

# Attitudes Towards State Languages versus Minority Languages in the Contemporary World: The Case of Catalan in Sardinia

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## Abstract

The dichotomy of state language versus minority languages is a well-known subject among linguists. However, there are several competing perceptions of the role that minority languages play in society. In Italy, Catalan is a minority language and has been spoken for centuries in the Sardinian city of Alghero. Today, however, its survival is uncertain. Why have Algherese people progressively abandoned the Catalan language over last few decades? To answer this question, we begin by reviewing the range of scholars' interpretations of the motivations and attitudes that lead people to reproduce or abandon minority languages. In this article, I argue that there is an unavoidable link between social systems and linguistic practices that determines the consolidation or extinction of some languages, as has happened in Alghero, where the traditional language is at risk due to changes in social structure.

**Keywords:** Algherese, Catalan, Sardinia, state language, minority languages, linguistic attitudes

## Introduction

The dichotomy of state language versus minority languages has been thoroughly covered by linguists (Bradley & Bradley, 2013; Cenoz & Gorter, 2006; Fasel *et al.*, 1992 & 2013; Fishman, 1991; Gorter *et al.*, 2012; May, 2000 & 2011). It is commonly agreed that minority languages suffer different processes of language shift and, in extreme cases, extinction, when faced with the power of a national state language that inevitably surpass them in prestige, social and economic value, and normative notions of usefulness. A thorough account of the global situation of minority languages around the world will exceed the scope of this paper, so I will focus on the European context, wherein "European language activists have successfully campaigned for the right to use regional or minority languages in a range of social contexts. Despite this, such

rights are rarely exercised" (Madoc-Jones & Parry, 2012: 165). In Italy, as in other European countries, minority languages enjoy legal protection, but at the same time, their own native speakers avoid using them in formal situations. As Gules *et al* argue, "To have a real understanding of specific language problems we need to study how people react to language varieties spoken in their locale" (1983: 81). In Alghero we have found that the local language is rarely used. Even when foreigners ask locals questions in Catalan, they prefer to reply in Italian.

UNESCO considers Algherese, the variety of Catalan spoken in the Italian city of Alghero, on the west coast of the Mediterranean island of Sardinia, to be an endangered language (Moseley, 2012: 19). The reasons for this situation are strongly tied to the social and economic situation of the local Catalan-speaking community. Social

systems and linguistic practices are closely linked to each other, and the development of Catalan in Sardinia is no exception. As I will explain in the coming pages, the social and economic changes that took place in Alghero in the last century provoked a decline in the number of Catalan-speaking members in the area, and displaced Algherese speakers from the upper class to the middle-lower class. Algherese switched from being the most prestigious language any citizen from Alghero could speak, to just a mere symbol of tradition and local folklore or, even worse, a burden for the younger generations who seek to find a place in a hostile monolingual society.

### Algherese from a Linguistic Perspective

Algherese is traditionally recognized as part of the Eastern Catalan division of languages, following its original appraisal by Milà i Fontanals (1861), although common opinion among scholars today is that Algherese cannot be classified as an eastern dialect of Catalan but as an eclectic one (Caria, 2006: 40). This paper, however, maintains the more common viewpoint that Algherese is a dialectal variation of Catalan, although with larger differences in comparison with other varieties. This makes it an isolated, idiosyncratic, and *consecutius*<sup>1</sup> dialect. With a seven-century history, and thanks to its own historical details, it deserves the honour to constitute a unique group.

Algherese has its roots in the fourteenth century, when Catalan was the official language of the Sardinian administration and the language spoken by nobles and tradesmen. Catalan was used widely across the entire island from the fourteenth until the eighteenth century, when the city was transferred to the House of Savoy. However, the only part of Sardinia where Cata-

lan has been continually spoken up to the present is Alghero, as it disappeared from the rest of the island (Sendra, 2012: 18). Consequently, Algherese became an isolated testimony of the island's Catalan-speaking past. Mapping its origins is important to help us understand the heterogeneity and distinctive features of Algherese. The new settlers who arrived in the second half of the fourteenth century came from almost all the corners of the Catalan-speaking regions, including Barcelona, Cervià, Collioure, Majorca, Perpignan, Tarragona, Valencia and Vilafranca del Penedès, (Armangué, 2008: 7), and they brought their own idiosyncratic dialectal features with them. Indeed, Algherese was born as a hybrid of the four greater varieties of Catalan (Central, Valencian, Northern and Balearic), between the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century (Caria, 2006: 41). The result was a kind of *koiné* influenced by all these dialects, which spread throughout the island for centuries.

One of the reasons why scholars do not agree as to whether Algherese became a distinctive language is that, since its arrival in the fourteenth century, there has been no documentation that shows any linguistic diversification of an endemic dialectal variation in the Catalan used in Alghero. It is only in the second half of the sixteenth century where we begin to find some lexical and morphosyntactic variations. However, these are not unique to Catalan; rather, they are the same variations that we find in Valencian documents, (Caria, 1990: 35), although the changes occurred separately in each place.

The isolation of Sardinia as an island, as well as its remoteness and political division from other Catalan-speaking enclaves for centuries, are the main causes of Algherese's divergent evolution from other forms of Catalan. Moreover, all the substrata, adstrata and superstrata it has so far been in contact with have deeply influenced its phonetics and lexicon. During its rule by the Spanish, Sardinia was a linguistically diverse island and linguistic influences were mutually constitutive (Krefeld, 2013). Algherese was there-

<sup>1</sup> In Romance linguistics, *constitutius* dialects are those that emanate from original locations caused by Romanization and evolved from the Vulgar Latin spoken in those areas, whereas *consecutius* are those that reached those areas due to conquest or massive repopulation. Algherese is therefore a *consecutius* dialect (Caria, 1990: 34).

fore influenced by the multiple languages that it came into contact with, and Catalan influenced other languages in turn (Musso, 2013: 34). At the moment, influences of Sardinian, Spanish and Italian in Algherese have been thoroughly studied, but not the influences of other languages that also contributed to form it, such as Corsican, Gallurese, Ligurian, Piemontese, Sassarese, Sicilian, or Tuscan.

### Origins and Historical Evolution

In 1354, Peter IV of Aragon conquered the island of Sardinia and integrated it into the Crown of Aragon. The city of Alghero<sup>2</sup> was appointed as the new capital, becoming “el confí de l’expansió medieval catalana per la Mediterrànea” [the confine of Medieval Catalan expansion through Mediterranean Sea] (Bover, 2002: 111). The new sovereign had to deal with numerous uprisings from locals, and after twenty years of repressing them decided to expel the original inhabitants, repopulating the city with Catalan speakers. This action was not a revenge against local villagers, but a previously planned decision as part of a strategy of colonization (Armangué, 2011: 504).

Thanks to its strategic position on the trade routes crossing the Mediterranean Sea, the city became a rich and well-developed centre. As its economy flourished, the Catalan-speaking community began to develop a strong sense of pride and prestige. At this point, they could already be considered a minority (according to the traditional definition of a linguistic minority as a community that uses a language different from the one spoken by the majority), with their own language and culture separate from the rest of the Sardinians and Italians on the island. Consequently, Sardinian-speaking immigrants from neighbouring villages began to settle in the city, attracted by the job opportunities it offered. Due to the city’s wealth and the predominant use

of Catalan among its wealthy, the new arrivals viewed the host language as more prestigious than their own. They made efforts to become integrated into the community, including learning Algherese.

As a part of the Crown of Aragon, contact with other Catalan-speaking communities continued and the language became well-developed and established. For centuries, Catalan was the language used for official documents, especially once the Crown of Aragon joined the Kingdom of Castile. De facto, historical evidence shows that Catalan was the language of all official documents until 1602. Afterwards there began a period of transition during which Catalan and Spanish were both official languages. From 1702, the administration excluded Catalan as an operating language, although Spanish continued in use for a few more decades (Sendra, 2012: 26).

Contact with other Catalan-speaking regions came to an end in 1720, when the island of Sardinia was handed over to the House of Savoy. Linguistically, this was the point of no return. All official domains ceased to use Catalan, and no more documents were written in it. Even so, Catalan continued to be the most spoken language in the city and the natural way of communicating among its inhabitants. From the eighteenth century, diglossia became an intrinsic part of daily life in Alghero. Italian became the language of administration and official institutions, and Catalan maintained its status as the medium of communication among Algherese people, who retained a strong sense of community and pride for their linguistic diversity.

This situation changed dramatically at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. The impact of the recently created new state of Italy, and of its national language, Italian, had a tremendous effect on the island, its society, and its languages. With the establishment of a powerful bureaucracy, common citizens began to feel their identity ignored and undervalued by the State (Strubel, 1991: 201). As a result, at the beginning of the twentieth century it was already clear that use of Algherese

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<sup>2</sup> The name of Alghero comes from Romans, who gave it the name of *Algarium*, stemming from the myriad of seaweed (*algae*) in its coastal areas. In Sardinian it is known as *Aliguer* and, in Catalan, *l’Alguer* (Caria, 2006: 31).

had decreased enormously when compared with a few decades previously. The Catalan-speaking scholar Alcover (1912: 349) described his sad impression of the dialect's impoverishment of the dialect among the inhabitants of Alghero, in which he lamented that only some citizens still spoke it on any given occasion.

The period of cultural flourishing known as *Renaixença* (second half of the nineteenth century), which brought a sense of unity and pride throughout all the Catalan-speaking areas, had a particular manifestation in Alghero. In this city, different cultural groups began to emerge, some trying to recover the ties they had in the past with other Catalan-speaking regions; others trying to break those ties in symbolic recognition of Algherese's exclusive cultural characteristics. Conflict also emerged with respect to the language's properties. Some thought that Algherese was a dialect, a local variation of a main language, Catalan. Others opposed, saying that Algherese was a different language to Catalan. In fact, two incompatible grammars of Algherese were published simultaneously (Leprêtre, 1995: 61). As a result, all the efforts made by both groups to revitalize it failed. Not everyone supported the revival of Algherese; Italian was, after all, the language of progress, culture, modernization, and utility, and thus it was supported by the upper class. Moreover, Catalan, as well as Sardinian, were considered to be strongly tied to tradition, offering no practical value in contemporary society. Simply put, these languages were considered mere folklore.

When the island of Sardinia was industrialized, the dominance of the traditional local elite was challenged by the rich newcomers from the Italian peninsula, who established their factories within the municipality and bought most of the properties in the historic centre of the village. The old inhabitants had to move into the recently created apartments in the outskirts and, consequently, broke their traditional ties, becoming isolated from what was the heart of Alghero. Social networks are extremely important in order to maintain language loyalty in a society sur-

rounded by different languages (Castelló *et al.*, 2013: 21), and when they disappear the process of language shift begins.

Furthermore, the Catalan-speaking community passed from being *bourgeoises* and owners of their own businesses and ateliers to being almost exclusively employees of the Italian factory owners. With this alteration the prestige associated with their language ended. Instead, prestige shifted to Italian, which was now the language of the market, the rich, and the new elite. The loss of the old economic structure heralded the breakup of the traditional social balance (Lepêtre, 1995: 60) and the spread of Italian as the main vehicle of communication. In practice, Catalan had no place in the new job market. Subsequently, widespread changes in the economy led to changes in the traditional way of life, which implied the fall of the long-established means of communication, Algherese (Argenter, 2008: 212).

Using the definition of social class as "a group of people within a society who possess the same socioeconomic status" (Social class, 2014), the old Catalan-speaking inhabitants of Alghero fell from the upper to the middle-lower class, as has been documented by Argenter (2008), Caria (2006), Chessa (2011), the European Commission (1996), Leprêtre (1995), Querol *et al.* (2007) and Tosi (2001). The dominant idea presented by these analyses is that the minority Catalan-speaking group descended the social scale due to several reasons. First, entrepreneurs from Italy came to Alghero and began to buy properties in the city centre; consequently, the united and well-established community that had been living for centuries in the heart of Alghero broke apart and moved to the outskirts of the city. Second, the new industries that began to emerge in the municipality made traditional ways of life look old-fashioned and unable to compete neither in quantity of goods produced, nor in their variety or price. As a result, owners and members of the *petite bourgeoisie* began to give up their jobs and become employees of the newcomers. Catalan, the language that was the heart of the city and of

the *bourgeoisie* for centuries, developed into the language of a minority comprised of peasants, fishermen, and factory workers. Italian arose as the language of the new rich and became the most demanded within their business.

The social and economic fall of the Catalan-speaking Algherese precipitated their insecurity regarding the use of their now minority language, a phenomenon very well described by Labov (1966). Although “concepts of social class and status have been absorbed into linguistic and sociolinguistic theory from different and often conflicting sociological perspectives creating substantial debate” (Brown, 2009: 952), our position on class and linguistics is very clear. We consider that in any developed society several groups, or classes, can be identified: the upper class, who possess political and economic power; the middle class, who keep a balanced economic situation thanks to their jobs; and the lower class, who struggle on a daily basis, working the hardest tasks in the labour market and receiving the lowest salaries. As a result, social class can be described as “a system of inequality” (Marshall, 2006: 34), evinced in the fall of the Catalan-speaking members of Algherese society.

Language attitude is “a defining characteristic of a speech community” (Cooper & Fishman, 1974: 5). Since the social and economic changes of the previous decades produced changes in the linguistic behaviours of Alghero residents, their linguistic attitude towards Catalan also changed. Moreover, as has been described in Argenter (2008 & 2010), Chessa (2011), European Commission (1996) and Tufi (2013), that Algherese transmission to the next generations faced problems. As Italian replaced Catalan as the language needed to progress in life, Catalan became “a mere symbol of local identity” (Chessa, 2011: 263) with no economic or practical value. Parents ceased to place importance on teaching their children Catalan. The linguist Perea concluded, “we can see a lack of interest in transmitting it, considering that the language has no social value and does not help to get a job” (2010: 145). As a result, intergenerational transmission broke and,

accordingly, what was for centuries a vibrant language became an endangered one. Whereas the entire society had spoken Algherese since its establishment in the fourteenth century, including non-natives who had to learn it to become accepted in the host community, today the daily use of the language among new generations, defined as people under thirty years of age, is non-existent or simply testimonial (Caria, 2006: 37).

New problems began to arise, however. When children educated in a language different from the one spoken by their parents, relatives, and other members of their community grow up and realize that they are considered second class citizens by the dominant elite, a feeling of frustration emerges. They are not purely part of the dominant society, but at the same time they are not fully integrated into their own community, due to their lack of competence in its language (Navarro, 1999: 64). Whereas the older generations are used to speaking in Catalan, Sardinian, or Italian among themselves, the only common language they have with new generations is Italian.

### **Algherese today and its Sociological Implications**

In the second half of the twentieth century the situation became even worse. During the 1960s and 1970s, around half of the traditional Algherese population had to relocate due to expanding industrialization in the areas in which they lived. Some moved to the new quarters of the city, some to continental Italy, and others to foreign countries. (Argenter, 2010: 130; European Commission, 1996: 40; Leprêtre, 1995: 60). This migratory displacement was so high that it is estimated that between 1955 and 1975 “around 43% of the island’s population moved to a new place of residence” (European Commission, 1996: 35). The most radical changes were those that affected the traditional economic structures of the city, which moved from an economy based on agriculture, cattle raising, fishing, and handicrafts to industrialization and services such



as tourism. The Catalan-speaking Algherese lost their sense of unity and pride for their divergent origin and tradition, and so the linguistic cohesion was broken and Algherese lost its symbolic power (Chessa, 2007: 19). Italian became “the socially prestigious language, associated with modern urban life, power and social advancement” (European Commission, 1996: 38).

On the other hand, numerous Sardinians, Neapolitans, and Sicilians moved into town. In 1977, only 20% of parents spoke Catalan with their children (Chessa, 2011: 131). Now, at the turn of the twenty-first century, only 2% of parents in Alghero speak in Catalan to their children (Chessa, 2011: 131). As a result, only people over forty are able to maintain fluent conversation in Algherese. Perea (2010: 145) illustrates the situation in similar terms: “the number of speakers committed to the use of Algherese is very low and generational transmission no longer takes place.” Simon (2009: 37) confirms this viewpoint: “The natural everyday language of these young people or the language in which one can address them, is Italian, and not the local variant of Catalan.” Caria (2006: 59) corroborates this view, writing that “les noves generacions des de fa 30 anys són monolingües en la sola llengua italiana, i només una estricta minoria és bilingüe passiva” [the new generations, since thirty years ago, are monolingual in Italian and just a selected minority is passive bilingual], as well as Tosi (2001: 34) saying that “today the new generations seem less committed and sometimes have receptive competence only... Catalan is currently under pressure from Italian.” Crystal (2000: 17) explains clearly that “a rise in average speaker age is a strong predictor of a language’s progress towards extinction” and, accordingly, Algherese is at the point of death.

An official report published by Generalitat de Catalunya (2004) found that 90% of the population in Alghero understand oral Algherese, although only 60% are able to speak in it, and while 46.5% of citizens understand written Algherese, just 13.6% can write in it. In addition, they report that 22.4% of Algherese people have

Algherese as their first language (almost 60% have Italian as their first language), and 13.9% use it frequently (while 83% use Italian on a daily base). A very important point is that 14.6% feel identified with Algherese, whereas more than 80% feel identified with Italian. According to their survey, it is quite clear that Algherese is a language in decline. Only 14.6% of the population identify with it and just 7.2% use it at home. But there is a detail that clearly shows the lack of real use of Algherese: in Alghero, the questionnaires given to residents were in Italian and not in Catalan as is usual in other Catalan-speaking regions (Querol *et al.*, 2007: 14). These data confirm that Algherese is more associated with old people, as well as with jobs linked the primary sector of the economy. It has no use at all among members of the city’s new upper class or within any employment linked with the tertiary sector.

More recent works confirm the negative view that Algherese has evolved from being the most popular dialect in the area into one that is in a state of diglossia with Italian, and which will almost certainly end with Italian monolingualism (Caria, 2006; Chessa, 2011; Gambini, 2007; Juge, 2007; Loporcaro, 2008; Perea, 2010; Sari, 2010). Compared to some decades ago, in Alghero there is now a total indifference from native speakers regarding transmission of their language (Arenas, 2000: 50), resulting from varied sociological and psycholinguistic causes as well as the view that it is a useless tool in contemporary life. This is not an isolated situation in Alghero, as other studies of Italian bilinguals demonstrate that they “rate their languages according to three idiosyncratic dimensions only partly ascertained in the literature: attractiveness, superiority and efficiency” (Santello, 2013: 1). In fact, “la percepció que els algheresos tenen de l’algherès (i dels qui el parlen) es podria descodificar en termes de baixa categoria, baix nivell social, impediment per a l’èxit escolar i semblants” [the perception Algherese people have of their language (and of the people who speak it) could be described as low category, low social level, and a burden for educational success] (Chessa, 2007: 74).

Today, some individuals and groups blame official institutions for abandoning the local Catalan by failing to promote or support it. The first to bring charges to official institutions for their lack of defence and encouragement of Algherese was one of the most respected local scholars, Rafael Caria, who writes: “tot i el que es fa a l’Alguer a favor de l’alguerès és ineludiblement testimonial!” [despite what is done in Alghero in favour of Algherese, it is inevitably testimonial] (2006: 33). His complaint is addressed not only to local institutions, but also to ones from Catalonia, which theoretically should support language preservation in the furthest Catalan-speaking enclave: “afirmo que s’assisteix a una mena de deriva de l’alguerès de la seva llengua mare per part de les institucions catalanes, en la qual pesa particularment l’abandó de l’Alguer al seu destí, per part de la secció Filològica de l’Institut d’Estudis Catalans” [I confirm that we are witnessing a kind of drift of Algherese from its mother language due to Catalan institutions, particularly the defection of Alghero to its own destiny, by the Philological Section of the Institute of Catalan Studies] (Caria, 2010: 120).

However, the reasons behind the situation are more complex than they may appear. In legal terms, there are three different laws promoting minority languages:

- Municipality By-Law from Alghero, 1991.
- Regional Law, 1997 (*Promozione e valorizzazione della cultura e della lingua della Sardegna*).
- Law 482, December 15, 1999 (*Norme in materia di tutela delle minoranze linguistiche storiche*).

According to these laws, the support of linguistic diversity is legally required, but this recognition alone is not enough, as it “does not guarantee the preservation of minority languages and does not necessarily lead to wider value put on multilingualism” (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2006: 181).

We assume that there is a widespread tendency towards abandoning minority languages in favour of national or global ones. Certainly, from a reductionist and materialistic point of view, this is the easiest choice to gain access to

better education and to the global market. But speakers of minority languages must not resign themselves to the theoretically inevitable death of their languages. There are many counterexamples of languages which have been able to keep their position and pride, even without being the state language, such as in Quebec, in Wales, and, obviously, in Catalonia (May, 2005: 325). Globalization leads to cultural and linguistic homogeneity, undervaluing diversity. Nevertheless, as defended by UNESCO (2002: 4): “as a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature... The defence of cultural diversity is an ethical imperative, inseparable from respect for human dignity”. Consequently, we defend the intellectual enrichment of the individuals who, through their two or more languages, are open to different visions of the world, confronting the homogeneity of those with one language only. The great writer Ambrose Bierce explained how differently two languages can see the world around us: “Belladonna, n. In Italian a beautiful lady; in English a deadly poison. A striking example of the essential identity of the two tongues” (Bierce, 2000).

Furthermore, language is not just a way to see the world from a different perspective; “language is the primary index, or symbol, or register of identity” (Crystal, 2000: 40). All human communities are defined by their language, along with their history, traditions, heritage and culture. As a result, “preservation of linguistic diversity and respect for the cultural heritage of members of a society is an important and much needed task” (Ginsburgh & Weber, 2011: 10). Within this context, Algherese, as a threatened language with just 20,000 speakers (Salminen, 2007: 224) that is part of a unique people, needs to be preserved. The studies carried out in recent years (Adell & Balata, 2012; Argenter, 2008 & 2010; Armangué, 2008 & 2011; Boix, 2008; Caria, 2006; Chessa, 2007, 2008 & 2011; Parisi & Fadda, 2013; Perea, 2010; Querol *et al.*, 2007; Sari, 2010; Simon, 2009 & 2011; Tufi, 2013), show that new generations are not very interested in keeping Algherese alive,

and “although we can be optimistic, all the indications suggest that the children of the children of current Algherese speakers will no longer use their dialect” (Perea, 2010: 146). If the process of language shift is not hindered, in a few decades we will no longer be able to speak of an Italianized Algherese, but of an Italian with Algherese substratum (Boix, 2008), because these will be the only traces left.

It is unfair to encourage members of minority groups to leave their cultural and linguistic values behind when the members of the dominant ones remain attached to theirs (May, 2005: 33). Those “monocultures first inhabit the mind and are then transferred to the ground. They generate models of production that not only destroy diversity, but also at the same time legitimize the destruction as progress, growth, modernization and improvement” (Romaine, 2009: 127). If we agree that “the assertion that speakers only make decisions on purely instrumentalist grounds, or at least that instrumental reasons are the only valid or rational choice available to minority language speakers” (May, 2005: 330), then Algherese people may abandon their language in favour of Italian, because the latter provides more opportunities for a better education and a bigger job market than the former. Under these premises, Italian people may also be encouraged to abandon their language in favour of English.

We agree, as is evident, that Algherese people must become proficient in their national language, since they are Italian citizens. Failing to do so would lead them to isolation and marginalisation. But sticking to the dichotomy of Algherese versus Italian is too simplistic. People would have more benefits from a wider vision of linguistic diversity through mastering both languages, rather than agreeing with the monolithic assumption than keeping Algherese alive and interacting with it on a daily basis would imply the loss of their proficiency in Italian: “Resistance is not through monolingualism in the minority language, but rather through bilingualism. Proficiency in both languages is the successful strategy of resistance” (Suárez, 2002: 515).

Maintaining their cultural and linguistic heritage is not the only benefit Algherese people would receive from preserving and continuing to speak their language. As covered by an extensive literature (Bradley & Bradley, 2013; Cummins, 2003; Parisi & Fadda, 2013), bilingualism and biculturalism “give speakers intellectual, emotional and social advantages over monolinguals, in addition to situational and sometimes economic advantages resulting from a knowledge of several languages” (Bradley & Bradley, 2013: 16). If bilingualism were extended to the education of both minority and majority children living in Alghero, those benefits would be accessible to the society as a whole (Cummins, 2003: 65). In fact, a study conducted by Parisi & Fadda in 2013 in Sardinian and Scottish schools that included monolingual and bilingual children from both places showed that the latter outperformed the former, and that the Scottish students, who received a formal bilingual education, outperformed Sardinian children who only speak their minority language at home (Parisi & Fadda, 2013).

The main problem, however, is that native speakers do not agree on any point, neither the language they should cultivate (standard Catalan or local Algherese), nor how to promote it. There have been some projects oriented to extend the use of Catalan among new generations, but they have not achieved the expected results. From the beginning, the promoters realized that a satisfactory outcome was not guaranteed. As a matter of fact, as Caria describes, previous promoters who attempted to teach Algherese in primary schools became frustrated: “quan la mare o el pare s’adreçava en alguerès al fill, aquest li contestava en italià i recorda molt poques coses del que se li havia ensenyat” [When the mother or the father addressed their son in Algherese, he replied in Italian and remembered just a few things of what he was taught] (2006: 36).

There are also some cultural concerns in relation to Algherese speakers. They do not feel themselves to be fully integrated into the greater Catalan community; rather, they feel they are



an isolated minority in Italy (Argenter, 2008: 210; Chessa, 2008: 190). Nevertheless, this is a recent feeling. Historically, the Catalan-speaking community considered any Catalan-speaker to be Catalan, independently of their place of origin (Catalonia, Valencia, Balearic Islands, Roussillon). This is proved by documents as ancient as the reign of Alfonso IV of Aragon (fourteenth century). In fact, even today most Catalan speakers consider people from Alghero to be members of the transnational Catalan community (Adell & Balata, 2012), but this is not a mutual perception. In truth, the Algherese recognize that there is no real desire from their side to reproduce the language.

Another reason behind this feeling is that the Algherese dialect is not fully intelligible by the rest of the Catalan speakers, as opposed to the total intelligibility of other dialects (Eastern, Western, Valencian). This fact arises from some specific phonetic phenomena such as rhotacism, metathesis, and assimilation (Perea, 2010: 144), as well as a substantial corpus of vocabulary incorporated into the dialect from other languages, mainly from Italian but also from Sardinian. These aspects make it insufficiently comprehensible to other Catalan speakers. In addition, the situation of Algherese as a non-unified language becomes a fundamental obstacle to setting up any kind of action to improve it (Bover, 2002: 113). Indeed, some scholars and observers point out that Algherese can no longer be called a Catalan dialect mixed with Italian; rather, it is an Italian dialect with a Catalan substratum (Boix, 2008).

If the language is to have any chance for revival, the first task that needs to be achieved is to attain agreement between scholars regarding what kind of language they would like to promote. For now, there are two opposing positions:

- One argues that Algherese has to settle on a phonetically based orthography, which unequivocally represents the sounds of colloquial Algherese using Italian graphemes, the ones that Algherese people are used to dealing with (Chessa, 2008: 190).

- The other proposes that Algherese needs to be written in a non-autochthonous standard variety, because it has to follow the same criteria as the rest of the Catalan-speaking regions (Bosch, 2012: 53).

The first approach is likely to be the more straightforward way to extend a written variety of Algherese among native speakers who are used to speak it, but not to write it, as well as to the passive bilinguals who are also used to hear it. However, this would develop Algherese into a non-formal dialect that is impossible to use when conducting any kind of formal activities. This would also segregate the Algherese people from the larger Catalan community, expanding the feeling of being isolated and speaking a dialect with no practical use outside of the tiny local community.

The second position would imply an extra effort to train speakers in a strange orthography that is different from Italian, which they use on a daily base, and which does not have a proper correspondence with local pronunciation (and sometimes lexicon). However, it could be argued that this is not a major stumbling block because it also occurs with other dialects, such as Valencian, Balearic, and others. Indeed, a lack of correspondence between written and oral forms is common with any kind of dialectal variation, and it is not a problem *per se*, but an attitude of language loyalty to a standard variety (Gumperz, 2009: 66). In fact, "In Europe today, non-standardised varieties are rarely written (and if so, only in personal genres, such as in e-mail, a conceptually half-oral, half-written text type)" (Auer, 2005: 10). This option would approximate Algherese to the rest of the Catalan-speaking community, and it would develop into a formal language that is not restricted to local employment, but extended to any kind of political, professional, or cultural sphere. The isolation of Algherese would come to an end, and they would enter once again into a greater linguistic domain.

This process of orthographic unification has also been developed in other Catalan varieties, such as Valencian or Balearic, with reliable

success: “la codificació ortogràfica (i també podríem dir-ho de la gramatical) unificà la manera d’escriure la llengua. I la unificació és un concepte positiu: la manera d’escriure la llengua ha contribuït a definir la comunitat parlant, ha facilitat l’ensenyament de l’instrument que la vertebrava i ha canalitzat de forma unitària les manifestacions expressives d’aquest instrument» [the orthographic codification (and we could say the same about the grammar) unified the way of writing the language. And unification is a positive concept: the way of writing the language has helped to define the speech community, has aided to the teaching of the instrument which supports it, and has oriented the expressive manifestations of this instrument in a unified form] (Badia i Margarit, 1994: 12). This position has already been adopted by some Algherese scholars who are aware of its benefits. In a project to edit an Algherese version of one of the most popular comics in the world, *The adventures of Tintin*, a team of Algherese speakers decided to use an orthography which respected standard Catalan, although including some particularities of proper Algherese morphology, syntax and lexicon (Bosch i Rodoreda, 2012: 52).

Nevertheless, in twenty-first century Alghero, as in many other minority languages, the best way to keep the language alive remains undecided: “For non-standardized varieties, there is a fundamental -perhaps unresolvable- tension between an emphasis on difference vs. an emphasis on sameness” (Jaffe, 2000: 506).

### Conclusions

All evidence suggests that Catalan in Alghero is undervalued by its own speakers. The radical and wide-sweeping changes that came to pass during the sixties and the seventies in terms of the urban economy and society disrupted how the language was practiced in daily life. The upper class witnessed the fall of their group and the rise of a new one, and their language went with them. Catalan lost its prestige and its social value as it could not find a place in the new market. It was replaced by Italian, which was quickly becoming

associated with wealth coming from the continent. Likewise, it was the only language that could open a new world of opportunities beyond the city. Subsequently, parents tried to provide their children with the best tools to attain a place in the new market, and so they stopped transmitting Algherese to them. This provoked an inter-generational rupture that is not easy to repair.

The twenty-first century began with the same situation, and there is little indication that the problem can be easily solved. Attitudes towards this minority language have changed thoroughly since its was challenged by Italian, the official state language. Previously, Catalan enjoyed great prestige among its speakers, and even among migrants who came to settle in the city. Today, it has come to be considered merely a symbol of old times, a relic that is almost useless in the twentieth century, excluding its consideration as an historical relic. Younger generations have lost the native competence in Catalan of which their elders were so proud, and they barely have a passive competence in the language. Correspondingly, Catalan has lost its place as a communicative tool. New generations do not seem to be interested in altering this position.

If people from Alghero do not value their linguistic and cultural heritage, there is no action that official institutions can take to preserve it. The only way to revive the language is if the Algherese people make an effort to see themselves as part of the larger Catalan-speaking community. It is very likely that local official institutions would need to intervene to make this process occur. Their main efforts must be directed towards changing the mentality of its speakers and their descendants. As long as languages continue being merely tools in the market and not valued for their intrinsic richness, there will be no opportunity for Algherese or any other minority language to flourish. We know that it is difficult to resist such changes in a world where “even the most inaccurate and improvised forms of language became prestigious when promoted by the most popular of the mass media: the television” (Tosi, 2008: 266). Yet languages are also

vehicles of culture, a culture that would be lost if the language it comes with disappears.

The future of Algherese is unknown. The loss of the old economic structures broke the traditional social balance and helped Italian to become the preferred language for communication, leaving Catalan without a place in the labour market (Leprêtre, 1995: 60). This can be interpreted as the abandonment of traditional linguistic attitudes in favour of an extremely practical language behaviour, leaving Algherese as an icon of nostalgia.

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