while the majority believes that
these stereotypes are not true or take a neutral stand.

The overwhelmingly positive reactions to Sicilian are somewhat
compromised by the question on the functional relevance of the di-
alect: 44.7% of the respondents consider the dialect (very) impor-
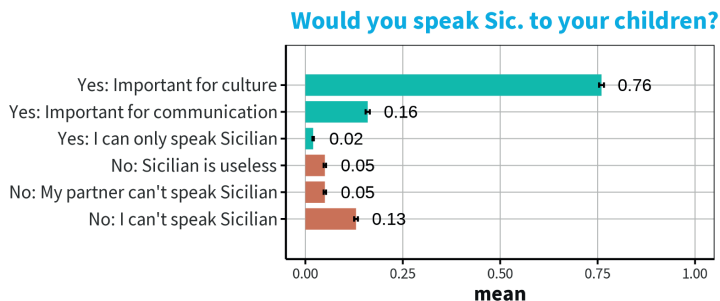tant for daily communication, while the remainder takes a neutral

Would you speak Sic. to your children?

or negative position. Somewhat similarly, only 48.3% seem to think that Sicilian can be used beyond private occasions, while other participants remain neutral or (strongly) disagree.

Another way to gauge the attitudes of Sicilian speakers toward their dialect is to examine their responses to the question "Would you speak Sicilian to your children?" **[fig. 2]**. The question was asked as a multiple-choice question and participants could select multiple answers. They could choose between three reasons why to speak Sicilian to their children (green bars for positive attitudes), and three reasons why not to speak it to their children (orange bars for negative attitudes). Most participants (76%) agree that speaking Sicilian to their children is crucial for maintaining their cultural heritage, while only a small minority would do so because they see Sicilian as essential for communication or because it is their only language. Similarly, as to reasons why they would not use Sicilian, two participants reported that they or their partner cannot speak Sicilian, or because they consider it useless (*n* = 2). These results underline that the dialect is valued more for cultural reasons than for communicational ones and that lack of intergenerational transmission is not due to negative attitudes.

Taken together, our findings underline the emotional attachment to the dialect and its role for the speakers' identities. They indicate that the expression of positive attitudes has become possible through ongoing revalorisation, and that the dialect is still transmitted to and spoken by younger people, regardless of social status. On the other hand, the perceived functional relevance of Sicilian appears to be somewhat restricted beyond the private sphere.

Figures 3 and 4 show Venetans' responses to attitude questions. Based on experience with the Sicilian survey, we simplified some of the original questions, making them more uniform (e.g., the question about categorising Venetan as dialect or language was phrased in a scalar rather than binary way), and we created a clearer distinction
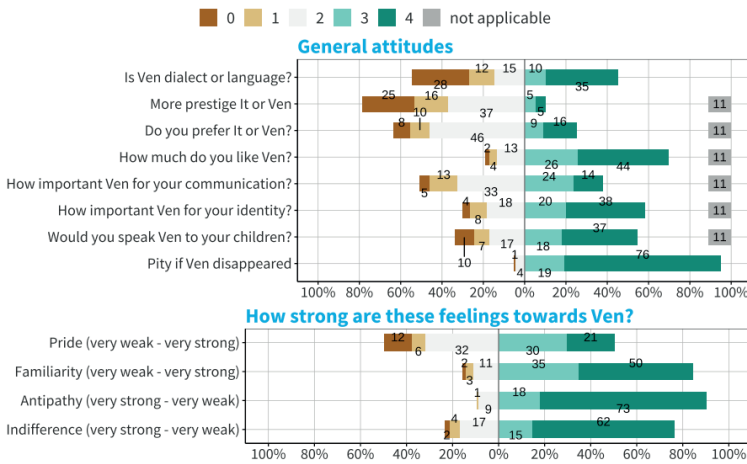
Figure 3 Attitudes towards Venetan

between the participants' personal attitudes to the dialect, their feelings associated with it [fig. 3], and their perceptions of others speaking the dialect. We also rephrased the questions on the consequences of dialect transmission [figs 2, 4]. Some questions were only asked to active users of Venetan (the portion indicated as 'non applicable' comes from Venetans with receptive competence who did not see these questions).

The results for Venetan mirror those obtained for Sicilian with some minor exceptions. Respondents are divided in their views on whether Venetan is a dialect (40%) or a language (45%), while 15% remains neutral. Similarly, the majority of the participants attribute the same prestige to Venetan and Italian (37%), or believe that Italian has more prestige than Venetan (41%). The overwhelming majority of the participants likes Venetan (70%), but when asked to express a preference, Venetans often remain neutral (46%), although they are more inclined to indicate a preference for Venetan (25%) rather than for Italian (18%). Similar to Sicilians, Venetans consider the dialect important to their identity (58%), they would speak Venetan to their children (55%), and they would find it a pity if Venetan disappeared (95%). Also like Sicilians, many Venetans (38%) express that Venetan is important for their communication, although a fair number (18%) does not share this view or stays neutral (33%). Feelings towards Venetan (bottom block) are predominantly positive, although pride is less clearly expressed (51%) than familiarity (85%). In terms of negative feelings, antipathy is virtually absent (1%), and indifference is close to absent (6%).
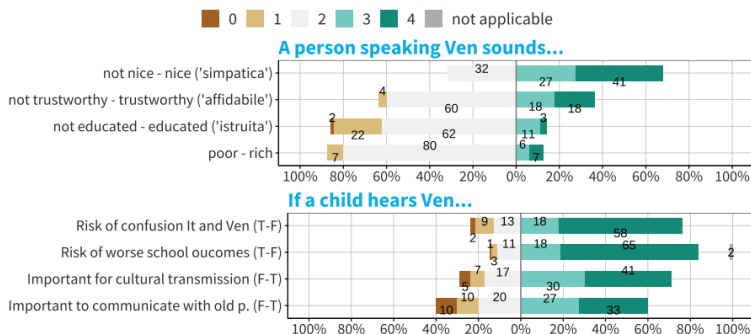
Figure 4   Attitudes towards Venetan speakers and towards the transmission of Venetan

Figure 4 shows that associations with people speaking Venetan are strongly positive when it comes to sympathy (68%), but respondents often remain neutral with respect to other attributes, including trustworthiness (60%), education (62%) and economic status (80%). This is somewhat unexpected considering SIT, according to which attitudes towards dialects are positive on the personal dimension, while being negative on the socioeconomic dimension (Giles, Coupland 1991; Giles, Billings 2004). Figure 4 further shows participants' reactions to questions on the transmission of Venetan to the next generation **[fig. 4]**. Generally, Venetans do not fear negative consequences resulting from dialect exposure, neither for the mastery of the standard language (11%) nor in education (4%), and they think that the transmission of Venetan is important for cultural reasons (71%) and, to a lesser degree, for the purpose of communicating with the older generation (60%).

Overall, the emerging picture is very similar to that for Sicilian, although the two regional languages were expected to present a different picture. Questions about prestige indicate that Venetans, like Sicilians, perceive the standard variety as being more prestigious. At the same time, many respondents stay neutral, which could be an effect of revalorisation. The possible effect of revalorisation is also indicated by the fact that some Venetans prefer Venetan over Italian and by their predominantly positive opinions and feelings pertaining to the dialect. They further express positive opinions about the transmission of Venetan. Like the Sicilians, the Venetan respondents are more reluctant in expressing importance for communication, possibly due to fewer opportunities to use the dialect outside of the home. Overall, the dialect is more important from an identity perspective than for functional reasons. When asked about other people speaking Venetan, respondents express sympathy, while being reluctant to automatically attribute specific social attributes.

5.2 Use of Dialect vs. Italian

Figure 5 shows the participants' responses to questions on language use within and outside of the home. This time, we directly compare responses in the Sicilian and Venetan survey because the questions were asked in the same way. Participants were asked to indicate on a 5-point scale to what extent they used Sicilian/Venetan compared to Italian, with '0' (orange) indicating 'only Italian', and '4' (purple) indicating 'only Sicilian/Venetan', while '2' (white) indicates using of the two equally often. An additional option was 'not applicable' (grey), for example, if participants did not have any siblings or grandparents **[fig. 5]**.

The results show that the highest degrees of dialect use can be observed within the family, which is consistent with Istat reports (Istat 2017). In the Sicilian survey, dialect use is noticeably more frequent with grandparents (42%), in line with the observation that dialect is mostly used by the older generations (Istat 2017; Berruto 2018). Indeed, for some speakers it might be the only way of communicating with their grandparents, who grew up during a time when there were no opportunities for learning Italian and exposure to Italian could not be taken for granted (i.e., the times before television and obligatory schooling). The situation resembles that of trilingual heritage speakers, where the possibility to communicate with grandparents is often mentioned as one major reason for preserving the heritage language (Braun 2012).

When comparing the two groups, Venetan and Sicilian, the results for dialect use diverge more strongly compared to those for attitudes. Venetans indicate exclusive dialect use more often in all domains except for school/university and chat/social networks. By contrast, Sicilians more often report that they use Italian and dialect to equal degrees, especially within the family. This observation is consistent with Istat (2007), reporting the highest amount of exclusive dialect use in Italy for Venetans (38.9%), whereas the most common pattern in Sicily is use of the dialect in alternation with or mixing with Italian (46.2%).

5.3 Towards Linking Attitudes, Use and Proficiency

In the previous section, we explored the reported attitudes of Venetans and Sicilians towards their respective dialects. This section summarises the results of our statistical analyses, modelling the relationship between speaker's attitudes towards dialect, their use and their proficiency in the dialect itself (measured by LexSIC and LexVEN) and in Italian (RQs 2-4). To this end, we calculated aggregate scores to be used as continuous variables in our statistical analysis.
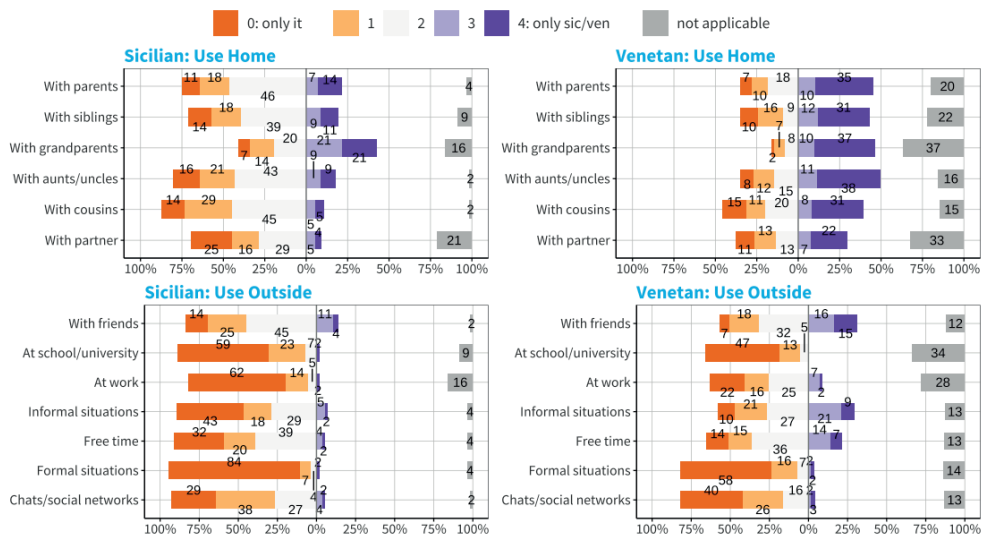
Figure 5 Use of Sicilian (left) /Venetan (right) vs. Italian within the home (top) and outside the home (bottom)

First, we calculated two separate use scores, 'Use in the family' and 'Use outside the family' (henceforth abbreviated as 'UseHome' and 'UseOutside'). They were obtained from the questions on use **[fig. 5]**, where 0 = only Italian and 4 = only dialect. We calculated the mean of answered questions in each category (a higher mean indicates more dialect use), and then multiplied the mean by a 'variety' coefficient (a higher multiplier indicates more domains of use). Thus, the coefficient was higher if the dialect was spoken with more people and/or in more situations, and lower if the dialect was spoken with fewer people and/or in fewer situations. Overall, the final use scores ranged from 0 (only Italian in all situations) to 4 (only dialect). Second, we calculated an 'Attitudes' score. As the set of questions was different between varieties, and some Venetan speakers did not answer all questions, we calculated the score based on a subset of questions, in common to all participants in both groups: questions on speaker's feelings towards their dialects (pride, love/familiarity, indifference, hate), the question on dialect maintenance, and the question on the perception of a dialectal speaker as educated/uneducated (see Appendix; questions in bold were used for the score).[8]

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8 To check the validity of this score, we calculated a different score for Sicilian respondents and for some of the Venetan respondents, including a higher number of questions. The two scores, the more detailed and the more selective one, were highly correlated ($r =.95$), proving that the simplified score was adequate for the present analysis.

The score was obtained by summing up the answers to each question, and it ranged between 0 (completely negative attitudes towards the dialect) and 24 (completely positive attitudes towards the dialect). Third, we included 'LexSIC' and 'LexVEN' scores as measures of proficiency in Sicilian and Venetan respectively, and 'DIALANG' as a measure of Italian proficiency. All vocabulary measures range from 0 to 50. Finally, 'Education' (1 to 7), 'Age' and 'Group' (categorical: Venetan vs. Sicilian) were included as predictors where appropriate.

For the statistical analysis, we fitted several (generalised) linear models, using the functions *lm* and *glm* included in the *stats* package (R core team 2022). When a model included interactions, we followed a procedure of stepwise model selection to obtain the best fit, removing interactions when not significant, based on the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC). Main predictors, by contrast, were kept in the model even when not significant. As a first step, we addressed RQ2 and RQ3 separately for Venetan and for Sicilian. Subsequently, in order to address RQ4, we fitted a model directly comparing the two groups. However, given the strong unbalance in the number of participants (56 vs 135), we run this comparison using only a subset of Venetans (n=82).[9]

5.3.1 How Attitudes Relate to (Self-Reported) Use

To address this question (RQ2), we fitted two linear models, one for Venetan and one for Sicilian, with Attitudes as dependent variable. UseHome, UseOutside, Age and Education were added as predictors, including an interaction term between UseHome and Age, and between UseOutside and Age.

For Sicilian speakers **[fig. 6]**, there was a significant effect of UseOutside (β = -4.87, *SE* = 2.38, *t* = -2.05, *p* = 0.05), qualified by an interaction between UseOutside and Age that, however, only approached significance (β = 0.1, *SE* = 0.06, *t* = 1.79, *p* = 0.08). Predicted values were extracted for two discrete values in the age distribution, i.e., 20 and 50 years of age. The interaction shows that, while for older speakers attitudes are not predicted by the amount of dialect use outside the family, for younger speakers there is such an effect: while little or no use outside the family is associated with positive attitudes, higher reported use is associated with more negative attitudes. All other predictors were not significant (UseHome: β = 0.63, *SE* = 0.58, *t* = 1.09, *p* = 0.28; Education: β = 0.14, *SE* = 0.36, *t* = 0.39, *p* = 0.70).

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9 In order to preserve province variation in the sample, we included all participants from Verona, Treviso and Venezia, and we randomly sampled 18 participants from Vicenza and 18 from Padova.
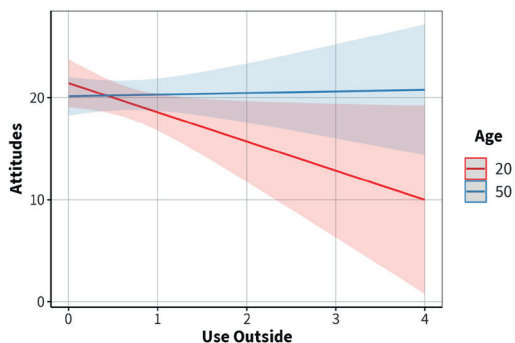
Figure 6   Predicted values of attitudes for Sicilian speakers, by age and use outside the family
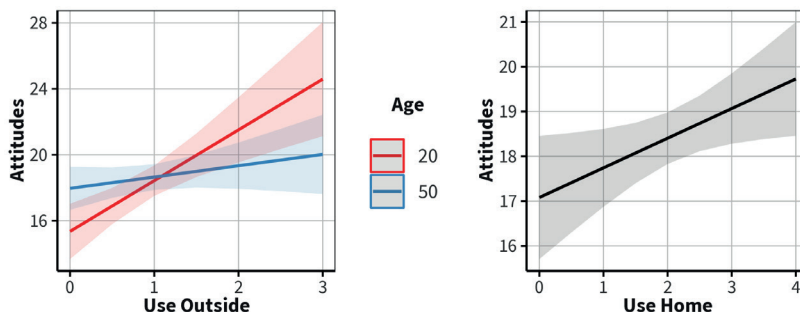

Figure 7   Predicted values of attitudes for Venetan speakers, by age and use outside the family (left) and use in the family (right)

For Venetan speakers **[fig. 7]**, there was a significant main effect of Age (β = 0.09, *SE* = 0.03, *t* = 2.76, *p* = 0.007) and UseOutside (β = 4.67, *SE* = 1.22, *t* = 3.85, *p* <0.001), qualified by a significant interaction between the two terms (β = -0.08, *SE* = 0.02, *t* = -3.21, *p* = 0.002). While for older speakers there was no effect of use outside the family on their attitudes, there was a positive effect for younger speakers, such that higher use outside the family predicted more positive attitudes. We also found a positive main effect of use in the family (β = 0.66, *SE* = 0.3, *t* = 2.2, *p* = 0.03).

5.3.2 Relations Between Self-Reported Language Use, Attitudes and Proficiency

To address how self-reported language use, attitudes and proficiency are related, we fitted a poisson model for each group, with LexSIC and LexVEN as dependent variables. UseHome, UseOutside, Attitudes, Age and Education were added as predictors, including an interaction term between UseHome and Age, between UseOutside and Age, and between Attitudes and Age. Furthermore, we fitted two additional poisson models (one for each group) with DIALANG as a dependent variable. We included the same predictors as above, with the addition of LexSIC/LexVEN as an additional fixed effect.

For Sicilian, dialect proficiency (LexSIC) was predicted by a significant interaction between Age and Attitudes ($\beta = 0$, $SE = 0$, $t = -2.65$, $p = 0.008$), which qualified the significant main effects of both predictors (Age: $\beta = 0.03$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = 2.64$, $p = 0.008$; Attitudes: $\beta = 0.05$, $SE = 0.02$, $t = 2.24$, $p = 0.03$). The interaction is plotted in Figure 8. The effect of attitudes on proficiency differed at different ages: while there was no effect for younger speakers, the effect was negative for older speakers (i.e., positive attitudes were linked to lower proficiency). Furthermore, there was a significant main effect of UseOutside ($\beta = -0.08$, $SE = 0.04$, $t = -1.96$, $p = 0.05$) **[fig. 8]**. This effect was negative, indicating that higher dialect use outside the family predicts, on average, a slightly lower proficiency. Sicilian speakers' performance in the DIALANG was not affected by dialect use or attitudes towards dialect, nor by age or education. There was a positive main effect of LexSIC: a higher score in the Sicilian vocabulary test also predicted a better score in the Italian vocabulary test ($\beta = 0.01$, $SE = 0$, $t = 1.98$, $p = 0.047$).

Venetan speakers' LexVEN score was not predicted by Attitudes and Use. There was a positive effect of education ($\beta = 0.04$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = 3.26$, $p = 0.001$); while the positive effect of age only approached significance ($\beta = 0$, $SE = 0$, $t = 1.87$, $p = 0.06$). Overall, an increase in age or a better level of education predicted a slightly higher LexVEN score **[fig. 9]**. Venetan speakers' performance in the Italian vocabulary task (DIALANG) was not predicted by any parameter.

5.3.3 Dialect Attitudes Towards Sicilian vs. Venetan

As previously discussed, the direct comparison between groups (Sicilian and Venetan) was carried out with a subset of Venetan speakers, to reduce the strong imbalance in the two samples. Before investigating attitudes in the two groups, we controlled for possible differences in the amount of dialect use. We fitted two linear models, one with UseHome and one with UseOutside as dependent variable. Group, Age and Education were added as predictors, with an
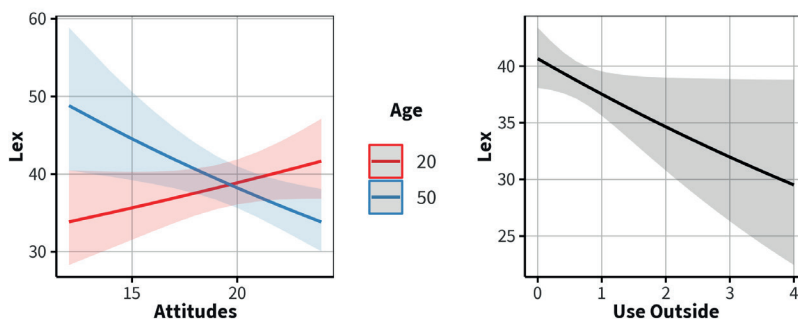
Figure 8   Predicted values of LexSIC for Sicilian speakers, by age and attitudes (left), and by use outside the family (right)
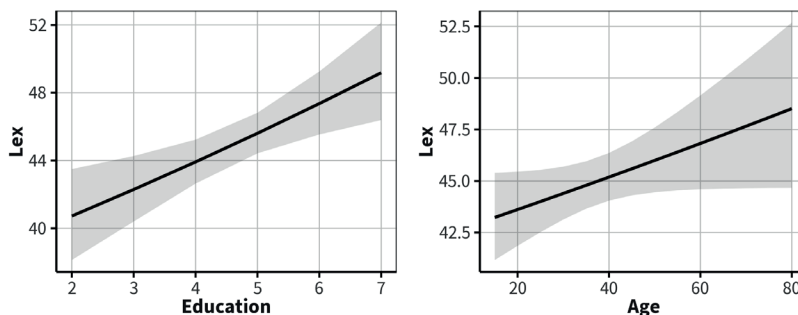

Figure 9   Predicted values of LexVEN by education (left) and age (right)

interaction term between Group and Age and between Group and Education. All interaction terms were removed because they were not significant. Results suggested a positive effect of Age (β = 0.02, SE = 0.01, t = 2.82, p = 0.005) and a negative effect of Education (β = -0.22, SE = 0.07, t = -3.2, p = 0.002) on UseHome: a lower level of education and higher age predicted higher self-reported use of dialect in the family. No difference between groups was observed (β = 0.3, SE = 0.19, t = 1.59, p = 0.11). UseOutside was negatively predicted by education: overall, a lower level of education indicated a higher use of dialect outside the family (β = -0.17, SE = 0.04, t = -4.09, p < 0.001). We observed no significant effect of age (β = 0.01, SE = 0, t = 1.45, p = 0.15) or group (β = 0.18, SE = 0.12, t = 1.59, p = 0.12).

We then addressed the research question, by assessing potential differences in attitudes towards dialect and its interaction with other factors in the two groups. We fitted a linear model with Attitudes
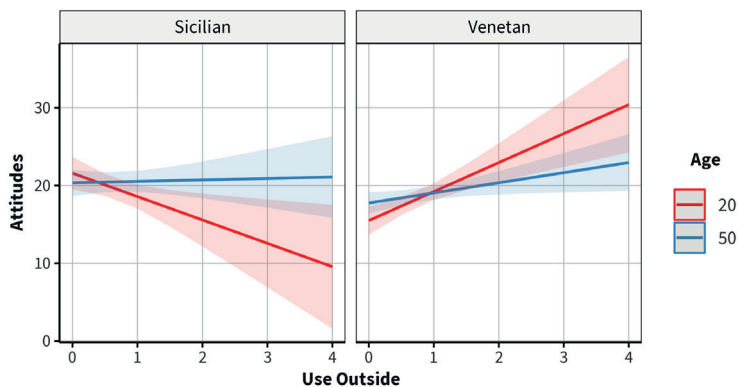
Figure 10   Predicted values of Attitudes by group and use outside the family

as dependent variable, and Group, UseHome, UseOutside, Age and Education as independent variables. We included an interaction term between Group and UseHome, and a three-way interaction between Group, UseOutside and Age. The choice of the latter was determined by the observation that UseOutside and Age interacted differently in Sicilian and Venetan speakers in the previous models, and we wished to control for possible effects in this sense.

The three-way interaction proved to be significant ($β = -0.19$, $SE = 0.06$, $t = -3.23$, $p = 0.002$), confirming the already observed patterns **[fig. 10]**. In both groups, older speakers' attitudes towards dialect were not affected by the amount of use outside the family, while the effect for younger speakers was reversed in the two groups. For Venetans, higher UseOutside predicted more positive attitudes, while for Sicilians a higher UseOutside predicted worse attitudes towards the dialect.

6   Discussion

We set out to explore Sicilians' and Venetans' attitudes towards their dialects (RQ1), how these relate to their (self-reported) language use (RQ2), and how both relate to proficiency (RQ3). In doing so, we explored similarities and differences between Sicilian and Venetan (RQ4). Following previous work (e.g., Baroni 1983; Galli de' Paratesi 1984; Volkart-Rey 1990) and SIT (Giles, Billings 2004), we expected that speakers would attribute a higher prestige to the standard variety compared to the non-standard variety. At the same time, we expected to see changes such that dialect use is no more exclusively linked to negative attitudes but rather as an opportunity to develop

one's identity and preserve cultural heritage (Parry 2010; Berruto 2018). We further expected higher dialect use to correlate with higher proficiencies and positive attitudes, but also with more advanced ages. Speakers of Venetan were expected to show more positive dialect attitudes, because the Southern Italian dialects have been relatively more stigmatised for a longer time, and even if revalorisation has taken place recently, feelings of inferiority may take several generations to heal.

6.1   Attitudes and Language Use

We have discussed participants' dialect attitudes from a descriptive standpoint in section 5.1, observing that they were generally more positive than negative. While this fact points to a revalorisation of dialects, it may also be attributed to an implicit bias in our survey, which may have reached people with an overall more positive attitude towards dialects.[10] The following discussion should be read with this potential caveat in mind.

Sicilian speakers' attitudes were not significantly determined by language use within the family, while they were affected by language use outside the family. This may point to the fact that use within the family is considered more normal, as witnessed by the high proportion of exclusive or alternating dialect use in Sicily within the family (68.8%; Istat 2017); it is not questioned and not affected by a change in attitudes. However, while it may be natural to use dialect within the family, it is not always contextually appropriate to use dialect outside the family, where the speaker has to ponder the appropriateness of their language use. The relation between attitudes and use outside the home was dependent on age. While older speakers' attitudes were not affected by the amount of dialect use, younger speakers showed an effect, though the opposite of what we expected: higher dialect use in the wider community was linked to more negative attitudes. In other words, those who expressed the most positive attitudes towards Sicilian were those who reported using it less in the community. This mirrors previous research with a focus on other regions, which also found a discrepancy between positive attitudes towards a variety and its use. In South Tyrol (Alto Adige), where German and Italian coexist alongside several minority languages, positive attitudes towards the different varieties exist, but actual use of these languages may be nevertheless low for historical and sociocultural

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10   At this point we would like to point out that, given the high educational levels of the participants in both groups, our sample might be overrepresentative for people with a high education.

reasons (Dal Negro 2017). For example, speakers may declare that German is their mother tongue despite always using Italian (Dal Negro 2017). Similarly, speakers of Sardinian have positive attitudes towards Sardinian, but these do not translate into practical language use (Rindler Schjerve 2017). In the case of Sicilian, we interpret this finding as an effect of the past stigma towards the dialect, which, in spite of the recent revalorisation, may still affect the perception of social judgement of those who actually use it. In this light, the re-evaluation of dialect as a positive aspect of Sicilian culture is less operative in those who use it as an actual means of everyday communication, but in those who do not use it actively.

Venetan speakers, by contrast, behaved more in line with our predictions. As expected, more use within the home predicted more positive attitudes. As to attitudes and use outside of the family, the relation was inverted compared to Sicilian: older speakers' attitudes were not affected by use outside the family, while younger speakers who use Venetan more outside of the family had more positive attitudes. In principle, we may interpret this positive link between attitudes and use in either direction: either people who speak more dialect are led to have a higher opinion of it, as part of their linguistic repertoire, or having a more positive attitude towards dialect leads to using it more. While our data does not allow us to choose between these two possibilities, this distinction provides a tool for interpreting the difference in relation between attitudes and use between Venetans and Sicilians, to which we return below.

6.2 How Do Use and Attitudes Relate to Objective Proficiency?

For Sicilians, dialect proficiency (LexSIC) was predicted by age and attitudes together. The effect of attitudes on proficiency differed at different ages: while there was no effect for younger speakers, older speakers showed positive attitudes when having lower proficiency. This result is only partially expected. The negative correlation between attitudes and proficiency resembles that between attitudes and use: more proficient dialect speakers perceive the negative social judgement more strongly, perhaps because they have experienced it more. This effect is found for older speakers, while it was true for younger speakers in the case of attitudes and use. Thus, in Sicily more use or higher proficiency in the dialect are not necessarily tied to more positive attitudes, but quite the opposite. This observation is in line with Berruto's (2018, 507) proposal of an "inverse relationship" between dialect attitudes and use, i.e., that dialect acquires a new positive value among those speakers who do not use it for everyday communication anymore, but who use it for expressive purposes. It

is paralleled by the aforementioned context of Alto Adige, where the declared mother tongue is primarily associated with a speaker's sociocultural identity rather than reflecting the language that is used actively (Dal Negro 2017). Likewise, Sardinian, associated with values of tradition and identity (Euromosaic 1995), adheres to this dialectal trend. This line of interpretation may help us explain why in Sicily more dialect use outside the family was also linked to a slightly lower proficiency – an unexpected outcome, if we expect more use to be connected with higher proficiency. The explanation may be that Sicilians interpret 'dialect use' differently from Venetans: Using dialect in Sicily may not necessarily involve speaking a distinct linguistic code with its own grammar and vocabulary. Instead, it may involve using dialectal traits and expressions within a regional Italian register for expressive purposes (Berruto 2018). In the latter case, reporting more 'dialect use' may not necessarily correspond to higher competence in Sicilian vocabulary.

Venetan speakers' proficiency, by contrast, was not predicted by either attitude or use. Rather, proficiency increased with higher age and education. The process of revalorisation is more advanced here and Venetans, regardless of age, have positive attitudes. Scores in the LexVEN were overall very high; this fact may be attributed either to a general familiarity with Venetan vocabulary in the population, even among those who do not speak (much) dialect, or LexVEN being overall easier than LexSIC.[11]

When exploring the relation between lexical proficiency in the regional variety and the standard variety, we found that Venetan speakers' performance in the Italian vocabulary task (DIALANG) was not significantly predicted by any parameter. On the other hand, for Sicilians, a higher score in the Sicilian vocabulary test also predicted a better score in the Italian vocabulary test. This is unexpected given previous stereotypes on dialect use (Cremona, Bates 1977; De Renzo 2008), but in line with more recent studies on the beneficial effects of acquiring typologically close languages (Garraffa, Beveridge, Sorace 2015; Garraffa, Obregon, Sorace 2017). It is plausible to assume positive effects of having larger lexicons, which can easily 'carry-over' between typologically close languages. An alternative explanation is that some participants may be better at performing at yes-no vocabulary tasks than others. For example, a risk taker may over-accept items, i.e., indicate that they know it even if slightly insecure, and may do so in both languages.

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11   The latter is less likely, however, because both the Sicilian and the Venetan tests were piloted with speakers of distant varieties, with expected low proficiency levels, in order to identify and control for the number of items whose meaning can be guessed easily given knowledge of Italian.

6.3 Comparing Sicilians and Venetans

When comparing Sicilians and Venetans directly, we found the relation between attitudes, use and age illustrated in Figure 11. Paraphrasing the discussion above, Sicilian might be in a transitional phase, where loss of proficiency and use is balanced by more positive attitudes on the part of those speakers who do not actively use the language, and therefore may have perceived less linguistic discrimination. Venetan revitalisation, on the contrary, presents itself as more structural and tied to active use. As pointed out by Berruto (2018, 520), the maintenance or the revitalisation of a dialect depends on the significance of its use. Whereas the 'actual' or 'effective' use of the dialect for the purpose of communication, as in the Venetan case, is of utmost significance for the maintenance of the dialect, other uses such as the 'expressive', 'symbolic' or 'folkloric' one only have a restricted effect because they do not result in the use of dialect in everyday communication. Contrary to Sicily, the Veneto region appears to maintain a situation of diglossia, with both languages playing a role in communication, albeit in different contexts [fig. 11]. A further point to consider is that positive attitudes and use in the community in Venetan may be linked not only to a cultural revitalisation, but also to a political one, as the regional language has been taken by some political parties as part of the construction of a "Venetan identity" (Perrino 2013).

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        ┌─────────────────────────┐
        │  Use outside the home   │
        └─────────────────────────┘
                    │
        ┌─────────────────────────┐
        │       Attitudes         │
        │   of younger speakers   │
        └─────────────────────────┘
           │                  │
┌──────────────────────┐  ┌──────────────────────┐
│ Sicily: more negative│  │ Veneto: more positive│
└──────────────────────┘  └──────────────────────┘
```
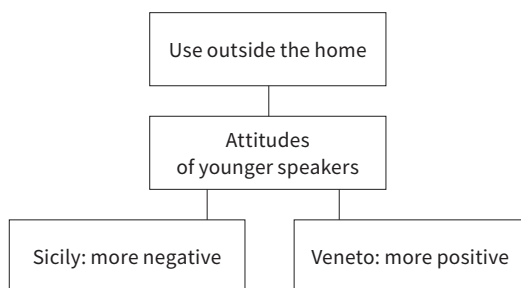
Figure 11   Comparing the relation between use and attitudes in Sicily and the Veneto

In conclusion, although on the surface both Sicilians and Venetans report mostly positive attitudes towards their dialects, at closer scrutiny, the interaction between attitudes, use and proficiency, and thus the perspectives for future maintenance of the respective languages, appear to be very different.

7 Conclusion

We investigated Sicilians' and Venetans' attitudes towards their dialects and how these interact with dialect use and proficiency. Both groups had mostly positive attitudes but differed in the interplay between attitudes, use and proficiency. While for Venetans more positive attitudes were connected to actual dialect use, for Sicilians more positive attitudes were found among those who do not use the dialect actively and who have lower dialect proficiencies. We interpreted these results as evidence that, in spite of the recent revalorisation of dialect, the stigma of dialect is still present in Sicily and that positive attitudes are limited to an expressive instead of a functional revitalisation of Sicilian. In Veneto, by contrast, dialect is still a vital means of communication. In the current situation of decreasing dialect speakers in Italy and beyond, we see this as an important implication for dialect maintenance: When positive attitudes are linked to the actual use of the dialect it has higher chances to survive, when positive attitudes are linked to 'expressive' dialect use, it will lose its role as the means of everyday communication and subsequently fade.

In this study, we have focussed on two regions where dialect is still considered to be very active. Future studies could expand the method of juxtaposing use, attitudes and proficiency to other varieties with different properties. The dialects spoken in the North-West differ from Sicilian and Venetan in showing a more advanced loss of vitality and a more dramatic decline in the number of speakers. We would predict a general lack of proficiencies, possibly going along with rather neutral attitudes. Neapolitan presents another extreme as it appears to be going through a process of revalorisation, as witnessed by TV series, social media, and youth culture with adolescents/young adults (e.g., rappers) as target audience. Thus, we expect expressive dialect use to figure prominently, even more than in Sicily, but not necessarily a high level of proficiency. Finally, a possible extension of this work is to include outsiders' attitudes towards dialects and see to what extent they are consistent with the self-perceived views.

In the appendix we report the questions and the respective scoring that we propose for future use. The questions and the respective scoring shall allow for a standardised and direct comparison between the attitudes towards different dialects.

Appendix: Proposed version of the attitudes questionnaire

The following questions result in a maximum score of 80. A higher score indicates more positive attitudes.

	Items All presented on a 1-5 Likert scale	Scoring All scored from 0 (=negative attitudes) to 4 (=positive attitudes)
Perceived status	In your opinion X is… a language/a dialect	0= dialect; 4= language
Perceived prestige	In your opinion, is Italian or X more prestigious?	0= dialect is less prestigious; 4= dialect is more prestigious
Language preference	Do you prefer Italian or X?	0= preference for Italian; 4= preference for dialect
Overall perception	How much do you like X?	0= not at all; 4= really
Perceived usefulness	How important is X for your communication?	0= not important at all; 4= really important
Identity	How important is X for your identity?	0= not important at all; 4= really important
	How attached are you to the region X is spoken in?	0= not attached; 4= strongly attached
Maintenance Awareness	It would be a pity if X would disappear	0= strongly disagree; 4= strongly agree
Perceived feelings	How strong do you perceive these feelings towards X? -pride, -sense of belonging, -dislike, -indifference	0= not at all; 4= really strong (for pride and sense of belonging) 0= really strong; 4= not at all (for dislike and indifference)
Social and socioeconomic traits	A person speaking X sounds… -not nice vs. nice -not trustworthy vs. trustworthy -not educated vs. educated -poor vs. rich	0= not nice/ trustworthy/ educated/ poor; 4= nice/ trustworthy/ educated/ rich
Transmission	If a child hears X… -there is a risk of confusion between Italian and X -there is a risk of worse school outcomes	0= strongly agree; 4= strongly disagree
Transmission	It is important that a child learns X… -in order to preserve the culture and identity X is associated with -in order to communicate with older relatives	0= strongly disagree; 4= strongly agree

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