

**Building Blocks of Cultural Identity: Language's Place in
Cultural Sustainability**

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Abstract

This capstone thesis was written to explore the collaboration between linguistics and cultural identity in the field of cultural sustainability. Moving to Italy while studying cultural sustainability at Goucher College, I was interested and excited to learn about Europe's diverse linguistic background and the preservation/revitalization efforts that are already being initiated in various parts of the European Union. Inspired by studies of language ideologies, sociolinguistics, cultural identity, and language preservation, my thesis takes previous linguistic and cultural research and language revitalization case studies to come up with a compilation of best practices for cultural sustainability through linguistic sustainability/revitalization. For the analysis part of my thesis, I did my own field research focusing on a dialect in northern Italy known as Venetian. The best practices for language sustainability suggested in this thesis are related to what was observed and learned while studying sociolinguistic and cultural aspects of this speech community.

Introduction

The process of learning a culture is “enculturation,” and language is a critical part of the enculturative process. Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary defines culture as, “the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations”. This idea of “transmitting knowledge” or, communication of knowledge, is pertinent in the sustainability of culture. Alexander Duranti, professor of Anthropology at the University of California Los Angeles, states, “To believe that culture is communication also means that a people’s theory of the world must be communicated in order to be lived.”¹ In order to pass on our way of life (“our theory of the world”) to successive generations we must communicate our ideals, beliefs, and knowledge to those around us. These ideals, beliefs, and knowledge regarding our world are seen through different cultural lenses also discussed as our various perspectives. Developed from our personal backgrounds, we develop our own unique “lens” that frames and interprets our worldview. From our individual viewpoint, we, as humans, are raised to see certain aspects of life in different ways. Language, as the mode of communication we are taught and teach in, affect the way we see the information around us and how we will pass this information along. When looking at language as a means of communication it becomes not only part of our cultural identity as tied to tradition,

¹ Duranti, Alessandro,. 2003. Language as Culture in U.S. Anthropology: Three Paradigms. *CURR ANTHROPOL Current Anthropology* 44 (3): 323-47.

but also part of the way we, as humans, develop relationships with those around us. Our differences in culture are affected by our differences in language. Whether language ties us to one community or excludes us from that community, it (language) becomes a part of who we are and how we identify ourselves and the communities we are a part of.

In the field of cultural sustainability, we strive to create ways to maintain cultural diversities in an increasingly connected world. Connecting topics of cultural identity and language, this thesis discusses the relationship between these two entities as directly related in the quest for a culture's sustainability. Determining aspects of importance in relation to specific communities requires a community's input regarding what they feel identifies their culture. As I research previous academic discussions and conduct field research, I want to highlight the important part language plays in personal and regional identity and its ability to help sustain or revitalize a culture through linguistic revitalization and sustainability.

As the world becomes more connected, dominant languages begin to replace minority languages. The loss of culturally unique languages leads to the diminishment of part of that culture's identity. "When you lose a language, you lose a culture, intellectual wealth, a work of art. It's like dropping a bomb on a museum, the Louvre".² Additionally, future generations within that culture will have diluted knowledge of their culture's customs and traditions, origins, and the way of life associated with that specific language. "...When small communities abandon their

² David Harrison, quoting linguist Ken Hale, in his book, *When Languages Die*. Harrison, K. David. *When languages die: the Extinction of the World's Languages and the Erosion of Human Knowledge*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

languages and switch to English or Spanish [dominant languages], there is also massive disruption of the transfer of traditional knowledge across generations”.³ In some instances, small communities have been able to retain their native tongue while still being able to learn the dominant language. This has allowed them to broaden potential economic opportunities while maintaining their cultural identity. In other examples, the dominant, non-traditional, language in the area becomes the only language spoken, leading to the native tongue becoming threatened, endangered, or extinct. By focusing on the relationship between acquisition of a minority language and its continued use we can better understand its probability and/or reasons for becoming threatened or endangered. With a deeper understanding of this relationship, we can better engage in revitalization initiatives.

This capstone thesis will address the problem of language endangerment and its detrimental effects on cultural identity and contribution to cultural loss as well as suggest ways in which language revitalization can be carried out in order to mitigate minority language vulnerability. Throughout the paper, I will examine the relationship between language and culture through analysis of previous research done by others as well as research I have conducted myself in the past year. As part of my own research, a case study involving the Venetian dialect of northern Italy will be discussed. This language, described as “vulnerable” in UNESCO’s “List of the

³ Harrison, K. D., 2007. *When Languages Die : The Extinction of the World's Languages and the Erosion of Human Knowledge*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press. Kindle edition.

World's Languages in Danger"⁴, is still spoken regularly among many members of the community (estimated 2,000,000 people speak Venetian⁵ in the Veneto region of the approximately 4,860,000 total population⁶), unlike a lot of regional dialects in Italy which are becoming more endangered as standard Italian becomes the dominant tongue. With there being more speakers of Venetian relative to other Italian dialects, I decided to conduct interviews and field observation to determine the qualities from this region that allow for successful vitality of their language and what hinders them from greater sustainability/achieving a non-vulnerable language status. With this information, I will suggest ways to maintain or revitalize an endangered language to strengthen regional cultural identity, leading to more productive cultural sustainability.

When a culture loses its language, or begins to speak predominantly in a dominant language, they lose a part of their identity. In the field of cultural sustainability it is important to discover the various aspects of a community, and what that community feels best represents their culture. By identifying what traits are important to a community, such as language, we are able to find ways to enable that community to continue, or revive, the traditions they feel contain parts of their cultural and personal identity. As globalization becomes a reality for many cultures,

⁴ Unesco Publishing,. Unesco publications. in Unesco Pub. [database online]. [Paris], 199u.

⁵Estimated of number of speakers. It is also estimated that another 2,000,000 people speak Venetian outside of the Veneto region (around the world). (<http://www.unesco.org/culture/languages-atlas/>)

⁶ 2011 Post-census demographic information, (http://demo.istat.it/index_e.html)

the sustainability of their language is directly related to their sustainability as cultures. The Basque culture in parts of Spain and France highlight an example of identity tied to language. There are members of this cultural group that associate the learning of the Basque language with the formation of their identity. In this case, the question is brought up as to whether or not someone acquiring Basque as a second language will truly be “Basque” as they did not learn to see the world through the Basque language (Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis or linguistic relativity theory) but merely learned the language, and thus way of life, after already developing an identity”.⁷

Linguistic sustainability has become an issue of concern around the world. The United Nation’s Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) discusses how the process of language loss is “neither inevitable nor irreversible”⁸. Internationally, they assist in the development of community support for production, education, and dissemination of tools and services related to language revitalization.⁹ Other organizations, from all levels, local, regional, national, etc., also lobby for minority linguistic sustainability. For example, the European Union supports a number of minority language projects¹⁰ following their initiative of respecting diversity as stated in Article 22 of the European Charter of Fundamental

⁷ Urla, Jacqueline. 1988. Ethnic Protest and Social Planning: A Look at Basque Language Revival. *Cultural Anthropology* 3 (4): 379-94.

⁸ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/endangered-languages/>

⁹ (<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/endangered-languages/>)

¹⁰ The following website lists regional and minority language initiatives supported by the EU (http://ec.europa.eu/languages/languages-of-europe/rml-products_en.htm).

Rights, “The Union respects cultural, religious and linguistic diversity.”¹¹ Cultural sustainability efforts in relation to language and identity also show up in smaller factions, such as a council in one of Italy’s northern regions, the Regional Council of the Veneto. Their regional law of 13 April 2007, number 8, dealing with preservation, enhancement and promotion of cultural heritage describes sustainability directly related to their regional language/dialect (Venetian) and what is expected for its protection in article 2 as follows:

1. Le specifiche parlate storicamente utilizzate nel territorio veneto e nei luoghi in cui esse sono state mantenute da comunità che hanno conservato in modo rilevante la medesima matrice costituiscono il veneto o lingua veneta.

(The historically specific ways of speaking in the Veneto region and the places in which it has been sustained by communities who have retained significantly the same model form the Venetian culture or the Venetian language.)

2. La Regione del Veneto considera la tutela, la valorizzazione e la promozione del patrimonio linguistico e culturale veneto una questione centrale per lo sviluppo dell'autonomia regionale. (The Veneto Region considers the protection, enhancement and promotion of Venetian linguistic and cultural heritage a central issue for the development of regional autonomy.)¹²

¹¹ http://ec.europa.eu/languages/languages-of-europe/regional-and-minority-languages_en.htm

¹² <http://www.consiglio Veneto.it/crvportal/leggi/2007/07lr0008.html#Heading10>

Specifically focusing on the language/dialect of the Veneto region in Northern Italy, known in English as “Venetian”, I have explored different aspects surrounding the continuing multilingualism of the region’s communities. Italy, as well as other countries in the world, has seen a decline in the local languages that were spoken before mass communication was readily accessible. Each region (Italy is separated into twenty different regions) had their own unique language derived from Latin. When Italy united, the official language was chosen from what was being spoken in Tuscany, partially due to the popular literature that came from the region, such as Dante. The different “languages” of the regions are now typically referred to as the Italian “dialects” though these “dialects” did not generate from the Italian language, but instead developed into languages of their own from Latin as the Roman Empire fell.¹³

I have found even in my own life experiences that language is a part of us, a part of our culture, and, a part of our identity. Rita Mae Brown said, “Language is the road map of a culture. It tells you where its people come from and where they are going.”¹⁴ I moved to Italy almost a full year ago and language has impacted the way I

¹³ Ackroyd, Peter,. 2009. *Venice: Pure City*. New York: Nan A. Talese/Doubleday.

¹⁴ Samovar, Larry A., Porter, Richard E., McDaniel, Edwin R., Roy, Carolyn S., 2013. *Communication Between Cultures*. Boston, MA: Cengage Learning. Chapter 8.

have seen and learned about my new surroundings. I recognized and related to familiar words and foods; my great-grandparents, having immigrated to the USA, left bits and pieces of our Italian heritage to trickle down the generations. Other than food, words or phrases and hand gestures are what I most remember and identify with. The ways my grandparents and relatives communicate and interact define a part of who they are and these characteristics relate to their culture. Our culture continues to show us where we came from and hold some of our most honored traditions close to heart. Moving to Italy, the Veneto region to be exact, I was excited to learn the language I grew up curious about. I quickly learned that what I believed to be Italian was actually a dialect even more specific to the region(s) in which my family had lived (Sicily and Abruzzo). The Veneto, along with its language, customs, and traditions are much different than what my family associates with “being Italian”. Distinguished by the frequent use of dialect, Venetians continue to speak it regularly, whereas many other areas of Italy have transformed their language learning toward solely standard Italian, diminishing the roots of their individual regional identities. What is it that keeps the Venetians tied to their culture? Is it their language? Would the Venetians be as strong, culturally, without their language continuation? And what will happen to this strong cultural base if the language loses its continuity as the children are increasingly becoming homogenized to the national standard of speaking Italian?

To achieve the outcome of determining successful strategies to language sustainability/revitalization I have analyzed my fieldwork on the Venetian dialect,

specifically in the area of Vicenza. This initiative was largely research based, compiling data collected in the field and other research related to endangered languages. Focusing on threatened/endangered languages, I compiled data regarding language acquisition, the communities' efforts pertaining to native tongue acquisition/current language revitalization efforts, the language's ties to policies, official versus unofficial use, and the surrounding education programs that help, or could possibly lend help to these threatened languages. Research specific to programs such as UNESCO's endangered language education initiatives and to the encouragement of language diversity in the European Union and local policies were also addressed in relation to the Venetian dialect. Field research was conducted in the forms of observation and documented interviews. Observation was used to determine how and when the non-dominant language is used rather than the dominant language (for example, Venetian or Standard Italian) and aspects of code switching. Interviews were documented to gain perspective into the communities' feelings regarding their local dialect (Venetian) versus standard Italian. Regarding program development, I will focus on programs related to developing tools for communities to use in hopes to regenerate pride and discourse in their native tongues.

Literature Review

There are many books and scholarly articles written on endangered languages, sociolinguistics, and the relationship between language and cultural

identity. A few of the most influential resources for my research included David Harrison's When Languages Die and The Last Speakers. His books detail, through case studies, endangered languages from around the world. With the languages he observes he notes information they hold as far as specific cultural knowledge for their community as well as the world. "Much-if not most-of what humankind knows about the natural world lies completely outside of science textbooks, libraries and databases, existing only in unwritten languages in people's memories."¹⁵ Another aspect of language endangerment that is mentioned revolves around the added value of comparative resources for further language study. For example, the loss of one language hinders our scientific ability to compare and contrast its place in language development.

Books on sociolinguistics, such as The Routledge Companion to Sociolinguistics edited by Carmen Llamas, Louise Mullany, and Peter Stockwell, and Language Ideologies: Practice and Theories edited by Bambi B. Schieffelin, Kathryn A. Woolard, and Paul V. Kroskrity, helped develop my perspectives on the relationship of language to culture.

Routledge Companion to Sociolinguistics gave a general overview of basic views on language use, context, situational variations, and speech communities. Discovering the speech community I was working with, the Venetian-speaking members of certain communities in the Veneto region of Italy, was pertinent to my

¹⁵ Harrison, K. D. 2007. *When Languages Die: The Extinction of the World's Languages and the Erosion of Human Knowledge*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press. Kindle edition. Location 264 of 5656.

research. To begin research and evaluation of my research, defining “speech communities” came to be important:

The speech community is not defined by any marked agreement in the use of language elements, so much as by participation in a set of shared norms; these norms may be observed in overt types of evaluative behavior, and by the uniformity of abstract patterns of variation which are invariant in respect to particular levels of usage.¹⁶

Along with defining speech communities, the resources on language ideologies were important in determining language’s relationship with culture and identity. In Kathryn Woolard’s introduction to the book, Language Ideologies, she discusses, defining language ideologies as important to anthropological study “not simply because of its ethnographic variability but because it is a mediating link between social forms and forms of talk”. This statement relates well to the sociolinguistic aspect of context and situational varieties. Woolard continues, “ideologies of language are not about language alone. Rather, they envision and enact ties of language to identity, to aesthetics, to morality, and to epistemology.”¹⁷

¹⁶ Schieffelin, Bambi B., Woolard, Kathryn Ann., Kroskrity, Paul V., 1998. *Language Ideologies : Practice and Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press. Kindle edition. Location 85 of 276.

¹⁷ Schieffelin, Bambi B., Woolard, Kathryn Ann., Kroskrity, Paul V., 1998. *Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press. Kindle Edition.

In reference to academic theory, I want to also mention linguistic anthropology. Similar in context to sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology dedicates its study to the understanding of: (i) performance, (ii) indexicality, and (iii) participation.¹⁸ I particularly was interested in the performance and participation aspects of language and how Alessandro Duranti describes communication and culture as, “To believe that culture is communication also means that a people’s theory of the world must be communicated in order to be lived.”¹⁹

There are very few resources specifically on the Venetian language in English. Although there are some books on language that mention Venetian and its history, they do not go into great detail describing the language any further than its origins and current locational usage. The one book that gave the most comprehensive discussion of the Venetian dialect was The Dialects of Italy (Romance Linguistics) edited by Martin Maiden and Mair Parry. This comprehensive text looks into the history of Italy’s dialects and discusses dialects from each region individually as well distinctive features of grammar in each region. Of note, this text was translated into English from Italian as the editors saw a lack of English resources on this topic (Italy’s dialects). In Italian, there are a wider variety of

¹⁸ Duranti, Alessandro,. *Linguistic Anthropology*. Cambridge University Press [database online]. New York, 1997.

¹⁹ Duranti, Alessandro, *Linguistic Anthropology*. Cambridge University Press [database online]. New York, 1997, 33.

resources, but still not a great number of resources. A dictionary and grammar guide were consulted as they were available online. Also used as an online resource were government websites such as the Regional Council of Veneto's website (<http://www.regione.veneto.it/web/guest>), a site dedicated to the Venetian language and affiliated with the regional website, Lingua Veneta (http://www.linguaveneta.it/en_index.asp), and the Venetian Site (<http://www.sitoveneto.org/index.html>), a website dedicated to the language, culture and history of the Venetian language. These resources have been important in describing the current state of the Venetian dialect. Another important online resource was the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization website. Defining issues such as intangible cultural heritage around the world, UNESCO helps relate this concept to languages and their vulnerability in the face of globalization.

Cultural Sustainability through Sustaining Minority Languages

Language is a part of a person's identity. The language(s) we speak define who we are. They are linked to the knowledge we hold and the way we perceive the world around us. Similar to the Sapir/Whorf Hypothesis where a person's language affects the way they perceive the world around them, it has been said that those who are multilingual may even hold different perceptions depending on the

language they are using²⁰. As the world becomes more interconnected through globalization, dominant languages are continuing to take precedence over native languages. Whether due to economic influences, government policy, or simply the popularization of more dominant languages, lesser-used languages (on the global level) are becoming threatened, endangered and even extinct all over the world. We, as humans, are born into a world that communicates all aspects of life. Our parents teach us our first language and we continue to learn ways of communication throughout our lives depending on our personal situations and need to communicate with a variety of communities. The controversial concept of linguistic relativism highlights the importance of understanding the language of the communities in which we are involved. The language a person communicates in is not only part of their cultural identity, but also has helped shape their perspective of the world. The concept of linguistic relativism incorporates the idea that we see the world through the language(s) we speak, or through our native language:

The hypothesis [of linguistic relativity] was that languages provide their native speakers with a set of hard-to-question dispositions (e.g., to hear only certain sound distinctions, to favor certain classifications, to make certain metaphorical extensions) that have an impact on their interpretation of reality, and, consequently, on their behavior.²¹

²⁰ (<http://translation-blog.trustedtranslations.com/can-language-affect-the-way-we-think-2012-04-18.html>)

²¹ Duranti, Alessandro, 2003. Language as Culture in U.S. Anthropology: Three Paradigms. *CURR ANTHROPOL Current Anthropology* 44 (3): 323-47.

The idea that words and grammatical structure can shape our thinking patterns leads us to a map of translating culture. As the field of cultural sustainability develops, those working in the field see language as part of the community and as a means to understanding a perspective. To better understand a perspective, according to linguistic relativity, we must first understand the building blocks of that perspective, the language, and the window to our thought processes. By understanding a culture at its foundation, we can better communicate the needs and wants of a community and develop sustainability tools based on their cultural perspective and ideas.

Another aspect of language and culture is described in researching linguistic ideologies. Within linguistic ideologies there are many aspects of how culture and social value are associated with the language of the community. Topics include, but are not limited to, language value and/or devaluation, social inclusion and exclusion based on speech community, cultural identities tied to language and power structures, and popular media's relation to language choice. As many non-dominant languages see a shift in the use of their native tongue, the study of language ideologies can assist in the analysis of how the language is being perceived on a social or political level and help determine steps to improving its social status and keeping a steady speaker base:

Language ideologies are, among many other things, about the construction and legitimation of power, the production of social relations of sameness and

difference, and the creation of cultural stereotypes about types of speakers and social groups.²²

This quote in particular relates to many case studies surrounding threatened or endangered languages. In many cases (as seen even in my own research with Venetian) a language loses social prominence due to perception of a great number of people. As a language begins to be seen as less useful, the more prominent language may be used increasingly in professional settings and eventually in informal or social settings for ease of communication. This language shift can begin in many different places from home situations to school or other public settings:

Hidden behind the apparent content of any lesson are deeper messages about how the world operates, about what kind of knowledge is socially valued, and about who may speak and in what manner- a cultural worldview that is quietly conveyed through classroom language.²³

As is reiterated in this quote, a language's place in society can be disseminated and interpreted in situations that are not necessarily directly based around language use. As language is used as a form of communication, passing along cultural standards and norms, the language used in various situations can begin to set a standard for language

²² Schieffelin, Bambi B., Woolard, Kathryn Ann., Kroskrity, Paul V., 1998. *Language Ideologies: Practice and theory*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 164

²³ Schieffelin, Bambi B., Woolard, Kathryn Ann., Kroskrity, Paul V., 1998. *Language Ideologies : Practice and Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 149

use. This does not always have to have a negative effect on linguistic sustainability. Slang words and/or idioms, for example, begin to gain popularity through different situational use and can go from an unknown aspect of a language to a popular form of communication. Studying and understanding how a language (or other aspects of culture) gain positive perceptions in society greatly helps the creation of sustainability tools.

People often ask, “What is Cultural Sustainability”? The answers to this question can vary greatly depending on your specific cultural interest. Some of the core values, practices, and skills that define the field of Cultural Sustainability would have to be recognition, interpretation, and encouragement of community pride and identity. With this recognition would be the development of tools to aid community members in sustaining what they feel is important to them as well as communicating their wants and needs to outside entities. Overall, those who are involved in this community of sustaining culture emit empathy to those around them. The question we need to ask and address is how do we determine these values? How does language fit into cultural sustainability as one of these values? Effective communication with the communities we are working with to ensure we understand their perspectives without being too clouded by our own interests or our own cultural lenses/perceptions is pertinent. The language itself of a person interested in this field involves perspectives and ideas stemming from all over the world and branching from past experiences, wanting and yearning for more experience and perspective to incorporate vast varieties of people, communities and culture of all different sorts. However, how do we translate, within a community or

to the world, the cultures we are working with? The different theories surrounding language ideologies and linguistic relativism come up in understanding the base at which we will start the study of the communities we will work with and continue with communication to outside communities as well as to the academic world. Understanding the ideas or thoughts presented by all parties in the discussion, whether one member, or many, is pertinent to the core development of concepts and tools in which we will use to sustain a language, helping to sustain a culture. From this first step of understanding a cultural identity and background, we can move onto where the language fits in the community and how the community sees their language's place of importance in identity.

When working to sustain a culture and their language, a significant, if not the most important, aspect of research begins with collaboration. Working inside a community, the field of cultural sustainability differs from other cultural fields in that the goal is not to preserve or sustain what outsiders feel is important, but to help sustain that which the community values. If a community were still speaking their non-dominant language, research and development can be done to continue its vitality thus continuing at least one aspect of their culture. From this starting point, perceptions and traditions can be maintained through written documentation and oral traditions (such as poetry and story-telling). Ideally, there would be development of pathways of sustainability with tools and ideas to communities that are being overcome by dominant populations. With collaborating with communities, and creation of these community-developed tools, we open the arena for sustainability to come from within. This organic process in itself will aid in

sustainability, as it should not be an outside force encouraging sustainable practices but a community-generated desire. To achieve this structure, we need to create and initiate creation through a community's language and not our own. For example, let us imagine a mathematician trying to tell an artist how to geometrically shape their artwork. Although there may be instances in which the outcome is wonderful, it most likely would lead to confusion and possibly conflict between the two involved in creation. The conflict would not stem from difference of opinion necessarily, but more a difference of words and viewpoint. Overall the artist is most likely using some form of geometry in creation, and the mathematician is most likely using creativity. To mediate the differing ways of speaking, the different points of view, the field of cultural sustainability comes in. If cultural sustainability can find a background in language studies (whether language ideologies, sociolinguistics or linguistic relativity), to help determine and inform regarding context and community identification, it will aid in mediation between the researcher and the community, and the research and the rest of the world, if it is to be shared. So by first understanding the community's language, we can better understand their worldviews and intentions creating a better way to recontextualize their ideas into tools designed specifically for that community. "Researchers can accordingly ground their analysis in the participants' interpretive efforts" (Bauman and Briggs 70). By opening up this communication and better understanding these "interpretive efforts" we stand a better chance of sustaining culture through a community's own direction and self-inspiration.

Understanding a point of view cannot be solely done so through preliminary research and study. Before a cultural worker engages with a community, research is generally taken into account. From community populations and demographic information, having an understanding of a community's history and cultural background is also necessary. As a part of studying the cultural background we should engage with the particular speech community in their language. Whether the language family is wholly distinct (Romance, Germanic, Slavic, etc.), a different dialect, or just a different accent, the importance is not necessarily on translating specifically the words that are spoken but the ideas that are said or the songs that are sung. Bauman and Briggs said:

The reason [form, function, and meaning of verbal art cannot be understood apart from context] is precisely that verbal art forms are so susceptible to treatment as self-contained, bounded objects separable from their social and cultural contexts of production and reception²⁴.

This emphasizes the need to look beyond direct translations and stereotypical language interpretation and learn how to interpret what surrounds the sounds and interactions that surround human communication. How does the community use language to communicate? Questions such as what follows are examples of how language should be addressed in cultural sustainability research: Where does language interaction occur? Is language seen, heard, felt? To what extent does

²⁴ Bauman, Richard., Briggs, Charles L., 1990. Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19 : 59-88.

language include/exclude those in surrounding communities? By addressing these and similar sociolinguistic concepts we learn much about the social structure of the community and how interactions are initiated and continued. By acknowledging already existing interactions, we are able to better understand where the community's priorities lie and thus build on these and construct suitable tools for sustaining what is most important to the community in question.

The importance of understanding language in developing tools of cultural sustainability relates to how the community will see and use the tools as well as the initiatives of collaboration within the community. First understanding a perspective will give a person working in the field the ability to discuss and interpret the needs of the community better. Working with communities and understanding what is important to them needs cultural workers to not just decipher what is being said directly, but also for the cultural worker to understand their position to the community:

Decentering and recontextualization have powerful implications for the conduct of social life. Investigating how this process takes place and how individuals gain rights to particular modes of transforming speech can therefore illuminate issues of central concern to anthropologists, linguists, folklorists, and literary scholars²⁵.

²⁵ Bauman, Richard., Briggs, Charles L., 1990. Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19 : 59-88.

Being an outsider or an insider can drastically change what is being said or shared. When a speaker is presented with an audience, everything from their voice to their body language can change depending on the audience. Therefore, "Performers extend such assessments to include predictions about how the communicative competence, personal histories, and social identities of their interlocutors will shape the reception of what is said".²⁶ This change in performance should be noted as differing due to the audience. Understanding our place (as an audience) is pertinent, and its effects on our research are undeniable. However, this position, whether etic or emic, cannot allow our different perspectives to turn our work into maybes and what-ifs. There are many disciplines that encourage non-passive writing and to step into that authoritative tone would not hinder us. We can be sure in that our research and discussion our minds are open to opinion, but what we study, our methodology, and our outcomes/tools/results (as long as they are observed and documented) can show the reality and the persuasion of our ideas. Collaboration with a community and a background in cultural sustainability should produce community-derived tools for sustainability. These tools, whether for preservation, education, performance and sharing, or even just recognition and added pride should be something that the community itself wants and after creation are accessible and pertinent in a way that the community will use them without outside assistance. The next step, however, is for those cultural workers to share the tools of sustainability

²⁶ Bauman, Richard., Briggs, Charles L., 1990. Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19 : 59-88.

and their outcomes. Whether positive or negative, these ideas and outcomes could help another community thrive or spark relevant ideas. This is the point in which the cultural workers cannot shy away from their own research and documentation. Here is where the field of cultural sustainability can grow academically. By sharing methodology and research for prior projects, other cultural workers and even outsiders may be able to make a difference in their cultural communities. This attempt at sharing the process must be thought of as interpreting cultural work for the masses. Depending on the audience, whether public, academic or other, the presenters must understand the language they should use in order to best exhibit the process which has just occurred. Understanding how to communicate to different audiences will overall allow the idea of cultural sustainability to grow and become more pertinent in many areas of life.

Hymes mentions folklore as taking a place in the “nature of language”, letting his audience think of what would happen (culturally) if there were a lack of language or communication between people²⁷. Folklore is created using communication and transition of ideas. If a community did not have the means to communicate, what would happen to their culture? How would a community’s culture change if their means of communication changed? Cultural sustainability moves beyond the “nature of language” and community communication and into the communication of multiple cultures. As the world becomes economically dependent

²⁷ Hymes, Dell,. 1975. Folklore's Nature and the Sun's Myth. *The Journal of American Folklore* 88 (350): 345-69.

on communities outside of their own, the ability to manage their cultural resources becomes important even when faced with outside, possibly dominant, cultures. An example of language planning is mentioned in regards to the Basque language, another language labeled as “vulnerable” on UNESCO’s scale of language endangerment. “Basque society, in order to survive, did not so much have to be sheltered from contact as it had to be properly managed.”²⁸ This idea of language planning/management has helped Basque change and develop with the times as its community continues to be in a world where Basque is not a dominant language. The ability to communicate and collaborate between each other in an ever-homogenizing world to ensure uniqueness continues. Or beyond continuation, sustainability is the fight for stability and peace. At the beginning of peace is understanding, we do not have to agree with the different cultures around us, but we have to accept our differences and find ways to communicate these to the outside world. In this communication we can better understand our neighbors, and attempt to educate others on the benefits of accepting our differences for a world that not only accepts but celebrates our unique human differences. The growing field of Cultural Sustainability can create a path for an academically unique cultural study. Gaining knowledge from the inclusion of many different scientific and humanities based fields of study, cultural sustainability can grow into a deep field that, unlike some culturally based fields, truly incorporates the community as a

²⁸ Urla, Jacqueline. 1988. Ethnic Protest and Social Planning: A Look at Basque Language Revival. *Cultural Anthropology* 3 (4): 379-94.

partner and not just a subject. Linguistics, or more specifically sociolinguistics, and the study of language/communication are the most fundamental in determining basis of cultural ideals. In the field of cultural sustainability we should all become familiar with sociolinguistics. This background would allow us to communicate with the cultures we intend to work with, as well as expand our communication throughout the world of academia and surrounding structures that will allow our culture and that of what we want to sustain to thrive. It would allow our vision and our future to be interpreted and contextualized by many, thus sustaining the field of cultural sustainability.

Linguistic Sustainability through Cultural Policy

Often, steps are taken to teach or preserve aspects of a certain culture to ensure they will not be lost entirely. These steps can begin with cultural policy. Cultural policy can be defined as, “the values and principles, which guide any social entity in cultural affairs”.²⁹ One aspect of culture, being described at length in this thesis, is language. In an effort to sustain a specific language, communities will create policies aimed at preserving or rehabilitating their language. These policies may be made nationally or locally as long as it involves a community. A community can range in size. James Brow points out that a community can range from an erotic relationship to a religious brotherhood, or a military corps to a family as long as

²⁹ What is Cultural Policy? [nd] Webster's World of Cultural Policy: An online resource. Center for the Study of Cultural Policy from the Perspective of Cultural Democracy. <http://www.wxcd.org/policy/policy.html#DEF>

there is a sense of belonging.³⁰ Therefore the policies that deal with language can develop in any size community; their commonality or belonging factor merely being the speech community they represent. The linguistic policy may include educating younger members of the community in the language, how a community prints material or uses broadcasting, the construction of new words in that language or language purification (purification entailing purging borrowed words or structures in order to keep true to its origin). I want to ask what is the most effective way to preserve or sustain a language. Should purification be regarded as strengthening a language or in reality does it aid in its deterioration by pushing those speaking the language to frustration over backwards change? Being a part of what is defined as intangible culture, language is constantly morphing and evolving. Richard Kurin discusses intangible culture in regards to cultural heritage and its inevitability to change and evolve by stating, "ICH [intangible cultural heritage] is not something fixed in form that remains constant forever, safeguarded when only found in its pure essential form".³¹ With this information should communities strive to keep a language "pure"? Or should keeping a language spoken and recognized the most effective way to ensure its virility?

The linguistic policies I will discuss here are related to a language's ability to sustain or rejuvenate itself. In, *Appeal for Cultural Equity*, an article by Alan Lomax, there is a discussion about culture and how it relates to humans. He indicates that as

³⁰ Brow, James. 1990. Notes on Community, Hegemony, and the Uses of the Past. *Anthropological Quarterly*. 63(1):1-6.

³¹ Kurin, Richard. 2007. Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage: Key Factors in Implementing the 2003 Convention. *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*. V. 2, 2007, 12.

humans our tie with nature is more indirect than other animals because our tie is mediated by culture versus being purely biological. This relates to the possibility of culture becoming extinct due to “over-centralized electronic communication systems...imposing a few standardized, mass-produced, and cheaper cultures everywhere” (Lomax: 1). He then leads this article down a conversation of cultural equity descriptions and the need to commit ourselves to this theory or else risk the demise of unique cultural attributes around the world.³² Lomax takes his ideas and relates them to music and our society’s inherent way of consuming this mass media instead of generating their own music. I want to look at language as a kind of music in the cultural sense. Especially when a language is spoken by a minority group or has heavy influences from a more dominant language, it becomes in danger of being consumed by the stronger language and losing its distinctiveness, just as Lomax discusses our “unique cultural identities” and the threat mass media makes to them.

Languages become less spoken and in need of reform or revitalization due to a variety of reasons. Commonly, the community has had political influences that change the way they speak and their national language due to another culture’s domination. In this instance, when language reform is being discussed, it is typically associated with nationalism. This results from the community’s association with their language as their culture and the dominating language as that of another, outside culture. Iranian scholars have long discussed the growing number of Arab words in their lexicon and its detrimental effects to their pure, Persian language.

³² Lomax, Alan. [1977] 2003 "Appeal for Cultural Equity".
 Lomax, Alan. "Appeal for Cultural Equity." *Program of the Festival of American Folklife* (1985): 1-8. Web. 19 Feb. 2012.

They see their language as related to ancient Persia being able to defy thousands of years being conquered and conquering but overall staying strong. With this nationalistic view intertwined with their language, their policies include a lean toward linguistic purism, attempting to purge the Arabic loanwords (and some European loanwords) from their vocabulary in order to ensure or restore greater strength to their heritage. However, Iranians never was forbidden to speak Persian and always taught Persian in schools, their language has just become infused with many other words mostly due to religious teachings and scientific advancement being from other countries and using their coined terminology.

In another part of the world, Ireland went through a period where their language was deteriorating, as it was not taught in schools according to Britain's ruling. This not only made it difficult for the language to continue, but gave it a negative stigma allowing the English language to take precedence in many areas. As Ireland became an independent state and began to revive the language it saw a struggle to essentially rebuild their native tongue. The economic value to knowing English allowed people to find work in England or the United States whereas Irish was now limited to smaller communities only in Ireland. To rehabilitate the Irish language, a diverse array of ideas came about. One, in particular, began in communities as they came up with ways to surpass the mainstream majority language of English. The idea was to bind together to form cohesive groups that would bring back their native tongue to a state of sustainability. This idea found great success in Irish schools as it began teaching Irish at a young age helping develop this minority language as a first language to children once again.

There are times, in a country, where the language has become the minority language but revitalization efforts have begun. In Ireland, for example, once independence was gained communities wanted to revert to Irish speaking and teaching in schools. With the standardization of Irish came roadblocks in the rehabilitation of the language. With no clear “stronger” dialect, it became hard to know where to begin the standardization. At this time, English had been the dominant language not just in their country but also in surrounding countries, making English speakers more desirable for the workforce and more common. Irish also carried a negative stigma as many had been raised to speak English and forget their Irish-speaking roots. Still, small communities still spoke their native tongue and admired the idea of reinstituting Irish in the country. A small community in Belfast took matters into their own hands. To combat the threat of losing their language, a group of families built their homes together, created a school, and were able to teach and live speaking their native Irish. The children raised in this, what is called Shaw’s community, spoke Irish at home, learned it in school and it was their first language. The community and school have grown, becoming recognized by Ireland’s department of education in 1985.³³ With the school in the Shaw’s community, the language is spoken, and taught, but does evolve. The community has noticed that even though Irish is most of the children’s first language, the syntax has evolved and some English grammar structures have developed in the children’s speech. Is it better, in this aspect, to “bend rather than break”? Nancy Dorian discusses the difficult task of determining what constitutes “healthy change” in a language during

³³ Maguire, Gabrielle (1991) *Our Own Language, An Irish Initiative*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

its revitalization in “Purism vs. Compromise in Language Revitalization and Language Revival”.³⁴ When another language is dominant, it is important to hold strict to the structure of the non-dominant language to ensure its progress. However, without allowing it to evolve the threat of it becoming an unusable language looms. The children of the Shaw’s school are speaking Irish. They have grown in number and become a successful school where not so long ago they would have been taught in English and a school in that area would have had that many more English, not Irish, speakers. This success for the language shows the possibilities of revitalization but warns of its potential adaptation. Will the children adapt the grammatical structures and soon the vocabulary to return to the dominant language of English? Should the small adaptations be seen as a threat or inevitable evolution? In this case the education of a younger generation using Irish as a first language helps rehabilitate the language. They are taught the correct grammar in school, most likely adapting syntax outside of the classroom setting as many languages do using slang. This adaptation shows, however, that the children are continuing to speak in Irish. They are not changing to English as they grow older and learn the language but just adapting their first language to better suit current needs. In this aspect they are allowing Irish to modernize and become useful to them in multiple instances. Allowing a language to adapt and modernize will help in its sustainability, as it will continue to be spoken in everyday instances and passed down generations. If a language is structured too strictly it may be seen as an overly

³⁴ Purism vs. Compromise in Language Revitalization and Language Revival
 Nancy C. Dorian
 Language in Society , Vol. 23, No. 4 (Dec., 1994), pp. 479-494

formal tongue not to be used in conversation, thus becoming in danger of dying out.

In the big picture, when the language is spoken, even in its adaptive form, it is still being used and thus is still part of an identity and a culture.

In order to aid in language sustainability or rejuvenation what policies are most effective? Where should you draw the line of revitalization and sustainability in linguistic policy? As we see in the examples, Ireland is in the position of revitalization where Iran is using purification to sustain their national language. It should be noted that Iran has been creating and revising these puristic language movements for hundreds of years and although they do continue to have a lot of Arabic loan words, they do still speak a distinctly Persian language. On that note, a language's evolution should not be seen as a bad thing. Even in revitalization efforts it is not necessary to adhere to strict grammatical structures and shun any borrowed words. To do so would frustrate and discourage new speakers of the language and inhibit the globalization in the economic sense that is inevitably happening. If for example, you were growing up in Iran, learning and speaking Persian but there lacked the proper way to discuss a scientific topic unless using Arabic loan words what would you do? It would inhibit your development and economic opportunities to not understand this majority language in your region. In that instance, it would seem better to speak Arabic than Persian for your own advancement. The same goes for the children of the Shaw's school. In their community, their learning of Irish at a young age and as a first language instills it in their minds but as they grow and learn they will be exposed to English and most likely find work opportunities in a place that needs the linguistic skills of an English

speaker. Their exposure and adaptability to Irish at a young age, however, will allow them to continue to use Irish in their community and family life.

To purify a language would require that the language and purification efforts are so vast as to ensure the community would be able to live, grow, and work within it. A daunting task, seeing as the world has become interdependent on a large scale. Therefore the “healthy change” in a language should be in direct relation to a community’s independent sustainability. We can take another community into consideration, the Amish, a group that speaks Pennsylvanian German. It is impermissible to not speak their language in their community (though it is allowed with outsiders). This allows their language to flourish and continue in their community. They, however, can stay within their community for most of their daily activity, work, and education. Those that have to interact outside the community would have to stray from their linguistic norms for communication. This seemingly strict rule is enabled by their independence. If a good number of their community were required to interact a majority of the time with non-Pennsylvanian German speakers everyday their language would continue to evolve and intertwine with English threatening its existence. Their rules of communication within the community ensure that their language will continue to be a priority to their identity. So as to shape policy regarding language, the community has to be involved and active in what they identify with. This linguistic identification can then modernize and develop, but strict policies of education will allow the language to be ensured social media and mass media production may modernize to become more effective and efficient with the developing world and foreign interaction.

Linguistic policy in regards to language revitalization and purification should be considered in regards to a community's size and interdependence. A language thrives when used and in order for it to take priority over a dominant language it must also be practical for everyday use. In order for a language to successfully thrive, the policies put into place must be accepted and owned by the particular community. The policies must also include printed material that will be available to the community and local schools. These schools must teach the language and require its academic presence beginning from the start of schooling. A dominant language has the ability to be learned later in life and still allow for economic success by its learner, while the non-dominant language must be taught and encouraged through media and schools at all ages. Iran's purification efforts of Persian have kept the nationalistic ties to their language strong allowing it to survive though a dominant language is present, and Irish is being revitalized and rehabilitated in communities after being a language only spoken at home and by small intimate communities. Overall, language will have a natural progression and evolution but should be considered its own and "healthy" as long as it is still being considered separate from the dominant language. Linguistic policies should adhere to mass media and educational systems to ensure the sustainability of a language and its presence in day-to-day life.

As Nancy Dorian stated, “Purity need not be a requirement for persistence, and compromise need not be the death knell, for smaller languages any more than for larger ones.”³⁵

What is Language Endangerment? Introduction to Venetian as a Vulnerable Language

Italy holds one of the most diverse populations of dialect languages in Europe.³⁶ These dialects were, at one time, the only languages spoken in the region. These dialects developed from Latin after the Roman Empire fell. In the sixteenth century the Tuscan dialect was named as the standard for the Italian language.³⁷ Currently Venetian is not recognized nationally as an official language of Italy. It is recognized in the Regional Council of the Veneto and since 1999 the council has tried to gain recognition for the language within National Italian Policy.³⁸ In a regional law posted on January 14, 2003 a concrete step towards recognition was achieved when it was written:

³⁵ Purism vs. Compromise in Language Revitalization and Language Revival
Nancy C. Dorian
Language in Society, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Dec., 1994), pp. 479-494

³⁶ Austin, Peter. 2008. *One Thousand Languages : Living, Endangered, and Lost*.
Berkeley: University of California Press, 40.

³⁷ Ackroyd, Peter. 2009. *Venice : Pure City*. New York: Nan A. Talese/Doubleday, 224.

³⁸ http://www.linguaveneta.it/en_normative.asp

The regional Council promotes and favors initiatives of research, spread, and enhancement of the cultural and linguistic heritage on which Venetian identity is based by means of the organization of conferences, workshops, exhibitions, researches, publications, and events aimed at introducing the cultural and linguistic complexity in which the expression and marks of Venetian identity can be recognized.³⁹

With the availability of mass media today the popularity of dialects, such as Venetian, without official status, are becoming more difficult to maintain. Currently Venetian, also called Venetan, is described as vulnerable in UNESCO's "List of the World's Languages in Danger". This defines the language use as "most children speak the language, but it may be restricted to certain domains (e.g., home)".⁴⁰ This is the first step on the path to endangerment. UNESCO's criterion to determine the status of an endangered language follows:

- (1) Is the language being passed on to the next generation?
- (2) What is its absolute number of speakers?
- (3) What proportion of the indigenous community still speaks the language?
- (4) Is the use of the language diminishing as it loses domains of use (e.g., In print or in the workplace/home)?
- (5) How does the language respond to new domains (e.g., mass media and the Internet)?

³⁹ http://www.linguaveneta.it/en_normative.asp

⁴⁰ (<http://www.unesco.org/culture/languages-atlas/index.php>)

- (6) What materials are available for language education and literacy?
- (7) What are governmental and institutional attitudes and policies, including official status and use of the language?
- (8) What are community attitudes towards the language?
- (9) What amount and quality of documentation of the language is available?"⁴¹

Language fits into the category of intangible cultural heritage. Oral tradition is language based and communication in general relies on languages whether oral, written, or preformed. The different languages around the world hold unique characteristics of communal communication and use for social practices. As a part of intangible cultural heritage we want to find ways to aid in the preservation and vitality of this indispensable dimension of culture. "For intangible [cultural heritage] to be kept alive, it must remain relevant to a culture and be regularly practiced and learned within communities and between generations." (What is Intangible Cultural Heritage UNESCO p.7)⁴². To keep the practice of this language going what must be done? What would be lost if the language was not continually practiced?

⁴¹ Austin, Peter., 2008. *One Thousand Languages : Living, Endangered, and Lost*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

⁴² UNESCO Culture Sector - Intangible Heritage - 2003 Convention : . (n.d.). *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*. Retrieved June 6, 2013, from <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00002>

When languages cease to be learned by the youth, the language stops evolving and stops being relevant in a person's life. People on a regular basis use the Venetian dialect throughout the region. The region, however, tends to see the use of dialect significantly increase in the elderly population compared to the youth. In a survey done in 2001 on the dialect use in the Veneto and Friuli 78% of people used dialect with their family, 82% used dialect with their friends, and 60% used dialect at work. However, when you add age to the statistics of instances of dialect use, speakers younger than 65 years of age use this language much less frequently than those who are older. Within a family setting, youth use dialect 50% of the time while those over 65 use it 86% of the time. At work, the divide is even greater as youth use dialect 29% of the time while elderly use dialect 71% of the time

(<http://www.linguaveneta.it/>). I had observed that my closest neighbors (all over 65) spoke in dialect. Seeing these statistics made it more evident that not only did they use dialect more, but also there was a generation gap in the dialects use all together. It might not just a matter of those living in the city or countryside, but also the statistics with regard to age add the aspect of generational acquisition to my quest for observation and would assist in the development of questions to ask as I searched for further information.

Methodology/Research Question

The Veneto region of Italy lies in the Northeast of the country. Each region of Italy has its own unique language (dialetti Italiani). These dialects were their languages prior to the standardization of Italian, which used the Tuscan Dialect (evolving from the more popular Italian literature of the time).⁴³ As standard Italian becomes stronger and more widely used the dialects become threatened or even endangered. With the loss of languages, we also risk the loss of cultural information tied to that particular language. I am interested in the state of the Venetian dialect not solely to address the dialects of Northern Italy, but also to add to the set of tools used to sustain threatened and endangered languages all over the world.

In regards to the non-dominant languages in the Veneto region of Italy (specifically the Venetian dialect), I have researched how is it acquired, when is it used, in what medium(s) is it used, and how does it relate to the Venetian culture?

My methodology included:

⁴³ See: Ackroyd, Peter,. 2009. *Venice : Pure city*. New York: Nan A. Talese/Doubleday. And Costantino, Mario., Gambella, Lawrence.,. 1996. *The Italian Way : Aspects of Behavior, Attitudes, and Customs of the Italians*. Lincolnwood, Ill., USA: Passport Books.

Observation

- During the formative stage of documentation I relied primarily on observation. Sitting in cafes and seeing/hearing what was going on around me gave me a more thorough understanding of what the community was like and how I would best be able to relate my research to represent the current community.

Audio recording/interview

- I interviewed members of the community ranging in age from 18-50s. In this group of people, I followed in depth a family of 3; parents in their 30s with a son of four years old. It was pertinent that I record these interviews to refer back to as each time I reviewed an interview I noticed different aspects of it. The recordings will also be of relevance in future research.
- Recorded interviews also allowed for transcription, leading to better translations and the ability to recall certain discussions.
- Due to the quality of my audio recording device, the product is not of archival quality. It can be used for reference, and certain clips may be used in future presentation.

Photographic Documentation

- To document visually, I used digital photographs taken by a Canon Rebel, Sony CyberShot, and the iPod touch. The goal with these photographs was to aid my field report visually

while accumulating documentation material that will be useful for current and future research.

Written field notes

- Handwriting notes was my main tool for observational recording. As I observed, photographed, and recorded, I also had a notebook handy to write down what I saw, heard, and felt to help jog my memory while compiling multiple media sources. Later in the day/week, I typed my field notes for reference.

The scope of this field research project was limited due to the size and area that I was able to observe in describing the Veneto Region in my time frame of a year. The documentation focused on 6 people and their responses/conversations. These people are all living in the Veneto region, specifically that of Vicenza municipality (See Fig. 1 for locality clarification). The people who were interviewed were found through the assistance of an Italian Professor and acquaintances from the local area. Their age ranges are from 18 years old to mid 50s. There were also many informal discussion/interviews with people such as the local shop owners or patrons of the local café. From the Vicenza area, I plan to expand to surrounding areas in the Veneto Region to document and discuss my questions and observations. This will be discussed further in the “Recommendations for Further Research Section”.



Figure 1: image by: <http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Veneto>

My limitations were concentrated around the language barrier. With an intermediate grasp of standard Italian, communicating in standard Italian to the interviewees was a challenge, but with the help of recordings and notes it was possible to achieve translations and understanding. Discussion in the Venetian dialect, at this time, was impossible. Further research plans in dialect are discussed in the section “recommendations for future research”. Another limitation is my role as an outsider. As an American, I had a fully outsider perspective going into these interviews. Although some advantages can come from being separate from the subject matter and having an outsider perspective, this also limits my ability to interpret as a community member who is a native speaker.

Case Study:

To better determine aspects of the Venetian language and its current state of use I wanted to get a native speaker's perspective. I conducted a number of formal interviews throughout the Vicenza province. Figure 1, above, shows where the Veneto region lies in Italy. The Vicenza province is in the middle of the northern border, its capital city being Vicenza. Figure 2, below, shows some the different towns around the Vicenza province and can be referenced when locating where the interviews took place.



Figure 2 (<http://en.comuni-italiani.it/024/mappa.html>)

Discussing dialect with those local to the region I have learned about a few different perspectives on the language. I interviewed two high school students, and a young family, among multiple other informal conversations. An interview was also conducted with two persons who moved to this region from other areas of Italy (Milan and Naples) for comparison. Dialect is used, but in different contexts. Marco and Francesca, the young couple from the Dueville high school, discussed the use of dialect in the home with their grandparents. They both acquired the language growing up, hearing it at home with family. When asked about speaking dialect Francesca says, “[I speak dialect] at home, yes, above all with my family and my grandparents”. When asked if she speaks dialect among friends her response is, “A few, but not all ...and maybe a few words, but not completely. There are phrases (we say) or maybe the mode of speaking is in dialect.” She continues to explain that speaking in dialect with her friends is not as common because not everyone speaks the same version of the dialect. The accents vary from zone to zone (the different parts of the regions) and also while some friends were not raised with a dialect, some are even from other regions and may even know a dialect from a different region, but not Venetian. I asked Francesca about domains of dialect use. She says she might use the dialect at the local markets but would never use it at the mall. The mall described by her as a “more formal” setting. She thinks about dialect use and clarifies that it is “instead maybe used in certain points, in the market or town square where there are people you are closer with such as your neighbors. You know they can speak at least a little in dialect and can be confident that they will respond in dialect.”

Marco reiterates the acquisition of dialect being from the home atmosphere saying, “I speak mostly with my grandparents [dialect] and also with my mother and father.” “We do not learn the dialect in school, we learn outside, with our grandparents only.”

When asked about children today, and if they speak dialect, Marco and Francesca slightly disagree. Francesca mentions her brother who is five years younger than she (13 years old). She says he tried to speak dialect around the house. Marco says that few children today speak dialect. Francesca is quick to point out that some children still speak and use dialect so Marco corrects himself saying, “it varies”. Francesca finishes the interview mentioning that she remembers a song her grandmother used to sing her walking down the street in dialect.

Overall, the two high school students, both eighteen years old, agree that the dialect is not spoken at school, and though mostly used between them and their grandparents at home there is the potential to use it when at the local markets. Typically, however, they would go shopping at the mall or downtown Vicenza where the people are not necessarily from this region, thus not necessarily speaking the same dialect. It is just more practical to speak in standard Italian in many situations, according to these two, even though they do speak dialect and look at future generations as continuing this tradition.

To compare these two to another northern Italian city’s perspective, I talked briefly with Federica Pennisi. She is from Milan, a city approximately 200 kilometers away from Vicenza in another region. She does not speak in dialect. Milan’s dialect would be called Milanese. When asked why, she concludes there was no reason to

learn a dialect. Federica is in her mid-twenties and discusses how she grew up speaking standard Italian and how this was the normal way for those in her city. She also mentions that since moving to the Veneto region she cannot understand their dialect as it varies so drastically from the conversations she grew up speaking. She also mentions the Veneto as seeming “closed off” and “private” or “old-fashioned”. Possibly this is one reason the region has continued to speak in dialect. As the people are stereotyped as being more closed off than regions south of here, it may also keep their community closer and more likely to carry on traditions.

Before taking a look at the family of three that were interviewed, I talked to one more immigrant to the area, Anna Terraccino-Leahy. Anna is in her mid-fifties. She is a very proud Napolitana (from Naples) and moved to Vicenza five years ago, but has not learned the local dialect. There are “very few chances to learn the dialect here” she says. With work and family commitments there is not enough time or opportunity to be exposed to the local speech community. Anna does know Napolitana, the dialect from where she is from. Here in Vicenza, Anna only speaks dialect in the home. This is due to the difference in her dialect versus the local dialect. However, she says, at home she speaks dialect frequently with friends in and out of the house. Anna is an Italian teacher on the American Base in Vicenza as well as a writer for a newspaper (among other commitments). She is fascinated with language and all that it holds. She states an important concept surrounding dialect(s) in general in Italy:

“Unfortunately there is this idea, has been in the last 40-50 years that teaching dialect or talking dialect to the kids, the kids, will not... it's not good

for them, when they go to school they will be looked down upon, but it's really not true. Because we all did that, it was ok, we spoke both. It's just like bi-lingual because there are two different ways, so unfortunately now, many dialects, beautiful languages, we are losing them, to the point that now in Sardinia some universities, they teach Sardinian. And, it's a shame because it is something that you are supposed to learn as your first language, and then it becomes like Latin, it is a dead language...[regarding the beginning of Sardinian programs in Sardinian Universities] now they realize how important it is, but they realize sometimes when it's too late when people really don't...you can learn but it's like learning a second language, it's not yours." Anna's interview was one of the first I had done, and this last quote inspired me to go deeper regarding language acquisition. The concept of a language being "yours" relates so closely to a person's identity that I had not thought about it before. In looking at Basque revitalization, the topic was brought up and discussed pertaining to a person not really "being Basque" if they did not learn the language as their first.⁴⁴ Throughout my observations and discussions, I see people, like Anna, who associate the dialect, or language, with the way they see themselves and their very core values. Then there are others who see the language as part of their heritage, their tradition and something that cannot be given up without losing a part of their history.

⁴⁴ Urla, Jacqueline. 1988. Ethnic Protest and Social Planning: A Look at Basque Language Revival. *Cultural Anthropology* 3 (4): 379-94.



Figure 3 Photo provided by Elisabetta Pedron: Elisabetta, their son, and Alessandro

Also

interviewed were two young parents and their child, Elisabetta, Alessandro, and their four-year old son (figure 3). They are in their early-mid thirties and both learned dialect when they

were very young. They learned dialect and Italian at the same time at home.

Although they did speak dialect sometimes in school, they learned dialect in the home and spoke it frequently with their family. When asked if they speak dialect more or less today than they did when they were younger, Alessandro first answers “now” while Elisabetta thinks about the situation and feels it may be the same amount now as when she was younger. They both agree that they do speak dialect frequently at their work. They run a fruit and vegetable stand at the local market

shown below in figure 4.



Figure 4: Montegalda Market Stand (Run by Elisabetta and Alessandro) in the Veneto Region.

that travels from Montegalda, to Torri Di Quarte Solo and Camisano. They speak dialect at home, with family, but in contrast with the interviews conducted with others, they also speak dialect regularly to the people they encounter during their work. The general age of their clientele ranges to the older generation, tending to be in their 50's or older. Sometimes they see younger family members at the market, but rarely do these younger people engage in conversation in dialect without first being prompted by an older relative. The downside to this kind of interaction (children not initiating conversation in dialect) is that there is less vitality to the language. Children speaking the language shows vitality, and initiation of conversation in Venetian shows the status and use of the language being

heightened in the younger, growing generation. If the language is being reserved for an older generation, years down the road the language may not be spoken as much, if at all. Alessandro stresses that he and his wife encourage their young son to speak in dialect when at home. He does learn Italian in school and has the opportunity to learn and become familiar with both. They say that he always speaks dialect at home and they are proud of this as they hope one day there will be more encouragement for this linguistic tradition. They believe that it is a problem for the dialect that the children do not always learn it. They mention the parents of the children being the impediment. "If they parents do not know dialect, the children will not learn it". "It is important for us to learn dialect because it is the language of our ancestors," Alessandro states. Potentially, this generation of families is more conscious of the sustainability issues revolving around language and regional identity. Elisabetta and Alessandro are not as sure, they comment again that if children are learning the language, it is highly dependent on both parents being from the region and actively speaking the dialect. This, it is noted, is decreasingly common as people are immigrating from outside areas as well as marrying and beginning families with parents from different regions or countries.

"Dialects give people a sense of identity and an attachment to culture and traditions about which they can feel proud".⁴⁵ Placing language on such a well-deserved pedestal highlights the position it takes in society. The media can

⁴⁵ Costantino, Mario., Gambella, Lawrence.,. 1996. *The Italian Way : Aspects of Behavior, Attitudes, and Customs of the Italians*. Lincolnwood, Ill., USA: Passport Books, 58.

encourage or discourage the use of a language. With the increase of globalization, dominant languages begin to be encouraged and spoken more often. In Italy, texts are written in standard Italian. Standard Italian is also what most media is presented in, and what is taught in schools. Throughout Europe, as the Roman Empire fell, the Latin language developed and morphed in to the different Romance Languages. What we do not as often hear about is how the languages we know today became what they are. Taking Italian, for example, the language began as many different regional dialects, different languages. As in previous centuries, communication and travel were not as easily accessible as they are today and the dialects developed into many distinctive languages based on their region of origin. During the Renaissance, the famous poet/writer Dante gave great popularity to the Tuscan dialect. The Tuscan dialect morphed into what is now known as standard Italian after the unification of Italy in 1870. Therefore the Italian dialects developed into Italian, they are not a development from Italian. With the integration of a standard language, and the ability to become more mobile, the dialects of Italy became less a norm and more of an exception. As means of communication open, standard Italian has become the language many use to communicate. Unable to understand dialects from different regions, many rely on standard Italian to carry on conversation with greater audience flexibility.

From my own observation, it is common to hear Venetian spoken in the Veneto Region, when listening to the older generation speak. In the Vicenza province, according to those interviewed, it is not taught in schools and use of the dialect during school hours is discouraged. The dialect is often learned through the

older generation passing it onto their children, grandchildren, etc. Due to this local trend of schools discouraging dialect use (at least in the Vicenza province from what my interviewees have experienced), children are only taught the local dialect by their parents or grandparents at home and only if their parents/grandparents know the local dialect and make the effort to speak it in the home and expose the children to this language.

In most instances, this can discourage the use of a native tongue. When discouraged, the language can eventually become threatened, endangered, and even extinct. As a language disappears the culture based around that language is also threatened. Within a language there is culturally sensitive information that also can disappear. Specialized information or a way of life, may not be able to be translated into the dominant language of the area therefore becoming threatened as the language does. In Venetian, the two high school students who were interviewed were happy to share vulgar idioms they had learned in dialect but which did not translate well into Italian, or English for that matter. Within the Italian dialects lies a link to their history and the spirit of their diverse regional cultures. If we can better understand the different situational uses of dialect and its acquisition we can better understand how to keep dialects alive, therefore allowing the diverse regional cultures to live on. Currently, the Veneto dialect is mostly used in intimate situations. Whether that be with family members, friends, or previous acquaintances the dialect is used in conversation with others that you know will be able to understand and respond in dialect. It is not typically used among strangers (as Italian is more commonly a mutually intelligible language), giving the

conversations in dialect a more personal/friendly aspect. By restricting dialect to certain situations we are limiting the domains in which it can be used and seen as relevant. If the use of dialect were to spread into varying situational uses, we would likely be able to see the language as thriving due to a heightened status. However, with some children growing up not speaking the dialect we risk this language being seen as something of an older generation and thus becoming less used in the future due to its limited conversational potential. If the community were to elevate the status of the dialect then children could broaden the domains in which it was used (for example with friends and new acquaintances) it would be more likely to thrive.

In the Vicenza area, from those I have interviewed and talked with, dialect is not learned in schools. It is acquired through listening and speaking with family/relatives in familial situations. It is also discouraged in schools, as it is not considered a “proper” way to speak. Acquisition based on conversation means that the language is learned and used in a viable way, being a means of conversation to those closest to you. It is reliant, however, on the situations a person is exposed to and how often they are able to communicate within the speech community group. Typically in the different zones people will be able to understand each other, they may just accent words differently or have slight variations. Venetian differs drastically from the different dialects of other regions. If a person from another region were to attempt conversation with a Venetian speaking person (and not use standard Italian) they would more than likely not be able to communicate.

Walking down a populated street in the Veneto region of Italy you can hear the storeowners conversing with their customers in standard Italian. Brief and

formal in conversation, the people are most likely interacting on a business level. However, if you are to wander down an alleyway and hear two old men discussing their day, you most likely will hear them speaking in dialect. Although categorized as threatened, the Venetian dialect is still heard in the streets of Italy and seen in select print media as well. Other initiatives to keep the language alive include a website where a story is written and told in Venetian or an app including Venetian, among other dialects, and translating standard Italian phrases to dialect phrases. The Regional Council of the Veneto has also established an interactive website dedicated to the history and education of the dialect. Resources like these help the vitality of the language. Within the printed/online material, orthography has been developed. Although it may vary a little from person to person, this development of a consistent structure allows for education and acquisition for those who are not exposed to dialect growing up at home. Children are learning the dialect but depending on their social situation may not continue to use it as they grow older and some are not exposed to it at all due to parents who may not speak or support the use of the language. This situation differs greatly from the older generation who consistently learned and used/uses the Venetian dialect to converse in all domains of social interaction.

The dialect in the Vicenza province of the Veneto continues to be taught and spoken at home, in some families. At schools, from infant daycares through university-level education, dialect is said to be looked down upon, by those I have talked to, if not prohibited from being spoken, as it is not seen as the standard. This

occurs through school policy aimed at adhering to a national standard (standard Italian being seen as the proper way to speak. However, at an Italian-American conference held this past March 2013, a presenter also studying the Venetian dialect described the implementation of Venetian as a school subject in younger-aged classes. The presenter, Sabina Perrino, mentioned Venetian being introduced through storybooks about the Venetian history and culture.⁴⁶ This was noticed in the Padua area, the province east of Vicenza and one that contains a large university, University of Padua. If implementation such as this were to increase, it would be a step towards revitalization and sustainability for Venetian.

Introducing Venetian into the school system would be a huge step for the language as not all children are exposed to it in the home setting. As mentioned earlier, a child's parents may not both be from the region, thus limiting communication in Venetian. As some children are being raised by parents who may not speak dialect, or do not speak the same dialect, children do not have the opportunity to share with each other the needed practice to competently learn and practice dialect. However, in some cases, such as the Padron family mentioned earlier, the parents are adamant about teaching their children dialect. Elisabetta and Alessandro, though from different towns, thus projecting different accents, proudly state their dialect as of this region. They say their son always speaks dialect at home, although he also knows standard Italian and is learning English in school. Their son

⁴⁶ The Conference discussed was the *Lingue Migranti: Global Languages of Italy and the Diaspora*. It was held by the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute in New York City from April 26-27, 2013. Sabina Perrino presented her paper titled, "Performing Eloquence in Public: the Interplay of Veneto Dialect and Standard Italian".

is 4 years old. This is the kind of language vitality that seems to be more prevalent here in the Veneto region than in other instances. For a comparison example, Federica, who is from Milan declares that she never learned the local dialect (of the Lombard Region) and never felt that she was missing anything. Coming from a highly populated area of Italy with many who may not be originally from this region, the lack of dialect is not surprising. On moving to the Veneto Region she emphasizes the way the people of the Veneto region seem “closed off” to other parts of Italy. “Here they are more conservative and about their own business rather than socializing with outsiders” she adds. In this sense, the people in this region are more likely to continue their customs (such as language) of the region, seeing it as part of their cultural identity, giving it an advantage over other dialects which may be exposed to even greater dominant language exposure. Outside of personal and family-based policy, regionally the Veneto supports their local heritage through official policy. Although not an official language of Italy, Article 4 of the Statute of the Veneto Region states a goal as, “...to ensure the preservation and the recovery of the environmental, historical and artistic heritage of Veneto and Venice.”⁴⁷ Though there is a written policy to protect and sustain Venetian, it is not necessarily effectively or consistently implemented throughout the region. Through language planning and management the Veneto statute for the preservation of their language could be achieved.

To assist in language sustainability, social interactions, such as at the local market, and media seem to be the most valuable way of preserving its popularity.

⁴⁷(<http://www.consiglioveneto.it/crvportal/pageContainer.jsp?n=90&p=95&c=6&e=125&t=0&>).

Among children and the youth, more exposure to the language will lend to more confidence speaking and using it. With schools discouraging the use of dialect, and economic opportunities opening up in the dominant standard language, the social interactions and family support of dialect will be the lifeline of this lesser-used tongue. With orthography created, and print materials available, the language is not likely to become extinct quickly, but we must encourage its use among the younger generation to build regional pride and assure that the language becomes part of their identity and not just an historic tradition of which to learn about. With the accessibility of social media present through sites such as Facebook and Twitter, there are vast arenas in which Venetian could potentially find use. Currently there are a few groups who post songs on YouTube in Venetian.⁴⁸ The more exposure and acceptance the language is able to get, the more ways in which its usage can be

⁴⁸ Alessandro and his brother gave “links” to two bands who sing in Venetian. In a YouTube search, typing in “Pitura Freska” and “Rumatera” bring up an array of music videos sung in Venetian.

accepted and repeated throughout generations. The following screen shot



Figure 5. A Facebook conversation regarding the Venetian dialect, its difficulty to learn for a second-language learner, and its prominence with the older generation.

(Figure 5.) was taken from Facebook regarding an overheard conversation in dialect. The translation provided in the picture is by “Bing”, however I also will translate below:

Comment #1: “My next-door neighbor of 74 yearshe was chatting outside my window in dialect with two of his peers....if they were speaking in Spanish or in English...I would have understood more...I am no other than an “old man” who must learn a new language hehe 😊

Comment #2: If you need lessons, give me a shout!

Comment #3: hehe...Andrea...but I do not need to learn Bresciano (the dialect of Brescia)...I could use lessons on Venetian... 😊

Comment #4: Do not worry, in the last year, I learned everything!

Comment #5: Ah Matteo, already an expert...😊”

Seeing the conversation through social media, although from someone not local to the Veneto region, shows that dialect is a topic of discussion among many. I see the Facebook conversation as a light-hearted comment on the older generations speech patterns, not necessarily pertaining to everyday interactions to those commenting. However, we see a comment (#2) where a person exclaims that they do know (a) dialect and would be willing to teach it. If this is truly the case, there may be more interest in adult acquisition of dialects even for non-natives in the Venetian language. I will discuss adult education initiatives in relation to economic advancement in a later section titled, "Suggested Strategies for Sustainability". A language's existence is related to its ability to develop and change through its own life path and not to become stagnant or irrelevant to its current community.

In considering the various emerging themes I feel that speaking and knowing dialect is not just about knowing the language but also about belonging to the community. A person can be accepted as living in the community, but will not connect with its history or understand its traditions in their entirety without having knowledge of its dialect. Speaking in dialect may be more difficult for an outsider to document/study due to the fact that it is reserved for conversation with those who are known to speak your specific dialect. Most will begin introduction or conversation in Italian due to the probability that it would be understood over dialect in most instances when meeting for the first time or in a formal situation. For future research it is pertinent to either learn the dialect or bring it up in conversation versus passive observation as a stranger would not just begin a conversation in this (dialect) language for convenience of conversation sake.

Significant Themes and Narratives

Community Exclusive Expression

Dialect was talked about as a means of communication with boundaries. You would only speak in dialect to people in your own town/family/region. Because of the differences between dialects, you would not (for example) try speaking Veneto in Rome. You may not even use it 3 towns over as within your dialect you have an accent that labels where you are from. This was brought up by each of my interviewees, but one interviewee, Francesca (18 years old), also added that within the community there are sometimes older members who do not speak standard Italian. These people, she said, live in the country and are older. They do not need to travel (outside their town) so they have no reason to learn Italian.

Family

Each formal interviewee stated that they spoke in dialect with their family. Two younger interviewees (Francesca and Marco, 18 years old) started with “I speak it with my grandparents” while in an interview with Anna (mid 50s) she discussed its use with her family and friends almost equally. Elisabetta and Alessandro create diversity to the spectrum by speaking dialect with family as well as at work with clients. The older members of the community, a shopkeeper and his

wife for example, seem to use dialect more regularly and with a wider group of acquaintances/friends than my two younger interviewees. Francesca and Marco both agreed that they do not typically speak in dialect with their friends because they may have different dialects or are meeting people from outside of their immediate town (Marco has just started university in a neighboring town).



Figure 6: The author with an older member of the community who only speaks dialect. Not mentioned specifically, this community member was one of the older generation who was involved with conversations regarding dialect in general.

Tradition/History

Whereas the interviewees over 20, Anna (mid-50s), Alessandro and Elisabetta (30s) discussed using dialect with her family and friends,

the younger interviewees, Francesca and Marco, discussed dialect as something that is spoken within the family. Within all age ranges, dialect is seen as a tradition that should be kept up to ensure people know where you are from. Talking informally

with small town shop owners (the one multi-purpose store in Colzé, a small town in the Vicenza limits), they describe Venetian as the “best Italian” and one that identifies their people and their history. Tradition/history links up with regional pride in the community. Italy in general has a deep history and the Veneto region itself has its own traditions and historical figures. This is seen visually as you walk downtown Vicenza and see the Veneto coat of arms on the signs for the Olympic Theater, or the description of “Corso Palladio” (a street named after the famous architect who worked in the city).

Identity/Community boundaries

This sense of regional pride is seen everywhere. Visually you can see graffiti claiming the Veneto as its own entity (Figure 7).

The signs around the city and historic markers typically have the Veneto crest (a lion) somewhere on them (figure 9 & 10). Although the dialect is rarely used



Figure 7. "Veneto Libero", "Free Veneto". This graffiti was seen on a road in the province of Vicenza. Not uncommon, graffiti relating to the region can be seen along roads and walking paths throughout the area.

in text (it is sometimes seen online and in a few printed books), I have documented Veneto examples seen on signs made specifically for your town. For example, a sign

for roasted chestnuts (figure 8) and a flyer for a local event written in Veneto Dialect.



Figure 8 Roasted Chestnuts and Good Wine: Sign in Dialect located on Via Borgo, in Colzé, Italy (in the Veneto region).



Figure 9: Historic Marker Sign, Downtown Vicenza. The languages displayed here are Italian (standard), English, and French. Along with the city and province of Vicenza crests, the middle symbol (the lion) is the symbol of the Veneto Region.

it is reserved for those who are known to speak your specific dialect (see “Limitations of Current Research”).

Scale of Language Vitality

The question of language acquisition and age groups are important ones and a basis for language vitality when it comes to what generation still uses the language. Michael Krauss, an established linguist, detailed a scale of language vitality, noting the language’s use by children to be a necessity for language vitality:

- (1) The language is spoken by all generations, including all, or nearly all, children;
- (2) The language is learned by all or most children;
- (3) The language is spoken by all adults, parental age and up, but learned by few or no children;
- (4) The language is spoken by adults in their thirties and older but not by younger parents;
- (5) The language is spoken only by adults in their forties and older;
- (6) All speakers in their fifties and older;
- (7) All speakers in their sixties and older;
- (8) All speakers in their seventies or older;

- (9) All speakers in their seventies and older, and fewer than ten speakers;
- (10) Extinct, no speakers.⁴⁹

As Krauss' scale indicates, children learning the language show the language's hope for a future. Will the next generation of children learn to speak dialect? Does the sense of pride in local dialect spread to the younger generation from their elders or are they more concerned with learning their official language, speaking what they are taught in school and exposed to through TV and other popular media⁵⁰? If the children are only speaking standard Italian what steps could be taken or what tools could the community develop to help re-popularize their native tongue?

The questions asked on acquisition and sustainability will assist us in determining where we might see the Venetian language in the coming years and how to sustain its existence if its popularity declines with the current youth. With language vitality assessment generally being based on children, it is important to understand their access to learning opportunities. It is also important to determine what situational domains children access where practice of dialect is common/encouraged.

⁴⁹ Austin, Peter., 2008. *One Thousand Languages : Living, Endangered, and Lost*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 217.

⁵⁰ Different regional dialects do appear on TV shows, newspapers, and comics. However, there is a small percentage of dialect use in popular media compared to the use of standard Italian.

Overcoming the Etic Perspective

“When I interview people and they give me an immediate answer, they’re often not thinking. So I’m silent. I wait. Because they think they have to keep answering. And it’s the second train of thought that’s the better answer.” –Robin Leach

(http://www.searchquotes.com/search/Train_Of_Thought/)

Throughout my fieldwork a few themes and narratives have developed as mentioned above. Some of these were generated by people’s words, others by their actions and visual cues. From my perspective as an outsider, I attempted to have an unbiased analysis of the themes and narratives developed. Following a methodology described below, I was able to document and reassess interviews and visual documentation at different points in my studies. My research focuses around a language in a community: The Venetian language in the Veneto region of Italy. However, throughout my interviews and observations, language did not always take center stage. Comments and ideas of regionalism, tradition/history, family, and community-specific expression also became pertinent to my research, illuminating my understanding of how language is a dynamic life form intertwined within the culture.

Audio and visual tools have assisted the documentation of the fieldwork that I have done. I typically relied on the iPod touch for quick photos and recorded

interviews. In addition, a Canon Rebel SLR 35 mm camera was used for higher quality photographs. I have conducted four official interviews (with signed consent form) and had many “conversations” where oral consent was asked, but no formal form was signed. The “conversations” were not recorded, but for future research I hope to revisit these people for further discussion. The age range of the people I talked with was between 18 years and mid 70s. Visually (documented by still photo), around the region, you see signs (such as the official Veneto coat of arms: a lion with wings or graffiti stating Veneto’s separate way of life) of regionalism. These are not portrayed as much in language. Dialect is very rarely used to write or create signs. I have only seen three examples of dialect being used to create a sign (only one of which was on a main road). Standard Italian is used as the communication medium for media such as radio, television, and magazines/newspapers. When talking with people in the Veneto region, their narratives show strength, pride and hope in the dialect. Dialect is discussed as a tradition that may not always be popular among all ages, but continues to be a strong part of regional and cultural identity.

Recommendations for Future Research

- For future research it is pertinent to either learn the dialect or bring it up in conversation, as contrasted with passive observation, since a

stranger would not just begin a conversation in this (dialect) language.

- For future interviews, I would like to gain a deeper perspective across generations by addressing the situational use of dialect in other family groups. Seeing the different perspectives through the generations will give insight into how the dialect is evolving and where it started.
- With the Venetian dialect, I would want to expand to other provinces of the Veneto Region. Currently limited to Vicenza, comparison to the provinces of this region (Belluno, Padova, Rovigo, Treviso, Venice and Verona) would help understand the use of Venetian throughout the entire region.
- It would also be of interest to compare the Venetian dialect with other dialects in Italy. Are all regions of Italy listening to the TV and radio in Standard Italian? Or are there regions that rely more on dialect than standard?
- Finally, studying the modes in which dialect is used and acquired, future research could take a more in-depth look at local and national policy in relation to education. Discussing education of the dialect and its relevance to regional identity as well as political movements would be important to official use of Venetian.

Suggested Strategies for Sustainability

Language preservation is important on many levels. Whether related to personal identity, community identity, the well being of local cultural ecology or the study of human cognition, sustaining language diversity is a benefit to all. To begin or continue sustainable efforts I want to first look at the Venetian language and their successes at linguistic sustainability and then offer further suggestions for their community and native language preservation in general. First, the Veneto community has an advantage of a large community who already generally partake in local events. For example, town festivals, open air markets and the general cafe scene where many gather at multiple times per day. These local events allow for the community to be engaged with other community members, increasing the chance they will hear and thus be able to respond in their local dialect. This setting is also conducive for younger speakers, as they are able to associate this kind of setting with the language being pertinent to everyday usage. Creating and encouraging growing relevancy is an important step in sustaining a language. Use of existing public community spaces in order to promote local interaction is my first suggestion for language sustainability. Creating these opportunities for interaction assists in community development as well. As people come together and share ideas they are also innately encouraged to participate further in community activities. This involvement can create multiple community partnerships, local economic initiatives,

and most importantly a more developed sense of community identity. The sense of community identity can strengthen family and individual identity to the point of happier work environments for adults and better grades for children by improving self-value and confidence.

Secondly I look at Venetian orthography. It is not accepted universally throughout the region, there are many who might disagree with spellings or word use, but overall it captures the language and is a good resource to those who want to acquire Venetian as a second language or to possibly encourage educationally further down the road. This documentation and public access to the language's orthography creates the ability to develop further language-related materials (such as stories/poetry using the website as a guide) or even as linguistic encouragement showing the dialect in a popular, relevant light. From translating or writing books or TV shows and movies, orthography allows for some consistency in the development and dissemination of written/print material in a native tongue.

At this point I want to briefly mention the Basque language, another minority language in the European Union. The Basque language has a strong background in language planning and management. In 1919 the "Royal Academy for the Basque Language" or "*Euskaltzaindia*" in the Basque language, became the official body responsible for the language. This has helped with their language planning and sustainability efforts as they can all be centralized and focused towards the same outcome, the vitality of the Basque language. Its goal is to, "[carry] out research on the language and its object is to safeguard it; the Academy has formulated the rules for the normalization of the language." The academy also states on its website that

they are, “always in the pursuit of the unity of the language and its modernization”.⁵¹ Venetian could learn from some of their revitalization efforts and develop their own language development/management entity. The addition of a separate entity dedicated to language planning would be helpful in addressing revitalization and sustainability. Using Basque and their current initiatives, one can notice their strengths are with their encouragement of the language and their expansion of the language’s domains of use. In the case of Venetian, I feel the Basque sustainability initiatives that would also suit Venetian sustainability would be public school integration, multi-media production, and translation of official documents into Venetian. The revitalization effort would be aimed at establishing greater domains in which the language could be used. There is much discussion of the need for a variety of places to use the language,

“... [the language] must be revived in domains outside as well as inside the classroom. A language cannot be perpetuated in a single domain such as the school or the church. Children will need to be able to communicate their

⁵¹ (About the Academy - Euskaltzaindia. (n.d.). *Euskaltzaindia*. Retrieved May 22, 2013, from http://www.euskaltzaindia.net/index.php?option=com_content&catid=78&id=196&lang=en&view=article

feelings, hopes, opinions, and thoughts into Hawaiian in all domains of life if the language is to truly survive." ⁵².

Currently Venetian is spoken by a much greater percentage of the older generation (over 65 years of age). Due to this, some of the younger generation sees the language as a means of communication reserved to the elderly. There are current production of media, such as YouTube videos and newspapers, however, a greater variety and a more youth-based approach to material would help spark interest in a wider variety of age-groups. Translating official documents into Venetian would also allow for the language to be seen in an elevated status. Even if the documents were not to be “official” they would be able to be studied and read in Venetian, giving the language another domain of use.

A challenge faced with creating the sense that Venetian is appropriate in multiple domains includes its exclusion from some of the public school systems as it tends to lead some to believe learning Venetian will not be of use in the future as more and more people are speaking standard Italian. By encouraging or even just allowing its use in schools, it can be seen as acceptable and also have the opportunity to be learned by immigrants as well as those raised around the language. As opposed to language-nests, the more advanced age groups would benefit as many are exposed to Venetian when they are still in a home setting. For example, many young children are watched by grandparents who still speak only in

⁵² Hinton, Leanne, and Kenneth L. Hale. 2001. *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice*. San Diego: Academic Press.

Venetian thus leading younger children to use Venetian up until school-age integration. It is in school where their exposure becomes drastically limited.

Lastly I want to mention the Hinton article where she discusses a language's "usefulness", "Perhaps the lesson here is in the word 'useful.' Families may have strong ideological reasons for wishing their minority language to stay alive, but at the same time they have a stronger sense of responsibility toward their children to make sure they learn a language at home that will help them make their way in the world."⁵³ This reminds me of both Venetian and Basque. Although there is an interest in linguistic sustainability, there are still many who see Italian and Spanish/French as the economically stable language and are not concerned with the "low " language's lack of consistent use by the younger generation. Youth programs where non-dominant language use is encouraged would enable the language to be relevant to new and evolving domains.

Impediments to Language Revitalization

Minority languages struggling for their sustainability often have obstacles in their way. Language discouragement in local or national policy, limited economic opportunities associated with the minority language, limited educational resources

⁵³ Hinton, Leanne, and Kenneth L. Hale. 2001. *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice*. San Diego: Academic Press.

for language acquisition, and limited accessible domains where the language can be used are among some of the impediments to language revitalization.

Language discouragement does not need to be directly against the minority language, but discrimination can be evident in the lack of acknowledgement of a language. In instances like Venetian, its lack of recognition at a national level hinders it from being seen as a language that would be recognized throughout Italy, let alone outside of the country. This lack of recognition can also affect the economic status of the language in question. If the language is not recognized, it is less likely to be needed in jobs or other business situations. Economic status plays a large part in a language's vitality as people who are not from an area, such as the Veneto, do not need to learn the language to be successful economically. If a language is encouraged or allowed in differing job opportunities, it is more likely efforts will be made to learn this language as it opens up advancement opportunities.

Conclusion

In contemplating the relationship between language and cultural sustainability there are a vast amount of resources and perspectives to consider. Each of these resources and ideas should be acknowledged and interpreted in relation to the specific community that is being engaged. What can be interpreted as a "good sustainability initiative" for one community may not work or be suited for another community.

Language is a vital part of cultural identity. Duranti discusses Franz Boas' argument that:

One could not really understand another culture without having direct access to its language. Such a need for linguistic study was not only a practical one, but, he insisted, a theoretical one, due to the intimate connection between culture and language.⁵⁴

Seeing language as tied to cultural identity, we can not only sustain minority languages with revitalization/sustainability efforts, but we can build towards sustaining entire cultures and their unique identities and ways of life. Throughout my research I have encountered connections between a language, its speech community, and their cultural identity. Reading case studies, there are multiple instances of communities coming together in order to revitalize, sustain, or manage their language in efforts to continue a part of their heritage that is seen as important to the community. This linguistic sustainability effort is often seen as a community's way of ensuring that future generations of their cultural community do not lose this aspect of cultural identity and the knowledge and/or perspective that is gained by also learning the community's language. Language use raises issues of policy and how this aspect of intangible cultural heritage can be safeguarded and protected for years to come and how to go about "protecting" language on a local, national, or international level. Communities can also use language as a means of inclusion or

⁵⁴ Duranti, Alessandro,. *Linguistic Anthropology*. Cambridge University Press [database online]. New York, 1997, 52.

exclusion of certain peoples. This compartmentalization of people with regard to language can be seen as tied to physical or mental boundaries but overall enables a distinction between members and non-members of a speech community and/or even cultural community.

Determining varying ways to sustain culture, we, as academics and activists for culture, should take into consideration language as it pertains to culture. Language is a means for constructing community boundaries, communication, and the medium in which much of a culture's traditions are passed along to further generations or documented for future reference. The pertinence of language in culture emphasizes linguistic sustainability's relation to cultural sustainability. By sustaining a language, we take a community's means of communication (the very basic building blocks of what began the transmission of ideas and ways of life in that cultural community) and we can develop ways to sustain that culture.

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