

The diversity of languages in the Alpine-Adriatic region I

Linguistic minorities and enclaves in northern Italy¹

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Der im vorliegenden Beitrag präsentierte multinationale Sprachraum des Alpen-Adria Gebiets stellt zweifelsohne eines der interessantesten und vielfältigsten Kulturräume Europas dar. Durch die jahrhundertelange Symbiose slawischer, germanischer und romanischer Kultur und die bewegte historische Vergangenheit hat sich in diesen Gebieten und Regionen sukzessive eine komplexe Verflechtung von Sprachen, Varietäten, Dialekten und Mundarten entwickelt, die in vielfältigster Weise und in unterschiedlichem Ausmass aufeinander wirken. Die soziolinguistische Situation in diesen multiethnischen Gebieten ist komplex und weist regionsspezifische Besonderheiten auf, die sich in unterschiedlichster Weise manifestieren. - Einige mundartliche Existenzformen des Alpen-Adria-Gebiets sind bereits verschwunden, viele sind vom Aussterben bedroht. Der Bewahrung der am Alpenhauptkamm Norditaliens angesiedelten vielfältigen Mundarten, Dialekte und Varietäten, aber auch der Pflege der kulturellen Identität ethnischer Minderheiten wird zurzeit überall verstärkt Beachtung geschenkt. Ob und in welcher Form hier die Sprachen-, Dialekt- und Varietätenvielfalt bewahrt werden kann, wird wohl von den jeweiligen sprachpolitischen, sozioökonomischen, ethnopsychologischen, rechtlichen u. a. Faktoren abhängig sein. Die Sprachenvielfalt des Alpen-Adria-Gebiets stellt für das multikulturelle Europa der Regionen zweifellos eine außerordentliche Bereicherung dar.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Alpine-Adriatic region in Central Europe is the place where Europe's major cultural groups meet in a complex pattern of interaction. It is here that the Germanic, Romance and Slavonic languages come together, as do various national borders as well as social and economic forms. The landscape is extraordinarily varied, ranging from high Alpine valleys, the gentle slopes of the Alpine foothills and the Mediterranean zones on the upper Adriatic to the Pannonian plains in Hungary. Likewise this area is characterized by historical, linguistic and social variety. In Italy, Austria, Slovenia, Croatia and Hungary, many minorities have emerged in the course of the centuries, both national linguistic minorities and smaller language groups, each with their own varied traditions. The number of speakers in the individual minorities ranges from a few hundred to several thousand and even to the half a million speakers of Friulian in Italy.

This paper looks at Germanic, Romance and Slavonic ethnic groups in the Alpine-Adriatic region, concentrating on those which are found in northern Italy. This region stands out for its extraordinarily wide variety of languages and dialects, making it possible to only deal with a small selection of the languages and some of their most important characteristics.

The ethnic minorities in the multicultural Alpine-Adriatic region came about at various points in history and under a wide range of circumstances (cf. Moritsch 2001). They can all look back on a complex past which has affected the development of their languages. The dialects and vernaculars spoken in the individual areas are quite diverse and influenced by the language spoken around them. Many of the vernaculars in this region have archaic features, particularly those found in isolated linguistic enclaves in Alpine valleys. Although efforts are being made to preserve this unique cultural inheritance, minority languages and linguistic enclaves with small numbers of speakers are threatened with extinction due to increasing globalization.

2. ETHNIC GROUPS IN NORTHERN ITALY

In Italy there are twelve non-Italian language groups from six different families of languages which are spoken by approx. 2.8 million people or around 5% of the total population (Pfister 2001: 20):

“The scattered minorities in southern Italy (Albanians, Franco-provençals, Greeks) and comparable Friulian, German and Slovene linguistic communities in the north east plus Franco-provençal minorities in the north west have lived on the Apennine peninsula since the high and late Middle Ages. This situation changed after the First World War when South Tyrol and Trentino were ceded to Italy along with parts of Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, all of which had large self-contained language groups” (Pfister 2001: 21).

This paper concentrates on the linguistic minorities and linguistic enclaves of northern Italy, the region where the Romance, Germanic and Slavonic languages come together and thus an interesting and varied area for research in which a large number of minorities live: the German-speaking ethnic group in South Tyrol, the French-speaking minority in the Aosta valley and the Slovene speakers in the provinces of Trieste and Gorizia in the region of Friuli-Venezia-Giulia. These minorities are all protected by the constitution. Furthermore there are other speech communities in these areas which only enjoy limited rights. These include the Rhaeto-Romanic group with Friulian and Ladin.

South Tyrol extends from the main Alpine chain to the south and forms the southernmost part of the self-contained Bavarian-Austrian language area (Minderheiten 1990: 253). The foothills of the Alps and the Dolomites delineate the area “which now comprises the autonomous province of Bolzano [...] in which three languages, German, Italian and Ladin, are spoken” (Eichinger 1996: 201). The region of Trentino-South Tyrol is

multilingual and home to the German ethnic group in South Tyrol, the Ladin ethnic group in the provinces of Bolzano and Trentino and ethnic groups of German origin in the province of Trentino. Cimbrian is spoken in Lusern and there are more German linguistic enclaves in Sauris/Tsare, in Timau and in the Canale valley.

In Italy there are some 300,000 German speakers, around 270,000 of which, or approx. two thirds of the total population (1981), live in South Tyrol (Eichinger 1996: 202). In the decades following 1880, 90% of the population in South Tyrol stated that German was the language they used colloquially. After the First World War the figures declined steeply, reaching an all-time low of 62.9% in 1961. Since then the situation has improved slightly (66.4%) but this figure actually refers to the language speakers identified with more rather than the language they use in every-day life. The statistics for Friulian are not so precise: estimates put the number of speakers at between 500,000 and 700,000. Neither are there any official data on the size of the Slovene minority in Italy, particularly since they have never been officially counted. According to http://www.uniud.it/cip/d_min_tutelate_scheda.htm (2.12.2003), a good approximation would be between 80,000 and 120,000.

The regulation of minority rights in Italy varies from region to region. About a quarter of the 20 regions has been accorded special status which at least covers certain aspects of minority rights (Pfister 2001: 21). Nowadays the individual linguistic minorities and linguistic enclaves in northern Italy enjoy differing privileges, the reasons for which can be traced back to the historical dividing line of 1919. In the Fascist era the linguistic and cultural home of Ladin was deliberately divided over various provinces on the basis of river systems, the effects of which can still be felt today. Out of all the linguistic minorities in this area, the German-speaking South Tyroleans and the Ladins in this region enjoy the most comprehensive system of protection. Recently, favourable regulations have also been introduced for Ladin speakers in Trentino and for Slovene and Friulian speakers in Friuli-Venezia-Giulia (Pfister 2001: 21f.).

2.1. German in South Tyrol

Traditionally, German dialects have always been spoken throughout the autonomous province of Bolzano, with the exception of the Ladin valleys where German is, however, and always has been a reference language (http://www.uniud.it/cip/d_min_tutelate_scheda.htm - 2.12.2003). Romance speakers had already settled in the area covered by modern-day South Tyrol in Roman times, giving rise to the Ladin linguistic group which lives there today. In the 7th century, Bolzano was held by the Counts of Bavaria, marking the beginning of continuous Germanic – or rather German-speaking – settlement in the town and laying the foundations for contact between the two languages lasting much longer than a thousand years. From early Bavarian times up to 1803, the bishops of Bressanone and Trento, who mostly came from the German-speaking area, ruled over their ecclesiastical principality (Eichinger 1996: 206f.).

South Tyrol was under Austrian administration for almost 600 years until it was ceded

to Italy in 1915 along with Trentino and other areas laid down in the secret Treaty of London. When Mussolini and the Fascists seized power in 1922, non-Italian sections of the population did not fit into the nationalist concept of Fascist Italy: they were to be assimilated. The process of Italianization was also forced in the public sphere. From 1936 onwards Mussolini more or less left it up to Austria to exercise German influence:

“As they were considered to be of German extraction, the problem of the South Tyroleans was meant to be solved by resettling them within the territory of the German ‘Reich’ in areas which still had to be conquered. This solution, known as the ‘option agreement’, was laid down in the German-Italian agreement on the resettlement of the South Tyroleans dating from 22 June 1939. By the end of 1939, the German-speaking South Tyroleans had to decide whether they would opt for German nationality and subsequently emigrate or whether they would retain their Italian nationality and relinquish all rights to minority protection” (Eichinger 1996: 208f.).

Some 75,000 of those who had opted for Germany were then relocated, around 25,000 of whom returned after the war. On 31 January 1948 Italy’s constituent national assembly passed the first statute of autonomy for the region Trentino-South Tyrol although it had an Italian majority. After extensive negotiations between the Austrian and Italian governments, a “package” of regulations for autonomy consisting of 137 articles was drawn up in 1969 which came into effect on 20 January 1972 but was now limited to the province of Bolzano. The regulations were gradually amended and in 1989 the full and effective equality of German and Italian was achieved. Not until 17 June 1992 did the Austrian government officially inform the General Secretary of the UN of the end of its dispute with Italy on this issue. After Austria joined the European Union, cross-border cooperation with Italy can also be seen in an entirely new light (Eichinger 1996: 209f.).

2.1.1.

The German vernaculars of South Tyrol belong to the south Bavarian group of dialects and differ greatly from one another. “German in South Tyrol” can be understood as a continuum of linguistic forms ranging from local dialects to a regional form of High German. There is no intermediate colloquial stage between dialect and standard German, just a “koine which is not recognized as a supraregional linguistic form by individual (dialect) speakers as it frequently allows regional phonetic variation” (Eichinger 1996: 211; cf. Egger 2001: 43-61).

In South Tyrol we can work on the principle that there is a diglossic distribution of dialect and standard German (Egger 1994: 116). Dialect is used almost exclusively for spoken communication covering almost all areas of everyday life while standard German is only used in official public situations and ritual acts (religious and civil ceremonies, speeches) and at school (cf. Grigolli 1997). It is quite similar to Austrian German but also has certain vocabulary items which have come from standard German (Riechl

2000: 239 and 236). In everyday life and semi-official situations, and sometimes even in official spheres, the dialects spoken in the three larger dialect regions dominate. There is also a koine which has not yet, however, developed into a truly colloquial language. In fact a new regional variety of “South Tyrolean standard German” is beginning to emerge. It is coloured by regional phonetic variation and has typical characteristics of Bavarian-Austrian regional standards but has also acquired elements of the contact language (Riehl 2000: 236; cf. Egger 2001: 57).

Within the spectrum of Italian, distribution varies on a regional and social basis with “dialectal (dialetto), colloquial (Italiano regionale) and standard (Italiano standard) varieties” which are called “Walscher” by the South Tyroleans (Eichinger 1996: 212; cf. Lepschy/Lepschy 1986: 43-100, Egger 2001: 63-72). In the bilingual lowland areas around Bolzano, Trentine is spoken, an autochthonous Italian dialect used in several varieties, ranging from very local dialects and a colloquial urban version (in Trento) to very strongly regionalized standard Italian. However, dialect clearly dominates (Eichinger 1996: 212).

2.1.2.

Nowadays German/Italian bilingualism is found throughout South Tyrol and German is equal to Italian in all areas of public life. Public notices, announcements and forms etc. as well as road signs, place name signs and street signs are all in German and Italian (and even trilingual in Ladin-speaking municipalities). “Today, South Tyrol can be seen as a relatively relaxed and positive example of a pluriethnic and pluricultural society in the way the three ethnic groups live side by side. Multilingualism in the province is embodied in the law and also occurs in practice with ever increasing frequency” (Pfister 2001: 24; cf. Egger 2001: 253). German language print media also play an important role:

“In the province of Bolzano, German has profited greatly from the large number of cultural associations and institutions. German is taught at all schools and there are German-speaking universities. The media (radio, television, the press and cinema) encourage the exclusive use of German, as do church services” (http://www.uniud.it/cip/d_min_tutelate_scheda.htm - 2.12.2003).

2.2. Linguistic enclaves in northern Italy

All communities which belong to linguistic enclaves in northern Italy are multilingual (cf. Bellinello 1996). Alongside Italian and depending on the area, French, Friulian and Slovene have an important role to play, as do northern Italian dialects which often differ radically from standard Italian. German linguistic enclaves in Upper Italy are spread out from Friuli to the Aosta valley on the Italian-French-Swiss border. “Rhaeto-Romanic” is used by linguists to cover dialects spoken in three areas: Graubünden Romansch (*rumantsch grischun*; the Romanic dialects spoken in Graubünden in Switzerland) which

is also known as Rhaeto-Romanic, with various literary forms and vernacular groups, central Ladin (*ladino dolomitico* or *atesino*) in the Sella area in the Dolomites and Friulian (*friulano*) (Ferrer 1994: 18, cf. Hubschmid 2000: 111). These do not make up a self-contained and uniform language block, however, just a “complex of very different vernaculars” (Rohlf 1975: 2).

2.2.1. French in the Aosta valley

For many centuries, French had a very good reputation in Italy as a cultural and linguistic model and was often spoken by the nobility and educated bourgeoisie. It is particularly common in the autonomous region of the Aosta valley, but also in the parts of the provinces of Cuneo and Turin with Occitan and Franco-provençal dialects.

The socio-linguistic situation in the Aosta valley is characterized by the existence of three Romance language systems. French has enjoyed its status as an official *lingua franca* along with Italian since a special law was passed to this effect on 26 February 1948 and has been regularly taught in schools since 1975. The third language in the area, Franco-provençal, is struggling for survival (Ferrer 1994: 15f.).

The Aosta valley is officially bilingual. Civil servants working for public authorities have to be able to speak French. The school system is bilingual (Italian and French). There are bilingual road signs and toponymy. French is also used in the print media, in radio and TV programmes and in cultural matters. It is hard to estimate the number of French speakers as they all speak Italian as well but the figure of 20,000 would appear to be reasonable (http://www.uniud.it/cip/d_min_tutelate_scheda.htm - 2.12.2003). In the Aosta valley there are also German linguistic enclaves (cf. Zürcher 1996).

2.2.2. Franco-provençal (*francoprovenzale*)

Franco-provençal consist of a

“group of dialects with common phonetic and morphological features which otherwise differ radically from each other and which are spoken in western Upper Italy, Rhaeto-Romanic Switzerland, in Savoy and in an area which is difficult to delimit comprising parts of the surroundings of Lyon and parts of the Dauphiné and Franche-Comté. The original area where this language was spoken was within the administrative limits of the old diocesan towns of Lyon and Autun” (Ferrer 1994: 15f.).

It is very hard to precisely define the area where Franco-provençal is spoken in Italy but it is generally taken to follow the borders of the region in the Aosta valley. Speakers of Franco-provençal live in a multilingual world - alongside the two official languages of Italian and French, they also use Piedmontese, which competes with Franco-provençal. Piedmontese is spoken mainly by older people and is now dying out. Preference is given to the official bilingualism of Italian and French while there is no official stance on the use of Franco-provençal in schools and it is also underrepresented in the media. Franco-

provençal is not established in Italian law (http://www.uniud.it/cip/d_min_tutelate_scheda.htm - 2.12.2003; cf. Belinello 1996: 37-46).

2.2.3. Provençal/Occitan (*provenzale* or *occitanico*)

Occitan generally stands for the dialects of southern France which are split up into a series of regional subvarieties (cf. Rieger 2000). Occitan dialects in Italy belong to the Alpine subgroup of the Provençal variety. They are used in various valleys in the provinces of Cuneo and Turin and have been under pressure from Piedmontese for several centuries. It is recognized as a minority language in Italian law but there is no standard language or a uniform spelling system (cf. Bellinello 1996: 47-53). It was not until the 1970s that Occitan/Provençal dialects started to be used sporadically in kindergartens and primary schools. The number of speakers of local Occitan/Provençal dialects has been estimated at about 40,000 (Ferrer 1994: 16). Occitan generally has no common identity uniting all the different groups and regions (http://www.uniud.it/cip/d_min_tutelate_scheda.htm - 2.12.2003).

2.2.4. Dolomite Ladin (*ladino dolomitico*)

Dolomite or Central Ladin, a Romanic language which belongs to the Rhaeto-Romanic group of languages along with Graubünden Romansch and Friulian, is spoken in five valleys in the provinces of Bolzano, Trentino and Belluno in Upper Italy, namely in Gherdëina, Badia, Cortina de Anpezo, Fodom and Fascia (cf. Bellinello 1996: 55-65; Egger 2001: 73-86). Ladin-speakers make up 4% of the population of South Tyrol (Kaltenbusch 1996: 312, Pfister 2001: 21) and the total number of native speakers in these areas is thought to comprise 30,000 to 35,000 (cf. Haarmann 2001: 238, http://www.uniud.it/cip/d_min_tutelate_scheda.htm - 2.12.2003).

“The Ladin areas belonged to Austria for centuries [1363-1919; Haarmann 2001: 238; HML]. It was not until 1810, in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars and in connection with the division of Tyrol (Tyrol had already been detached from Austria and given to Bavaria in 1808) that Ladinia was split up for the first time: the Gherdëina and Badia valleys were retained by the Kingdom of Bavaria and the other three Ladin valleys became Italian [...]. It's true that all Ladins were re-united under Austrian rule in 1813 but this brief period of separation had fatal consequences for them more than a century later when the area in which they lived was once again split up by the Fascists” (Kaltenbusch 1996: 315).

When a law was passed on 9 January 1927 creating the province of Bolzano, the division of the Ladin area into three provinces came into force. When the statute of autonomy came into effect for the region Trentino-South Tyrol on 14 March 1948, “teaching in Ladin was guaranteed in primary schools in those villages in which the language is spoken”. In contrast, Ladin speakers in the province of Bolzano were defined as belonging to the same group as Italian speakers in the regulations governing the implementation of the

statute of autonomy. Ladin was not recognized as a separate language until 1951 and it was not until the 2nd statute of autonomy dating from 1972 that a few improvements were granted to Ladins in the province of Bolzano. In the province of Trentino, a Ladin district (*comprensorio ladino*) was set up in 1977 and along with it indirect recognition of Ladin as a separate language (Kaltenbusch 1996: 315f.).

2.2.4.1.

Ladin has very pronounced regional differences (seven dialects; Haarmann 2001: 238). It can be subdivided into six dialect areas in the Badia valley, three in the Fascia valley, two in Fodom and the relatively unified dialect spoken in the Gherdëina valley. “Dolomite Ladin is strongly subdivided, the main groups being Gherdëina (it. *gardenese*), Mareo (it. *marebbano*), Badiot (it. *badiotto*), Fodomi (it. *dialetto di Livinalongo*, also known as *fodom*) and Fascian (it. *fassano*)” (Kramer 2000: 45f.). To date hardly any diastatical variation has arisen because Ladin has very little social differentiation; there is no regional centre with a high-prestige variety and no educated stratum of its own as for a very long time the educated classes in the area spoke other languages.

Ladins live in a typical contact area with a geographical and political situation in which they always had to rely on using their second or third language (Mair 1989: 699f.): “Throughout the Ladin area, there is a diglossic or triglossic situation. In the Gherdëina and Badia valleys, the majority of the population – at least once they have completed their compulsory education – is trilingual: Ladin, German and Italian” (Kaltenbusch 1996: 323; cf. Francescato 1989, Born 1998).

2.2.4.2.

Ladin is recognized as a minority language by law in Italy but it could do with increased protection. Depending on which province Ladins live in, they are treated differently, leading to tension within the ethnic group. There are approximately 65,000 Dolomite Ladins: “Some 40,000 live in the province of Belluno and are underprivileged [...], approx. 28,000 are Dolomite Ladins, comprising approx. 7,000 in Fascia, half-privileged, approx. 9,000 in Badia and 8,000 in Gherdëina, privileged, plus approx. 4,000 outside Ladinia [...].” (Pfister 2001: 23).

In South Tyrol, Ladin has more or less the character of an official language alongside German and Italian. In contrast, in Trentino and the Cadore valley, bilingualism is still not officially recognized. Ladin is, however, used in place names. The use of the different varieties of Ladin in schools has been regulated since 1948 in the province of Bolzano by the statute of autonomy. It was consolidated in the 1970s by setting up special educational authorities for the Ladin municipalities and providing for Ladin as the language of instruction with German and Italian enjoying equal rights in the classroom. In the provinces of Trentino and Belluno, Ladin has only been taught by private groups and institutions to date. It is worth mentioning that research into Ladin is carried out at several universities in Austria, for example a project sponsored by the University of Salzburg based at Trento University is drawing up a linguistic atlas of

Ladin (cf. Bauer 1999-2000; http://www.uniud.it/cip/d_min_tutelate_scheda.htm - 2.12.2003).

2.2.4.3.

The Ladins have been trying to codify their language for a very long time (cf. Kaltenbusch 1989). The oldest document written in Ladin, a text from the Badia valley, dates back to 1631. Since then there have been several attempts to draw up a supradialectal spelling system. The most recent attempt (1984-1987), which involved representatives from all of the valleys where Ladin is spoken, resulted in an official proposal for a spelling system being passed on 11 March 1987 (Kaltenbusch 1996: 329).² One of the problems was that Ladins use different idioms, none of which would have had the slightest chance of becoming a common system for all Ladins due to geographical and psycholinguistic factors (cf. Marcato 1989, Schmid 1998a, 1998b, Verra 2001). Thus a common “standardized compromise” was drawn up, “a *koine*, which every speaker of Ladin can recognize as their own language without having to lose their own identity” (Valentini 2001; preface). Published in 2001, the *Gramatica dl ladin standard (GLS)* “presents the norms and rules with the help of which Ladin can be written and used in a unified manner in the area in which Dolomite Ladin is spoken” (Valentini 2001; preface). A dictionary of standard Ladin, *Dizionar dl ladin standard*, appeared in the following year (Valentini 2002a).³

2.2.4.4.

Interest in the culture of the Dolomite valleys has been very great over the last fifty years in particular. Numerous associations are doing work on the vernaculars while academic and didactic projects are also being carried out, including the publication of periodicals and books. Radio programmes in Ladin are broadcast by the state broadcasting company, RAI, and by private radio stations. In addition, RAI’s regional channel occasionally broadcasts television programmes in Ladin (http://www.uniud.it/cip/d_min_tutelate_scheda.htm - 2.12.2003).

2.2.5. Friulian (*Furlan*)

Friulian is spoken in most parts of historical Friuli, more or less corresponding to the present-day provinces of Udine, Pordenone and Gorizia. Since 1964, and along with the province of Trieste, it has been part of the autonomous region of Friuli-Venezia-Giulia. Friulian is based on the rural Latin dialect of Aquileia which remained isolated from the Latin world for a long time (Minderheiten 1990: 86).

“According to a common classification, Friulian is the eastern branch of the Rhaeto-Romanic group which also includes Dolomite Ladin and the form of Romansch spoken in Graubünden [...]. Its incorporation in the Republic of Venice and then in Austria (1530) prevented further development of a specific Friulian culture but without being able to destroy its linguistic originality [...]. In a large part of the province of

Gorizia, Friulian coexists with Slovene [...]. Colonial dialects based on Venetian were or still are common prestigious varieties in the region's towns: even in Trieste, where Venetian and Slovene dominate nowadays, an old Friulian dialect used to be spoken until well into the 19th century. In some linguistic enclaves in Carnia, old German and Slovene dialects can still be heard, often alongside Friulian varieties" (http://www.uniud.it/cip/d_min_tutelate_scheda.htm - 2.12.2003).

As far as the number of Friulian speakers is concerned, no precise statistics are available but 500,000 to 700,000 would appear to be a reasonable estimate.

Friulian has a literary koine from historical sources which is based on Central Friulian as spoken around Udine. Over time, this language also took on the nature of a lingua franca. It forms the basis for standardization of a supradialectal general Friulian language which has had an official written form since 1987. This standard has been officially recognized by the provincial administration in Udine although written forms based on traditional notation continue to be used to a certain extent. The continued existence of the language is safeguarded by descriptive-normative grammars, dictionaries, technical reference books and encyclopaedias, as well as by topographical reform and the introduction of the language in schools and partly in public life (Ferrer 1994: 20).

Thanks to a special statute passed by the region of Friuli-Venezia-Giulia in 1963, Friuli has special rights to protect its language (Ferrer 1994: 20). Friulian is also recognized by law by the Italian state (Haarmann 2001: 137). Monthly, semi-annual and annual journals are published, especially on cultural, linguistic and historical topics. Friulian is used in a whole series of radio programmes, usually on private stations, and less frequently in television programmes (http://www.uniud.it/cip/d_min_tutelate_scheda.htm - 2.12.2003).⁴

2.2.6. German linguistic enclaves along the Alpine chain

Along the Alpine chain in northern Italy, German vernaculars of various origins are spoken in several linguistic enclaves (cf. Wurzer 1998). They are thought of as linguistic colonies (it. *oasi, enclavi*) which owe

“their present distribution to colonization in the Middle Ages by Walser Germans in the west and Bavarian and Tyrolean settlement in the east. The original form of these vernaculars has changed radically over the centuries. Romance loan words from these vernaculars usually bear marks of the times in which they were borrowed” (Kuen 1976: 73).

There may be no coherent linguistic policies in these areas but a strong consciousness of the language (*conscienza linguistica*) and loyalty to one's mother tongue (*lealtà linguistica*) play a decisive role in preventing these Germanic varieties from dying out (Ferrer 1994: 17). Optimistic estimates put the number of German speakers at 10,000 (http://www.uniud.it/cip/d_min_tutelate_scheda.htm - 2.12.2003).

Bavarian linguistic enclaves exist in the provinces of Belluno, Trentino, Udine, Verona and Vicenza. The German dialect is most strongly represented in linguistic enclaves in Trentino which were ceded to Italy at the end of the First World War. In the Cimbrian enclaves in the provinces of Verona and Vicenza, the German dialects are not very common. Like all linguistic enclaves in northern Italy, the linguistic communities in Lusern and the Ferina valley are multilingual (Rowley 1996: 265-283). There are also German linguistic enclaves in the Aosta valley on the Italian-French-Swiss border. Earliest evidence of the use of German in this area is to be found in feudal contracts dating from the first half of the 13th century. As mentioned above, the Aosta valley is in the Franco-provençal dialect area and is officially bilingual (Italian and French). In 1948 it was accorded special status in a statute of autonomy (Zürner 1996: 289).

2.2.6.1.

Cimbrian, a unique form of German, is spoken in the “thirteen communities” (*Dreizehn Gemeinden/Tredici Comuni Veronsei*) to the southeast of Trento (Verona), in the “seven communities” (*Sieben Gemeinden/Sette Comuni Vicentini*) of Asiago and in Lusern/Luserna (Trentino) (cf. Bellinello 1996: 67-85, Stefan 2000):

“Several experts are of the opinion that the German language area once used to cover the entire foothills of the Alps from the Adige and Brenta rivers to the Piave area. As time passed, the area shrank, resulting in the Cimbrian linguistic enclaves – remnants of the old German language area, as it were” (Prader 2001).

Ancestors of the German-speaking inhabitants of the *Sieben Gemeinden/Sette Comuni* linguistic enclave (Asiago) were originally from the Ötztal valley and Aussenfern in western Tyrol and neighbouring Upper Bavaria (the Loisachtal valley). Cimbrian is the oldest living form of German, a vernacular with western Tyrolean characteristics and Alemannic influences. It is classified as New High German but has many phonetic and morphological archaisms from Middle and early New High German (1170-1500) with a strong Romance influence. The Cimbrian language and literature reached their heyday in the 17th century (Cimbrian Catechism).

Cimbrian as spoken in the *Dreizehn Gemeinden/Tredici Comuni* (Verona) is an old western Tyrolean dialect. Italian is used as the standard language and a rural Venetian vernacular as the colloquial form. Recently literature in dialect has become quite popular. The German vernacular in Lusern/Luserna (Trento Cimbrian) is closely related to the Cimbrian spoken in the seven communities but with a strong German-Tyrolean influence. Alongside Italian, German also plays quite a significant role as a written language. The German Cimbrian vernaculars in Lafraun/Lavarone in the province of Trentino died out over the last few decades. According to the latest figures, there are around 200 active speakers of Cimbrian in the entire area of the thirteen communities plus around 300 people who still understand it (Prader 2001). There are some attempts of codifying the Cimbrian dialect and the vernacular of the German-speaking population

living in the Fersina valley (cf. Tyroller 1999).

2.2.6.2.

The Fersina valley/Valle del Fersina is in eastern Upper Italy, to the north of Pergine (Persen) in the province of Trentino. The ancestors of the German-speaking population living in this area came from various valleys in North and South Tyrol. "The German dialect spoken in the Ferina valley is an old Tyrolean mixed vernacular which is characterized by independent developments in the sound system and vocabulary" and is not Cimbrian (Hornung 1994; <http://members.aon.at/festungsschuetzen/spra.html> - 3.12.2003). In the Ferina valley and in Lusern "alongside the German dialect which has two subdialects in Lusern and several subdialects in every village in the Ferina valley, everybody speaks the Trentino dialect as their second language. However, the children all grow up speaking German dialect". In the schools of the Ferina valley and Lusern, German is taught as an elective subject. In the Ferina valley, the German dialect is influenced by Italian (Rowley 1996: 274 and 283).

2.2.6.3.

The linguistic enclave of Pladen/Sappada is in the eastern Upper Italian province of Belluno at the far end of the Piave valley, to the south of the Carnic Alps. The people in this German-speaking linguistic enclave originally came from the East Tyrolean Pustertal valley in the vicinity of Sillian-Heimfeld (Villgraten, Tilliach, Kartitsch, Abfaltersbach, Maria Luggau). The German East Pustatal vernacular is the language normally spoken at home for around 1,000 out of the 1,500 inhabitants although many of them also speak Friulian. Italian is the standard language used in official public situations, in church and at school (Hornung 1994, Marcato 2001, <http://members.aon.at/festungsschuetzen/spra.html> - 3.12.2003).

2.2.6.4.

The German linguistic enclave of Tsare/Sauris lies in the eastern Upper Italian province of Udine where Italian is used as the standard language and Friulian as the colloquial language alongside the German vernacular. It is an old East Tyrolean dialect which is very similar to the one spoken in Pladen but with stronger Romance influences (cf. Hornung 1994; <http://members.aon.at/festungsschuetzen/spra.html> - 3.12.2003).

2.2.6.5.

The German linguistic enclave of Tischelwang/Timau (some 600 inhabitants) lies in the But valley, on a tributary of the Tagliamento on the southern slopes of the Plöcken pass (Carnic Alps) in the province of Udine. The village has belonged to Italy since 1866. The German spoken in Timau is very different from the German standard language. It is a German-Carinthian dialect spoken at home which its speakers are at great pains to preserve (<http://members.aon.at/festungsschuetzen/spra.html> - 3.12.2003, cf. Hornung 1994, Francescato 1994).

2.2.7. German and Slovene vernaculars in the Canale valley/Val Canale

From a European perspective and in linguistic terms, the Canale valley is in a unique situation. Its Romance, Slavonic and Germanic population live together side by side (cf. Šumi 1995). Until the end of the First World War most of the valley was part of Carinthia with the eastern part (Weissenfels) belonging to Carniola/Kranj. In a similar way to southern Carinthia, the population spoke both languages, German and Slovene, and was surrounded by a Romance linguistic and cultural context.

In 1923 the Canale valley became part of the province of Udine. During the Second World War, a large proportion of the German-speaking population moved away. Families from Friuli and Venice moved in. Today around 80% of the population are of Italian and Friulian descent while the remaining 20% are old-established Carinthians speaking German and Slovene (cf. Šumi/Venossi 1993, Šumi 1996 and 2003, Enciklopedija 1990, <http://members.aon.at/festungsschuetzen/spra.html> - 3.12.2003).

2.2.8. Slovene in Italy

Slavonic settlement of northern Italy on the border to present-day Slovenia first started in the early 7th century. Since that time a Slovene minority with restricted linguistic rights has lived in the area. Slovene is most strongly anchored in the province of Trieste and slightly less so in the province of Gorizia (Minderheiten 1990: 72-84). In addition, Slovene is found in all of the provinces in the region of Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, with the exception of Pordenone. The ancestors of the present-day Slovenes arrived in the Canale valley in the 7th century (cf. 2.2.7). Resian is an archaic Slovene dialect in the Resia valley. Alongside Friulian, Slovene is the most important speech community in the Natisone valleys (bordering on present-day Slovenia) in the region of Friuli-Venezia-Giulia (cf. Minderheiten 1990: 85-91; Bellinello 1996: 19-35, Enciklopedija 1997; Dapit 1995).

2.2.8.1. The Slovene dialect in the Resia valley/Val Resia

The Resia valley is an isolated valley high up in the western Julian Alps at the foot of Monte Canin in Italy. It was settled by Slovene-speaking Resians who came from the Canale valley in the 7th century. Since then, they have lived there as an autochthonous Slovene minority, characterized by particularly archaic features in both their language and culture (cf. Enciklopedija 1996, Duličenko 1998). In the 11th century, the valley became part of Friuli and – together with Friuli – it came under Venetian rule from 1420 to 1797. As a result the Resia valley became a border region which came to be known as Venetian Slovenia. In 1797 the Resia valley, Friuli and Veneto passed to Austria and finally became part of the kingdom of Italy in 1866. The border between Venetian Slovenia and the Resia and Soča/Isonzo valleys follows the same line as the 1866 border of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy when Friuli came under Italian rule after a plebiscite in accordance with the Treaty of Vienna. As Resian was cut off from linguistic developments in its Slovene motherland over hundreds of years, the valley retained archaic linguistic and cultural features which have been preserved to the modern day.

In 1974 90% of the population in the Resia valley spoke Slovene.⁵ Today the valley is trilingual: Resian, Friuli and Italian (cf. Micelli 1995/96). Inspired by work on Ladin and Friulian, efforts are also being made here to codify this micro language in the process of which the special features of all four vernaculars found in the valley are being taken into account (cf. Steenwijk 1993, 1994, 1999; Duličenko 1993, Maurer-Lausegger 1999). Centuries of very close contact with the Romance language area have inevitably led to innovations in the linguistic system of Resian which come directly from this language. These phenomena, however, are not only valid for Romance and Slavonic languages. Instead, it is highly likely that they represent linguistic universals (Benacchio 2000: 890; cf. Steenwijk 1996).

2.2.8.2. Slovene in the province of Udine

The Slovene linguistic enclaves in the province of Udine are disadvantaged in comparison: here Slovene instruction is only provided privately by cultural associations, such as the Institute for Slovene Education, "Zavod za slovensko izobraževanje" based in San Pietro al Natisone. The two most important centres for Slovene organizations are Cividale and San Pietro al Natisone. (See Enciklopedija 1987: 227-235 for more information.)

2.2.8.3. Slovene in the provinces of Trieste and Gorizia

In the provinces of Trieste and Gorizia, theoretically at least, bilingualism is found everywhere with minority protection mainly covering the areas of education and teaching. Since 1961 there have been state schools where Slovene is the language of instruction. Slovene is also strongly anchored in the region in other aspects of daily life. There is a Slovene Culture and Business Association and a Council of Slovene Organizations, for example and a daily newspaper appears in Slovene in Trieste along with several monthly and weekly magazines. Radio and TV programmes are also broadcast in Slovene (cf. Enciklopedija 1989; http://www.uniud.it/cip/d_min_tutelate_scheda.htm - 2.12.2003).

2.2.8.4. Minority protection

"Slovene is recognized as a minority language by law by the Italian state. In the provinces of Trieste and Gorizia, protection of the minority is linked to international treaties (the last of which, that of Osimo, was ratified in 1977), which regulated relations between Italy and, firstly, Yugoslavia, then Slovenia, in the ethnic-linguistic area. The Slovene communities in the Province of Udine do not enjoy any such special protection, aside from that laid down in regional laws, as they were not embroiled in the incidents immediately after the Second World War and in the dispute over Trieste's sovereignty." (http://www.uniud.it/cip/d_min_tutelate_scheda.htm - 2.12.2003)

Due to historical events and differing social developments, the sociolinguistic situation varies from region to region. On the fringes of the Romance language area, a local

diasystem evolved in line with general trends for linguistic developments in Western Europe. Slovene-speakers are under constant pressure to assimilate and Slovene acts as a subordinate to the language of the Italian majority (Pogorelec 1990: 188f.; Zidej 1998).

3. CONCLUSION

The multinational linguistic area presented in this paper that makes up the Alpine-Adriatic region is undoubtedly one of the most interesting and varied cultural areas in Europe. Thanks to the symbiosis of Slavonic, Germanic and Romance culture over many centuries and an eventful historical past, a complex interweavement of languages, varieties, dialects and vernaculars has developed over time in these areas and regions which affect each other in a great variety of ways and to varying extents. The sociolinguistic situation of these vernaculars and dialects is complex, revealing regional and local peculiarities which manifest themselves in very many different ways.

Some of the vernaculars in the Alpine-Adriatic region have already disappeared while others are in danger of dying out. At present more attention is being paid to preserving dialects, vernaculars and cultural features of individual areas and regions everywhere. Whether the vernaculars and varieties of individual linguistic enclaves and regions can be preserved depends on political, socioeconomic, ethnopsychological and legal factors, amongst others, in the individual ethnic-linguistic regions of northern Italy. In a multicultural Europe of regions, the wide variety of languages in the Alpine-Adriatic area enriches our daily lives.

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- <http://members.aon.at/festungsschuetzen/spra.html> - 3.12.2003

NOTES

- ¹ The present topic was presented in a much shorter and somewhat different form as one of a series of lectures held on 24 September 2001 at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies in Tokyo. One minority language from the Romance, Germanic and Slavonic language groups has been chosen to be dealt with in more detail although only a few specific characteristics can be mentioned for each. All quotations from German and Slovene were translated by the author of this paper. A second article on the topic of ethnic minorities in the Alpine-Adriatic region will appear in a forthcoming issue: "The diversity of languages in the Alpine-Adriatic region II: Linguistic minorities and enclaves in Austria and Slovenia".
- ² See Kaltenbusch (1989) for more details on the standardization of Ladin.
- ³ An overview of Ladin language and literature is given in Belardi (1996). Alongside a brief survey of its history, it also includes detailed information on the socio-political and linguistic situation in multilingual Upper Italy.
- ⁴ Francescato (1991) provides insights into the problems of *friulano occidentale*. Various linguistic varieties of Friulian as well as linguistic and historical questions are dealt with in his work which cannot be covered here for reasons of space.
- ⁵ A general overview of Resian, the population in the Resia valley and their written culture is given in Enciklopedija (1996: 191-196).