

# PL

## Studi e ricerche sul plurilinguismo

### 8

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# **Introducing FURLEUS: a cross-country, cross-stage, cross-level comparison of Friulian and Basque teachers' language attitudes and motivation in search of best practices**

Ada Bier\*, David Lasagabaster\*

## **Introduction**

The main aim of this contribution is to introduce the FURLEUS project, whose acronym stands for FURLan (i.e., Friulian) + EUSkara (i.e., Basque) and which is funded within the Horizon 2020 – Marie-Skłodowska Curie Actions – European Individual Fellowship. To contextualise it, an overview of the rich, dynamic and complex situation characterising multilingual education in the two European regions involved will also be provided.

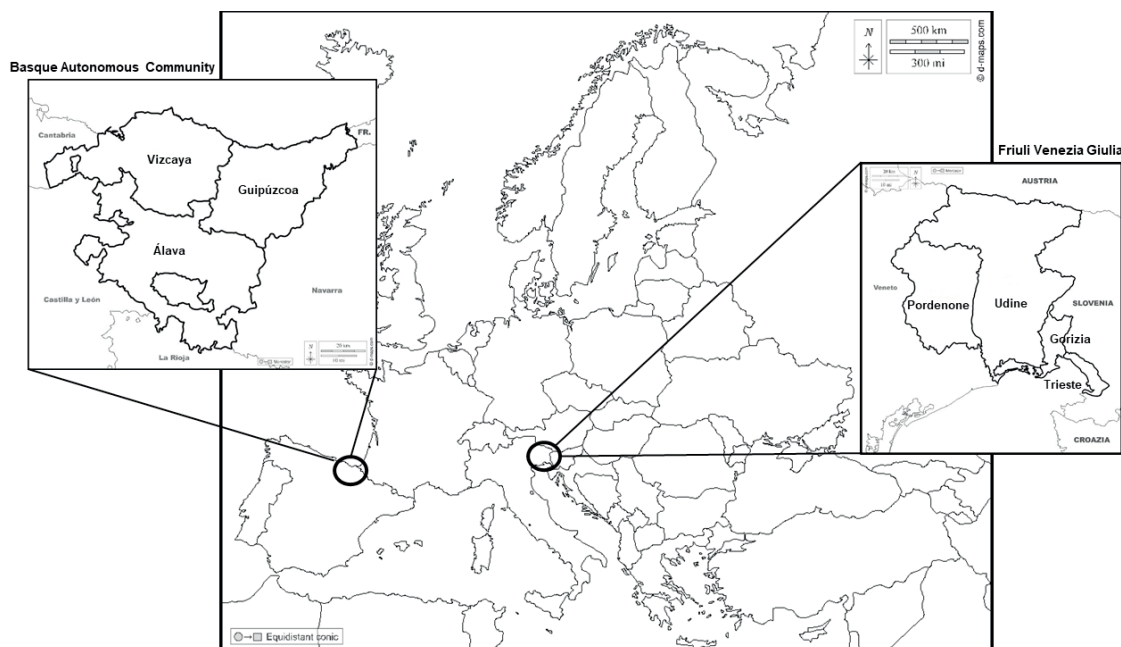
After a concise review of recent literature on teacher attitudes and motivation, the two contexts of interest for the research project will be presented. These are the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) in Spain, an internationally-known context for the success of the revitalisation of the Basque minority language within a multilingual educational system, and Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG) in Italy, an Autonomous Region whose Special Statute is deeply linked with its linguistic diversity and which is striving to implement the teaching of and through Friulian within multilingual education in its schools. A theoretical review of the main research studies underpinning the project as well as some relevant contextual background for both the BAC and FVG will be offered. Then, the outline of the FURLEUS project will be described and, finally, a few remarks on why it matters will conclude the chapter.

## **Teacher attitudes and motivation: a concise review of the literature**

Let's first of all briefly define the concept of language attitudes. Attitudes are defined as «a disposition to react favourably or unfavourably towards a class of objects» (Sarnoff, 1970, p. 279), which, in our specific case, are languages in

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Figure 1. The BAG and FVG.



contact. However, since research has found that the nature of attitudes is complex and may encompass positivity and negativity at the same time, the simple definition just given appears to be too simplistic. It is therefore worth recalling the theoretical framework proposed by Rosenberg and Hovland (1960), according to which language attitudes should not be regarded as a unitary concept, but rather as a combination of three classes of components: the *cognitive* component (thoughts, beliefs), the *affective* component (emotions, feelings), and the *motivational*, or *conative*, component (readiness for action).

Language attitudes are one of the most relevant sociolinguistic factors to consider in language teaching, especially in the case of minority languages, as they may profoundly influence the success (or failure) of teaching endeavours in particular and, more in general, entire language planning strategies (Ó Riagáin, 2008). Students spend a large part of their day at school where they have direct contact with teachers, and teachers' role in shaping their attitudes towards the maintenance of their heritage or minority language can be remarkable. Starting from Gardner (1985), research has shown that teacher attitudes significantly affect student attitudes (Lee, Oxelson, 2006). Positive attitudes of teachers lead to positive attitudes in students, to increased student achievement and acquisition of languages (Gardner, 1985).

The reverse is also true: in a study carried out in Flanders, Belgium, Pulinx and colleagues (2017) investigated the interaction between teacher beliefs and



attitudes on the one hand, and school ethnic composition and language policies – as expression of specific language ideologies, monolingual or multilingual – on the other. They found that teachers' strong adherence to monolingual policies triggers teachers to have lower expectations about their students' academic achievement<sup>1</sup>. Similar findings are those by Blanchard and Muller (2015), who inquired into the perceptions teachers have about their students in American multilingual schools and found that language-minority students are more likely to be negatively perceived. They thus underline the importance of considering both language-minority and migrant status as social dimensions of students' background that moderate the way that high school teachers' perceptions shape students' preparation for college.

Lee and Oxelson found that «the nature of teacher training and personal experience with languages other than [the dominant L1, that is] English significantly affect teacher attitudes toward heritage language maintenance and bilingualism» (Lee, Oxelson, 2006, p. 453). Their findings show a significant relationship between teacher attitudes and beliefs and teacher practices. Thus, they emphasise that

unless teachers believe in the benefits of bilingualism and understand the adverse effects of heritage language loss, it is unlikely that the needs of heritage language speakers will enter into the interest span of teachers (Lee, Oxelson, 2006, p. 464).

In line with these conclusions, De Angelis as well points out that teachers view heritage language teaching as «something that is not part of their job and should be dealt with by students' families» (De Angelis, 2011, p. 229).

Finally, research shows that positive teacher attitudes towards minority languages are associated with higher inclusion of such languages in education programmes: see, for example, Paciotto (2009) for Slovene in schools in FVG, Dubiner and colleagues (2018) for Arabic in Israel, and Ó Murchadha and Flynn (2018) for Irish in Ireland.

### **The Basque Autonomous Community: sociolinguistic context and education system**

The Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) was established by the Statute of Autonomy of 1979 and encompasses three provinces, Álava, Vizcaya and

<sup>1</sup> This effect is reminiscent of the 'inverse' of the Pygmalion effect (Rosenthal, Jacobson, 1968), that is the Golem effect (Babad, Inbar, Rosenthal, 1982).

Guipúzcoa. Since 1982, and as a result of the Basic Law on the Standardisation of Basque, it has become a bilingual community where both Basque (i.e., the minority language) and Spanish (i.e., the majority language) are official languages (Lasagabaster, 2007, p. 65) with equal status.

In the BAC there are 631,000 bilingual speakers and for 60% of these Basque is the first language. 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 (it was 25% in 1991) (Gobierno Vasco, Gobierno de Navarra, Euskararen erakunde publikoa-Office public de la langue basque, 2016). Compulsory education remains a primary factor in the regeneration of Basque, and several studies show that this recovery is gradually increasing (for a recent review, see Roman Etxebarrieta, Pérez-Izaguirre, Langarika-Rocafort, 2020). The rise in the number of Bascophones in recent years has been remarkable.

As far as the educational system is concerned, since the passing in 1983 of the law establishing the use of Basque at preuniversity levels, there are *three linguistic models* in which children can complete their studies: A-B-D (the letter C does not exist in modern Basque):

- *Model A* is a programme in which Spanish is the medium of instruction and Basque is taught only as a subject, for 4 to 5 hours per week.
- *Model B* is an early partial immersion programme in which both Basque and Spanish are used as media of instruction. These students' L1 is usually Spanish, although there may be some exceptions with Basque as their L1. In this model the first three schooling years (kindergarten) are generally taught through Basque. In the first year of primary education, pupils usually start to learn the reading-writing process and mathematics in Spanish. Many schools have evolved towards a more intensive model B, in which the reading-writing process and part or the whole subject of mathematics is implemented in Basque. This is the most heterogeneous model, and depending on different factors such as the sociolinguistic setting in which the school is located or the availability of Basque teaching staff, the time allotted to each of the languages varies considerably.
- *Model D* is a total immersion programme for those students whose L1 is Spanish and a maintenance programme for those with Basque as L1 (unlike what happens in Canada, for example, where total immersion programmes are only used with students who have no knowledge of the medium of instruction). Basque is the language of instruction and Spanish is only taught as a subject, for 4 to 5 hours per week (Lasagabaster, 2007, p. 69).

While enrolment figures in Model A go steadily down, those for Models B and D go steadily up; the bilingual models of education are greatly responsible for the composition of the number of new speakers of Basque. In the 2020/21

school year, more than 83 % of pre-university students were enrolled in models B (17.4%) and D (65.9%, the most popular model by far), whereas only 16.7% chose model A.

As far as the training of teachers, a pivotal role is played by the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU).

The idea is that the University cannot be isolated from the rest of the educational system and Basque society and should also participate in the Basquization process because it is the most important cultural reference in the BAC (Cenoz, 2009, p. 216).

The University faces the need to offer courses in Basque because of the high demand to study through Basque, which comes from students who want to go on having the same language of instruction as in secondary school. When considering the total number of students at the university, in the 2020/21 academic year 44% of the undergraduate students were studying in Basque.

### **Research on language attitudes in education in the BAC**

As far as language attitudes are concerned, Lasagabaster (2005) revealed that students in model A (i.e., Spanish as language of instruction) harbour negative attitudes toward Basque and hold positive attitudes toward Spanish, whereas students in models B and D are more favourably disposed toward Basque. On some occasions, the attitudes and motivation to learn Spanish are negative among model D students: such an unfavourable disposition fits within what Baker (1992) labels as *bunker attitude*, which is found when minority language speakers hold the belief that the majority language represents a risk to the survival of the minority language (Lasagabaster, 2005). Two independent variables stand out when scrutinizing the impact of different individual variables on students' attitudes and motivation: the linguistic model attended at school and the language mainly used at home, as both these variables function as a catalyst of students' attitudes (Lasagabaster, 2017, pp. 585-586).

As far as students' language attitudes in model A are concerned, Ibarra, Lasagabaster and Sierra (2008) observed that both local and immigrant students held negative attitudes toward Basque, whereas the attitudes toward Spanish were very positive and there was practically no rejection among the immigrant group as a whole. Immigrant students' attitudes toward English were neutral/positive, and two main reasons were put forward to explain such a positive stance toward the foreign language, i.e., its role as *lingua franca* and its perceived usefulness for obtaining a job. A study conducted by Uranga

Arakistain (2013) led to conclude that the many linguistic limitations of model A leave no leeway to design any efficient measure to boost students' Basque learning motivation and improve their Basque competence (Lasagabaster, 2017, p. 587).

In their transnational study involving nine European bilingual contexts (i.e., BAC, Catalonia, Valencian community, Galicia, Malta, Brussels, Friesland, Ireland and Wales), study which is also the main reference for the FURLEUS project, Lasagabaster and Huguet (2007) compared the language attitudes and habits of language use of prospective primary teachers. It was found that the family language and the linguistic model at school were the most important variables influencing the future teachers' language attitudes in all the contexts investigated. More specifically, in the BAC, it was found that students with Basque L1 were more favourable to Basque than those who had Spanish as their L1, who, in turn were less favourable towards the minority language. Moreover, future teachers in the BAC declared a very high competence in the minority language (81% of a sample of 222 subjects), whereas more than half of the sample (60%) declared a low competence in the foreign language, English (Lasagabaster, 2007). Finally, teachers' views on students' attitudes were recently examined by Roman Etxebarrieta and colleagues (2020), and negative attitudes towards Basque were perceived by teachers not as deriving from students' background (i.e., immigration) but especially as influenced by students' families.

### **Friuli Venezia Giulia: sociolinguistic context and legislative framework for Friulian**

Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG) is one of the five Autonomous Regions in Italy. One of the most important reasons for its Special Statute is its linguistic diversity (Fusco, 2019): in the Region, Italian (the national language) coexists with German and Germanic languages (spoken in the area close to the border with Austria), with Slovene and Slavic languages (along the border with Slovenia), and with Friulian<sup>2</sup>, which – like Basque – is a *unique minority language*, that is it does «not have a majority status anywhere» (van Dongera, van der Meer, Sterk, 2017, p. 10).

The Friulian-speaking area roughly corresponds to the former provinces of Udine, Pordenone and Gorizia, and figures for Friulian speakers vary between 420,000 and 600,000, depending on whether figures for occasional speakers are

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of the Friulian language, see Benincà, Vanelli, 2016; Vicario, 2011.

added to those of regular speakers, which means 35 to 49% of the total population of the Region (ARLeF, 2015).

As for the legislative framework, a National Law was passed in Italy in 1999 for the protection of linguistic minorities,<sup>3</sup> which foresees the introduction of minority languages in compulsory education. More specifically, in FVG, a Regional Law provides the rules for such introduction<sup>4</sup>, rules whose implementation became systematic in 2012, when the ‘System plan for the teaching of the Friulian language’ was implemented<sup>5</sup>.

Based on these norms, today Friulian is compulsorily 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 or not, for at least 30 hours a year (i.e., one hour a week, as a minimum). According to Perini (2021, p. 158), and based on a limited sample of schools, in the 2019/20 school year, 67% of families chose to have Friulian taught to their children, in kindergartens, primary and low secondary schools.

As for the initial training of teachers to teach Friulian or through Friulian, worthy of note is the curriculum *ad hoc* in the MA programme in Primary Teacher Education at the University of Udine, which was inaugurated in 2016. However, apart from that curriculum and specific individual courses, usually in the fields of linguistics or philology, there are no other degree programmes in which Friulian is taught or officially used as a medium of instruction.

## Research on language attitudes in FVG

In contrast to the situation in the BAC, with regards to the teaching/learning of and through the minority language in the Friulian-speaking area, relatively little research has been carried out and it mainly focusses on teacher training.<sup>6</sup> The most recent research outcomes are those resulting from the Interreg European Project *Eduka2* (<http://www.eduka2.eu/>): first, a teacher development model aimed at – among other things – producing teaching material to promote literacy in Friulian (Menegale, Bier, 2020); second, a Massive Open Online

<sup>3</sup> Law 15 December 1999, n. 482. *Rules on the protection of historical linguistic minorities.*

<sup>4</sup> Regional Law 18 December 2007, n. 29. *Rules for the protection, enhancement and promotion of Friulian.*

<sup>5</sup> For a complete overview of the laws for the protection of the Friulian language, see Cisilino, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> For an overview of published research in this area, see Burelli, 2015.



Course (MOOC) created *ad hoc* for the distance training of CLIL teachers who wish to use Friulian as a medium of instruction (Bier, Menegale, 2020).

The only research findings that tell us a little about teachers' views on Friulian in education are those deriving from the last sociolinguistic survey commissioned by the Regional Agency for the Friulian Language (ARLeF) in 2014. A small sub-sample of teachers – very small, 40 subjects, and not representative of the entire population of reference – was isolated from the overall sample and it was found that:

- there is a remarkable difference between opinions about plurilingualism in general (without specifying in what languages) and plurilingualism including Friulian: the latter tend to be significantly less positive than the former;
- furthermore, it appears that 80% of teachers think it is right that Friulian be protected with specific laws; however, when asked whether Friulian should be taught at school the percentage falls at 63% (all these findings, albeit from a very small sample, are in line with those from the international literature presented earlier, e.g., De Angelis, 2011).

To our knowledge, no research so far has specifically focussed on teachers' attitudes towards Friulian in multilingual FVG and on how they relate to their teaching practices: FURLEUS wishes to fill this gap and break some ground in these directions.

### **The FURLEUS project: outline and output**

The project foresees three main phases.

The aim of *Phase 1* is to inquire into the language attitudes of prospective primary and secondary teachers in the Friulian-speaking area and in the Basque-speaking area (i.e., students training to be teachers in the two regions, BAC and FVG). This inquiry will be based on Lasagabaster and Huguet's study (2007) and will consist of a quantitative investigation using their same data collection instrument (based on Baker, 1992), which will map student-teachers' language attitudes and behaviours with respect to the use of the different languages they are in contact with (minority, majority, others). This will allow, first, to understand the attitudes of prospective primary and secondary teachers in FVG, a multilingual context that was not included in the 2007 study. Second, to update Lasagabaster's findings on prospective primary teachers in the BAC (2007). Finally, three, it will allow to explore the attitudes of prospective secondary teachers in the BAC, who were not included in the 2007 study.

The aim of *Phase 2* is to produce a catalogue/database of best practices of multilingual education in the two contexts, in both primary and secondary

school, wherein the minority language is used and promoted together with the majority language (Italian, Spanish), the international language (English) and any other language that may be present in the area. A series of semi-structured qualitative interviews with a purposefully selected sample of primary and secondary in-service teachers from the two contexts will be conducted with a view to acquiring in-depth knowledge of their teaching practices, thus gathering information to include in the best practices catalogue.

The aim of *Phase 3* is to inquire into the language attitudes of in-service primary and secondary teachers in the Friulian-speaking area and in the Basque-speaking area and understand what types (if any) of multilingual education practices they adopt in their classes. Like in Phase 1, this inquiry as well will consist of a quantitative investigation using the same data collection instrument, which will be integrated with a section inquiring into teachers' multilingual education practices. Phase 3 will thus allow us to understand what relationship there exists between attitudes and practice.

Overall, this research will allow several comparisons: at *regional* level (BAC, FVG), at *career stage* level (pre-service, in-service), at *school* level (primary, secondary).

As for the output of the project, four achievements will be aimed at:

- first, the organisation of a colloquium at the *XIX International Conference on Minority Languages*, which will take place in Wales in 2023;
- second, the organisation of a Symposium BAC-FVG, where scholars from both contexts will be invited to share research experiences;
- third, the preparation of the updated edition of the Mercator Dossier *The Friulian language in education in Italy*, whose last edition, by Cinzia Petris, is of 2014.
- finally, an important, intangible output that FURLEUS aims at regards networking and transfer of knowledge. Since the research project involves both the BAC, where the project is hosted, and FVG, research stays in FVG are envisaged, thanks to which collaboration with the University of Udine, the ARLeF, the Friulian Philological Society and its Docuscuele will be sought after. The project will also seek to establish a connection between two universities, UPV/EHU and UniUD, sharing the mission of promoting a minority language within their multilingual/multicultural environments. Moreover, a research stay at the Mercator European Research Centre, in Friesland/The Netherlands, is also envisaged, which will provide an additional important occasion for networking and knowledge sharing.

## **Conclusion: Why does FURLEUS matter?**

The results deriving from this project will represent a significant contribution to the body of research on European multilingual educational contexts and will be timely and relevant because no research so far has been carried out on how Friulian, a «definitely endangered language» according to the UNESCO's Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger, is perceived by teachers. In the last Regional Conference on the Friulian Language<sup>7</sup> the pivotal role of the education system for language promotion has been stressed over and over. Teachers are the most important actors in this process, and knowing what they think about the languages they are in contact with is of paramount importance. FURLEUS will thus allow to better frame and understand the characteristics of the Friulian educational context and identify the possible steps that should be taken, for both policy and practice, to improve the promotion of the minority language, adjusting its teaching to the new challenges posed by globalisation, while boosting the knowledge of additional languages and multilingualism.

FURLEUS is also in line with the European commitment to support the exchange of best practices on minority language promotion through researchers' mobility between Member States. Moreover, the best practices of multilingual education collected in both contexts will be disseminated and made known, also through teacher training.

By preparing the new edition of the *Friulian Mercator Regional Dossier*, and thus putting forward suggestions and recommendations for policy and practice, the ambition is to contribute to the public debate on the promotion of minority languages in education, as a means also to encourage the Italian Government to consider ratifying the *European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages* (1992), as well as to ensure better compliance with European policy documents.

The research is focussed on timely issues, the resolution of which will help improve the understanding of Europe's cultural and social diversity in a changing world, towards the fulfilling of its own vision of 'unity in diversity' and as a means to find solutions for shaping the Europe of tomorrow.

<sup>7</sup> *Conference regional su la lenghe furlane*, held in Udine and streamed online on November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021.



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