

The Conundrum of Friulian Language Vitality

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Italy is characterized by a considerable amount of language variation. Only a few spoken vernaculars enjoy institutional support and are officially recognized as minority languages. Among these, Friulian is one of the largest in terms of number of speakers. In the past decade, the assessment of Friulian language vitality has yielded discordant conclusions. The aim of the present paper is to shed light on Friulian's vitality by providing an informed discussion of the findings of the three most recent studies on the topic, namely De Cia (2013), Coluzzi (2015), and Melchior (2015). As a framework for discussion and means of synthesis among the different claims put forward on Friulian's vitality, I will make reference to the nine factors of language vitality proposed by UNESCO (2003): each factor describes six possible sociolinguistic scenarios, which reflect six different levels of language vitality. Despite its official status and institutional support, Friulian lacks young native speakers and is used more and more infrequently in a limited number of social settings. The overall picture suggests that a marked process of language shift from Friulian to Italian is taking place. National and regional authorities should take immediate action to ensure the future survival of the minority language.

1. Introduction By the turn of the next century, it is estimated that more than that 90% of the world's languages will cease to exist (Krauss 1992; Bernard 1996), dramatically impoverishing the linguistic diversity on our planet. In this scenario of widespread language endangerment, accurately assessing language vitality is of crucial importance. It is a fundamental step in order to adopt adequate measures of language planning that can effectively block or even reverse the obsolescence of a language. However, assessing language vitality in a speech community is not an easy task, and, often, the sociopolitical agenda of the local authorities that administer the speech community interferes in the objective evaluation of the gathered sociolinguistic data. It is therefore important that those who assess the vitality of an endangered language follow an independent international framework, in which a set of criteria guide the researcher in the objective evaluation of the vitality of the language, without leaving room for any possible sociopolitical biases. In this respect, UNESCO's (2003) Ad Hoc Group on Endangered Languages offers a solid framework for the assessment of language vitality that is based on the following nine factors.¹

¹ See Soria (2016) on Piedmontese's ethnolinguistic vitality. In her work, she argued that, for the assessment of Piedmontese's vitality, UNESCO's factors are more appropriate than other language vitality scales (e.g., EGIDS, EuLaViBar, Red List). Nevertheless, at the same time, she also put forward a few

UNESCO's (2003) factors of language vitality:

1. Intergenerational Language Transmission
2. Absolute Number of Speakers
3. Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population
4. Trends in Existing Language Domains
5. Response to New Domains and Media
6. Materials for Language Education and Literacy
7. Governmental and Institutional Language Attitudes and Policies
8. Community Members' Attitudes toward Their Own Language
9. Amount and Quality of Documentation

UNESCO's (2003) Ad Hoc Group on Endangered Languages stresses that none of these factors can be used in isolation to assess the vitality of a language, but the assessment must be carried out by concurrently considering all nine factors and their interaction with one another. Each factor describes six possible sociolinguistic scenarios, which reflect six different levels of language endangerment (grades 5 to 0). By adopting UNESCO's (2003) framework, a researcher can not only objectively and independently assess the vitality of a language in a speech community but also ensure comparability among different levels of vitality across different languages.

Taking Friulian as a case study², the aim of the present paper is twofold: (i) to adopt UNESCO's (2003) framework to assess the level of vitality of Friulian in light of the sociolinguistic data provided by the two most recent quantitative sociolinguistic studies on Friulian (De Cia 2013; Melchior 2015) and (ii) to show that assessing language vitality without a firm balance between sociolinguistic data and a rigorous framework can lead to inaccurate conclusions that can be potentially fatal for an endangered language. As for point (ii), Friulian is an interesting case study, as the previous assessments of its vitality have led to very different conclusions (see Melchior 2019). On one hand, De Cia (2013) observed a clear process of language shift toward the national dominant language, Italian, foreseeing the disappearance of Friulian within three generations of speakers. On the other hand, Melchior (2015; 2017) observed a rebound in the vitality of Friulian driven by the younger generation of speakers and stressed that Friulian's language shift is significantly slowing down. Given the conflicting conclusions, I claim that only by closely adhering to UNESCO's (2003) framework in light of De Cia's 2013 and Melchior's 2015 data is it possible to shed light on the true level of Friulian's vitality. In fact, while the two studies are not directly comparable for methodological reasons (see §2), a synthesis of the two can be achieved by adopting UNESCO's nine factors of language vitality.

The paper is structured as follows: In Section 2, I will provide a brief introduction to Friulian and discuss the most relevant past sociolinguistic/language vitality surveys undertaken in Friulian-speaking territories; in Section 3, I will examine

critiques on the theoretical framework proposed by UNESCO. See Soria (2016) for full discussion.

² Friulian is an endangered Romance language spoken in the northeastern part of Italy.

UNESCO's (2003) factors of language vitality in light of the Friulian sociolinguistic data gathered by De Cia (2013) and Melchior (2015); in Section 4, I will put forward an informed assessment of the level of vitality of Friulian on the basis of the discussion in Section 3. Section 5 concludes the paper with some final remarks on the assessment of Friulian vitality.

2. Assessing Friulian language vitality: Past and present The Italian linguistic scenario is extremely rich and characterized by a surprisingly large number of Romance varieties that coexist alongside Italian and are traditionally labeled Italian Dialects. Only very few of these varieties enjoy institutional support and are officially recognized as minority languages. Despite their misleading name, Italian Dialects should not be mistaken for dialects of Italian; they are instead sister languages of Italian that independently developed from Latin (see Maiden & Parry 1997 for a general overview). Italian Dialects also ought not to be confused with regional Italian (Beruto 1989; 1993), which is the umbrella term that refers to the actual varieties of Italian spoken throughout the Italian peninsula. In line with the world's trajectory of language endangerment (Krauss 1992; Bernard 1996), the vast majority of Italian Dialects are likely to disappear at the turn of the next century.

Italian national law 482 (Norms on the Matter of Protection of Historical Linguistic Minorities), adopted on December 15, 1999, sets the parameters and indicates the modality for safeguarding twelve minority languages spoken within the Italian territory.³ Among these languages, Friulian is one of the largest in terms of absolute number of speakers. It is spoken in the northeastern part of Italy by more than half a million speakers (Grimes 2000; Melchior 2017).⁴ Despite its official status and some institutional support, Friulian is listed as a *definitely endangered* language in UNESCO's *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* (Moseley 2010). Several studies from 1977 to 2015 have monitored the sociolinguistic status of Friulian. The studies from 1977 to 1998 revealed a 1% reduction per year of the Friulian-speaking population (Picco 2001; 2006). In the last decade, only two studies have gathered a substantial amount of data on the sociolinguistic situation of Friulian: De Cia (2013) and Melchior (2015). De Cia (2013) carried out a questionnaire-based survey with 560 participants in the province of Udine.⁵ The questionnaires were distributed in

³ These languages include the following indigenous Romance languages: Franco-Provençal, Friulian, Ladin, Occitan, and Sardinian. Law 482/99 also legally protects the languages and cultures of the autochthonous Slovenian-, French-, German-, Catalan-, Greek-, Albanian-, and Croatian-speaking communities that have inhabited the Italian peninsula for centuries.

⁴ Friulian is spoken in 176 municipalities in the Italian provinces of Udine, Gorizia, and Pordenone in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region (see Cisilino 2015). Parts of the region are not Friulian-speaking (for example, all the territories of the province of Trieste). The overall linguistic situation in the region is rather complex and historically characterized by a triglossic situation where Friulian, as the low language, coexists with Venetian and Italian (see Francescato 1955; Vicario 2005; Melchior 2019). In addition, it is worth noting that, in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region, there are also legally protected German- and Slovenian-speaking communities.

⁵ It is important to note that the core of the Friulian-speaking community lies in the province of Udine (see Vicario 2005; Heinemann & Melchior 2015; Benincà & Vanelli 2016).

bars, shops, schools, summer camps, and other public places during summer 2012. De Cia (2013) also employed the “friend-of-a-friend” technique (see Milroy 1987). For the statistical analysis, De Cia (2013) only considered the questionnaires filled in by participants who had lived in the province of Udine for at least ten years at the time they took the questionnaire: 514 out of 560 questionnaires met this requirement. Melchior (2015) carried out an interview-based survey across all Friulian-speaking territories, namely the provinces of Udine, Pordenone, and Gorizia. One thousand two hundred interviewees were randomly selected from the resident lists of seventy-two randomly selected municipalities located in the three provinces under investigation. Interviews took place in 2014. Melchior’s 2015 statistical analysis was based on 1,005 interviews. It is important to note that thirty-two municipalities (out of the total seventy-two municipalities investigated) were specifically included in order to assure continuation and comparability with the previous sociolinguistic studies carried out in 1977 and 1998. This subgroup of interviewees was labeled the *Friuli* sample. Melchior’s 2015 investigation was commissioned by the *Agenzia Regionale per la Lingua Friulana* (ARLeF), or the Regional Agency for the Friulian Language, which is the political and administrative organization that monitors and safeguards Friulian in the Italian region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia. This fact can be appreciated by the methodological articulation and numerical robustness of the study. Nevertheless, the study per se does not directly aim to assess the vitality of Friulian, but rather its sociological trends within the Friulian-speaking community. In this respect, Melchior’s 2015 and 2017 conclusions seem to be overoptimistic with regard to the future survival of the Friulian language (see Melchior’s 2019 critique). For instance, Melchior (2015; 2017) claimed that the younger generation of the Friulian speech community is becoming more and more inclined to speak the minority language, signaling a rebound in use and appreciation of Friulian in the three provinces under investigation. De Cia’s 2013 study was instead originally presented as a bachelor’s dissertation at the University of Manchester, and, despite the large number of questionnaires gathered and his robust statistical analysis, De Cia’s 2013 data collection within the province of Udine was not as widespread and as evenly distributed as that of Melchior 2015. Nonetheless, De Cia (2013) specifically focused on the assessment of Friulian language vitality, as well as outlining Friulian’s main sociolinguistic trends with respect to the variables of age, gender, and level of education. De Cia’s 2013 conclusions yielded an irreversible language shift toward Italian with the concrete danger of Friulian’s extinction within the next three generations of speakers.

Notwithstanding the different interpretation of the data with regard to the future trajectory of Friulian, De Cia (2013) and Melchior (2015) both agreed that the stigma on Friulian as a language spoken by uneducated people of a low socioeconomic background is fading away.⁶ The two studies hence found that no particular stigma is associated with speaking Friulian in the twenty-first century (see also Kumar 2018 on the topic). Melchior (2015; 2017) interpreted the lifting of the stigma on Friulian as the “renaissance” of the Friulian language, which will eventually lead

⁶ Such stigma has characterized minority languages in Italy since the consolidation and fall of Mussolini’s fascist regime, which sought to annihilate language diversity in Italy (see De Mauro 2011).

to a rebound in the use of the minority language. De Cia (2013), in light of the global situation of language endangerment, interpreted this datum more cautiously: Friulian speakers seem to have become more and more indifferent to their ancestral language, hence the lifting of the stigma. He claimed that the reason for such indifference lies in the perceived lack of *prestige* and *instrumental value* of Friulian in terms of the socioeconomic advancement of its speakers (see O’Shannessy 1999; Crystal 2000; Grenoble & Whaley 2006).

For methodological reasons, Melchior’s 2015 and De Cia’s 2013 data cannot be directly compared. I will therefore try to reach a synthesis between the two studies through the strict adoption of UNESCO’s (2003) nine factors of language vitality. The discussion will show that without a solid and independent framework, assessing language vitality may lead to inaccurate conclusions, which can be potentially dangerous for the survival of the language under scrutiny. It is important to highlight a third study that aimed to assess Friulian language vitality by Coluzzi (2015), who used both UNESCO’s (2003) factors of language vitality and the Extended Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) by Lewis & Simons (2010).⁷ He assessed the vitality of Friulian in a comparative fashion by drawing parallels between Friulian and other minority languages spoken in Spain and Italy, namely Galician, Asturian, Aranese, Milanese, and Cimbrian. Despite the important cross-linguistic perspective of the study, Coluzzi (2015) did not make reference to any actual sociolinguistic data (from the 1977–2015 studies) to support his choices of endangerment level per factor of language vitality. In light of Coluzzi’s 2015 study, if it is true that an accurate analysis of language vitality needs a solid theoretical framework for the interpretation of the gathered sociolinguistic data, the opposite is also true: for an accurate assessment of language vitality, sociolinguistic data are crucial to feed the theoretical framework. In fact, on the basis of the sociolinguistic data provided by De Cia (2013) and Melchior (2015), the assessment grades for several of UNESCO’s (2003) factors of language vitality proposed in this paper will considerably differ from those given by Coluzzi (2015).

In the following section, for each UNESCO’s (2003) factor of language vitality, I will propose a grade of language endangerment on the basis of De Cia’s 2013 and Melchior’s 2015 sociolinguistic data. I will also compare my assessment for each factor with those by Coluzzi (2015). The aim of §3 is to contribute toward a final assessment of Friulian language vitality that most accurately and objectively describes its real sociolinguistic situation.

3. UNESCO’s (2003) factors of language vitality UNESCO’s (2003) nine factors of language vitality comprise the following main aspects of language endangerment: intergenerational language transmission, language use in communicative domains, speakers’ attitudes toward their own language, institutional support available for the language, and level of documentation. In assessing language vitality, UNESCO’s (2003) factors must be conceived as intertwined criteria: no factor taken in isola-

⁷ It is important to note that De Cia (2013) also explicitly discussed some of UNESCO’s (2003) factors of language vitality. However, his analysis was incomplete.

tion can provide us with a reliable conclusion on the level of vitality of a language. Each of UNESCO's (2003) factors of language vitality, with the exception of Factor 2 (absolute number of speakers), describes six possible sociolinguistic scenarios that reflect different levels of language endangerment from *safe/non-endangered* to *extinct*. Let us start our assessment of Friulian language vitality from the first factor on the list: intergenerational language transmission.

3.1 Factor 1: Intergenerational language transmission One of the most important factors of language vitality on different scales of language endangerment (see Fishman 1991; Krauss 2007; Lewis & Simons 2010) is intergenerational language transmission. The passing on of speakers' ancestral language to the new generations of the speech community is especially important in predicting whether the language will maintain its vitality in the foreseeable future. At any time, speakers of a minority language may decide to cease to pass on their language for different reasons. In some circumstances, this is due to external factors such as military, economic, or cultural/education subjugation (UNESCO 2003). In other circumstances, in plurilingual contexts, speakers decide that their ancestral language is not worth retaining and, hence, passed on. Speakers prefer to pass on the dominant language in the hope of ensuring their children a higher chance of socioeconomic advancement. Italian, the national language, is perceived as the language of sociopolitical power and economic growth, as well as the primary language of culture and education. By contrast, Friulian lacks *prestige*, which can be roughly translated into the speakers' perception of the *instrumental value* of their language (i.e., what someone can achieve by speaking the language; see Grenoble & Whaley 2006). If a language lacks new native speakers due to a disruption in its intergenerational transmission, it can be considered as already dead: it is just a matter of time before it completely disappears along with the remaining speakers. Speakers' decision not to transmit their language to their children signals the start of serious attrition in the language and the subsequent inevitable shift of the speech community to the dominant language (Winford 2003). A language lacking young native speakers is also much harder to revitalize (see Grenoble & Whaley 2006).

As shown in Table 1, UNESCO's (2003: 8) document provides a scale of endangerment from grade 5 (*safe*) to 0 (*extinct*) for Factor 1 (intergenerational language transmission).

In light of the sociolinguistic data from De Cia (2013) and Melchior (2015), Friulian should be placed in grade 3 (*definitely endangered*). It is important to note that Friulian is quickly moving toward grade 2 (*severely endangered*). The outlook for the proposed grade assessment for Factor 1 is hence negative.

The sociolinguistic data gathered in the past decade show that the majority of the population in the parental generation prefers the use of Italian over Friulian in their day-to-day interactions.

Table 1. UNESCO’s (2003: 8) scale of endangerment for Factor 1

Degree of endangerment	Grade	Description
safe	5	The language is used by all ages, from children up.
unsafe	4	The language is used by some children in all domains; it is used by all children in limited domains.
definitively endangered	3	The language is used mostly by the parental generation and up.
severely endangered	2	The language is used mostly by the grandparental generation and up.
critically endangered	1	The language is used mostly by very few speakers, of great-grandparental generation.
extinct	0	There exists no speaker.

In Melchior’s 2015 *Friuli* sample, only 38.7% of the interviewed population between 40 and 49 years of age is a regular speaker of Friulian. This percentage further drops to 30.8% in the 30–39 age group. Along the same lines, De Cia (2013) found that the percentage of participants who “speak and understand Friulian” in the age classes 35–44 and 25–34 is respectively 69.1% and 66%. Even if, at first glance, De Cia’s 2013 data seem more comforting than Melchior’s (2015), De Cia (2013) investigated frequency of use in a separate question, “How often do you use Friulian in a day?” with five possible options: *never*, *rarely*, *sometimes*, *often*, and *always*. For the 25–34 age group, the two answers that got the relative majority are *rarely* (26%) and *often* (32%); the majority of the 35–44 age group instead answered *sometimes* (22.8%) and *often* (46.8%). De Cia’s 2013 and Melchior’s 2015 data hence showed that the use of Friulian in the parental generation is far from optimal: Friulian will soon be *severely endangered* (grade 2) with respect to the grade assessment for UNESCO’s (2003) Factor 1.

Melchior (2015) and De Cia (2013) investigated the intergenerational transmission of Friulian with a set of specific questions, whose results and analysis support the categorization of Friulian as *definitely endangered*. De Cia (2013) devised three multiple-choice questions to investigate Friulian’s intergenerational language transmission. Participants were asked (i) which is/was the language spoken by their parents, (ii) which is their native language, and, finally, (iii) which language they would speak to their children from birth. All three questions shared the same four possible answers: *mostly Italian*, *mostly Friulian*, *Italian and Friulian with the same frequency*, and *neither Italian nor Friulian*. This set of questions covers three generations, which is normally the time frame in which a language shift takes place in a situation of language attrition (Winford 2003). Table 2 shows the results of questions (i) to (iii) with respect to the whole interviewed population.

Table 2. Intergenerational language transmission:
Answer distribution in De Cia (2013)

	Italian	Friulian	Italian & Friulian	Other languages
Language spoken by participants' parents	28.2%	52.9%	17.3%	1.6%
Participants' native language	41.1%	46.1%	10.1%	2.7%
Language spoken to participants' children from birth	43.4%	19.1%	37%	0.5%

Table 2 clearly shows an ongoing language shift from Friulian to Italian: participants' parents speak/spoke mainly Friulian, whereas only 19.1% of the interviewed population speaks mainly the minority language to their children. The data on the participants' native language suggest that, at the time the survey was carried out, the use of Friulian was about halfway through a shift to Italian. The percentage of native speakers of Friulian is in fact only 5% higher than the percentage of Italian native speakers. It is, therefore, realistic to think that, from this generation of speakers onward, the use of Friulian will quickly decay. Interestingly, De Cia (2013) reported that, while administering the questionnaires, many young participants claimed that their native language was originally Friulian, but as soon as they started primary school, Italian became their dominant language. The explanation for this phenomenon may be found in the role of the children's peer group in the dynamics of language transmission: when two different models of transmission are given, namely the parents' and the peer group's, children normally follow the peer group (Hazen 2002), which in our case privileges Italian over Friulian. This trend was also found in Melchior's 2015 investigation. The percentage of interviewees who in their childhood (with a focus on the interviewees' past) spoke Friulian with their mother and father is respectively 64.6% (father) and 62.4% (mother). This percentage slightly drops with the interviewees' siblings (58.2%) but drops considerably to 49.1% with the interviewees' playmates.⁸ Melchior (2015) also reported that, at the time the interviews were conducted, only 21.2% of the interviewed parents declared that their children normally speak Friulian among themselves, whereas the majority of parents (59.2%) declared that the preferred language among siblings was Italian. These figures show that Friulian children prefer to align to the language of their peers rather than the ancestral language of their parents.

⁸ As far as playmates are concerned, it is important to note that, in his study, Melchior (2015; 2017) used the broad Italian term *compagni di gioco* 'playmates' without providing a specific setting where the playing takes place.

As for the investigation of Friulian intergenerational transmission in Melchior's 2015 study, he adopted a set of questions comparable to De Cia's (2013). Melchior (2015) asked interviewees to indicate (i) the language that their parents spoke among themselves, (ii) the language that they speak with their partner, and (iii) the language that they speak with their children. Table 3 summarizes Melchior's 2015 results.

Table 3. Intergenerational language transmission:
Answer distribution in Melchior (2015)

	Italian	Friulian	Italian & Friulian	Other languages
Language spoken by interviewees' parents among themselves	10.5%	67.2%	13.2%	9%
Language spoken by interviewees with partner	39.6%	37.9%	16.9%	5.6%
Language spoken to interviewees' children	41.1%	28.2%	27.7%	3%

The trend in intergenerational language transmission that emerges from Melchior's 2015 data is in line with that of De Cia 2013 and shows that Friulian is undergoing a clear language shift toward Italian. Melchior's 2015 data also neatly show that Friulian is quickly heading toward grade 2 with respect to UNESCO's (2003) scale for Factor 1: only a minority of the parental generation privileges Friulian in everyday interaction with their partner, whereas the use of Friulian is undoubtedly solid in the grandparent generation.

The increased disruption in the intergenerational transmission of Friulian is self-evident. However, in both studies by Melchior (2015) and De Cia (2013), a considerable minority of participants speaks/would speak both Italian and Friulian with their children: 37% in De Cia's 2013 and 27.7% in Melchior's 2015 studies. The following questions arise: What is the reason for such a relatively high figure? Is this bilingual mode enough to save Friulian from extinction? This high figure may be explained by the fact that Friulian speakers have a strong sense of cultural identity, but they also recognize the importance of Italian in everyday interactions. The choice to speak both languages to their children hence seems more of an ideological statement than an actual sociolinguistic trend (see Picco 2001; 2006; De Cia 2013; Melchior 2017). Nonetheless, even if interviewees were to speak both languages to their children from birth, there is no guarantee that, in the current sociolinguistic situation, they will become active speakers of Friulian. The more likely outcome is that those children will become *semi-speakers* of the minority language (in the sense of Dorian 1977 and subsequent works). If we add the percentage of those children who are spoken to bilingually to the percentage of children who are spoken to monolingually in Friulian, the figure adds up to roughly 50% in both Melchior's 2015 and De Cia's 2013 studies. Half of the children are hence spoken to in Friulian to differ-

ent extents. Given that, in the current sociolinguistic situation, Italian is more and more prominent in everyday interactions, and education (starting from kindergarten and primary school) is overwhelmingly monolingual in Italian (see Petris 2014), this proportion is not enough to promote and ensure a balanced bilingualism in those children raised bilingually in Friulian and Italian. Bilingual Friulian-Italian children will instead either follow their peers and gradually abandon Friulian or not receive enough input to become fluent speakers in the language. The result is a growing presence of semi-speakers of Friulian within the speech community. Despite their solid passive knowledge of the minority language, semi-speakers, due to their limited active competence in the minority language, are unable to pass it on to their own children, thus accelerating the language shift to the national dominant language.

As far as Coluzzi's 2015 assessment of UNESCO's (2003) Factor 1 is concerned, in his comparative analysis of Friulian with other minority languages in Italy and Spain, he placed Friulian in grade 3. His assessment of Factor 1 is hence in line with the assessment proposed here. Nevertheless, the data from Melchior (2015) and De Cia (2013) clearly suggest that the outlook for this factor is negative: Friulian is quickly moving toward the grade 2 scenario.

3.2 Factor 2: Absolute number of speakers UNESCO's (2003) Ad Hoc Group on Endangered Languages did not provide an explicit scale of endangerment for Factor 2 (absolute number of speakers). The smaller the speaking population, the more likely the language is vulnerable to internal and external shocks (e.g., disease, natural disasters, warfare) that may lead to the decimation of its speakers (see UNESCO 2003). A larger speaking population has hence a better chance of surviving into the indefinite future. Also, in terms of language revitalization, a language with two dozen fluent speakers is much harder to revitalize than a language spoken on a daily basis by a hundred thousand speakers.

Coluzzi (2015) claimed that, with respect to the other minority languages that he investigated in his study, Friulian can be placed somewhere in the middle in terms of absolute number of speakers. In fact, Friulian has roughly half a million speakers. In Coluzzi's 2015 study, the language most at risk with respect to Factor 2 is Cimbrian (spoken in the neighbouring Veneto and in Trentino) with 300 speakers, whereas the language least at risk is Galician with approximately two million speakers. De Cia (2013) did not discuss, nor investigated, Friulian's absolute number of speakers. Melchior (2015), on the other hand, provided the most up-to-date approximative number of Friulian speakers on the basis of the data gathered in his sociolinguistic study. Taking as a reference point the total population of the three provinces under investigation, Melchior (2015) estimated that the total number of Friulian speakers is 600,412, of which 421,679 are regular speakers and 178,733 are occasional speakers (see also Templin's 2020 estimates on the number of Friulian speakers and their evolution over time).

Despite the official recognition of Friulian as a minority language, the national Italian census does not offer the possibility to report on Friulian as a spoken language. As a consequence, it is impossible to know the exact number of Friulian speakers within the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region. Nevertheless, with approximately

half a million speakers, it is safe to claim that Friulian is not immediately endangered with respect to UNESCO Factor 2 (absolute number of speakers). Also, given the relatively large number of speakers in the Friulian speech community, there is still room for a potentially successful plan of language revitalization.

3.3 Factor 3: Proportion of speakers within the total population UNESCO's (2003) Factor 3 focuses on the proportion of speakers with respect to the total population: the higher this proportion, the safer is the language. Table 4 summarizes the different degrees of endangerment.

Table 4. UNESCO's (2003: 9) scale of endangerment for Factor 3

Degree of endangerment	Grade	Description
safe	5	All speak the language.
unsafe	4	Nearly all speak the language.
definitively endangered	3	A majority speaks the language.
severely endangered	2	A minority speaks the language.
critically endangered	1	Very few speak the language.
extinct	0	None speak the language.

By considering the total population of the three provinces where Friulian is spoken, which approximatively amounts to roughly a million, Friulian falls within grade 3 (*definitely endangered*). It is nonetheless important to establish what “speaking the language” means. If speaking the language means to be able to sustain a full conversation in Friulian, then Friulian falls in grade 2 (*severely endangered*): Melchior (2015) estimated that the absolute number of Friulian *regular* speakers is 421,679. It is in fact very common for *occasional* speakers of Friulian (178,733 in Melchior's 2015 study) to exhibit a reduced active competence in the minority language and limit their use of Friulian to greetings, swearwords, or set expressions. Nevertheless, given Melchior's 2015 estimates and given that some parts of the three provinces are not historically Friulian-speaking territories, it can be safely claimed that at least half of the total population is actively competent in Friulian. Friulian should hence be placed in grade 3 (*definitely endangered*) with a negative outlook. Let us now discuss this further with the relevant sociolinguistic data from De Cia (2013) and Melchior (2015).

Campbell & Muntzel (1989) proposed four main types of language death, which generate different linguistic and sociolinguistic outcomes (see Wolfram 2004). These are *sudden death*, *radical death*, *gradual death*, and *bottom-to-top death*. Friulian is clearly facing *gradual death*, which is characterized by “the gradual shift to the dominant language in a contact situation” (Sasse 1992: 22). In this type of language death, there is generally a continuum of language proficiency, which corre-

lates with the different generations of the speech community. The younger speakers have often been labeled semi-speakers (Dorian 1977) because they do not possess a full range of functional or structural competence in the language. In situations of gradual language death, the lexicon of the disappearing language starts declining and is gradually replaced by loanwords from the dominant language. Among the semi-speakers of the minority language, calques or loan translations may also be used to compensate for the limited knowledge of the obsolescing language (Wolfram 2004). In the Friulian speech community, the variable *age* is perhaps the most important factor in determining who speaks and who does not speak the minority language: the younger the speakers, the less likely they are competent Friulian speakers. The younger generations predominantly consist of semi-speakers of Friulian with a solid passive knowledge of the minority language but limited active competence. In De Cia (2013), the cut-off point with respect to *age* and regular use of Friulian is forty-nine years; in Melchior (2015), the cut-off point is fifty-three. The data suggest that the use of Friulian is more and more relegated into the older generations of the speech community.

Melchior (2015) and De Cia (2013) devised several questions to investigate the proportion of active Friulian speakers within the overall speech community. De Cia (2013) put particular attention to participants' active versus passive knowledge of Friulian, as well as on their competence in the minority language. Melchior (2015) instead more prominently investigated the frequency with which interviewees speak the minority language, distinguishing between *regular* versus *occasional* speakers. In De Cia's 2013 survey, participants were asked which of the following statements best represented them: [Friulian...] "I speak it and I understand it"; "I do not speak it, but I understand it"; or "I do not speak it and I do not understand it." Figure 1 shows the distribution of the three answers with respect to the whole interviewed population.

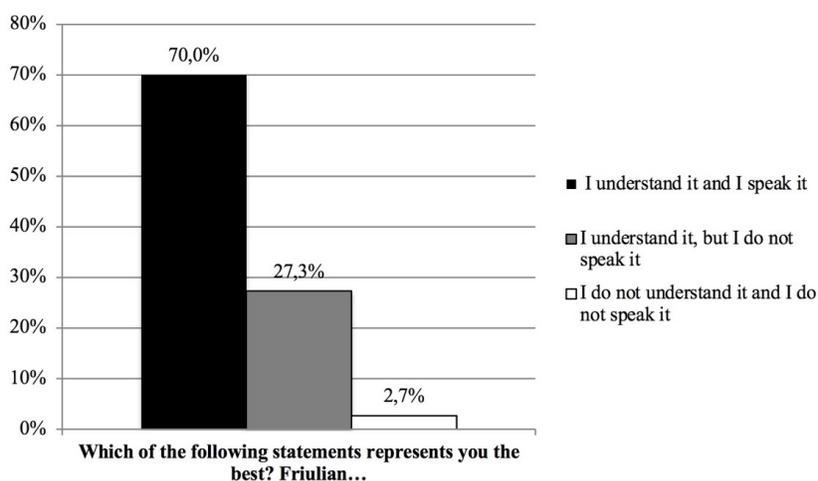


Figure 1. Distribution of active and passive speakers of Friulian (De Cia 2013)

Only 30% of participants do not actively speak Friulian. However, the percentage of participants who claim to actively speak Friulian (70%) must be interpreted with caution, since it includes both *occasional* and *regular* speakers. In fact, De Cia (2013) asked participants to indicate how often they speak Friulian in a separate question. Five possible answers were given: *always*, *often*, *sometimes*, *rarely*, and *never*. Figure 2 shows the answer distribution with respect to the whole interviewed population.

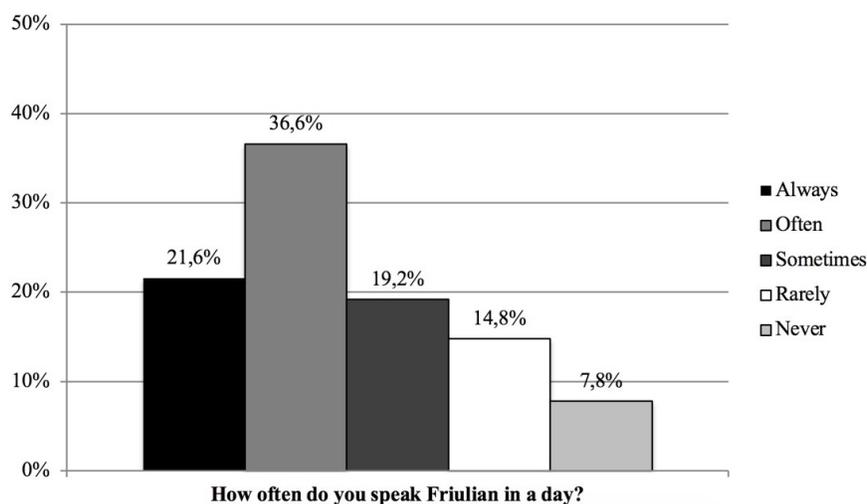


Figure 2. Frequency of use of Friulian in a day (De Cia 2013)

The relative majority of participants (36.6%) claim to speak Friulian *often* in a day, and 21.6% claim to *always* speak Friulian throughout the day. The sum of these two figures (58%) makes up the *regular* speakers of Friulian. The *occasional* speakers, those who chose *sometimes* and *rarely*, are instead 34% of the interviewed population. The fact that only a fifth of the sample speaks Friulian continuously throughout the day is indicative of the fact that Italian has become absolutely necessary in everyday interactions. De Cia (2013) also investigated the proportion of Friulian speakers who, by virtue of not having enough fluency and competence in the minority language, are de facto semi-speakers (Dorian 1977) and unable to pass on Friulian to their children. To this end, De Cia (2013) asked participants to self-evaluate their conversational ability in Friulian against the following grade scale: *excellent*, *very good*, *good*, *poor*, and *very poor*. Figure 3 shows participants' answer distribution.

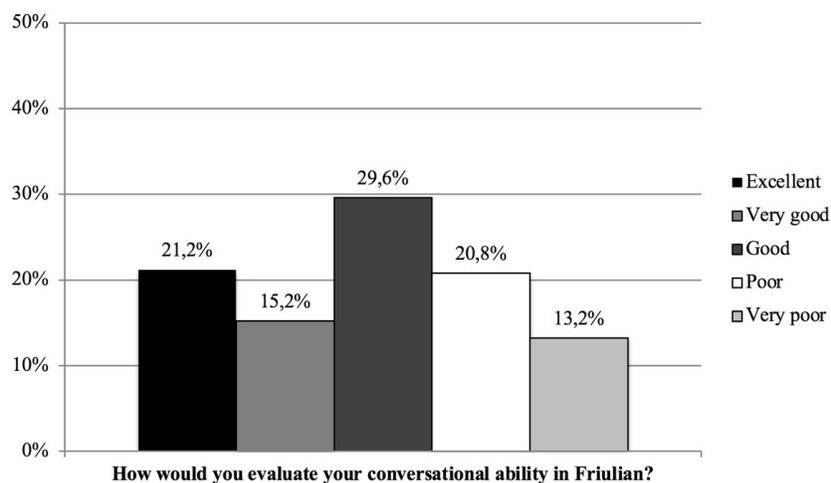


Figure 3. Participants' self-evaluation of their Friulian conversational ability (De Cia 2013)

De Cia's 2013 results showed that the majority of participants do not seem very confident in their ability to speak Friulian. The relative majority of the interviewed population (29.6%) self-evaluated their conversational ability in Friulian with the grade *good*. It could be argued that participants were too humble to claim that their conversational ability level in Friulian was *excellent*. Nevertheless, it is more realistic to think that participants' self-evaluation was conditioned by the fact that many of them are aware of not having in Friulian the same linguistic competence that they have in Italian.

Melchior's 2015 investigation showed similar results,⁹ but his conclusions on the future survival of Friulian were exceedingly more optimistic than that of De Cia 2013. Melchior (2015) asked interviewees to self-evaluate their degree of use/knowledge of Friulian by choosing one of the following statements: [Friulian...] "I speak it regularly"; "I speak it occasionally"; "I understand it, but don't speak it"; or "I don't understand it." Figure 4 shows the answer distribution with respect to the sample *Friuli*. Melchior (2015) was particularly optimistic about the fact that 94% of the interviewed population has at least some passive knowledge of the minority language. In terms of the successful outcome of a potential plan of language revitalization, the figure is undoubtedly encouraging. Nevertheless, if no substantial measures of language policy and planning were to be adopted in the next decade, the figure by itself is by no means reassuring.

⁹ It is important to note that Melchior (2015) investigated participants' knowledge of Friulian and frequency of use in the same question (as opposed to two separate questions). Direct comparability with De Cia's 2013 data is hence not achievable.

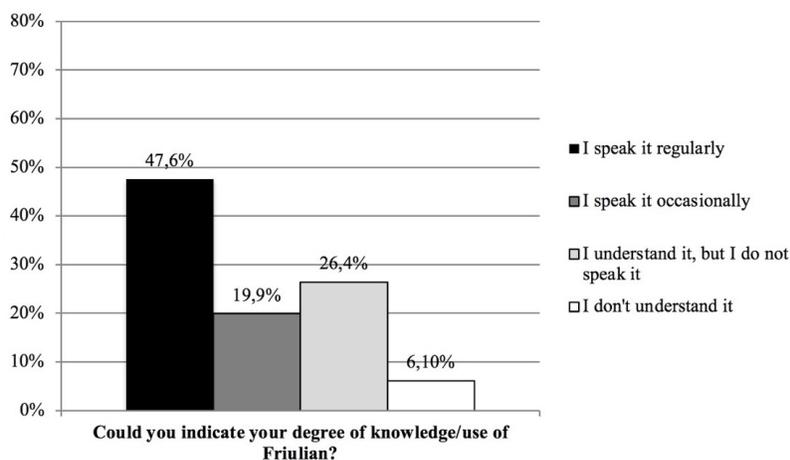


Figure 4. Distribution of active and passive speakers of Friulian (Melchior 2015)

In fact, the data from De Cia 2013 seemed to suggest that a great portion of *occasional* speakers of Friulian are de facto semi-speakers (Dorian 1977) of the minority language and hence very unlikely to pass it on to their children. The percentage of *regular* Friulian speakers has been constantly decreasing from the first Friulian sociolinguistic investigation in 1977. In 1977, the percentage of *regular* speakers was roughly 78%. In the 1998 study, it had lowered to 57%, and in Melchior's 2015 investigation, it reached the lowest record of 47.6%. On the other hand, the overall percentage of those who can understand Friulian has only marginally decreased (97% in the 1998 study), signaling a growing proportion of semi-speakers within the total population who are replacing active speakers of Friulian. Melchior (2015; 2017) nonetheless talked about a rebound in the use of Friulian and a significant deceleration of the language shift to Italian, which is led by the younger generation of the Friulian speech community. His exceedingly optimistic conclusions were based on the distribution of *regular* Friulian speakers across the variable *age*, which is shown in Figure 5.

As shown in Figure 5, the younger 18–29 age class outperforms the 30–39 age class. Even if the data collected by Melchior (2015) are indeed encouraging, they must be interpreted with caution. First, as a matter of fact, the percentage of regular speakers is still a minority within the 18–25 age group. Second, this generation of speakers did not receive formal schooling in Friulian, which could justify a rebound in the use of the minority language. Friulian as an optional subject was in fact systematically introduced in primary and middle schools in 2012 (see Section 3.6). Between 2002 and 2012, nonetheless, some Friulian teaching was in place in some schools: in 2002, the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region started funding projects to teach the minority language (see Petris 2014). Third, the 18–29 age class is the generation that, within the speech community, has the least experience with the stigmatization of Friulian.

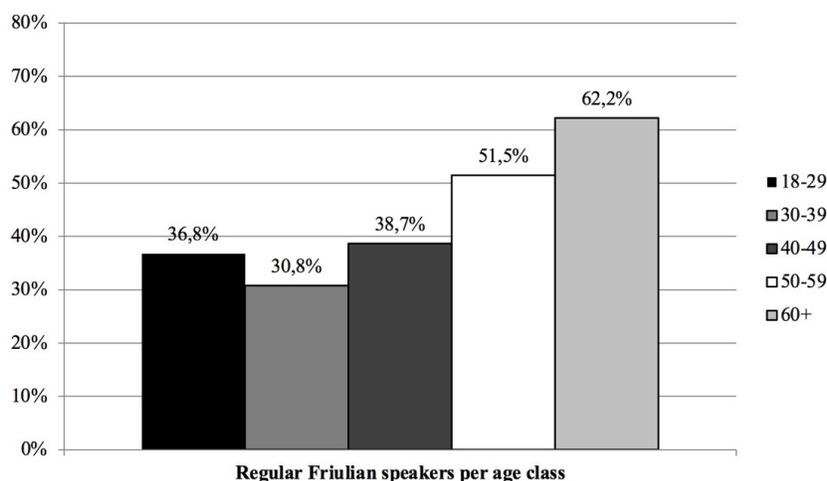


Figure 5. Distribution of regular Friulian speakers by age (Melchior 2015)

Younger speakers are hence more prone to freely identify themselves with the Friulian identity and culture (see Kumar 2018 on the fading of the stigma associated with speaking Friulian). Melchior (2019) challenged Melchior's 2015 overoptimistic interpretation of his findings by pointing out that the perception of what is meant by "speaking/using Friulian" nowadays may be different from what "speaking/using Friulian" meant in the past. Within the younger generation, in fact, speaking Friulian does not mean using Friulian as a primary means of communication in all its complexity, but rather the adoption of a limited set of Friulian expressions, which include greetings, swearwords, and set phrases, while de facto speaking Italian. This type of behavior indexes more one's strong sense of identity and belonging to the Friulian-speaking community rather than one's ability to speak Friulian (see also Melchior's 2017 cautious considerations on his own trend). De Cia (2013), on the other hand, did not observe a revival in the use of Friulian in the younger generation, but a decline in the percentage of (*occasional + regular*) Friulian speakers across the different age classes: 65+ (82.9%), 55–64 (88.3%), 45–54 (72.9%), 35–44 (69.1%), 25–34 (66%), and 15–24 (46.6%). Nevertheless, if we assume the existence of a genuine growing minority of Friulian speakers within the younger generation of the speech community, it would be interesting to further investigate their frequency of use of Friulian and their conversational ability in the minority language. Such data are not available in Melchior's 2015 study; however, they are available in De Cia's 2013 study with respect to the 15–24 age class. In terms of frequency of use in a day, the 15–24 age class follows this distribution: *always* (3.7%), *often* (24.8%), *sometimes* (33%), *rarely* (26.6%), and *never* (11.9%). As for their self-assessed conversational ability in Friulian, the 15–24 age class follows this distribution: *excellent* (5.5%), *very good* (18.5%), *good* (23.8%), *poor* (33%), and *very poor* (19.3%). In

De Cia 2013, the relative majority of 15–24-year-old speakers hence declare to speak Friulian *sometimes* and *poorly*. In light of these data, it is sensible to support Melchior's 2019 critique of Melchior's 2015 overoptimistic interpretation of his own data: younger speakers do not seem to rely on Friulian as a means of communication, but as a marker of their regional identity. In fact, given their limited frequency of use of Friulian and their poor linguistic competence in the minority language, most young speakers are de facto semi-speakers of Friulian.

To conclude, with respect to the categorization of Friulian against UNESCO's (2003) scale of endangerment for Factor 3 (proportion of speakers of the language within the total population), the sociolinguistic data from Melchior (2015) and De Cia (2013) leave no room for interpretation: Friulian falls within grade 3 (*definitely endangered*) with a negative outlook. Half of the overall population of the three provinces under investigation regularly speaks Friulian. Furthermore, Friulian *regular* speakers are concentrated in the ageing generations of the speech community. As far as Coluzzi's (2015) categorization of Friulian with respect to UNESCO's (2003) Factor 3 is concerned, it is in line with what is proposed in this section (grade 3 *definitely endangered*).

3.4 Factor 4: Trends in existing language domains An important factor underlying language vitality is the range of domains in which a language is spoken (UNESCO 2003). The healthier the language, the more domains in which it is found (Grenoble & Whaley 2006). Meyerhoff (2006: 11) provided a straightforward definition of language domain: "the social and physical settings in which speakers find themselves." Speakers choose to speak different languages or different styles of language based on who they are talking to, where they are, and the attitudes they want to convey. With respect to Factor 4 (trends in existing language domains), UNESCO's (2003: 10) document provides a scale of endangerment from 0 (extinct) to 5 (universal use), as shown in Table 5.

The detailed description of grade 3 (*dwindling domains*) by UNESCO's (2003: 10) Ad Hoc Group on Endangered Languages neatly describes the situation of Friulian:

Dwindling domains (3): The non-dominant language loses ground and, at home, parents begin to use the dominant language in their everyday interactions with their children, and children become semi-speakers of their own language (receptive bilinguals). Parents and older members of the community tend to be productively bilingual in the dominant and indigenous languages: they understand and speak both. Bilingual children may exist in families where the indigenous language is actively used.

Table 5. UNESCO's (2003: 10) scale of endangerment for Factor 4

Degree of endangerment	Grade	Description
universal use	5	The language is used in all domains and for all functions.
multilingual parity	4	Two or more languages may be used in most social domains and for most functions.
dwindling domains	3	The language is in home domains and for many functions, but the dominant language begins to penetrate even home domains.
limited or formal domains	2	The language is used in limited social domains and for several functions.
highly limited domains	1	The language is used only in a very restricted domains and for a very few functions.
extinct	0	The language is not used in any domain and for any function.

It is interesting to note how, without making reference to the existing sociolinguistic data on Friulian, Coluzzi (2015) proposed grade 4 (*multilingual parity*) for the classification of Friulian. UNESCO's (2003) Ad Hoc Group on Endangered Languages, however, explicitly stated that grade 4 should be reserved for a situation of *diglossia* (see Ferguson 1959; Fishman 1967), where the nondominant language (i.e., Friulian) coexists with the dominant language (i.e., Italian), but the two languages are used for different functions and in different settings. More specifically, the nondominant language is used in informal and familiar settings (*low language*), whereas the dominant language is used in formal and official settings, being seen as the language of social and economic opportunity (*high language*). The Friulian situation is instead very different. It is best described by Berruto's (2005; 2012) concept of *dilalia*: a situation of bilingualism with diglossia where the high language (i.e., Italian) is used in informal and familiar settings alongside the low language (i.e., Friulian). This trend is evident in the existing sociolinguistic data from De Cia's 2013 and Melchior's 2015 studies. In the previous sections, we have already seen how Italian is spoken alongside Friulian in the interviewees' households. Let us now discuss the physical settings in which Friulian is used the most.

Melchior (2015) did not systematically investigate the settings in which Friulian is used most frequently. I will hence have to principally rely on De Cia's 2013 data. Previous sociolinguistic studies on Friulian have only partially discussed the contexts in which Friulian is used to a greater extent than Italian. A 2003 study conducted by the Interdepartmental Centre of Research on Friulian Language and Culture (CIRF) showed that Friulian was no longer the main language of communication

in the family but had become the language of everyday interactions, being seen as a very suitable tool to maintain and reinforce community bonds (Picco 2006). In a 1999 survey, 63.7% of the interviewed population used Friulian with colleagues and schoolmates; likewise, a similar percentage (61.8%) used Friulian for their everyday shopping (Picco 2006). De Cia's 2013 data, which were collected more than a decade after these studies, showed a considerably weakened use of Friulian in these contexts. While Friulian is still relatively thriving in home-related/familiar settings, the use of Friulian has considerably declined in any type of public domain: the use of the minority language seems to be limited to casual social encounters (alongside Italian). On the other hand, Italian is the primary means of communication at school, at the workplace, in shops, in public places, and in any type of official setting. De Cia (2013) asked participants to indicate all the contexts in which they regularly use Friulian. Figure 6 shows the answer distribution across the whole interviewed population.

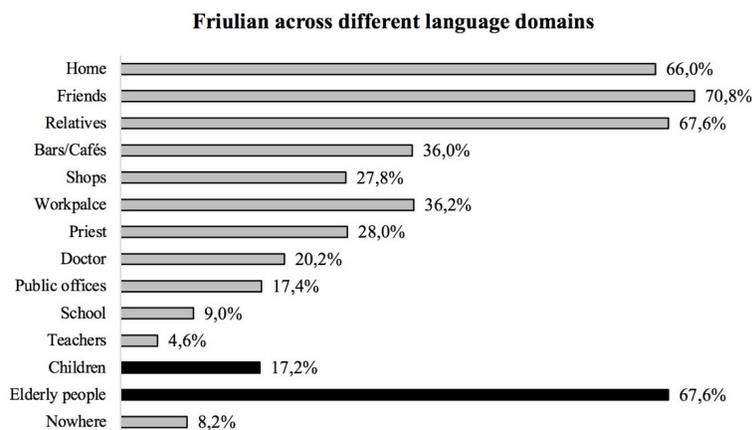


Figure 6. Use of Friulian in different physical and social settings

Friulian is used to a greater extent than Italian at home, with friends and with relatives. However, the data also suggest that Friulian is not universally the primary means of communication in these three settings. The particular low use of Friulian in domains tightly connected to authority and official settings is in line with the results of previous sociolinguistic studies on Friulian (see Picco 2001; 2006). Picco (2006) reported a stigma toward the minority language in formal and official domains. In these contexts, Friulian speakers tend to switch to Italian, privileging the use of the national language. As shown in Figure 6, De Cia (2013) also included the unspecified settings *with children* and *with elderly people*: the use of Friulian with the elderly is attested at 67.6%, whereas only 17.2% of the interviewed population regularly uses the minority language with children. These findings suggest that most adults speak Friulian among themselves and/or with the elderly but switch to Italian when addressing children, highlighting a very poor intergenerational transmission of Friulian

outside the family environment. Finally, as shown in Figure 6, only 8.2% of the interviewed population does not use Friulian in any context and ticked the box *nowhere*.

Within the Friulian speech community, there exists a widespread belief that the minority language can survive for the foreseeable future as the low language of the community in home-related and informal contexts in a diglossic relation with Italian (see Strassoldo 1996). However, the existing sociolinguistic data seem to strongly suggest that this is not the case; in fact, in stable and institutionalized diglossia, low and high languages are spoken side by side throughout the entire speech community and not just by part of it (see Trudgill 2000).

3.5 Factor 5: Response to new domains and media UNESCO's (2003) Ad Hoc Group on Endangered Languages emphasized that if a language is not able to cope with the challenges of modernity, it becomes increasingly irrelevant. With respect to Factor 5 (response to new domains and media), UNESCO's 2003 document proposed the scale of endangerment illustrated in Table 6.

Table 6. UNESCO's (2003: 11) scale of endangerment for Factor 5

Degree of endangerment	Grade	Description
dynamic	5	The language is used in all new domains.
robust/active	4	The language is used in most new domains.
receptive	3	The language is used in many domains.
coping	2	The language is used in some new domains.
minimal	1	The language is used only in a few new domains.
inactive	0	The language is not used in any new domains.

In assessing the presence of a language in the new domains and the media (e.g., TV and radio broadcasting, Internet, printed press), the UNESCO document stated that, even if the language is used in a sufficient number of new domains, availability and amount of broadcasting hours are crucial to accurately establish its degree of endangerment. For instance, if a language is used only for a limited amount of (broadcasting) time or has a very limited space in a new domain compared to the dominant language, UNESCO's (2003) Ad Hoc Group on Endangered Languages claimed that the assessment cannot exceed grade 2 or 3. This is indeed the case of the Friulian situation, where the language is used in many new domains, but minimally. In such contexts, the use of the minority language has more of a *symbolic value* than an actual *instrumental value* (see Grenoble & Whaley 2006). In light of the remarks of UNESCO's (2003) Ad Hoc Group on Endangered Languages on Factor 5, Coluzzi's 2015 proposal of placing Friulian in grade 4 (*robust/active*) seems too optimistic. The data collected by Melchior (2015) and the huge disproportion between Italian and Friulian in terms of presence in the new domains and the media strongly indicate

that Friulian does not exceed grade 2 (*coping*): a language that tries to cope with modernity. Let us now further discuss these two points with some concrete data. Note that De Cia (2013) did not investigate the presence of Friulian in the new domains and the media; the data that will be presented are hence only from Melchior (2015).

As far as the media are concerned, there is only one radio station that broadcasts continuously in the minority language, namely *Radio Onde Furlane*. *Radio Spazio 103* also offers some broadcasting in Friulian. The national radio stations *Radio Rai* only broadcast a few minutes per day in Friulian within Friuli-Venezia Giulia in an extremely limited set of dedicated short programs (e.g., *Vuê o fevelin di...*). In sum, it is very unlikely that a person turns on the radio and hears Friulian on it. TV broadcasting represents an even worse situation: only one local channel, *Telefriuli*, offers some programs in Friulian. Recently, the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region has successfully negotiated with the national TV channels (*Rai* – channel 103) to broadcast in Friulian for four hours per month, starting in October 2020. Again, this measure has great symbolic value, but, with an average of one hour per week of TV broadcasting, it does not help Friulian score a higher grade on UNESCO's (2003) scale for Factor 5. The data collected by Melchior (2015) on the percentage of users of TV/radio programs in Friulian are also not particularly encouraging: only 13.6% of the interviewed population (the figure includes the sum of those who answered *always* and *often*) regularly watches or listens to programs that broadcast in the minority language; 53.7% claims to watch/listen to Friulian broadcasting occasionally, whereas 32.5% never does so.

As for the printed press, Friulian appears in only a couple of pages in some local newspapers like the daily *Messaggero Veneto* and the weekly *Il Friuli*. *La Patrie dal Friûl* and *Il diari* are instead the only newspapers entirely in Friulian but are published monthly and fortnightly, respectively, and, most importantly, they do not attract as many readers as the *Messaggero Veneto* and *Il Friuli* (see also Coluzzi's 2015 discussion of Friulian TV, radio, and newspapers). Melchior's 2015 data showed that Friulian speakers are not in the habit of reading in the minority language: on average, interviewees claim that they read in Friulian for one hour per week. This finding clearly shows that Friulian speakers do not take advantage of the few written Friulian materials that are available in the printed press.

Let us now turn our attention to the World Wide Web. Friulian is present in a few private websites and only a few regional administrative websites.¹⁰ There exists a *Wikipedia* page in Friulian; however, no main social media platform (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp) offers Friulian in its language settings. Along the same lines, nowadays basic digital activities like online banking (including

¹⁰ Most administrative websites do not offer a Friulian translation of their webpages. More commonly, however, they offer a translation into German and Slovenian. German and Slovenian are officially recognized minority languages spoken in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region (especially within the border territories). This fact suggests that, pragmatically, within the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region, Friulian does not enjoy the same status as German and Slovenian. This is worrisome for the future survival of the minority language and a clear sign of Friulian's lack of prestige. In fact, the Friulian-speaking population greatly outnumbers the German- and Slovenian-speaking population, and, according to Italian national law 482/1999, all language minorities should be equally safeguarded.

ATM machines) or the online booking of public and private services do not offer Friulian as a language option. Friulian speakers' use of the minority language on the Internet is also scarce. Melchior (2015) reported that the percentage of interviewees who write regularly (the sum of those who answered *always* and *often*) in Friulian on social media platforms is only 3.4%, and the percentage of those who do so occasionally does not exceed 15%. As far as the viewing of Internet pages in Friulian is concerned, the percentage is even lower: the percentage of interviewees who regularly access Friulian content online is 1.6%, whereas the percentage of those who do so occasionally is 18.2% (Melchior 2015).

The data from Melchior 2015 suggest that the presence of Friulian in the new domains and the media is still fairly limited. The assessment of UNESCO's (2003) Factor 5 of language vitality hence cannot exceed grade 2 (coping): a language that is trying to cope with modernity while being overwhelmed by the quick spread of the dominant language in the new domains and the media.

3.6 Factor 6 and Factor 9: Materials for language education and literacy and amount and quality of documentation

Two further factors of vitality proposed by UNESCO (2003) are (i) the adequacy of materials for language education and literacy and (ii) the amount and quality of documentation of a language. These two factors summarize the importance of language description and documentation for the purpose of language teaching. I will hence discuss the two factors together. Table 7 shows the different degrees of adequacy with respect to language materials for both Factor 6 and Factor 9 (UNESCO 2003: 12, 16).

As for Factor 6 (materials for language education and literacy), Friulian falls in grade 3 (fair), whereas grade 4 (*good*) best describes the Friulian situation with regard to Factor 9 (amount and quality of documentation). It is important to note that the assessment proposed here for Factor 6 departs significantly from that of Coluzzi (2015), who instead proposed grade 5 (*superlative*) for the characterization of Friulian with respect to the adequacy of materials for language education and literacy. Coluzzi's 2015 assessment of Factor 9 is instead more in line with what is proposed here: he, in fact, placed Friulian between grades 4 and 5.

The assessment of Friulian with respect to Factor 6 is not straightforward: it must be sought out by carefully considering the descriptions of all the different degrees of adequacy proposed by UNESCO (2003). Friulian has an established orthography. There are a few grammars, dictionaries, and some other publications in the language. This is mainly thanks to the ongoing work of the *Società Filologica Friuliana* 'Friulian Philological Society,' whose members have been safeguarding and promoting the Friulian language for more than a century, making Friulian literary production relatively stronger than other language minorities in Italy.

Table 7. UNESCO's (2003: 12, 16) scale of assessment for Factor 6 and Factor 9

Degree of adequacy	Grade	Factor 6 description	Factor 9 description
superlative	5	There is an established orthography, literacy tradition with grammars, dictionaries, texts, literature, and everyday media. Writing in the language is used in administration and education.	There are comprehensive grammars and dictionaries, extensive texts; constant flow of language materials. Abundant annotated high-quality audio and video recordings exist.
good	4	Written materials exist, and at school, children are developing literacy in the language. Writing in the language is not used in administration.	There are one good grammar and a number of adequate grammars, dictionaries, texts, literature, and occasionally updated everyday media; adequate annotated high-quality audio and video recordings.
fair	3	Written materials exist and children may be exposed to the written form at school. Literacy is not promoted through print media.	There may be an adequate grammar or sufficient amount of grammars, dictionaries, and texts, but no everyday media; audio and video recordings may exist in varying quality or degree of annotation.
fragmentary	2	Written materials exist, but they may only be useful for some members of the community; and for others, they may have a symbolic significance. Literacy education in the language is not a part of the school curriculum.	There are some grammatical sketches, word-lists, and texts useful for limited linguistic research but with inadequate coverage. Audio and video recordings may exist in varying quality, with or without any annotation.
inadequate	1	A practical orthography is known to the community and some material is being written.	Only a few grammatical sketches, short word-lists, and fragmentary texts. Audio and video recordings do not exist, are of unusable quality, or are completely unannotated.
undocumented	0	No orthography available to the community.	No material exists.

Nevertheless, it is not possible to talk about a widespread Friulian *literacy tradition* among the general (nonspecialist) population. Most Friulian texts are fairly recent, with a limited number of novels and poetry collections. The first writings in Friulian date back to the fourteenth century and mainly consisted of notarial deeds (see Vi-cario 2005). Only at the very end of the twentieth century did the Friulian speech

community develop an official standardized orthography,¹¹ which is still very poorly spread among Friulian speakers. Writing in Friulian is only *symbolically* used in administrative settings (no one has ever paid taxes by filling in a module in Friulian), and its presence in education is extremely limited. If we look at Factor 6 grade 4, it states that children develop literacy in the language, which is unfortunately not the case with Friulian. Grade 3 is far more accurate, stating that “written materials exist, and children may be exposed to the written form at school” (UNESCO 2003: 12). If we look at grade 2, it states “written materials exist, but they may only be useful for some members of the community; and for others, they may have a symbolic significance. Literacy education in the language is not a part of the school curriculum” (UNESCO 2003: 12). The statement captures very well the situation of Friulian. Friulian is taught on a voluntary basis in kindergartens, primary schools, and middle schools. The schools that integrate Friulian teaching in their curriculum must observe a minimum of thirty hours per academic year. However, the development of literacy in the minority language is not required, with only a few elements of grammar and orthography being taught (see Petris 2014). Despite the weak literacy education in Friulian, I argue that, for Factor 6, grade 3 most appropriately reflects the Friulian situation: the minority language is symbolically used in administration,¹² and some Friulian literary texts do exist.

The low level of literacy in Friulian is reflected in Melchior’s 2015 findings on Friulian speakers’ reading and writing habits. Recall Melchior’s 2015 finding that, on average, interviewees read in Friulan for one hour per week. As far as writing is concerned, only 10.5% of the interviewed population regularly writes emails or SMSs in Friulian (the percentage includes both those who answered *always* and *often*), whereas 27.3% does so occasionally. As for the writing of personal notes in Friulian, the percentage of interviewees who regularly write notes in Friulian is 6.1% (again the figure includes the answers *always* and *often*), while 16.3% does so occasionally. At the same time, Friulian speakers do not seem to actively try to

¹¹ The first real attempt to standardize Friulian orthography took place four centuries later in the eighteenth century, when a restricted group of intellectual Friulian speakers tried to come up with a “common” Friulian. This attempt wanted to overcome the communication barriers created by the different linguistic traits of the Friulian dialects. This written form of Friulian is better known as *Friulian koiné*, and it was the base from which the current Friulian orthography was developed. The first actual concrete solution to the problem of Friulian orthography dates back to 1871, when the abbot Jacopo Pirona published the *Vocabolario Friuliano* (‘Friulian vocabulary’), which is a fundamental step in the orthography development of Friulian. Nonetheless, the current version of the orthography was developed and finalized in the late 1980s: In 1986, the Province of Udine appointed a special committee that had the task to develop an official orthography. During this period, Xavier Lamuela, a Catalan linguist and expert in language policy and planning, helped the committee in the normalization process of Friulian orthography (see Lamuela 1987). This orthography became then official according to regional law 15/1996, the first law created to safeguard Friulian language and culture (see Vicario 2005 for a full overview on the development of Friulian orthography).

¹² As previously mentioned, the use of Friulian in administrative settings is overwhelmingly *symbolic*. It involves mostly bilingual signs and translations of publicly displayed documents. Friulian can also be used alongside Italian in official events while addressing the public. Although, legally, Friulian can be used for administrative purposes (e.g., filling in official documents and forms; see Cislino 2015), this is rarely the case and Italian tends to be the predominant instrumental language for this setting.

become literate in their language. Melchior (2015) reported that only 7.5% of the interviewed population had attended/was attending a Friulian language course. Literacy in Friulian is not developed through education either. Although some teaching of Friulian as a subject has been carried out in some schools since 2002, only in 2012, thirteen years after Italian national law 482/1999, did Friulian start to be systematically “taught” in kindergartens, elementary schools, and middle schools on a voluntary basis (see Petris 2014). Friulian classes rarely follow a similar style of teaching among different schools, and their content and activities are very often arbitrarily chosen by the Friulian instructor. The same is true for teaching materials: some teaching materials exist, but it is very often up to the will of the instructor to create or integrate them (Petris 2014). On average, pupils are exposed to Friulian one hour per week (a minimum of thirty hours per school year). During this weekly hour, children generally learn songs, poems, and proverbs in Friulian, and they are not required to learn Friulian orthography and grammar (although some elements of grammar and orthography may be taught; see Petris 2014). Apart from the enormous symbolic value of these classes, they cannot be seen as an effective means to reverse the language shift to Italian. UNESCO (2003) claimed that education *in the language* is essential for language vitality. Education in *Friulian* should, therefore, equip students with the ability to write and speak the standardized variety of Friulian. Grenoble & Whaley (2006) pointed out that in the present century, language vitality is strictly linked to the level of literacy of its speakers. In other words, it is very difficult for a language to be vital if it is not written. Even if the possibility to adopt Friulian as a medium of instruction in education is provided for by Italian national law 482/1999, it has not been implemented.¹³

In both Melchior’s 2015 and De Cia’s 2013 studies, the majority of Friulians very positively welcome the teaching of Friulian in schools. Melchior (2015) found that 70.4% of interviewees think that it is right to teach Friulian in schools (Friuli sample). In De Cia’s 2013 study, the percentage is 65%. There is nonetheless roughly a third of Friulians who still think that it is not right to teach Friulian in schools. When asked to explain their negative answers, interviewees provided comparable justifications in both studies, which are strikingly similar to those collected by Blackwood (2004) in his survey on the attitudes of Corsican islanders with regard to the introduction of compulsory Corsican language classes. Similarly to Corsicans, some Friulians do not think that their language is worthy enough to be taught in school. They would rather prefer their children to study another more “useful” foreign language or curricular subject. These interviewees only approve the teaching of Friulian in school as an extracurricular activity, which must not “threaten” the curricular hours. De Cia (2013) noted that another widespread belief is that by teaching Friulian as a language in school, it is spoiled of its cultural and familiar value: it is “de-

¹³ In her report on Friulian education, Petris (2014) pointed out a rare exception. Friulian as a medium of instruction (also known as Content and Language Integrated Learning, or CLIL) is used in an optional course in mathematics in one high school in Udine (i.e., Arturo Malignani). The CLIL method can be used by Friulian instructors throughout the Friulian-speaking territories, but this is rarely the case.

authenticated” by being put at the same level of a foreign language (see also Henze & Davis 1999).

As far as Factor 9 (amount and quality of documentation) is concerned, there are a number of Friulian grammars and dictionaries. The *Grant Dizionari Bilengâl Talian-Furlan* ‘The Great Bilingual Italian-Friulian Dictionary’ is the most comprehensive dictionary in the language in the official standardized orthography. There exists some texts and some literature in the language. Everyday media is present, however, as previously discussed, considerably limited. There also exists adequate annotated high-quality audio and video recordings. Nevertheless, there is no constant flow of new language materials: their publication is in fact quite infrequent. For this reason, Friulian’s classification with respect to Factor 9 is assessed as not exceeding grade 4 (*good*). Furthermore, most written materials do not follow the official codified orthography. A considerable amount of spelling variation is found among noncodified texts, which make up the majority of texts available in Friulian. This is due to several different factors: (i) the low level of speakers’ literacy in the language (i.e., knowledge of the official orthography); (ii) the existence of many dialects of Friulian, to which speakers are very loyal (loyal to the point of violently rejecting standardized Friulian and adopting ad hoc spelling solutions that more closely resemble their dialect); and (iii) different scholarly positions with respect to the codification of Friulian. As for this last point, for example, the orthography used in the *Grant Dizionari Bilengâl Talian-Furlan* to a certain extent differs from the orthography found in Nazzi’s 1993 vocabulary and in Faggin’s 1985 and 1997 vocabulary and grammar. All these aspects hinder language documentation and make widespread literacy in the language harder to achieve.

3.7 Factor 7: Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies Italian national law 482 (Norms on the Matter of Protection of Historical Linguistic Minorities) of December 15, 1999, formally identified twelve language minorities within the Italian territory and indicated the modality for their protection and promotion. Friulian is among these languages. Friulian had been previously officially recognized as a minority language within the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region through regional law 15 in 1996. In 2007, a further regional law, law 29, further defined the procedures for the normalization, safeguard, and promotion of Friulian (see Cisilino 2015 for a full picture of the legal status of Friulian and the controversy surrounding the approval of law 29/2007). Given the existence of specific policies that safeguard and regulate Friulian, Friulian falls in grade 5 (*equal support*) within the UNESCO (2003: 14) scale of endangerment for Factor 7. The scale is shown in Table 8.

Table 8. UNESCO's (2003: 14) scale of assessment for Factor 7

Degree of support	Grade	Description
equal support	5	All languages are protected.
differentiated support	4	Minority languages are protected primarily as the language of the private domains. The use of the language is prestigious.
passive assimilation	3	No explicit policy exists for minority languages; the dominant language prevails in the public domain.
active assimilation	2	Government encourages assimilation to the dominant language. There is no protection for minority languages.
forced assimilation	1	The dominant language is the sole official language, while non-dominant languages are neither recognized nor protected.
prohibition	0	Minority languages are prohibited.

The assessment of Friulian proposed here for Factor 7 is in line with Coluzzi (2015), who placed Friulian between grades 4 and 5. The outlook for this factor grade is nonetheless negative. Equal legal support does not pragmatically translate into parity of status between Italian and Friulian. Many points of law 482/1999, such as the systematic use of Friulian as a medium of instruction in education and the total parallel use of Friulian in administrative settings, have yet to be implemented. Friulian enjoys a specific administrative regional organization responsible for its safeguard and promotion, namely the Regional Agency for the Friulian Language (ARLeF). Nevertheless, the measures of language policy and planning that have been taken so far are fairly weak. They have great symbolic value but do not equip the language with the instrumental value the speakers need for their socioeconomic advancement. For example, bilingual signs in Italian and Friulian show symbolically that the minority language is present in the speech community but do not enhance per se the instrumental value of the language (i.e., the socioeconomic advancement one can achieve by speaking the language). Some fault must be attributed to the limited funding allocated for the safeguarding and promotion of Friulian, which is definitely not adequate for the task (see Coluzzi's 2015 comparison with other minority languages). Additional fault is attributable to the present and past regional administrations, which have been quite reluctant about implementing the existing norms on the matter of the safeguard and promotion of the minority language.

3.8 Factor 8: Community members' attitudes toward their own language In assessing language vitality, speakers' attitude toward their own language plays a crucial role. Attitudes are important in determining how speech communities view them-

selves and their cultures (see Grenoble & Whaley 2006). In fact, people's reactions to different language varieties are tied to their perception of the speakers of these varieties (Edwards 1982; Baker 1992).

In past sociolinguistic studies on Friulian, participants were asked to indicate their favorite language, the language to which they were more sentimentally attached (*la lingua del cuore* 'the language of the heart'). In the 1977 survey, 68.9% of the interviewed sample chose Friulian as their favorite language (Picco 2006). This percentage dropped across subsequent studies (50.1% in a 1998 study) and reached only 44.9% in Melchior's 2015 investigation. As it is clear from these data, nowadays the majority of the population is not particularly attached to Friulian. "Sentimental attachment" seems to be increasingly associated with Italian and other languages. This detachment is not necessarily triggered by negative attitudes toward Friulian (see Kumar 2018). It is rather the result of the gradual abandonment of the minority language, which generates an increasing indifference toward its survival or disappearance.

As far as Factor 8 is concerned, the UNESCO (2003: 15) document proposes six degrees of endangerment, which are summarized in Table 9.

Table 9. UNESCO's (2003: 15) assessment scale for Factor 8

Grade	Description
5	<i>All</i> members value their language and wish to see it promoted.
4	<i>Most</i> members support language maintenance.
3	<i>Many</i> members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss.
2	<i>Some</i> members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss.
1	Only <i>a few</i> members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss.
0	<i>No one</i> cares if the language is lost; all prefer to use a dominant language.

Grade 3 seems to best describe the Friulian situation. The outlook for this factor is nonetheless negative. While the majority of the speech community supports language maintenance, there is a growing portion of the speech community that is indifferent toward Friulian's fate and a relatively small minority that actively supports its loss. The assessment of Factor 8 proposed here is fully in line with Coluzzi (2015), who places Friulian between grades 2 and 3.

In order to support the proposed assessment of Factor 8, let us now discuss the data collected by De Cia (2013) and Melchior (2015) on the interviewees' language attitudes toward Friulian. De Cia (2013) asked for participants' reaction if a person approached them in a public place speaking Friulian. There were three possible an-

swers: *positive*, *indifferent*, or *negative*. Only 4.1% of the interviewees would have a negative reaction; 62.8% would have a positive reaction, and, finally, 33.1% of the interviewees chose *indifferent*. The answer distribution neatly matches the description of grade 3 with respect to UNESCO's (2003) Factor 8: most speakers are keen on the use of Friulian, a numerous minority is indifferent, and a few members of the speech community have negative attitudes toward its use. De Cia's 2013 survey also employed a *matched-guise* test (see Kristiansen 2010) to investigate participants' attitudes toward Friulian. Participants were asked to associate Friulian speakers with eight different attributes, which were presented in pairs of antithetic adjectives. For each attribute, participants could choose a *positive* or *negative* association, or, alternatively, choose the option *indifferent*. De Cia's 2013 findings are represented in Table 10.

Table 10. Summary of De Cia's 2013 matched-guise test results

	Positive	Indifferent	Negative	
Educated	27.6%	65.8%	6.6%	Uneducated
Intelligent	33.2%	65%	1.8%	Stupid
Diligent	29.2%	67.1%	3.7%	Lazy
Friendly	62.2%	34.1%	3.7%	Unfriendly
Kind	43%	53.5%	3.5%	Rude
Reliable	38.1%	59.5%	2.4%	Unreliable
Refined	19.9%	62.8%	17.3%	Vulgar
Familiar	68.3%	29%	2.7%	Foreign

From the matched-guise test results, it is possible to rank positive and negative attributes associated with Friulian speakers. The three most chosen positive qualities were *familiar* (68.3%), *friendly* (62.2%), and *kind* (43%). In terms of negative attributes, the ones chosen most often were *vulgar* (17.3%), *uneducated* (6.6%), and *lazy* (3.7%). It is important to note that the percentages for the negative attributes most often chosen were considerably lower than those of the positive attributes. As far as the negative attribute *lazy* is concerned, De Cia (2013) noted that the vast majority of the participants who chose *lazy* attached to it a different connotation from the standard meaning of not being hard-working: *lazy* in the sense of not making an effort to switch from Friulian to the national language. With the exception of *level of familiarity* and *level of friendliness*, where the majority of participants picked a positive attribute, the most frequently selected option was *indifferent* for all the given attributes. The results are in line with UNESCO's (2003) description of grade 3 for Factor 8: many members of the speech community have positive attitudes toward the minority language; others are indifferent or may have negative attitudes toward it.

Melchior (2015) also found that the majority of interviewees have positive attitudes toward Friulian. Interviewees were presented with a series of statements with

which they could agree or disagree, or alternatively, in some cases they could pick an answer from a limited set of options. The vast majority of interviewees agreed that Friulian should be protected with specific laws: 85.7% among those interviewees who regularly speak Friulian and 67.7% among those interviewees who are not regular users of the minority language. Melchior (2015) also investigated the reaction of interviewees when (i) they hear Friulian spoken in a shop, (ii) they hear Friulian spoken in an administrative office, or (iii) a stranger replies in Friulian to a question formulated in Italian. In his analysis and discussion of these stimuli, Melchior (2015; 2017) did not provide the answer distribution with respect to the total interviewed population but divided the overall sample into four different subgroups on the basis of the interviewees' preferred identity as *Friulian*, *Italian*, *from the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region*, or *European*. For the sake of brevity, I will only present Melchior's 2015 findings with respect to the subgroups *Friulian* and *Italian*. As far as stimuli (i) and (ii) are concerned, the *Friulian* subgroup is overall happy with the use of Friulian in shops (80.1%) and in administrative offices (75.1%). These percentages drop considerably within the *Italian* sub-group: 40.4% for shops and 29.5% for administrative offices. With respect to stimulus (iii), the majority of interviewees in the *Friulian* subgroup (86.5%) think that replying in Friulian to a question formulated in Italian is normal (as opposed to a sign of rudeness). This percentage again drops significantly among the interviewees who belong to the *Italian* subgroup, 50.7%. Finally, Melchior (2015) asked interviewees what Friulian speakers should do in a local gathering (while discussing local matters) in case there were only one person who is unable to understand Friulian. Both the *Friulian* and the *Italian* subgroups think that the best solution is to speak in Italian: respectively 53.3% and 77.3%. Melchior's 2015 data are indicative of a generalized positive attitude toward Friulian, which is nonetheless subordinated to the prestige of Italian. Within the *Italian* subgroup, the data do not show overwhelming negative attitudes toward Friulian, which means that only a few members of the speech community have overt negative attitudes toward the minority language. The data instead seem to suggest a generalized indifference toward Friulian by those members of the speech community who do not actively identify themselves with the Friulian language and culture.

4. Friulian language vitality: A synthesis Table 11 provides a summary of the “health condition” of Friulian on the basis of UNESCO's (2003) nine factors of language vitality.¹⁴ For each factor, an outlook is provided to indicate how well the language is doing according to the factor's scale with respect to its current assessment. The outlook can be *negative*, *stable*, or *positive*. For example, if, for a given factor, the language scores grade 3 with a negative outlook, it means that its sociolinguistic

¹⁴ The assessment proposed in Table 11 is based on the sociolinguistic evidence collected by De Cia (2013) and Melchior (2015). As for Coluzzi's 2015 independent assessment of UNESCO's (2003) factors of language vitality for Friulian, it shows similar results and conclusions, especially with respect to Factor 1 (grade 3), Factor 2 (not immediately endangered), Factor 3 (grade 3), Factor 7 (between grade 4 and grade 5), Factor 8 (between grade 2 and grade 3), and Factor 9 (between grade 4 and grade 5). Nevertheless, Coluzzi's 2015 assessment departs significantly from the one proposed here with respect to Factor 4 (grade 4), Factor 5 (grade 4), and Factor 6 (grade 5).

situation with regard to that factor is gradually worsening, and in the relative near future, the score will have to be lowered to 2.

Table 11. Friulian's vitality assessment on the basis of UNESCO's (2003) nine factors of language vitality

Factor	Grade (0–5)	Label description	Outlook
1. Intergenerational Language Transmission	3	definitively endangered	negative
2. Absolute Number of Speakers	N/A	not immediately endangered	negative
3. Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population	3	definitively endangered	negative
4. Trends in Existing Language Domains	3	dwindling domains	stable
5. Response to New Domains and Media	2	coping	positive
6. Materials for Language Education and Literacy	3	fair	stable
7. Governmental and Institutional Language Attitudes and Policies	5	equal support	negative
8. Community Members' Attitudes toward Their Own Language	3	many support the language	negative
9. Amount and Quality of Documentation	4	good	stable

Overall, Friulian is *definitely endangered* and gradually *disappearing* (in the sense of Whaley 2003). Friulian is characterized by a language shift toward the national dominant language (Italian). In the absence of a solid plan of language revitalization that aims to increase the *prestige* and, hence, the *instrumental value* of the minority language, such language shift is destined to become irreversible, leading to the death of Friulian by the turn of the next century. Despite having different assessments for Factor 4, Factor 5, and Factor 6, Coluzzi (2015) reached comparable conclusions on the level of vitality of Friulian and its future survival. The sociolinguistic data provided by De Cia (2013) and Melchior (2015) suggest that Friulian is characterized by poor intergenerational language transmission (Factor 1), and the older members of the speech community make up the majority of regular fluent speakers (Factor 3). Nevertheless, Friulian has a sufficient absolute number of speakers not to be immediately endangered (Factor 2). The minority language is mainly spoken in a limited set of domains that relate to familiar and informal settings. In these domains, however, Italian is used alongside Friulian, indicating

a situation of previously mentioned dilalia (Berruto 2005; 2012). In this context, when spoken to in the minority language, children tend to reply uniquely using the national dominant language (Factor 3). In the new domains and the media, Friulian is little used. Nevertheless, even if parity with Italian is still out of reach, there seems to be a willingness to strengthen the presence of Friulian in the media (Factor 5). The materials for language education and literacy are somewhat adequate, but most speakers are not literate in the minority language (Factor 6). The amount and quality of documentation of Friulian is good, which is very important to (i) successfully support a potential plan of revitalization of the language and (ii) strengthen the level of literacy within the speech community (Factor 9). Friulian is officially recognized as a minority language; nonetheless, the laws that safeguard and promote Friulian have not been fully implemented. The existing language policies are rather weak. Furthermore, the regional government does not seem to keenly support Friulian as an instrumental language, but only as a symbol of cultural identity (Factor 7). Most members of the speech community have positive attitudes toward Friulian but do perceive the minority language as being less important/subordinate to Italian. Only a few members have negative attitudes toward the minority language: no particular stigma is associated with Friulian. Nevertheless, within the speech community, more and more speakers are indifferent toward Friulian and its future survival (Factor 8).

Friulian is definitely at risk, but local authorities still have some margin to intervene to reverse the shift toward Italian: a solid plan of language revitalization is needed, as well as the implementation of language policies that increase the instrumental value of Friulian within the speech community. Friulian can in fact count on (i) the positive attitudes of its speakers, (ii) specific laws for its safeguard, (iii) a standard orthography and some literacy materials, and (iv) a minority of young speakers who are to some extent attracted to the minority language (Melchior 2015; 2017). These four aspects on their own, however, are by no means enough to guarantee the future survival of the minority language but could still provide some fertile ground for a successful plan of language revitalization.

5. Conclusion and final remarks Assessing language vitality is not an easy task. An accurate assessment is nonetheless fundamental for the implementation of the most effective measures of language policy and planning that are tailored to the endangered language's needs. The case of Friulian teaches us that no proper language vitality assessment can be carried out without an appropriate and solid theoretical framework. An overly optimistic assessment of the existing sociolinguistic situation (e.g., Melchior 2015; 2017 on Friulian) may in fact be very dangerous for the survival of the minority language, as it can lead to inaction in the adoption of the necessary institutional measures to safeguard the language. At the same time, an overly pessimistic evaluation (e.g., De Cia 2013 on Friulian) may put off the speech community and their efforts to revitalize the language. The case of Friulian also teaches us that the development of an accurate analysis of language vitality cannot solely rely on theory, but it needs to be corroborated with actual sociolinguistic data (see the case of Coluzzi 2015 on Friulian). A successful analysis must hence find the right balance between data and theory. To conclude, in light of this paper, it would be desirable

that, in order to closely monitor Friulian language vitality, the regional authorities responsible for the safeguard and promotion of Friulian should carry out a periodical data collection and analysis (ideally, every five years) by adopting a sound and internationally recognized methodological framework.

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