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Language use and attitudes of prospective teachers: a comparison of the Basque and Friulian multilingual contexts

Ada Bier ⬥ and David Lasagabaster ⬥

Department of English and German Philology, Translation and Interpretation, University of the Basque Country UPV/EHU, Vitoria-Gasteiz, España

ABSTRACT

Since educators play a decisive role in the formation of language attitudes, this study analyses perceived competence, habits of language use and attitudes towards three languages in contact harboured by prospective teachers. Our research replicates a 20-year-old study and is comparative, as it parallels two European regions: the Basque Autonomous Community in Spain, and Friuli Venezia Giulia in Italy. The sample was made up of 553 participants. Quantitative data were collected by means of the original questionnaire. Significant results were obtained, with strong effect sizes. As for the minority language, our results show that while Basque is mainly linked with the educational domain and tends to be used more often with younger people, the situation is different for Friulian, which is virtually absent from the educational domain and tends to be used in exchanges with older people. The status of majority language is especially true for Italian in FVG, which, in addition to being the main language in education, is predominantly used by future teachers in all domains of their daily life. As for English, our findings seem to indicate that its general position is becoming stronger, and this trend may be maintained in both contexts in the future.

Introduction

Attitudes express evaluative orientations towards social objects, languages among them, and research shows that *education* plays a crucial role in shaping students' language attitudes (Baker 1992; Garrett 2010). Inquiring into educators' attitudes towards languages is therefore highly important. It is even more so when the population under scrutiny is that of prospective teachers, who will exert great influence on future generations of students (Lasagabaster and Huguet 2007).

This research is about habits of language use and attitudes harboured by future teachers, i.e. university students who are attending programmes geared towards a career in teaching. Moreover, this is a comparative study that parallels two European contexts: the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) in Spain, and the Autonomous Region Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG) in Italy.

The present study is a replication of a comparative study carried out almost two decades ago in nine European bilingual contexts (Lasagabaster and Huguet 2007). While the BAC was already included in the original study, a circumstance which allowed us to compare the attitudinal situation in two rather distant points in time (Bier and Lasagabaster 2022), the FVG context is new to this

CONTACT Ada Bier ✉ ada.bier@ehu.eus 🖃 Department of English and German Philology, Translation and Interpretation, University of the Basque Country UPV/EHU, c/ Justo Vélez de Elorriaga, 1, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Álava/Araba 01006, España

research. To our knowledge, no previous studies on future teachers' language attitudes have been carried out there; our inquiry is thus an attempt to fill such gap, while comparing two European multilingual contexts, as comparisons between multilingual contexts are conspicuous by their absence.

Future teachers' attitudes towards languages and multilingualism

Focussing on beliefs about multilingualism and multilingual education is a common feature characterising recent international literature targeting future teachers (e.g. Jeoffrion et al. 2014, in France; Fischer and Lahmann 2020, in Germany; Iversen 2020, in Norway; Gartziarena and Villabona 2022, in the Spanish Basque Country; Portolés and Martí 2020, in the Valencian Community in Spain; Campos Bandrés 2021, in Aragón in Spain). There seems to exist general agreement among authors on the fact that prospective teachers' beliefs about multilingualism tend to be positive, even if deep-seated monolingual beliefs are often detected as well. However, not all these studies specifically analyse future teachers' attitudes towards individual languages, but conceptualise multilingualism and multilingual education holistically. English, instead, is a language to which explicit reference is usually made, as it is often the most popular foreign language (FL) in compulsory education (e.g. Portolés and Martí 2020).

With specific reference to the Basque Country, a recent study where attitudes towards individual languages are investigated is the one by Gartziarena and Villabona (2022) in the BAC and Navarre (Spain). It was found that pre-service teachers held the most positive attitudes towards the Basque minority language, which was perceived as the most valuable language, when pre-service teachers were compared to in-service and university teachers.

In the early 2000s, Lasagabaster and Huguet (2007) coordinated a large-scale inquiry on prospective teachers in nine European multilingual contexts: the BAC, Catalonia, Galicia, Valencian Community, Brussels, Friesland, Ireland, Malta and Wales. Such inquiry aimed at exploring future teachers' habits of language use and attitudes towards languages in contact (i.e. the national language, the minority language and English as the main FL learnt at school). It was found that the L1 and the linguistic model at school were the variables that exerted the greatest influence on future teachers' language attitudes in all the contexts investigated.

After almost two decades, the same inquiry was repeated in the BAC (Bier and Lasagabaster 2022). It was found that the minority language, Basque, was mainly linked with the education domain, whereas the national language, Spanish, was dominant in leisure time. Attitudes were highly positive for all three languages, Basque, Spanish and English, as considered from both a monolingual and a multilingual perspective. While participants expressed the most favourable attitudes towards Basque, the most noticeable improvements from the previous study were detected for English.

In contrast to the situation in the BAC, little empirical research has been carried out on this topic in FVG. To our knowledge, the only research findings that give us a glimpse about teachers' views on Friulian in education are those deriving from the last sociolinguistic survey (ARLeF 2015). A small sub-sample of 40 in-service teachers was isolated from the overall sample and it was found that: (i) there was a remarkable difference between opinions about plurilingualism in general (i.e. without specifying in what languages), which tended to be more positive, and plurilingualism including Friulian, which turned out to be more negative; (ii) furthermore, 80% of teachers thought it is right that Friulian be protected with specific laws but, when asked whether Friulian should be taught at school, the percentage dropped to 63%. These findings, albeit from a very small sample, are in line with those from the international literature (e.g. Lee and Oxelson 2006; De Angelis 2011).

The aim of the present study is twofold. First, it aims at collecting information on prospective teachers' perceived competence, habits of language use and attitudes towards languages in contact in the BAC and in FVG, a context which was not included in the original study. Second, by adopting the same data collection instrument, it intends to make comparisons between the situation described in the BAC and the one existing in FVG. As, to our knowledge, no previous studies on future teachers' language attitudes have been carried out in FVG, the possibility of comparing

findings with those obtained in the BAC in the same period will allow us to better interpret the results from FVG, while analysing the influence that the language policies implemented in each context exert.

The two research contexts: the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) and the Autonomous Region Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG)

The BAC is one of Spain's 17 Autonomous Communities. It is a bilingual community where both Basque, the minority language, and Spanish, the national language, are official languages with equal status. FVG is one of the 20 Regions in Italy and, more specifically, one of its five Autonomous Regions. One of the most important reasons for its Special Statute is its linguistic diversity (Fusco 2019), as four languages are officially recognised there: Italian, the national language, German, spoken in the area close to the border with Austria, Slovene, along the border with Slovenia, and Friulian, which – like Basque – does not have the status of national majority language anywhere.

In the BAC there are 631,000 bilingual speakers and, for 60% of these, Basque is the L1. The percentage is even higher, 71.4%, for those in the 16–24 age range, and such percentage has increased dramatically in the last thirty years, as it used to be 25% in 1991 (Basque Government 2016). Figures for Friulian speakers in FVG vary between 420,000 and 600,000, depending on whether occasional speakers are computed together with regular speakers or not, and the average age of the Friulian speaker is 53 years old (ARLeF 2015, 7).

While the education system is managed at Autonomous Community level by the Basque Government in the BAC, this is not the case in FVG, where, despite its Special Statute, the main regulator of education is the central State.

In the BAC there are three linguistic models in which pupils can complete their compulsory studies: *Model A*, where Spanish is the main medium of instruction and Basque is only taught as a subject; *Model B*, where both Basque and Spanish are used as media of instruction; and *Model D*, where Basque is the main medium of instruction and Spanish is only taught as a subject. Enrolment figures in Model A have gone steadily down in the past forty years, whereas those in Model B and, especially, Model D have gone steadily up; according to EUSTAT, the Basque Institute of Statistics, 78.4% of primary school enrolments in the 2020/21 school year where in Model D. The bilingual models of education are to be held responsible for the composition of the number of new speakers of the language.

In FVG, instead, Friulian is not a medium of instruction at school, nor is it an obligatory subject; the main medium of instruction is Italian, the national language. Based on a national law (482/1999) and a regional law (29/2007) (for an overview, see Cisilino 2014), today Friulian ought to be offered in schools as an optional subject, subjected to the choice of pupils' families, who can decide whether they wish to make use of the opportunity to have Friulian taught to their children for 30 hours a year. In the 2019/20 school year, 33.80% of pupils were attending lessons of Friulian, in kindergartens, primary and low secondary schools in the Friulian-speaking area (i.e. former provinces of Udine, Pordenone and Gorizia).[1]

In both contexts, English is the main FL learnt by students during their pre-university studies: according to Eurostat,[2] in 2020 83% of upper secondary students in Spain and 99.8% in Italy were learning the language.

Research questions

These research questions were addressed:

(RQ1) What is the *perceived competence* in the three languages in contact of prospective teachers in the BAC and in FVG? How do they compare?

(RQ2) What are the *habits of language use* of prospective teachers in the two contexts? How do they compare?

(RQ3) What are the *attitudes towards the three languages in contact* of prospective teachers in the two contexts? How do they compare?

Method

This study adopted a cross-sectional design in two different regions. The two data collections targeted the same population, i.e. future teachers, and followed the same sampling procedures, i.e. convenience sampling and snowball sampling (Dörnyei 2007). Reasonable representativeness of both samples is guaranteed by the quite high number of respondents (>100) that were reached in both contexts.

Participants

The overall number of participants was 553, 354 from the BAC and 199 from FVG. All of them were university students enrolled in study programmes geared towards a career in teaching. Data collection took place in March-June 2022. The Basque participants originated from the three provinces that make up the BAC, Álava-Araba (16.38%), Bizkaia (51.13%) and Gipuzkoa (25.99%). 13 subjects were from the neighbouring province of Navarre (3.67%) and 10 participants were from different provinces. As for FVG, participants originated from the four provinces that make up the region, Udine (54.77%), Pordenone (16.08%), Gorizia (9.05%) and Trieste (6.03%). 28 participants were from provinces outside of FVG. In both the BAC and FVG, participants whose province of origin was outside the region were living, studying and training in the two contexts under scrutiny at the time of data collection.

The vast majority of participants were female, with a higher percentage in FVG than in the BAC (80.40% in FVG, 71.19% in the BAC). Their mean age was 20 years and 3 months in the BAC, 25 years and 11 months in FVG. Their specialisation ranged from Kindergarten and Primary education (51.13% in the BAC, 54.27% in FVG) to Secondary education (46.61% in the BAC, 45.73% in FVG).

As regards the L1 of participants, the sample can be divided into four groups: those with the minority language as L1, those with the majority language as L1 (49.44% in the BAC, 64.32% in FVG), those with both languages as L1 (22.88% in the BAC, 28.64% in FVG), and a very small group of participants with different L1s (1.98% in the BAC, 2.01% in FVG). While the percentages of those indicating both languages were rather similar, the most striking difference between the two contexts was found in the figures for minority language-L1 speakers: while in the BAC more than a quarter of the sample (25.71%) indicated Basque as their L1, in FVG a much smaller proportion (5.03%) declared having Friulian as their L1.

In both contexts, the vast majority of participants came from small towns with less than 50.000 inhabitants (64.97% in the BAC, 79.90% in FVG). The language predominantly spoken in participants' towns of origin was the national language in both contexts investigated: Spanish (68.08%) in the BAC, Italian (52.26%) in FVG. As for the minority language, we observed that the proportion of towns where it is predominantly spoken was higher in FVG (40.20%) than in the BAC (30.51%).

As for minority language-medium education, due to the differences in the education systems in the two contexts, a straightforward comparison between the BAC and FVG was not possible. As far as the BAC is concerned, 80.79% of participants completed their pre-university studies in model D, 11.86% in model B and only 4.52% in model A. This distribution mirrors quite well the pattern that is found in model enrolments in the whole of the BAC, with a clear predominance of model D over A and B. As for FVG, slightly less than a third of our sample (30.65%) attended lessons of/in Friulian, while the vast majority (69.35%) never attended any lesson of/in the minority language. This

circumstance can be explained by the fact that the main language of instruction in schools in FVG is Italian and Friulian is an optional subject. The difference between the percentages of those who have received instruction about/in the minority language is the most remarkable one that was detected in the two contexts under investigation: this is a clear reflection of the different language policies adopted in each of the regions.

Data collection: the questionnaire

Data on habits of language use and attitudes towards the local minority language (Basque/Friulian), the State majority language (Spanish/Italian), and the most popular FL (English) were collected by means of the same questionnaire (Lasagabaster and Huguet 2007). The questionnaire was administered online, through *EUSurvey*, and it was rigorously anonymous. The questionnaire for respondents in the BAC was in Spanish; the one for respondents in FVG was in Italian. It was divided into four sections.

The first section was dedicated to participants' languages: their L1(s), other languages they knew, their perceived competence in the three languages in contact, the age when they started learning them.

The second section aimed at collecting data on participant's language attitudes. It was made up of a series of multi-item 5-point Likert scales, all comprising the same ten items but each targeting a specific language: one for the minority language (Basque: Cronbach's alpha = 0.862; Friulian: Cronbach's alpha = 0.908), one for the majority language (Spanish: Cronbach's alpha = 0.811; Italian: Cronbach's alpha = 0.743), one for English (in the BAC: Cronbach's alpha = 0.800; in FVG: Cronbach's alpha = 0.737) (Table 1).[3]

The five answer options for all scales ranged from *Totally agree* (5) to *Totally disagree* (1), with a central neutral option, *Neither agree nor disagree* (3). Following Lasagabaster and Huguet (2007), answer options were codified as follows: the option *Totally agree* was recoded as 100, the option *Agree* as 75, *Neither agree nor disagree* as 50, *Disagree* as 25 and *Totally Disagree* as 0. Afterwards, the average score for the ten items related to each language was calculated, and this allowed us to divide the sample into three distinct groups: (i) the *Favourable attitudes* group, comprising participants whose scores ranged between 100.00 and 66.67; (ii) the *Neutral attitudes* group, with scores from 66.66 to 33.34; (iii) the *Unfavourable attitudes* group, with scores between 33.33 and 0.00.

The third section was dedicated to participants' habits of language use with regards to communication with people (e.g. family, friends, classmates, teachers, etc.) and in media (e.g. television, songs, internet, etc.). As far as communication with people is concerned, six answer options were given: *Always in Spanish/Italian*, *In Spanish/Italian more often than in Basque/Friulian*, *In Spanish/Italian and Basque/Friulian almost equally*, *In Basque/Friulian more often than in Spanish/Italian*, *Always in Basque/Friulian*, *I can't answer (NA)*. As for habits of language use in media, answers could be chosen from the following eight options: *Always in Spanish/Italian* (1) / *Basque/Friulian* (2) / *English* (3); *In Spanish/Italian, Basque/Friulian and English almost equally* (4); *In Spanish/Italian more often than in Basque/Friulian, never (or almost never) in English* (5);

Table 1. Items in scales on attitudes towards Basque/Friulian, Spanish/Italian, English.

I like hearing [language] spoken.
[Language] should be taught in all schools in the Basque Country/Friuli Venezia Giulia.
I like (or I would like) speaking [language].
[Language] is an easy language to learn.
There are few languages to learn that are more useful than [language].
I prefer that classes are in [language].
Learning [language] enriches my cultural knowledge.
I would not mind marrying a [language] speaker.
[Language] is a language that is worth learning.
If I have children, I would like them to be [language] speakers (regardless of other languages they may know).

In Spanish/Italian more often than in English, never (or almost never) in Basque/Friulian (6); *In Basque/Friulian more often than in Spanish/Italian, never (or almost never) in English* (7); *In English more often than in Spanish/Italian, never (or almost never) in Basque/Friulian* (8). The third section closed with a multi-item 4-point Likert scale aimed at gauging participants' perceived importance of the minority language. The scale comprised 16 items, each picturing a specific situation with regards to which participants were asked to express the importance they attached to Basque/Friulian (see Table 4 for the list of activities) (Cronbach's alpha in the BAC = 0.925; Cronbach's alpha in FVG = 0.951). Answer options ranged from *Very important* (4) to *Not important* (1).

The fourth and last section gathered information about the participants' general background, such as age, gender, type of school, study programme attended, future profile (e.g. primary or secondary education school teacher), province and city of origin, province and city where they lived at the time (if different from those of origin).

Statistical analyses

Microsoft Excel 2016 was used to compute descriptive statistics. To ascertain whether any statistically significant differences existed between the results obtained in the two contexts, a series of Chi-square tests for independence were carried out with the aid of the same software (see Appendix for a summary of the results). Finally, to compare the attitudes towards the three languages in the BAC and in FVG, independent samples t-tests were carried out with the aid of IBM SPSS version 27.

Results

RQ1: Participants' competence in the three languages in contact

Participants were asked to indicate their degree of general competence in the three languages by choosing among four options, namely *Very good*, *Good*, *A little* and *None*. If we consider the sum between positive options (i.e. *Very good* and *Good*), they declared the highest competence in the national language, i.e. Spanish (97.74%) in the BAC and Italian (99.50%) in FVG. These figures clearly show that each language is undoubtedly the majority language in the respective region. Then, while in the BAC the second most known language was Basque (95.19%), in FVG the second most known language was English (91.96%). English in the BAC (69.21%) and Friulian in FVG (44.22%) came third (Figure 1).

With reference to perceived general competence in the local minority language, while in the BAC almost all responses cluster around *Good* and *Very good* competence, in FVG the biggest cluster is around *A little*, *Good* and *None*. In FVG, a small group of participants indicated possessing *Very good* competence in Friulian (10.05%), whereas twice as many indicated *None* (20.10%). In the BAC, participants declaring no competence in Basque were a tiny minority (2.54%). A Chi-square test for independence indicated that there is a significant difference between the situation in the BAC and in FVG (χ^2 (1, $n = 553$) = 186.09, $p < 0.001$), with a very large effect size (V = 0.58). When looking specifically at the perceived competence in *writing* in the minority language, important differences were also found. While those indicating *None* or *A little* competence in writing in Basque were just 9.04% (32 participants, only 8 of which indicated *None*), this percentage substantially increases in FVG, where 84.92% of participants declared *None* (103 subjects) or *A little* (66) competence in writing in Friulian. A Chi-square test for independence indicated that the difference is significant (χ^2 (1, $n = 553$) = 317.07, $p < 0.001$), with a very large effect size (V = 0.76).

As for English, the situation appears to be the opposite. While in FVG almost all responses cluster around *Good* and *Very good* competence, in the BAC the biggest cluster is around *A little* and *Good*. Moreover, in the former context, a tiny group indicated having *A little* knowledge of English (7.54% vs. 29.94% in the BAC), whereas almost the same percentage indicated *Very good* competence in the BAC (9.04%). A Chi-square test for independence indicated that there is a significant
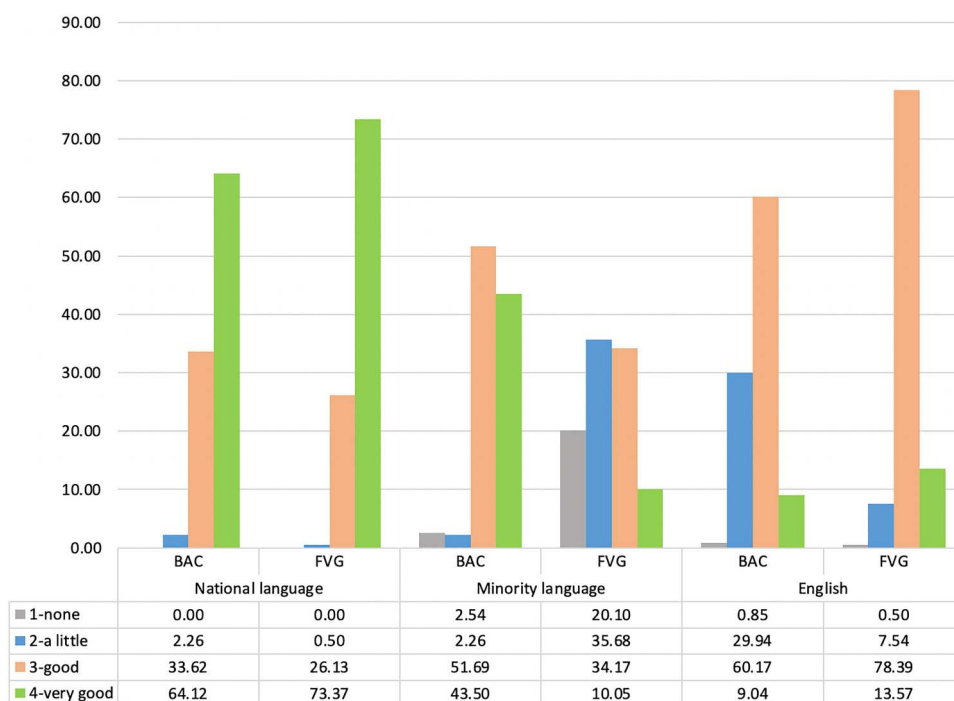
	BAC	FVG	BAC	FVG	BAC	FVG
	National language		Minority language		English	
■ 1-none	0.00	0.00	2.54	20.10	0.85	0.50
■ 2-a little	2.26	0.50	2.26	35.68	29.94	7.54
■ 3-good	33.62	26.13	51.69	34.17	60.17	78.39
■ 4-very good	64.12	73.37	43.50	10.05	9.04	13.57

Figure 1. Perceived competence in Spanish/Italian (national language), Basque/Friulian (minority language), and English in the BAC and in FVG (% data).

difference between the two contexts (χ^2 (1, $n = 553$) = 37.69, $p < 0.001$), with a small-to-medium effect size (V = 0.26).

With regards to the majority language (Spanish/Italian), it can be noticed that figures are rather similar: in both contexts, basically all responses cluster around *Good* and *Very good* competence, and zero responses are found for *No competence* in either language. A Chi-square test for independence indicated that the difference between the two contexts under investigation is not significant.

RQ2: Participants' habits of language use with people and in media

In both contexts, the majority of participants showed a tendency to prefer the majority language (Spanish/Italian) when speaking with parents (Table 2). However, such tendency is stronger in FVG than in the BAC where, instead, participants declared using the minority language more. When looking at data about language use with siblings and grandparents, the generational differ-ence is evident, in both ways. As for language use with brothers and sisters, while in the BAC the percentage of 'Spanish-only' drops to 33.90%, in favour of a higher use of Basque, the proportion of 'Italian-only' increases up to 62.81% in FVG. The opposite happens as regards language use with grandparents: in FVG the percentage of 'Italian-only' is below 50% (46.73% with father's parents, 41.71% with mother's parents), in favour of a higher use of Friulian (only or in combination with Italian), whereas figures in the BAC for 'Spanish-only' increase above 60% (60.17% with father's parents, 61.30% with mother's parents). To ascertain the statistical significance of such differences, chi-square tests for independence were performed considering three main groupings: (i) those who indicated using always the majority language (Spanish/Italian); (ii) those who indicated using pre-dominantly the majority language or both languages, majority and minority, equally; (iii) those who indicated using the minority language (Basque/Friulian) always or predominantly. The tests

indicated that there are significant differences (at the $p < 0.001$ level) between the two contexts under investigation as far as language use with family members is concerned (see details in Appendix). Specifically, effect sizes regarding the use of the minority language in the BAC when compared to FVG are medium-to-large in the case of language use with parents (father: V = 0.31; mother: V = 0.27), very large in the case of brothers and sisters (V = 0.46). Instead, effect sizes with regards to language use with grandparents, the alternated use of majority and minority language being significantly higher in FVG than in the BAC, are medium-to-large (father's side: V = 0.28; mother's side: V = 0.41).

As far as the educational domain is concerned, in the BAC Basque was found to be the language most often used with teachers: 59.32% indicated using always Basque and 12.15% Basque more often than Spanish. Instead, the almost exclusive use of Italian (95.98%) characterises exchanges with teachers in FVG. The pattern is similar with regards to language use with classmates. In FVG, the exclusive use of Italian is rather high (73.37%), although there was also a good percentage of participants declaring using both languages (Italian more often than Friulian: 21.11%). In the BAC, the majority declared using Spanish more often than Basque (51.41%), but there were also several participants who declared using Basque only (18.93%) or Basque more often than Spanish (11.58%). Chi-square tests for independence indicated that there are significant differences between the two contexts as far as language use with teachers (χ^2 (2, $n = 548$) = 354.61, $p < 0.001$) and classmates (χ^2 (2, $n = 548$) = 177.61, $p < 0.001$) are concerned. In both cases, the effect sizes are extremely large (V = 1.14 and V = 0.81, respectively), and therefore the use of Basque is much more habitual than that of Friulian.

Leaving the educational domain and focussing on habits of language use with partner and friends, Spanish-only and Italian-only appeared to be the most widely used languages, with higher percentages in FVG (55.78% and 67.34%, respectively) than in the BAC (27.40% and 36.44%). However, while Basque-only was declared by a low percentage of respondents in the BAC (15.25% with partner, 16.38% with friends), figures are even lower in FVG, where only a tiny group declared using Friulian-only with their partner (3.52%) and the same percentage affirmed using Friulian more often than Italian with friends. Chi-square tests for independence indicated that there are significant differences between the two contexts as far as language use with partner (χ^2 (2, $n = 389$) = 34.01, $p < 0.001$) and friends (χ^2 (2, $n = 550$) = 63.34, $p < 0.001$) are concerned. In the former case, the effect size is large (V = 0.42), in the latter it is very large (V = 0.48). Therefore, the presence of the minority language outside the educational context in the BAC is still rather low, being negligible in FVG.

As for language use with neighbours, shopkeepers and in offices, in all three cases chi-square tests indicated that the exclusive use of the majority language is significantly higher in FVG than in the BAC, whereas the predominant use of the minority language is significantly higher in the BAC than in FVG (see details in Appendix).

In the case of habits of language use when consuming media content, our data revealed that the minority languages had very little or no presence in this important domain. However, participants in the BAC show a rather well-established tendency of using all three languages, Spanish-Basque-English, a habit which is not as common in FVG (Table 3).

Since the use of Basque was minimal among participants in the BAC and the use of Friulian in FVG was basically absent, we decided to focus on the use of the national language and English. More specifically, chi-square tests for independence were performed considering two main groupings: (i) those who indicated using always the national language (only or predominantly, together with English); (ii) those who indicated using English (only or predominantly, together with the national language). Chi-square tests for independence indicated that there are no significant differences between the BAC and FVG, in all the seven activities.

Table 2. Language spoken with people (% data).

	SPA	ITA	SPA-bas	ITA-fri	SPA-BAS	ITA-FRI	BAS	FRI	BAS-spa	FRI-ita	NA [BAC]	NA [FVG]
father	58.76	59.80	10.45	0.00	0.00	20.60	22.32	8.04	5.65	3.52	2.82	8.04
mother	50.56	57.29	0.00	26.13	19.49	0.00	20.62	7.04	6.50	4.02	2.82	5.53
brothers and sisters	33.90	62.81	24.86	0.00	0.00	12.06	21.75	7.54	4.24	3.02	15.25	14.57
grandparents (father)	60.17	46.73	6.50	16.58	0.00	0.00	21.47	11.56	2.54	6.03	9.32	19.10
grandparents (mother)	61.30	41.71	8.47	0.00	0.00	26.13	20.90	10.55	2.54	3.52	6.78	18.09
partner/boyfriend/girlfriend	27.40	55.78	18.36	19.60	0.00	0.00	15.25	3.52	3.11	2.51	35.88	18.59
classmates	17.51	73.37	51.41	21.11	0.00	0.00	18.93	0.50	11.58	3.52	0.56	1.51
friends (out of the university)	36.44	67.34	0.00	28.14	38.42	0.00	16.38	0.00	8.47	3.52	0.28	1.01
teachers (except for with those of languages)	13.84	95.98	0.00	2.51	13.84	0.00	59.32	0.00	12.15	0.50	0.85	1.01
neighbours	58.47	63.82	17.80	24.62	0.00	0.00	13.84	5.53	8.19	4.52	1.69	1.51
shopkeepers	41.24	70.85	32.49	22.61	0.00	0.00	8.19	0.50	13.84	4.52	4.24	1.51
in offices	40.96	81.91	0.00	15.58	30.79	0.00	6.78	0.00	12.99	1.01	8.47	1.51

Table 3. Language use in/for media (% data).

	SPA	ITA	BAS	FRI	ENG [BAC]	ENG [FVG]	SPA-bas (eng)	ITA-fri (eng)	SPA-eng (bas)	ITA-eng (fri)	BAS-spa (eng)	FRI-ita (eng)	ENG-spa (bas)	ENG-ita (fri)	SPA-BAS-ENG	ITA-FRI-ENG
to watch TV	29.38	30.65	0.85	0	4.24	7.54	18.93	0	17.23	42.71	5.65	0	10.17	13.57	13.56	5.53
to read	32.77	45.73	2.26	0	1.13	1.51	24.01	1.51	12.71	40.2	11.02	0	3.39	5.53	12.71	5.53
to listen to songs/music	5.93	9.05	3.67	0	3.95	13.07	7.34	0.5	10.73	39.2	9.89	0	13.84	26.13	44.63	12.06
to listen to the radio	38.42	54.77	13.84	0	0.56	1.01	15.82	2.51	5.65	27.14	13.28	0	3.39	7.04	9.04	7.54
to search the internet	30.23	35.68	1.98	0	0.85	4.02	20.9	0.5	11.58	46.73	5.93	0	3.95	10.05	24.58	3.02
in social media	39.27	32.16	4.24	0	1.69	2.51	12.15	2.01	13.84	46.23	9.04	0.5	4.24	10.55	15.54	6.03
to write personal stuff	44.63	79.4	19.49	0	0.56	0.5	13.28	2.51	4.24	13.57	10.73	1.01	0.28	2.01	6.78	1.01

RQ3: Participants' language attitudes

When analysing participants' attitudes towards the three languages in contact, interesting differences emerge (Figure 2). In the BAC, participants expressed the most favourable attitudes towards the minority language, Basque (77.97%), followed by those towards English (63.28%) and a very similar percentage towards Spanish (62.43%). An entirely different situation appears to be true in FVG, where the most favourable attitudes were those towards the foreign language, English (88.94%), followed by attitudes towards Italian (86.93%), and then, at a distance, towards the minority language, Friulian (31.66%).

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare the attitudes towards the three languages in the BAC and in FVG. Participants in the BAC ($M = 76.74$; SD $= 14.98$) appeared to nurture significantly more positive attitudes towards Basque than did participants in FVG for Friulian ($M = 54.35$; SD $= 20.58$; $t(317.61) = 13.48$; $p < 0.001$ two-tailed). The magnitude of the difference in the means was extremely large (Cohen's $d = 1.30$).

Participants in FVG ($M = 78.83$; SD $= 10.23$) appeared to nurture significantly more positive attitudes towards Italian than their BAC counterparts towards Spanish ($M = 70.04$; SD $= 15.42$; $t(536.14) = -8.04$; $p < 0.001$ two-tailed), the magnitude being medium-to-large (Cohen's $d = 0.64$). Similarly, participants in FVG ($M = 78.38$; SD $= 10.43$) harboured significantly more positive attitudes towards English than participants in the BAC ($M = 69.61$; SD $= 14.57$; $t(519.99) = -8.19$; $p < 0.001$ two-tailed), the magnitude being also medium-to-large (Cohen's $d = 0.66$).[4]

As far as the perceived importance of the minority language is concerned, we proceeded with an analysis of the individual items making up the scale (Table 4). Basque was deemed *important* or *very important* in 9 occasions (out of 16). More specifically, the activities for which Basque registered the highest degree of importance are tightly linked with work and educational domains: getting a job (96.89%), passing exams (90.68%), living in the BAC (88.14%) and educating children (85.31%). Instead, the activities for which more than half the sample thought that the minority language is less or no important are going shopping (72.03%), being liked by people (69.77%), making

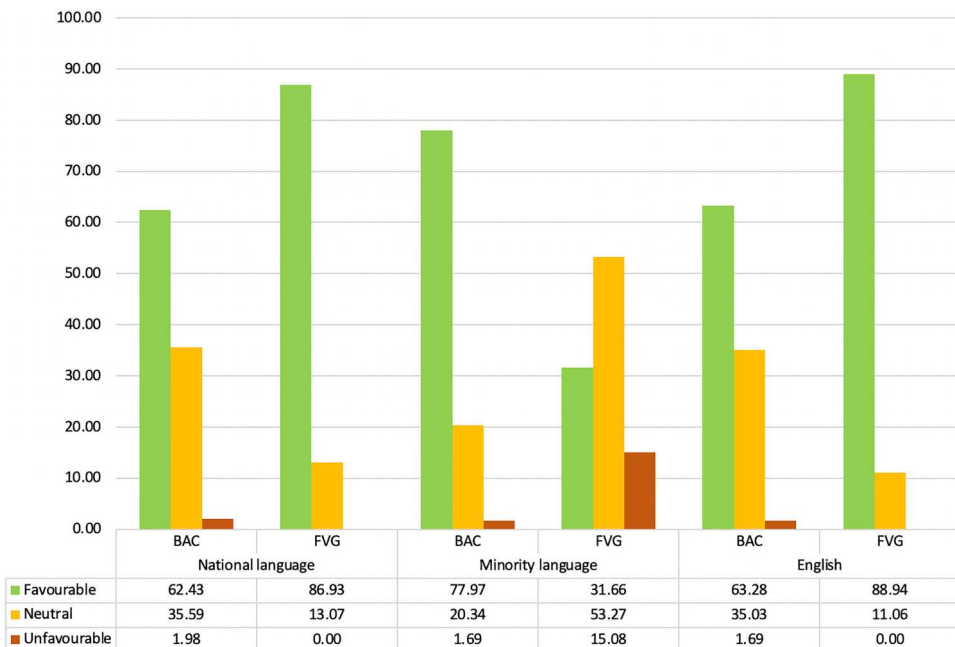|	National language		Minority language		English	
	BAC	FVG	BAC	FVG	BAC	FVG
■ Favourable	62.43	86.93	77.97	31.66	63.28	88.94
■ Neutral	35.59	13.07	20.34	53.27	35.03	11.06
■ Unfavourable	1.98	0.00	1.69	15.08	1.69	0.00

Figure 2. Attitudes towards Spanish/Italian (national language), Basque/Friulian (minority language) and English in the BAC and in FVG (% data).

Table 4. Perceived importance of Basque/Friulian (% data).

	Not important at all		Little important		Important		Very important	
	BAC	FVG	BAC	FVG	BAC	FVG	BAC	FVG
(1) to make friends	7.91	25.63	36.44	45.23	37.29	26.13	18.36	3.02
(2) to read	5.93	34.17	19.77	49.75	45.48	14.07	28.81	2.01
(3) to write	6.78	37.69	16.67	49.75	45.48	10.55	31.07	2.01
(4) to watch TV	10.17	46.73	44.07	48.24	32.20	4.02	13.56	1.01
(5) to get a job	0.85	32.66	2.26	44.22	40.11	22.11	56.78	1.01
(6) to be liked by people	27.97	31.66	41.81	40.20	22.88	25.13	7.34	3.02
(7) to live in the BAC/FVG	2.54	17.09	9.32	26.13	41.24	41.71	46.89	15.08
(8) to educate one's children	4.52	28.64	10.17	32.16	39.83	28.14	45.48	11.06
(9) to go shopping	21.75	46.23	50.28	40.70	20.62	12.56	7.34	0.50
(10) to make phone calls	14.97	45.73	45.48	44.72	27.97	8.54	11.58	1.01
(11) to pass exams	2.82	60.30	6.50	35.68	29.38	4.02	61.30	0.00
(12) to be accepted in one's social environment	18.64	26.63	38.14	34.67	31.92	29.65	11.30	9.05
(13) to speak with friends at the university	11.58	52.26	27.68	36.18	35.03	11.06	25.71	0.50
(14) to speak with professors at the university	6.21	66.33	11.02	30.15	33.33	3.52	49.44	0.00
(15) to speak with friends out of the university	22.03	47.74	34.75	36.68	25.99	14.57	17.23	1.01
(16) to speak with people out of the university	19.49	35.68	38.70	38.19	27.40	24.62	14.41	1.51

phone calls (60.45%), speaking with people out of the university (58.19%), being accepted in one's social environment and speaking with friends out of the university (56.78%), watching TV (54.24%).

The situation is rather different in FVG, where the only occasion in which Friulian was considered as *important* or *very important* by the majority of participants is living in FVG (56.79%). In all other cases, the minority language is perceived as less or not important at all by more than half of our sample.

Chi-square tests for independence indicated that there is a significant difference between the situation in the BAC and in FVG for 14 items. The only two items in which no significant difference was found were item 6, i.e. being liked by people, and item 12, i.e. being accepted in one's social environment. The items where the strongest differences were found are those relating to *literacy* (items 2 and 3), *education* (items 8, 11, 13, and 14), and *work* (item 5), with large and very large effect sizes (see details in Appendix).

Discussion

In response to our first research question on participants' perceived competence in the three languages, it can be said that the only evident similarity between the two contexts under investigation is the perceived competence in the respective national languages, which clearly maintain their status of majority languages. Significant differences were then found especially with regards to perceived competence in the minority language and with regards to English. While in the BAC the second most known language is the local minority language, Basque (95.19%), in FVG the second most known language is English (91.96%), that is, the main FL learned at school. The perceived competence in Basque is remarkably close to the one in Spanish (97.74% vs. 95.19%), a rather clear confirmation that the Basque Government efforts at the Basquisation of society – especially through language policies and Basque-medium education – are producing good results. As for the position of English in FVG, the results obtained are interesting as they show that the commitment of the Italian Government to improving the learning of English is, in a way, bearing fruit. Our findings on perceived competence in English are in line with the results of the INVALSI national standardised tests, carried out yearly at pre-university levels: considering the secondary school level in the North-Eastern regions (FVG among them), results for English have been improving in the last few years, while those for Italian have been stagnating, if not slightly declining (INVALSI 2022, 37, 51, 91, 124).

As far as English in the BAC is concerned, results are positive as they show that a remarkable improvement in the perceived competence in the first FL has taken place in the last two decades (Bier and Lasagabaster 2022). However, the percentage of participants declaring at least good competence in the FL is significantly lower than the one we found in FVG. As for the minority language in FVG, figures show that Friulian is the third language most known in the region, and less than half the sample declared having a good level of competence in it (44.22%). Figures decrease when considering the percentage of those who possess a degree of literacy in the language, with only 15.08% declaring being able to write in Friulian (vs. 90.96% in Basque, in the BAC). The lack of language policies, especially in the educational sphere, aimed at strengthening the position of Friulian in FVG seems thus to be clearly reflected in our data.

In response to our second research question on participants' habits of language use, we found that the clear status of majority language is especially true for Italian in FVG, where participants declared to make a prevalent use of this language in all domains of their daily life. Italian appears to be the exclusive language in the educational domain, with both teachers and classmates. In the BAC, instead, Basque is clearly predominant in the educational domain but Spanish remains the most frequently used language outside the university (Bier and Lasagabaster 2022), as is also the case in other minority language contexts (e.g. in Catalonia: Newman and Trenchs-Parera 2015; in Scotland: Smith-Christmas 2017; Nance 2020). Thus, despite all the efforts made at Autonomous Community level to boost the minority language, its use outside the educational domain is still relatively limited among those who will be educating future generations (Bier and Lasagabaster 2022). However, if compared with findings from FVG, Basque is much more commonly used with younger people, e.g. siblings, classmates, friends, partner. On the opposite, Friulian seems to be used relatively more often with older people, i.e. grandparents, as these are those who speak the language on a more regular basis. This generation-related differences do not point towards bright future perspectives for Friulian.

As regards English, it is the second most known language by pre-service teachers in FVG, who also express the most favourable attitudes towards it. Instead, it is the third most known language in the BAC. English is also the language that, after Spanish/Italian, appears to be mostly used in media in both contexts, as the use of Basque in the BAC was rather limited and the use of Friulian in FVG basically absent. If the use of a minority language is not promoted in media as well (by means of a sufficiently rich and appealing content), where English seems to take the lion's share, its revitalisation will be seriously affected in the future.

In response to our third research question on participants' language attitudes, it can be affirmed that attitudes towards individual languages were found to be remarkably different in the two contexts under investigation. In the BAC participants expressed the most positive attitudes towards the minority language, which was also perceived as highly important for a number of everyday activities. Our findings are thus in line with those recently obtained by Gartziarena and Villabona (2022) in the same context. In FVG, instead, Friulian is the language that registered the lowest percentage of favourable attitudes. Interestingly, the language that was regarded most favourably in the latter context is English, which is the foreign language most frequently learned at school. The results for attitudes towards English in FVG are in line both with those on perceived competence in the language and also with the results in the INVALSI tests we commented on earlier, where it seems that the FL, English, follows a different trajectory (upward) than that of the national language, Italian (downward).

If, on the one hand, these differences between future teachers' perceived competence and attitudes towards the minority language are significant and very large, on the other hand, it should be borne in mind that the two contexts differ substantially in their education systems. While Basque is the main medium of instruction in schools in the BAC and, as we have seen, it is perceived as an important, prestigious language, Friulian does not count on the same status, as it is an optional subject that is not even officially included in students' final assessment. The effects of such differences in the treatment of the minority language in the education system

are evident when looking at the extremely large difference between the percentages of those who are literate in Basque (90.96%) and of those who are literate in Friulian (15.08%). Yet, notwithstanding such considerable difference in terms of language status, the fact that 44.22% of preservice teachers in FVG declare *good* and *very good* competence in Friulian harbours hopes for the future of the language.

Safeguarding linguistic diversity and promoting favourable attitudes towards its numerous languages is a key goal in Europe, where it is expected that young citizens learn two European languages in addition to their L1 (Commission of the European Communities 1995). Nevertheless, the increasing presence of English in all education systems as well as its constant rise as the world's lingua franca may be related to students' lack of motivation to approach other languages (Henry 2011). Such a situation might present a challenge to the boosting of multilingualism, since learning languages other than English – local minority languages included – might be perceived as a futile task (Phillipson 2003). The FVG situation seems to be a case in point, especially with regards to Friulian.

Research indicates that pre-service teachers are likely to revisit their initial attitudes and beliefs, and develop more positive understandings of language diversity (e.g. Jeoffrion et al. 2014; Szecsi, Szilagyi, and Giambo 2015; Fischer and Lahmann 2020; Campos Bandrés 2021). Targeted training interventions could promote reflection and awareness raising about their own beliefs and ideas about languages and the value of multilingualism, and the same awareness could then be raised and passed on to their future pupils. With their own example, therefore, future teachers will be active promoters of the value of multilingualism and language diversity in class, and not just deliverers of subject content.

Conclusion

In this research, we aimed at replicating a previous study, collecting information on prospective teachers' perceived competence, habits of language use and attitudes towards languages in contact in two contexts, the BAC and FVG. Our study is thus original not only because the FVG context was not contemplated in the original study and it has been investigated for the first time, but also because comparative research of this kind is not common in the literature.

From this cross-country comparison we obtained findings which differ in many ways, due to the influence exerted by the language policies implemented in each region: the language policy in the BAC being much more fully-fledged in support of the minority language than that in FVG. The only apparent similarity was found when exploring participants' perceived competence in the national language (Spanish and Italian), in which a high competence was declared by participants. As for the minority language, Basque is the second most known language in the BAC and the first in terms of positive language attitudes. Instead, Friulian in FVG is the third language most known and the least preferred in terms of attitudes.

With regards to language use, the minority language is much more widespread in the BAC, especially in the educational domain and with younger people. Instead, the use of the majority language is higher in FVG, both with people and in media. Then, in both contexts, the use of the minority language is not common when using media. Our results demonstrate that the general position of English is becoming stronger, and this trend may be maintained in the future in both contexts. It is thus evident that the evolution of knowledge of and attitudes towards English should be under researchers' radar in further studies, as it might have a knock-on effect on the minority language and this needs to be carefully scrutinised.

As for future research directions, it would be worth delving into the attitudinal data that were collected and analyse how attitudes vary based on relevant parameters such as gender, SES, L1, language mainly used in the family and school model attended, while ascertaining whether the same variation is found in both research contexts.

Notes

1. To compute this percentage, we referred to the statistical data published by the Regione Autonoma Friuli Venezia Giulia (2020, 244–245 and 313).
2. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/education-and-training/data/database.
3. Cronbach's alpha values of scales on Italian and English in FVG are based on standardised items.
4. All results obtained with independent samples t-tests were confirmed by the corresponding nonparametric Mann-Whitney U tests.

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ORCID

Ada Bier 🆔 http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2794-9019
David Lasagabaster 🆔 http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7750-2314

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Appendix

Chi-square tests for independence (only significant results are reported):

Perceived proficiency in Basque/Friulian, Spanish/Italian and English in the BAC and in FVG
(2 categories: None + A little, Good + Very good)

Basque/Friulian (general competence)	χ^2 (1, $n = 553$) = 186.09, $p < 0.001$, V = 0.58
Basque/Friulian (written competence)	χ^2 (1, $n = 553$) = 317.07, $p < 0.001$, V = 0.76
English	χ^2 (1, $n = 553$) = 37.69, $p < 0.001$, V = 0.26

Habits of language use with people in the BAC and in FVG
(3 categories: Always in Spanish/Italian, In Spanish/Italian more often than in Basque/Friulian + In Basque/Friulian and Spanish/Italian about equally, Always in Basque/Friulian + In Basque/Friulian more often than in Spanish/Italian)

father	χ^2 (2, $n = 527$) = 24.91, $p < 0.001$, V = 0.31
mother	χ^2 (2, $n = 532$) = 19.11, $p < 0.001$, V = 0.27
brothers and sisters	χ^2 (2, $n = 470$) = 49.08, $p < 0.001$, V = 0.46
grandparents (father)	χ^2 (2, $n = 482$) = 18.62, $p < 0.001$, V = 0.28
grandparents (mother)	χ^2 (2, $n = 493$) = 41.16, $p < 0.001$, V = 0.41
partner	χ^2 (2, $n = 389$) = 34.01, $p < 0.001$, V = 0.42
classmates	χ^2 (2, $n = 548$) = 177.61, $p < 0.001$, V = 0.81
friends (out of the university)	χ^2 (2, $n = 550$) = 63.34, $p < 0.001$, V = 0.48
teachers	χ^2 (2, $n = 548$) = 354.61, $p < 0.001$, V = 1.14
neighbours	χ^2 (2, $n = 544$) = 13.85, $p < 0.001$, V = 0.23
in shops	χ^2 (2, $n = 535$) = 48.50, $p < 0.001$, V = 0.43
in offices	χ^2 (2, $n = 520$) = 82.20, $p < 0.001$, V = 0.56

Importance attached to Basque/Friulian the BAC and in FVG
(2 categories: Not important+A little important, Important+Very important)

(1) to make friends	χ^2 (1, $n = 553$) = 36.01, $p < 0.001$, V = 0.26
(2) to read	χ^2 (1, $n = 553$) = 173.45, $p < 0.001$, V = 0.56
(3) to write	χ^2 (1, $n = 553$) = 209.70, $p < 0.001$, V = 0.62
(4) to watch TV	χ^2 (1, $n = 553$) = 98.65, $p < 0.001$, V = 0.42
(5) to get a job	χ^2 (1, $n = 553$) = 332.38, $p < 0.001$, V = 0.78
(7) to live in the BAC/FVG	χ^2 (1, $n = 553$) = 70.39, $p < 0.001$, V = 0.36
(8) to educate ones' children	χ^2 (1, $n = 553$) = 126.02, $p < 0.001$, V = 0.48
(9) to go shopping	χ^2 (1, $n = 553$) = 16.17, $p < 0.001$, V = 0.17
(10) to make phone calls	χ^2 (1, $n = 553$) = 55.97, $p < 0.001$, V = 0.32
(11) to pass exams	χ^2 (1, $n = 553$) = 396.97, $p < 0.001$, V = 0.85
(13) to speak with friends at the university	χ^2 (1, $n = 553$) = 125.66, $p < 0.001$, V = 0.48
(14) to speak with professors at the university	χ^2 (1, $n = 553$) = 322.36, $p < 0.001$, V = 0.76
(15) to speak with friends out of the university	χ^2 (1, $n = 553$) = 43.84, $p < 0.001$, V = 0.28
(16) to speak with people out of the university	χ^2 (1, $n = 553$) = 13.56, $p < 0.001$, V = 0.16