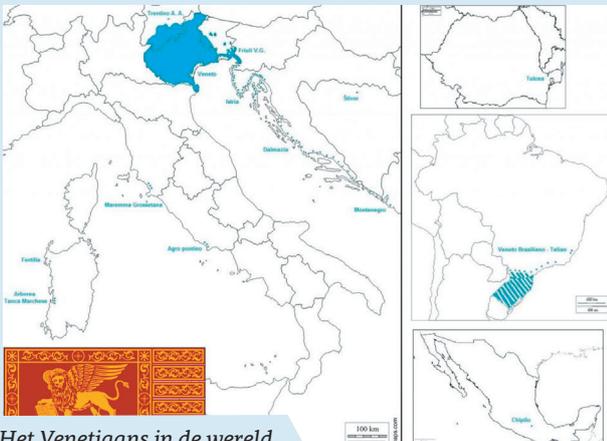


WILL THE VENETO LANGUAGE SURVIVE THIS CENTURY?

Venetian is a language and not a dialect

Dear friends of ICEC, in this article we will try to explain the difficult situation of the Venetian language starting from the fact that to Italy this language does not exist, as it does not exist an extraordinary mosaic of “local words” that makes the Italian peninsula the richest and linguistically differentiated area of Europe.

Unfortunately, despite the European Union and Italy itself having legislated to protect and respect linguistic and cultural diversity, through a questionable rendering of the words “language” and “dialect”, the local languages are not protected sufficiently.



Het Venetiaans in de wereld.

The Italian Constitution weighs and weighs ... wrong

The European Union has 24 official languages spoken in the 28 member countries while there are over 60 minority regional languages spoken by about 40 million people.

Italy uses policies to protect the linguistic minorities present in their territory with a specific law, art. 482/1999, which on the one hand supports art. 6 of the constitution on the protection of linguistic minorities by defining them as deserving of being valued. On the other hand, establishes a hierarchy within the linguistic repertoire, excluding dialects, and grouping sociolinguistic realities and downgrading them to dialect, including the Venetian language.

For this reason we like to say that every language is born in the condition of “dialect” and grows to become a “language” when it receives the recognition and support of a political power.

Nearly 8 million Venetian speakers

Many world-renowned linguists believe that half of the world’s languages will be extinct by 2100, among those includes Venetian. If it is not kept alive we would lose an incredible amount of cultural heritage passed down from generation to generation through that same language.

Venetian is an Indo-European, Romance, Western language: it is recognized with a code international identification ISO 639-3 “VEC” by Unesco and classified among living languages in “Ethnologue” catalogue which collects a list of about 7099 languages spoken in 228 states and contains also an index of languages organised according to families and linguistic groups. According to Ethnologue, the Venetian varieties in Italy have more or less 3,800,000 speakers in the Veneto region (about 69% of the population) and they are also spoken in Friuli Venezia Giulia and Trentino Alto Adige. Abroad, the Venetian varieties are mainly spoken in Istria, Slovenia, Dalmatia and Montenegro (ancient Venetian Republic territories), Crete and Cyprus, Romania (Italo-Romanian community), and where the Venetian people historically emigrated, such as Mexico (Chipilo) or the Brazilian states of Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, Paraná and Espírito Santo for a total of 7,852,500 speakers of the Venetian varieties.



Fascist Ban

With the rise of fascism, starting from the 1920s, the regime tried to impose the same language on everyone, forbidden by law “to deal with dialect and dialect productions”. Press and cinema were written exclusively in Italian, the German-speaking and Slav-speaking territories were forced to replace the German and Slovenian toponyms (Sterzing / Vipiteno, Fare / Farra d’Isonzo, Rijeka/ Fiume) with the Italian



equivalents. The Italian language came to the African colonies and the islands of the Dodecanese in Greece while in the case of the venetian people, many surnames were Italianized (Menegato / Menegatto), forbidding finally with a law of 1934 the interaction between teachers and students in dialect. As we can therefore see, Veneto is a region where its language remains strong despite various adverse events in the past.

The (however decreasing) resilience of the language

A recent survey noted that seven out of ten people speak the venetian language 'very' or 'quite' often in their family and 69% normally use it with friends. However, it is significant that among the under 25 only 55% speak it habitually, despite the 82% among the over 65s. Less widespread is the use in the workplace where only 35% speak it regularly, where only ten years ago it was used by 55% of workers.

Interestingly, immigrants to Veneto use the local language. It is really important to speak it to be able to find a stable job, to communicate better with their colleagues / employers and for a full and complete integration into Venetian companies: it acts as a code, a slang that allows you to declare your own belonging to a certain community, not only in the workplace.

This data perceives the Venetian language as a factor of local identity and as a symbol of belonging to a particular community despite the obstructionism, the centralism and Italian nationalism perpetrated since the birth of the Italian Republic. It suggests that local languages have been able to resist and so we can say that "what Italians wanted to put outside the door, came back in through the window" and now enjoy a broad social diffusion.

Since the 1970's the use of Venetian language within families was disappearing, caused by reasons such as cinema, school and social position. Interestingly today there seems to be a revival of sorts even with the centrally managed school censorship. Social media is among the most popular ways by young people to communicate in the Venetian language. The countless chats, blogs, Facebook groups and online magazines where the joking and informal nature of these kinds of communications seems to leave space to a traditional expression linked to values of identity.

From dialect to language

As mentioned there is no protection of the Venetian language from the Italian State. From the region there are instead some protections of the local linguistic heritage starting from the law n°40/1974 called "protection of the historical, linguistic and cultural heritage of Veneto language" repealed and replaced over the years several times by extending the protections to Cimbri, Ladin and Friulian languages.

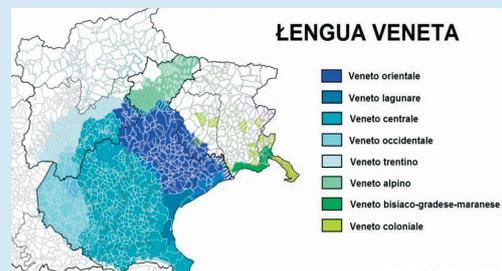
Recently the regional law n°8/13.4.2007 brought a significant novelty constituted by the fact that the Veneto language is

defined for the first time a "regional language" rather than a "dialect". This was inspired by the principles affirmed by the European Charter of Minority Regional Languages and subsequently with the promulgation of the new Veneto Region Statute. The aim was to strengthen the safeguarding and promoting the historical identity of the Venetian people by recognizing and protecting the minorities present in our territory. In 2016, a Bill proposed to apply to the Veneto Region focused on having minority rights recognized, including bilingualism.

Some cultural groups have also given particularity emphasis on the promotion of the Venetian language by pushing to build a modern graphic system and proposing a model of language standardisation able to make it easier to get that status which is missed only officially.

Recently several Venetian language courses have been organised by cultural associations and through a trick in the Italian school system where a part of the program involving the Venetian language is proposed through general "projects" with the total money charge sustained by student's families but able to reach several hundreds of young people who enjoyed the courses. The effort to create a common Venetian official codification was noteworthy for example with the Venetian language inserted in the famous software Libre Office.

International conferences and festivals of the Venetian language are becoming more common and also the recognition by the international academic world is increasing. The most recent (2021) is the approval of the agreement with the University, Education and Research Minister aimed to teach Venetian history and culture and the history of Venetian emigration in the schools from the primaries to all levels.



Conclusion: it can if they want

As I mentioned at the beginning, a "dialect" becomes a "language" as soon as there is political support. The importance of language has been noted by regional political groupings but the national one is still covering their eyes to the issue and unfortunately does not care about the disappearance of linguistic varieties of which it should be proud of the language and culture that helps to create that sense of unity that Italy always missed.



We hope that the importance of protecting languages is soon understood and that this demonization of local dialects ends as they are synonymous with interaction, openness, identity and expression.

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