

# Effects of National Language Policies on Local Varieties

## Campanian and Sicilian Case Studies

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**Abstract** This study analyses the impact of institutional language policies on the status of two local varieties spoken in the area of Messina and in the province of Caserta, which are non-officially promoted in national laws concerning plurilingualism but specifically addressed in legislative measures at Regional level. In order to unveil the impact of language policy on speaker view of languages, this study offers a quantitative analysis, based on questionnaires and focusing on (a) speakers' judgments about their regional languages; (b) local varieties collocation in their repertoires; (c) correlation between specific communicative situations and local varieties; (d) differences in linguistic prestige assignment among demographic classes of informants.

**Keywords** Local varieties. Language policy. Multilingualism. Linguistic minorities. Sicilian local variety. Campanian local variety.

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## 1 Context of the Research: Some Remarks on Current Language Ideologies and Policies in Western Europe

Multilingualism - intended as “the presence of two or more languages in a community or society” (Council of Europe 2022, 5) <sup>-1</sup> is generally considered a vital tool for promoting democratic citizenship and tolerance (cf. European Conference on Plurilingualism 2005, *Preamble*) in super-diverse societies (cf. Vertovec 2007) and therefore actively promoted by supra-national entities both in the field of education and in policies on human rights.<sup>2</sup>

Over time, “the practice of alternately using two [or more] languages by the same person” (Weinreich 1979, 1) and by a certain community has been deeply investigated in several disciplines, whereas the appearance of an explicit political interest in plurilingualism and the definition of specific regulatory frameworks concerning linguistic plurality are relatively recent. Limited to Western Europe, these transformations occurred in particular with the birth of national States (cf. Siemund 2023, 25-7; for Italy, Toso 2008a) in the nineteenth century. Since then, a gradual shift from private to public consideration of language matters (cf. Croce, Mobilio 2016) occurred and, consequently, a strong correlation between political organisations and language uses emerged.

In the attempt to separate the “*éléments internes et éléments externes de la langue*”, Saussure had already noted the fact that “*la politique intérieure des États*” and “*les rapports de la langue avec des institutions de toute sorte*” (1964, 40-1) had a huge impact on the development of languages, implicitly anticipating the dynamic that Heinz Kloss in 1967 ultimately defined with the concept of *Ausbausprache* or “language by development” (Kloss 1967, 29). This ‘development’ was interpretable in a sociolinguistic sense (cf. Muljačić 1981, 87, fn. 7) as the result of interventions aiming at making a certain variety the High one (cf. Ferguson 1959) in a diglottic (or, better, dilalic in the case of Italy, cf. Berruto 1987; 1993) situation, i.e. the “standard tool of literary expression” (Kloss 1967, 29), not limited to the private domain (cf. also Kloss 1952). In current practices, this

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1 Especially in policies designed by the Council of Europe and the European Commission, ‘multilingualism’ indicates the “coexistence of differing languages within communities and indeed within nation states” (Modiano 2023, 53) and it is generally intended as different from ‘plurilingualism’, used to refer to “the use of several languages by an individual” (European Conference on Plurilingualism 2005, *Preamble*). In Italian policies this distinction seems to be less common, and the term ‘plurilingualism’ prevails as indicating both conditions (cf. Marcato 2012, 12-13). In this paper, however, ‘multilingualism’ is preferred, in line with the uses attested in European documents.

2 In this respect, cf. among others De Varennes 2007; Romaine 2013a, 2013b; Skutnabb-Kangas 1998; Tamburelli 2014a; Tosi 2017.

“culture of standardization” (Silverstein 1999, 285) results – among other consequences – in the establishment of an alleged correspondence between “the (socio)linguist’s ‘languages’ and the ‘languages’ recognised by European states” (cf. Tamburelli 2014b, 23). This approach ultimately produces an overlap between the standard variety and the juridical relevance of language uses, expressed in the category of officialdom, having solely juridical foundation (cf. Piergigli 2001, 21-2) and intended as an “arbitrary cut-off point along the *Ausbau* continuum” (Tamburelli 201b, 23). This discourse results in a logic of perpetual formal imbalance between language varieties, a situation that Tamburelli critically defined “*Ausbau*-centrism”, responsible – according to the author – of continuing

a situation where linguists call x-ish a language if and only if x-ish has sufficiently powerful socio-political backing to have achieved extensive *Ausbau*-isation and/or recognition. (Tamburelli 2014b, 23)

Looking at the current situation of Europe, many contradictions emerge about the scope assigned to multilingualism at the (supra) national level. The terminology used in official documents on the subject implicitly proposes a “descending hierarchy” (Extra 2011), starting with the official languages of member states, followed by regional minority languages across Europe and, lastly, immigrant minority languages, whose assimilation to the minority-model is however controversial (cf. Simoniello 2023; Ganfi-Simoniello 2021a; 2021b). No mention is done of those varieties spoken locally but having no official recognition,<sup>3</sup> thus confirming the identification made by Peled of “monolingual multilingualisms” (2012).

Another interesting point is the final objective pursued in these policies. Observing multilingualism and plurilingualism in the EU, Carli stated that

l’obiettivo del plurilinguismo (istituzionale e societario) si trova ad essere programmaticamente funzionale alla pax linguistica e alla certezza del diritto, oltre che alla mobilità sociale all’interno del libero mercato e della “società della conoscenza e dell’informazione”. (Carli 2004, § 1)

In other words, the consideration of multilingualism and multilingual competence is strictly related to the possibility, through them, of a larger individual development and democratic participation, together

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**3** Reference here is not, of course, limited to the varieties identifiable in the label ‘regional or minority languages’, but – as specified in next paragraph – to all the varieties spoken locally.

with maintaining a collective plurilingual and pluricultural identity in the EU (cf. Carli 2004). However, this approach contributes to perpetuate the vision mentioned above about the hierarchisation in terms of prestige, due to the fact that some varieties have a higher value in reaching the objectives listed by the author, while others are considered less useful.

One last consideration concerns the cultural value assigned to language varieties. Let us consider the case of the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*. The *Explanatory Report* accompanying the text explicitly states that “the charter’s overriding purpose is cultural” and the aim of the document is the promotion of regional and minority languages “as a threatened aspect of Europe’s cultural heritage” (both in *Explanatory Report*, 2). It means that language varieties which benefit from the measures contained in the Charter are primarily considered as cultural entities, whose recognition “must not be confused with recognition [...] as an official language” (*Explanatory Report*, 9), i.e. those languages are hierarchised with respect to official varieties, with no detriment for them and the need to learn them (*Charter*, 1).

The perseveration of this language hierarchisation seems to be at the same time “both a consequence and a cause” (see Wells 2018, 244) of the status these other varieties ultimately have. This is especially true in the case of those varieties which can only access recognition through official statements, and not because of their factual existence (cf. Piergigli 2001, 152). This approach ultimately supports the consideration of multilingualism as a condition *de jure*, addressed with measures having the form of declarations, resolutions, laws, surveys (cf. Romaine 2013a, 117) with different constraints in their application (cf. Piergigli 2020). Nevertheless, it excludes the (larger and more complex) multilingualism existing *de facto*, not represented politically (cf. Wells 2018, 245) and thus essentially ignored or addressed inappropriately. Considering the coordinates briefly introduced until now, it seems possible to better understand the perplexity recently expressed by Telmon (2019) about the alleged irreversible decline of monolingualism (cf. De Mauro 2005). The author questions whether recent interest in plurilingualism really corresponds to a concrete evolution of the social representations of languages, or it is rather a politically correct discourse, in which the social complexity accompanying languages and diversity is dramatically simplified (cf. Telmon 2019, § 3). In this framework, there is a general tendency to overestimate

[the] importance of ‘top-down’ policy measures in relation to language status or to suggest that legitimacy for a language can only be acquired through political authorities such as the state. Indeed [...] there are limitations to what such external recognition can achieve. (Wells 2018, 246)

Given these premises, one can thus hypothesise two consequences:

- a. the first is that official recognition in institutional measures and the mention in public debates are fundamental for local languages transmission and survival;
- b. alternatively, one can expect that official recognition is neither indispensable nor sufficient for language maintenance for varieties spoken locally, recognising instead local speakers and their attitudes as the only subjects responsible for preserving and transmitting them.

This paper aims to propose an answer to this question by analysing the concrete situation of two local varieties having no official recognition. This contribution is articulated in two main parts. The first one - which constitutes the background of the research - contains some general indications about the Italian linguistic situation, specifically focusing on the neglected role of local varieties in the diachronic debate on language diversity in the Peninsula. A more specific focus on laws addressing Italian linguistic diversity is also proposed in order to individuate the main actors allowed to decide on institutional language use. In the second part, our data are exposed and commented.

### 1.1 Our Study: A Sociolinguistic Survey on Two Varieties

This work is a sociolinguistic research aiming at analysing the status of two local varieties spoken in the Italian provinces of Caserta and Messina, that do not benefit any kind of institutional provision at the national level, but are specifically addressed by regional authorities. The perspective of analysis adopted in our work is social and juridical, not philological (cf. Malfatti 2004, 249).

This paper is divided into two parts. The first one focuses on the juridical and sociolinguistic framework. In the second one, sociolinguistic data collected by the authors through questionnaires and interviews (cf. *infra*, § 2) are displayed and commented under the light of our theoretical premises, proposing some results describing local linguistic situation. The aim of the work is to measure:

- a. the impact that policies actually have on local language uses with respect to the varieties considered here;
- b. the prestige of local varieties, as perceived by speakers;
- c. the awareness that speakers have about the existence and the extension of these measures and the implicit impact they have on language dynamics.

A brief terminological clarification is necessary before presenting the study. In the Italian literature, the definition of 'local varieties' or 'local languages' normally covers three different situations having in

common the geographical limitation of their uses: primary dialects, as defined by Coseriu (1981); regional varieties of Italian and, ultimately, minority languages (cf. Dal Negro 2008, 127-8). In this paper, the designation 'local varieties' is specifically used to refer to the primary dialects in the Italomance group (cf. Coseriu 1981), constituting "autonomous linguistic systems [...] directly derived from Latin" (Dal Negro 2008, 127; cf. also Cerruti 2011).

## 1.2 Local Varieties, Minority Languages and New Minorities in Italy: The Neglected Multilingualism

The impressive work of Tullio De Mauro (1963; 2014) exploring the linguistic history of Italy in modern era critically reveals the diachronic descending trajectory of its historical multilingualism - in quantitative terms - and the progressive emergence of Italian as the language of the almost totality of people living in the Country. Italian co-exists in the Italian linguistic space (see De Mauro 1983) with Italian primary dialects mentioned above, the minority languages historically present within Italian boundaries and the languages spoken by foreign people permanently resident in the Country. The concept of *dilalia* (Berruto 1987; 1993) recognises the possible presence of local varieties in everyday linguistic uses:

entrambe le varietà [lingua nazionale and dialetto] impiegate/impiiegabili nella conversazione quotidiana e con uno spazio relativamente ampio di sovrapposizione (aspetto più propriamente sociolinguistico). (Berruto 1993, 5-6)

For the purpose of our study, it is worth noting two implicit assumptions of this description, both having a sociolinguistic matrix. The first is the obvious fact that local varieties have persisted over centuries (and especially in the last one, when the most extensive imposition of 'monolingualism-hegemony' has been attempted), as an effective code of everyday communication (i.e. not consciously intended as 'cultural objects' by speakers), despite the lack of positive institutional interest in them. The second is the parallel perseverance of the (circular) bias mentioned above about the alleged hierarchisation of existing varieties, resulting in the inaccessibility for local varieties to higher internal development as intended by Kloss.

On the first point, the issue to be solved concerns the reasons for monolingualism bias. In Italy, similarly to other European countries where the nation-state has constituted the dominant political model, with the establishment of a new political order - the Unification of Italian States, completed in 1871 with the birth of the Kingdom of Italy - 'languages' started overlapping symbolic functions previously held

by other social and identity markers (cf. Dall'Aquila, Iannàccaro 2004, 27), therefore transcending the boundaries of communication and literature to acquire a political value (cf. Palici di Suni 2002, 8). This political need resulted in a precise willingness of *reductio ad unum* perpetrated through specific actors such as schools and bureaucracy (cf. Toso 2008a, 16) against both primary dialects and other minority languages. It was at that time that the language/dialect dichotomy<sup>4</sup> became a permanent opposition between positive and negative characters: cultured, normalised, widely spread the first; not-prestigious, not-normalised and not-widespread (cf. Toso 2008a, 16) the second.

With the progressive affirmation of the fascist regime since 1922, a particularly pervasive attempt to affirm monolingualism was established, aiming at the uniformity of national language (cf. Pizzoli 2018, 70), with measures covering all areas of legal relevance of language use (cf. Croce, Mobilio 2016, 245). However, those efforts had temporary effects: after the defeat of fascism and the end of the World War II, Italy once again was at the centre of social and institutional transformations. In the early years of the Republic, Italy still retained traditional structure and customs (cf. De Mauro 2014, 19), especially noticeable in the persistence and the active use of many heterogeneous varieties across the Peninsula and, conversely, the scarce use of the national language (cf. De Mauro 2014, 19). In 1948, the Italian Constitution explicitly addressed the issues related to linguistic diversity, with art. 6 stating that the Italian Republic must protect with specific rules the linguistic minorities. However, no further specifications were provided about what should be considered under this term, at least until 1999, when the law n. 482 containing *Norme in materia di tutela delle minoranze linguistiche storiche* addressed a limited selection of varieties not belonging to the Italo-romance group and historically present within Italian boundaries.

The 'neglected multilingualism' in our title refers therefore to all the varieties excluded from the institutional debate on the Italian linguistic diversity until now. Limited to the Italian situation, local varieties are generally well described in dialectological studies, but they are absent in debates and measures about language promotion. These attitudes seem to confirm the idea of a restrictive scope of multilingualism, depending on a top-down conception of language dynamics and a rigid hierarchisation based on factors as officialdom, language-related ideologies (cf. Patten 2001) and social utility of local language use.

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<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting, however, that the establishment of an explicit opposition between the Italian language and dialects in the meaning currently assigned to the term as a variety whose use is geographically limited is earlier than the Italian Unification, dating back to 1724 (cf. Di Caro 2022, 14).

In this paragraph, attention has been focused on the historical development of monolingual bias in Italy. In the next one, explicit measures adopted in Italy to manage linguistic diversity are analysed, stressing particularly the centralisation of powers in language matters.

### 1.3 Local Varieties and Minority Languages in Italian Language Policies: The National and the Local Level

According to art. 6 Cost., the Italian Republic is bounded to protect linguistic minorities by means of specific provisions. Some clarifications are indispensable for the correct interpretation of subsequent developments in legislative action and the total exclusion of Italian dialects from measures of explicit promotion. First remarks concern the determination of the subject responsible for such actions, as the text of the article does not give any precise indication on the exact division of powers, and it does not provide any justification for an automatic contraction of regional autonomy in favour of the State (cf. Panzeri 2009, 1014). The text of art. 6 recognises the Republic as the subject responsible for protecting linguistic groups identified as minorities. Ciauro states that the Republic is to be understood, here, as all the entities – from municipalities to the State, according to art. 114 Cost. – which constitute it (cf. Senato della Repubblica 2010, 126). However, the issue of legislative power on linguistic matters becomes even more complex if we consider another programmatic provision of the Constitution. Indeed, art. 9 affirms the Republic's commitment to promote the development of culture (§ 1) and to protect the nation's historical and artistic heritage (§ 2). As stated by Piergigli, the meanings given to “the Republic” in the two cases cannot be automatically compared and overlapped (cf. 2001, 131-2, fn. 19): while in art. 6 “the Republic” is to be identified with the State as a system of government, in art. 9

i compiti di tutela del patrimonio culturale devono ritenersi confermati in capo alle strutture ministeriali conferendosi alle autonomie territoriali, oltre alla collaborazione al momento conservativo, le funzioni di promozione e valorizzazione. (Ainis in Piergigli 2001, 133)

This remark is crucial: it is possible to affirm that, on the one side, when considering the possible recognition of linguistic rights – thus related to a concrete expansion of domains of uses – issues on local varieties are assumed to be a state-level matter. Instead, promotion of languages as cultural heritage is accessible to Regions, as will be clear from the analysis of regional laws concerning the varieties analysed in our study. Key indications confirming this dichotomy come



from the Constitutional Court in statements concerning the legitimacy of regional provisions on the recognition and promotion of local varieties. The content of art. 6 has been in fact repeatedly recalled within the statutes of the Regions with ordinary and special autonomy, as well as in municipal and provincial statutes (cf. Piergigli 2001, 140; cf. also Tani 2006). However, especially in the case of ordinary Regions, these references were usually limited to a provision of safeguard of the cultural heritage of historical minorities present in the Region (cf. Panzeri 2009, 982, fn. 12) and therefore not specifically addressed to the protection of linguistic minorities in a broader sense. Emblematic in this regard is judgment no. 32 of 1960, which reserves to the State the exclusive legislative power in the field of language policy, on the grounds of the need for unity and equality (cf. Panzeri 2009, 983). Nevertheless, in recent years there has been a larger adoption of measures in the form of regional laws with the aim to promote local varieties. However, those statements have been received critically, as in the emblematic cases of Piedmont<sup>5</sup> and Lombardy.<sup>6</sup> As clearly emerging from the judgment given by the Constitutional Court in the case of the Piedmontese language (sentence of the Italian Constitutional Court no. 170, 13 May 2010),<sup>7</sup> in the case of ordinary Regions legislators are not allowed to extend the promotional treatment preview by art. 6 to local varieties (cf. Delle-donne 2010, 718-19). It is therefore interesting to note that, when local varieties enter in statements of recognition, the label chosen is 'language', in order to implicitly suppose an equalisation with the official language, even in those domains – such as administration, education, culture – in which only the latter is accepted. One last remark concerns the fact that caution openings to regional provisions about local languages focus on the cultural value of these ones, and thus they are not interpretable as the recognition of a status.

About the content of these measures, as noted by Dal Negro

The maintenance and, in some cases, the revival of local languages in Italy today is part of a more general trend towards regionalization that encompasses political localism, the commoditization of regional products (such as food, wine, landscape). (Dal Negro 2008, 127)

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**5** See, for example, the website devoted to the Piedmontese language: <https://piedmonteis.it/>.

**6** To this regard, see for example the debate accompanying the (critical) intervention of Accademia della Crusca on the regional law recognising the existence of a Lombard language: <https://accademiadellacrusca.it/it/contenuti/la-salvaguardia-della-lingua-lombarda-in-una-legge-regionale/7402>.

**7** Accessible at the following webpage: <https://www.cortecostituzionale.it/acc-tionSchedaPronuncia.do?anno=2010&numero=170>.

These aspects are not purely linguistic, as they produce effects on the current possibility to reverse the loss of local varieties by extending their domains of use. The observations proposed in the next paragraph of on/about? The measures established in Campania and Sicily confirms this vision.

#### 1.4 Case studies: Campanian and Sicilian Regional Measures Promoting Local Varieties as Part of the Immaterial Cultural Heritage of the Territory

Varieties observed in our study have been the object of two regional measures, i.e. Campanian regional law no. 14 of 8 July 2019,<sup>8</sup> titled *Salvaguardia e valorizzazione del patrimonio linguistico napoletano* and Sicilian regional law no. 9 of 31 May 2011 (hereinafter cited as *Delibera*),<sup>9</sup> containing *Norme sulla promozione, valorizzazione ed insegnamento della storia, della letteratura e del patrimonio linguistico siciliano nella scuola*. A general remark has to be made about these titles: both refer to the cultural value of local varieties, equalised to other cultural goods such as music, literature and history. This is not unexpected, if we consider the narrow space of action resulting from the already mentioned Constitutional Court's clarifications about the regional powers on language matters. Therefore, the main objective – and the only one possible – pursued in both cases is to spread the knowledge of the cultural value of local varieties and, more generally, of local culture and not to promote local varieties.

Campanian law explicitly mentions two UNESCO's acts. Art. 1, § 1 of Campanian law refers to art. 5<sup>10</sup> of UNESCO's "Universal

<sup>8</sup> Accessible at the following webpage: [http://regione.campania.it/normativa/userFile/documents/attachments/1843\\_14\\_2019Storico.pdf](http://regione.campania.it/normativa/userFile/documents/attachments/1843_14_2019Storico.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> The text of the law is accessible at the following webpage: <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/regioni/caricaDettaglioAtto/originario?atto.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=2011-08-06&atto.codiceRedazionale=011R0350#:~:text=LEGGE%2031%20maggio%202011%2C%20n,9&text=La%20Regione%20promuove%20la%20valorizzazione,di%20ogni>. The denomination *Delibera* in the text refers instead to the following group of documents, whose page numbering is used in our text: <http://pti.regione.sicilia.it/portal/pls/portal/docs/148922740.PDF>.

<sup>10</sup> The article contains the following statements: "Cultural rights are an integral part of human rights, which are universal, indivisible and interdependent. The flourishing of creative diversity requires the full implementation of cultural rights as defined in Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in Articles 13 and 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. All persons should therefore be able to express themselves and to create and disseminate their work in the language of their choice, and particularly in their mother tongue; all persons should be entitled to quality education and training that fully respect their cultural identity; and all persons have the right to participate in the cultural life of their choice and conduct their own cultural practices, subject to respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms".

Declaration on Cultural Diversity” on cultural rights. Art. 2, § 1 refers instead to UNESCO’s “Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage”, affirming the Region’s commitment to support the protection and the enhancement of the Neapolitan linguistic heritage, the related literary production, as well as all forms of artistic, musical and cultural expressions (cf. art. 2). The same paragraph also states the kind of initiatives to be implemented: a) historical and linguistic research activities; b) organisation of seminars and conferences; c) production and publication of literary, theatrical and musical works, with particular attention to their texts; d) literary and musical competitions and prizes; e) initiatives addressing schools and students. The text seems, therefore, to follow the contents of art. 2, § 3 of the UNESCO’s Convention, where a definition of ‘safeguard’ – as intended in the document – is provided:

‘safeguarding’ means measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage.

Further specifications on the kind of measures to be adopted are provided by art. 3, § 3, which lists the duties of the Comitato scientifico per la salvaguardia e la valorizzazione del patrimonio linguistico napoletano, that can be grouped in three main areas: the scientific study of Neapolitan linguistic heritage; the promotion of specific safeguard projects and the valorisation of Neapolitan ethnic-linguistic heritage; the promotion of initiatives, coordinated with school, on the subject contained in the law.

Similar structure is detectable in the Sicilian law. Also in this case, the Region is the authority responsible for adopting the measures concerning local varieties. However, Sicilian law presents the same limitations mentioned before, which are even narrower here. In fact, while a general consideration of the cultural value of the language and local culture was assumed in Campania referring to the ‘Neapolitan heritage’, Sicilian measures specifically addressed schools and education. The law promulgated in 2011 provided general indications, which have been better explained in 2018 with the introduction of the Guidelines actuating the norm.<sup>11</sup> As in the previous case – even if no mention of international measures is made – the focus is on the

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**11** Cf. Deliberation of Sicilian Region n. 376, 2018-10-12 available at the following page: <http://pti.regione.sicilia.it/portal/pls/portal/docs/148922740.PDF>. Cf. also fn. 21 above.

research to be developed in the field of philology and linguistics, and then it is applied to educational curricula. Two aspects in particular deserve to be dealt with: the ‘reassurances’ about its non-opposition to national projection and the reference to activities promoting the awareness of (young) speakers about the functional domains of use. These aspects are particularly interesting because they reproduce, on a smaller scale, the debate that followed the approval of the national law and that persists in the background of the previously mentioned decision of the Constitutional Court.

It is possible to question the fact that these measures can be integrally considered as language policies, if we assume that they are not able to intervene on the status and the function of the languages mentioned by the Regional laws, nor in any of their parts this point is present as an explicit claim. Particularly, the mention of the primacy of national identity, together with the metalinguistic observation about the domains of use adequate for each variety (cf. Deliberation 376/2018, 11)<sup>12</sup> – standard Italian in the H pole is a silent presence here – confirm the fact that these measures perpetuate the *status quo*, whose change is not even among the declared aims of the provisions, which explicitly look at the past.

## 2 Data Analysis: An Overview

This study is based on a data collection carried out by the authors from June to August 2022 in the province of Caserta (Campania), in the municipality of Sessa Aurunca, and in Messina (Sicily). These places have been chosen because of the authors’ origins, and the possibility to easily access local communities for recording spontaneous speech data.

The survey has been made by employing two instruments, designed for observing both explicit declarations of speakers about their language uses and the actual uses in informal situations: a questionnaire, submitted to a limited number of people through Google Forms, and recordings of spontaneous conversations and interviews directed by the authors.

The questionnaire consisted of 53 questions, 32 of which were compulsory and 21 were optional. The questionnaire was divided into three main parts:

1. Demographic features (questions 1-1.5), concerning gender, age range, education level, profession and linguistic history

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**12** Original text: “[...] attivare la distinzione tra le varietà diatopiche di lingua nella competenza comunicativa dello studente e la conseguente applicazione funzionale di dialetto, italiano regionale e lingua (neo-)standard nelle diverse situazioni comunicative. [...]” (Delibera, 11).

- of participants (e.g. if he/she had emigrated in other Italian Regions or elsewhere);
2. Domains of use (questions 2-2.18.1), designed to get participants' self-judgments on their own competence in Italian and in the local variety, their language habits in specific contexts of use (public and private domains), the access and the actual use of cultural works in local varieties;
  3. The prestige recognised to local varieties and the awareness about the role of institutions in enhancing local varieties and traditions (questions 3.1-3.20).

In the case of recordings, instead, the aim was to compare the actual language use with data collected in questionnaires, in order to verify the reliability of explicit answers. People involved in the survey have been informed about privacy policies, the anonymous treatment of their data and the non-commercial purpose of the survey. Data have been fully anonymised before publishing in this contribution.

We chose to previously select the participants engaged in the questionnaires – the quantitative part of the research – in order to control the provenience of individuals collected in the sample. For qualitative research, instead, spontaneous conversations were recorded in familiar and friendship networks, asking the permission for using their linguistic productions for research purposes.<sup>13</sup> It is worth noticing that since the number of informants included in our sample is quite limited – 23 for the area observed in Campania and 60 for Sicily – results herein proposed cannot be generalised for local languages uses in Southern Italy, and they should rather be considered as a pilot study deserving further expansions and comparisons with other areas having the same features.

With respect to the research hypothesis introduced above (cf. § 1), this section of the investigation aimed at collecting data suitable to

- a. indicate the collocation of national and local varieties in the individual repertoires;
- b. shed light on the correlations between conversational domains and the use of national or local varieties;
- c. reveal the speakers' judgments about the variety they speak locally;
- d. detect the occurrence and the conditions for code mixing and shifting phenomena;
- e. identify the differences in the linguistic prestige<sup>14</sup> recognised to local varieties throughout various demographic classes.

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**13** Only a few informants included in the sessions also answered the questionnaires.

**14** On the relevance of the linguistic prestige recognised to local varieties, cf. Toso 2008b; Turchetta 2008.

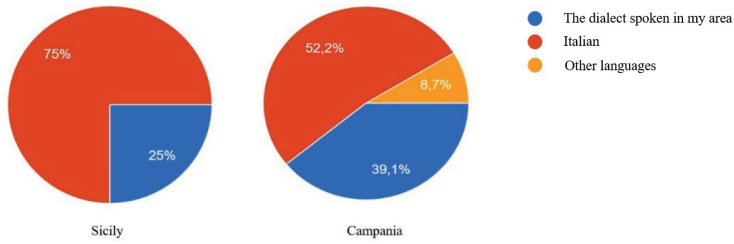
## 2.1 Quantitative Analysis

The first issue investigated in the questionnaire is the active and passive proficiency of participants in local varieties (question 2.1). Participants have been requested to specify whether they can speak or understand dialects, with three possible answers: (a) they do not have any proficiency in the local variety; (b) they can understand the local variety; (c) they can understand and speak the local variety. All Campanian participants claim active and passive proficiency, while 15% of Sicilian declare only passive competence, versus 85% claiming active and passive competence in the local dialect. Thus, passive competence can be considered as a regular feature of the Sicilian and Campanian speakers of our investigation and active competence is, still, a common characteristic. However, although proficiency in local languages is significant, Italian seems to be the preferred linguistic choice. When questioned about language uses in everyday conversations (question 2.5), Italian language seems to be the unmarked choice [graph 1].

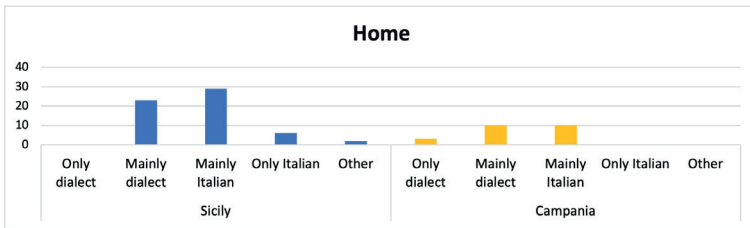
Nevertheless, the inquiry reveals that language preference may vary according to communicative situation (question 2.6). In fact, in informal contexts local varieties can prevail over the Italian ones. More often Campanian speakers use dialect at home, communicating with members of family and friends (3 informants declared that they only use the dialect and 10 of them mainly use the dialect, against 10 people who claimed to use mainly Italian). Italian is a more common option for Sicilian, as highlighted by the fact that 29 informants primarily speak Italian and 23 mainly use the dialect. It is noteworthy that both groups' answers clearly show that the local varieties are used for home communication, since informants who would rather select only Italian for home communication are marginal in the Sicilian group and not represented in the Campanian group [graph 2].

Our inquiry reveals an opposite orientation towards linguistic choices characterising other domains. In more formal and codified social interactions, participants tend to prefer the use of Italian over local languages. This is the case of the work environment (question 2.8 and 2.10), where Italian seems to be the unmarked choice. For both the investigated groups, the prevalence of Italian is quite regular in conversation with employers; even though some uses of the dialect can be documented, they never exceed Italian. In the interactions with colleagues, the use of local varieties is lightly more robust, since there are informants (8 Sicilians and 3 Campanians) who claimed to use mainly dialect in these communicative contexts. Collected data about work domain are shown in Graph 3 [graph 3].

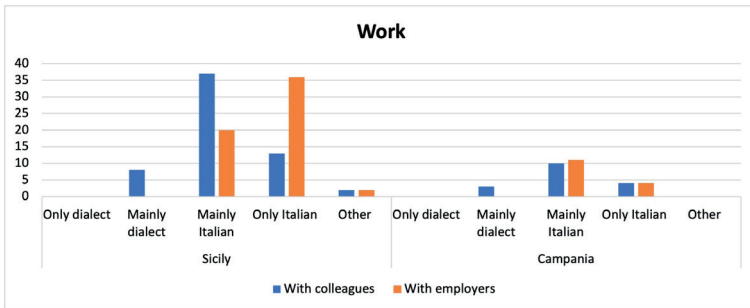
Data concerning linguistic preference in the school domain (questions 2.11-2.12) echo the results observed for the work environment. More common collected answers entail the prevalence of Italian,



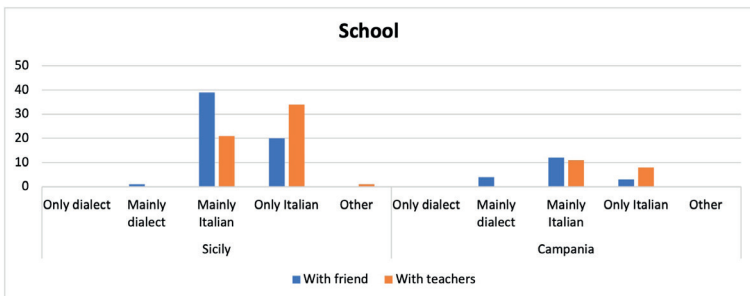
Graph 1 Which language do you normally speak?



Graph 2 At home, which language do you speak the most?



Graph 3 At work, which language do you speak the most with your colleagues? And with your employers?



Graph 4 At school, which language do you speak the most with your friends? And with your teachers?

since it is preferred for the conversations with friends and with professors in both groups. Also in this case, Italian is the main choice for the conversations with peers (i.e. friends), even if some utterances in local language can also appear. Conversations with upper hierarchically-ranked speakers (i.e. professors) a clear preference towards Italian uses only involve in the Sicilian sample, while Campanian participants declare the absolute recourse to the national variety, even if not so clear-cut. Comprehensive data about linguistic preference in school are shown in Graph 4 [graph 4].

In the work and school domains, indeed, local varieties are very limited or even absent in both the investigated areas: participants never report to use only the dialect to communicate in these contexts, even when they interact with peers (i.e. colleagues or friends). Several reasons can be mentioned to explain the lack of local languages in conversations in work and school environments. Among them, cultural and official characteristics of the national variety are irrefutable causes for the marginalisation of dialects in more formal domains of interaction. Cultural prestige of national languages plays, of course, a central role in school communication, since the national education system traditionally focuses on Italian teaching and does not involve any interest towards local varieties (cf. De Mauro 2014; Pizzoli 2018; Toso 2008a; 2008b). The official status of Italian, that can motivate its predominance in the work domain, is overtly enforced by the constata-tion that all sources of institutional communication (local or national) always use the official language. The status recognised to standard Italian in national policies seems to produce important effects on the tendencies highlighted by our inquiry of quantitative data. Polarisation of the extremes of repertoires – local varieties for informal situations and national one for more formal contexts – can be viewed as an effect of the assignation of officiality and elaboration traits to Italian, consequently confining dialects to the familiar sphere.

## 2.2 Qualitative Analysis

Within this section we aim to refine the representation of local varieties, beyond self-declared and self-perceived evidence collected through questionnaires. The first part of qualitative analysis focuses on contact phenomena related to national and local varieties, while the second part is devoted to implicit judgment about local languages, highlighting relations linking domains of usage and specific varieties.<sup>15</sup>

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**15** Recordings have been transcribed using standard orthography, as our interest was in switch phenomena and not in the phonetic analysis. Italics is used when the



Spontaneous conversations show evidence of a solid interaction between varieties. Thus, several instances of inter-clausal code switching (i.e. language changes that occur among two different clauses) and intra-clausal code switching (i.e. language changes occurring within the same clause) occur. In these cases, alternations of codes among two different clauses are characterised by functional awareness, since these occurrences are associated to precise values (cf. Alfonzetti 1992). In the following examples each instance of code switching is distinguished according to its function.<sup>16</sup>

### 2.2.1 Reporting Direct Speech

Speakers of both investigated varieties shift between local and national languages to signal a passage to the direct speech, as shown below:<sup>17</sup>

- (1) *Ci fici na vesta a me niputi e dissi* nonna, stasera metto il tuo vestito!  
'I made a vest for my granddaughter and she said: "grandmother, tonight I'll wear your vest!"
- (2) *E peché ha ritto* noi diamo la preferenza ai pazienti già che sta- che stiamo trattando. Poi, quelli nuovi li mettiamo in interrogativo perché i posti non ci sono più.  
'because she said: "we give priority to patients who are already being treated. Thus, we put the new ones on hold, because the doctor has no more availability".'

In both Sicilian (1) and Campanian (2) examples the main clauses are uttered in local varieties, while for subordinate clauses, reporting speeches of other individuals, speakers use Italian. It is worth noticing that the choice of Italian in reported speech reflects the realistic linguistic preferences of speakers to whom clauses are attributed. In (1) the utterer of the direct speech is a baby living in Northern Italy and lacking competence of the local language, and in (2) the utterer is an Italian speaking medical doctor, working in a hospital out of the investigated area.

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local variety is used. Data have been anonymised by deleting all the informants' details which would have allowed their identification.

**16** Functions identified above should not be considered as an exhaustive list of values characterising code switching in Southern Italy. Sentences discussed in this paragraph exemplify phenomena of contact among local and national varieties in investigated areas, but other investigations, involving larger data sample, are needed to fully describe functional underpinnings of code switching in contemporary Sicilian and Campanian.

**17** In the examples, switches to local variety are highlighted by italic.

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### 2.2.2 Irony and Sarcasm

Intra-clause code switching can code a peculiar attitude of speakers towards the content of the sentences, indicating ironic or sarcastic interpretations. In the Sicilian example (3), the Italian phrase is a climax listing some of the most important factors of the Italian law system, while the Sicilian clause contains the speaker's complaint about the corruption in the administration of laws in Sicily.

- (3) Ma quale diritto, leggi, avvocati?! *A missina u processu u manovrinu finu a cassazioni.*  
'But what jurisprudence, what laws, lawyers?! In Missina a trial is conditioned until it reaches the Court of Cassation.'

Therefore, the use of Italian in the first sentence is correlated with an ironic interpretation of its content. In the following, the Campanian example (4) shows an analogous function:

- (4) *ma peccché n- se so trasferiti definitivamente lontano da qui, no lo so*  
'Because they moved far from here definitively, I don't know.'

The shift into Italian in the phrase *definitivamente lontano da qui*, expressing a wish of the agents, marks a sarcastic reading of the sentences, since the speaker does not share the same opinion of other participants about the opportunity for those people to leave.

### 2.2.3 Topic Alignment

In both investigated areas informants use inter-clausal code switching to align languages of utterance with the topics of interaction. In (5), a Sicilian speaker shifts into Italian in the adverbial (final) clause to align the content of the utterance with the chosen language.

- (5) *Non avi arruvatu nienti! Ora videmu si fannu u governu e decidunu qualcosa pic-chì di tutto parlano fuorché di 'ste cose.*  
'Nothing has arrived. Now we'll see if they'll make a new government and decide something, since they talk about everything but these matters.'

Consequently, since the National government is explicitly mentioned (*u governu*) in the speech, and the official variety used for political and administrative communication is Italian, the switch to this language adapts the variety to the topic of discussion.

An analogous function of the inter-clausal code switching can be seen in the following example from the Campanian corpus:

- (6) [...] *chissà si stanno a passà addò simmo passati nui, a chigli là che ce simmo iuti a vere nui, perché que-* in Sardegna ce ne stanno tre o quattro più importanti e poi gli altri so' tutti così  
'Who knows if they are doing the same route we did, visiting the same ones we visited because th- in Sardinia there are three or four important nuraghi, and then the others are all the same.'

The speaker recalls a trip to Sardinia. When the informant mentions the geographic area, a switch to Italian takes place, since the homophone *Sardegna* could trig a switch to Italian.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the function of topic alignment for code switching, herein discussed, can be explained with the strong relation linking specific varieties of repertoire with domains of usage.

#### 2.2.4 Emphasizing

Inter-clausal and intra-clausal code switching can be used to indicate an emphatic reading of utterances. In the next example in Sicilian the speaker shifts into Italian remarking the meaning already expressed in the Sicilian sentence. The phrase *insipido completamente* does not add any new meaning, but emphasises the value codified by the previous sequence:

- (7) *Russu paria bellu ma poi... sapuri nenti... insipido completamente!*  
'[The watermelon] seemed red and good but then... no flavour ... totally flavourless!'

The analysis of contact phenomena proves the existence of a strong interaction between local and national varieties for the investigated areas. Thus, speakers can select the variety according to the situation, but they are also able to switch the language to realise peculiar functional values.

### 2.3 Prestige of Local and National Varieties

The last section of the questionnaire directly addressed the issue of the prestige recognised to the varieties spoken locally. Various aspects of the issue were included: intergenerational transmission (questions 3.1, 3.10-3.13), institutional presence and social sanction in education (3.2-3.3), assessments on quantitative and qualitative presence of local varieties in everyday situations (3.5, 3.8-3.9, 3.14, 3.17-3.20); concrete

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**18** On the relevance of homophones in triggering code-switching, cf. Grosjean 2018.

and desired institutional support (3.15-3.16); evaluation on the functional distribution and adequacy of local language use (3.4, 3.6-3.7). Questions referring to the same aspects were not grouped together in the same section, in order to avoid the influence of previous declarations, in the attempt to obtain more reliable and spontaneous data.

Concerning the first point, most participants (16 out of 23 for Campania; 43 out of 60 for Sicily) affirm to have acquired the local variety at home. Among those who have children, the majority (8 out of 12 for Campania; 25 out of 42 for Sicily) affirms to have spoken local varieties with them during childhood; however in question 3.12, related to current habits in daily interactions, the trend is reversed, since in both cases most speakers affirm to not use dialects with their children. A possible explanation for this may be the emergence of mixed couples.<sup>19</sup> In this context local varieties are not mutually understood and parents prefer using Italian language with their children, as testified by answers such as “I prefer to talk to him/her in Italian so that he/she knows that I consider standard Italian the one he/she must perceive as mother tongue”.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, it is worth noticing the consideration of the minor ‘utility’ or ‘functionality’ of local varieties when compared to other languages and especially English, and the perception of a social stigma towards its use out of the Region, a tendency emerging especially in the Sicilian sample.

In education, as we can expect, the situation is unbalanced in favour of Italian: in the questions detecting the awareness about the presence/absence of local varieties and traditions among topics treated at school, most informants of both varieties gave negative answers, and almost the totality (18 out of 23) affirms that using dialect is not allowed at school. The Sicilian sample, again, is particularly interesting in this sense, since the regional law commented above specifically addresses education as the field in which the spreading of local culture is expected. Further studies on this point are thus desirable, in order to better evaluate the current effects of the measure and how school curricula actually integrated the contents of the mentioned laws.

The third subgroup of questions, concerning quantitative and qualitative presence of local varieties in daily life, is the most interesting for a consideration of their state of (perceived) vitality. Question 3.5 concerned the perception about the ‘quantity’ of dialectal/Italian uses in daily life, having as reference point the uses by previous generations, among which we hypothesise that dialect was the main language, due to the limited spread of the Italian language until recent decades. In both samples the majority affirms that, in their

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**19** Concerning local people and people coming from other Italian Regions or even from other countries.

**20** Here and in following cases, Italian answers are cited with our translations.

perception, uses have decreased, and this negative assessment is confirmed in question 3.8 on the 'quality' of the variety spoken (Do you think that your dialect is the same as your grandparents?), where the answers clearly state that the variety spoken currently is not the same one used in the past, with differences detected especially in lexicon and pronunciation (question 3.9). However, when questioned about the personal perception about a possible 'disappearance' of dialect, speakers' opinions are conflicting. Two tendencies are detectable: on the one side – prevailing in Campania – speakers consider their variety still viable, but its use is decreased with respect to the past. On the other side, a strong perception of an ongoing 'transformation' exists – especially in lexicon, as already noted in question 3.9 – accompanied by the collateral disappearance of the ancient forms, generally attributed to the growing spread of standard Italian and the related disappearance of the culture to which those varieties referred to.

Despite self-declarations, however, spontaneous recordings show a more complicated situation, in which the definition of what speakers mean by 'local variety' is complicated by the fact that no conversation is entirely accomplished in Italian or in the local variety alone. These aspects have already been treated in the previous paragraphs. Here, their mention is necessary to highlight the inconsistencies detectable among what participants declare and what they actually do in current daily uses. As said before, even when people are convinced to use dialect, they concretely use a mix of both dialect and Italian. As a result, we might assume that the state of health and transmission of local varieties could be worse than it seems from self-declarations. In spontaneous conversations the occurrence of dialect as the only language of the utterances decreases also depending on the age, although young people in questionnaires declare to speak dialects, and this can be reasonably considered a sign of decline of local varieties. On the other side, however, speakers seem to have at least a clear perception of the formal/informal specialisation of each variety, also collocating this 'hybrid-form' in the low domain, showing a clear awareness in distinguishing respective functional domains.

This tendency is instead not observed when old people are interviewed, as shown in the next examples: in these cases, the local variety is used in the whole sentence and Italian is only limited to the first parts of the utterance and repeats those elements which have been previously introduced in Italian by the interlocutor:

- (8) Interviewer: [...] che lavoro facevate?  
'What job did you do?'  
Speaker 1, old: *cuntadini. Tutta robba re campagna. Appriess' a- appriess' a- a le pecore. A li ma- a ri porci [ridono]. Ammo lavorata a terra+*

'We were farmers. All duties related to the fields. Breeding ships, pigs (laughs)  
We worked the soil.'

Speaker 2, adult: *sì però dîl- dî- da- la tua famiglia, dici che cosa faceva la tua  
famiglia, i- tuo papà+*

'Yes, but tell her about your family, tell her what your family did, your father+'

Speaker 1, old: *eh mio papà ìa a spaccà e prete.*

'My father went breaking rocks.'

In the section referring to the institutional support, participants were asked if they thought that institutions should do more to encourage the preservation of dialects. Also here, answers from both samples follow two main lines. The majority believes that institutions should do more to enhance local varieties. However, the speakers' interest seems to be oriented towards a convinced consideration of languages as cultural goods to be preserved, and not as current instruments for communicating and expressing identity. Among the participants claiming for more institutional interventions, reference is especially made to "studies on dialect and on local traditions" (thus, a cultural, historical or scientific interest), to cultural associations and schools as promoters of languages (therefore, local institution at regional and supra-regional level are not considered at all as playing a role in this matters) and, more generally, to the fact that "dialects are a heritage". On the other hand, other answers explicitly opposed dialect to standard Italian, confirming the tendencies emerged in other sections. Local varieties are therefore considered as a cultural heritage, whose promotion is desirable as far as it does not contrast with the primacy of Italian. In this sense, the answer present in the Sicilian sample is emblematic, since it affirms the importance of cultural events to promote local varieties, but simultaneously judges negatively the case of Sardinian language, whose knowledge is required - in the knowledge of the participant - as a requisite in public competitions. This opinion shows that an expansion of the local variety's functional domains is not desirable, this kind of policies are not recognised as related to an enlargement of local languages uses.

### 3 Conclusions

Blommaert observes that the political process specifically develops through exchanges involving politics, policy-makers, academic and non-academic institutions, media, in the form of public debates (cf. Blommaert 1999, 10). When language issues are addressed, those debates also contribute to define the way language varieties are perceived in the 'social arena' regardless of their intrinsic value, constituting instead the basis on which "they can be motivated

and legitimated” and thus becoming the “locus of ‘ideology (re)production’” (both in Blommaert 1999, 10), keeping the *status quo* (cf. Tamburelli 2014, 23). Data presented in our study confirm this vision: local varieties are still attested in informal domains, but they face attrition phenomena promoted by the presence of Italian and decrease of transmission. These dynamics are influenced by the perception of the local value of these varieties, an approach confirmed and perpetuated also in the regional measures that – although exploiting the only possible space for action resulting by the restrictive national policy toward local varieties – adopt the approach which considers languages as cultural heritage.

As far as the impact of policies on local language is concerned, this study confirms that local varieties, lacking official recognition, are still present in several communicative domains of the investigated areas. If sociolinguistic features of local languages herein investigated are compared with national historical minorities fostered by national laws, a similar scenario will emerge (cf. Dal Negro 2008). Thus, language policies can really promote local varieties transmission, when they overlap with prestige and values speakers recognise to their own languages. A last remark on the comparison between these two scenarios concerns problems of domain restriction of local languages. Without any official promotion, speakers are led to keep them confined to informal situations and to prevent their extension into domains fully dominated by Italian.

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