

Elders' and young adults' perceptions and attitudes towards languages in contact in multilingual Friuli-Venezia Giulia: A comparison to inform language teaching within an intergenerational perspective

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Abstract

The overall research project framing the present contribution fits within studies on plurilinguals' language attitudes, studies on language learning motivation, on lifelong language learning and on language learning in old age, its aim being to understand whether elders and young adults could be successfully involved in language learning and teaching within an intergenerational perspective. The research has been carried out in the Friulian-speaking area of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Italy.

Our main focus here is on the *first phase* of the wider research, which, starting from Baker (1992), consists in a quantitative survey on elders' and young adults' habits of use and perceptions with reference to the languages they are mainly in contact with in their everyday life (i.e., Italian, Friulian, English). The aim of this exploratory investigation is to define *elders' and young adults' profiles* and identify the most relevant similarities and differences between the two categories of subjects, with special regard to their relationship with the *local* minority language (Friulian) and the *global* international language (English). Findings from the quantitative survey will be presented, together with a preliminary discussion of possible implications for language teaching within an intergenerational perspective.¹

Keywords

Intergenerational comparison, plurilingual subjects, language attitudes, Friulian minority language, global English

1. Intergenerational language learning towards multilingual competence

The ageing of the European society —mainly due to the concomitance of increasing life expectancy and falling birth rates— and the growing structural unemployment especially among young people have pushed the European Union to carefully ponder over the role of *lifelong learning*. Continuous learning throughout life is regarded as a crucial comprehensive strategy to tackle the above challenges, so much so that “in recent years it has become virtually impossible to locate a policy document issued by the European Commission (EC) that makes no reference to lifelong learning” (Formosa 2014: 13). Following 1996, the European Year of Lifelong Learning, a number of key documents were published on this theme. Among them, of particular relevance is *A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning*, in which the tight connection between education and active citizenship is brought into focus and where three main categories of purposeful learning —i.e., formal, non-formal and informal— are clearly discussed and emphasised as complementary in the “lifewide” dimension of lifelong learning (EC 2000: 7-9). Following the adoption of the Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018, one of the most recent publications on the same topic is *Key competence for lifelong learning*, which discusses a set of eight competences that are deemed essential for citizens in order to reach “personal fulfilment, a healthy and sustainable lifestyle, employability, active citizenship and social inclusion” (EC 2019: 4).

¹ A shorter version of this paper was presented at the *XVIII International Conference on Minority Languages (ICML)*, March 24, Bilbao, The Basque Country. <https://icml2021.eus/programa/?lang=en> (last access: June 16, 2021).

One peculiar form of lifelong learning is *intergenerational learning*, which is “learning taking place between different generations” (Boström 2014: 193). A comprehensive theory of intergenerational learning is still missing, and the label ‘intergenerational learning’ is generally attached to a variety of activities where the participation of subjects belonging to different age groups seems to be the only common denominator (Schmidt-Hertha 2014). Empirical research has found that, on the one side, intergenerational learning may be an effective means to tackle the ever-decreasing contact between generations in different spheres of life (e.g., in the workplace, within the family), thereby fostering intergenerational dialogue through reciprocal learning (Lohman et al. 2003). On the other, research findings seem also to offer evidence that intergenerational learning could be a powerful vehicle for bringing together the novel ideas of younger generations with the life experience of older ones, thus tapping new potential (McGuire et al. 2007).

Siebert and Seidel (1990, cited in Schmidt-Hertha 2014: 148) distinguish between three types of intergenerational learning, the central criterion being the *nature of interaction* required for the learning process to take place: 1. learning from each other, 2. learning together, and 3. learning about one another. The third type, learning *about* one another—which is regarded by the two authors as “the true form of intergenerational learning”, is of particular interest as it implies that the different perspectives and interpretation patterns adopted by the generations involved are not only used *for* learning, but are *part of* the learning content and objectives themselves.

With a view to pursuing this third type of intergenerational learning while at the same time targeting multilingual competence—which is included in the eight key competences for lifelong learning mentioned earlier (EC 2019), *language learning* is a scenario worthy of consideration. It would not (simply) mean bringing together subjects of different ages in a shared learning space: it could also offer “the opportunity to learn about different perspectives of different generations, to reflect on one’s own generational attitudes, and to gain a deeper understanding of other generations” (Schmidt-Hertha 2014: 149). Intergenerational *language* learning could thus be regarded as an additional means to boost the development of social capital, which is linked to the well-being of the subjects directly involved and also of society in general (on the link between intergenerational learning and social capital see Boström 2014).

Mastering multilingual competence is crucial not only for young pupils and students in compulsory education, but also for young adults—especially, albeit not exclusively, to successfully enter the job market—and elderly people. Studies agree that language learning in old age produces important benefits, of social, cognitive and affective nature (for a review see Cardona, Luise 2019a and Ramírez Gómez 2016): it is a means to strengthen active citizenship skills thus avoiding social exclusion, and it successfully contributes to the stimulation and maintenance of cognitive resources, while encouraging the development of compensation processes (Cardona, Luise 2019b).

Whatever the age, in order to boost one’s multilingual competence, the role of language attitudes is of paramount importance: ample evidence has been provided by research of the key contribution of attitudes in language achievement, as they function as the affective bedrock of learners’ motivation (Gardner, MacIntyre 1993; Bernaus et al. 2004; for a review of studies on the relationship between language attitudes and L2 achievement see Lasagabaster 2003). Citing Huguet and Gonzales Riaño’s work, Lasagabaster points out that “language attitude is the most relevant sociolinguistic concept when it comes to setting up particular strategic options in the process of teaching and learning languages” (2005: 298). Therefore, when planning for practice, learners’ language attitudes should be taken into careful consideration, even more so when learners belong to different generations.

The *aim* of the overall research—which this contribution is part of—is to understand whether elders and young adults could be successfully involved in language learning and teaching within an intergenerational perspective. Bearing in mind that every social context is characterised by its own specificities, and with a view to enhancing our understanding of the phenomenon just mentioned, two key operations ought to be carried out at the outset: first of all, the *context* where such intergenerational language learning would occur needs to be thoroughly explored; second, the

profiles of the two categories of subjects should clearly be outlined. The next paragraph is dedicated to the first preliminary operation, whereas the rest of this paper is an attempt to address the second one, i.e., profiles description.

2. A truly multilingual context: Friuli-Venezia Giulia

Friuli-Venezia Giulia (FVG, henceforth) is one of the five Autonomous Regions in Italy and one of the most important reasons for its Special Statute is its linguistic diversity: in this Region, “one of the most convincing examples of a plurilingual community” (Fusco 2019: 167), Italian, the official national language, historically coexists with German —spoken in the area close to the border with Austria, with Slovene —along the border with Slovenia, and with Friulian, which is a “unique minority language”, that is it does not have a majority status anywhere (van Dongera et al. 2017: 10).

In Italy, a National Law was passed in 1999 for the protection of historic linguistic minorities,² which, *inter alia*, foresees the introduction of minority languages in compulsory education. Moreover, in FVG, a Regional Law provides specific rules for the introduction of Friulian,³ rules whose implementation has become systematic since 2012.⁴ On the basis of these norms, Friulian is nowadays compulsorily offered in schools as an *optional subject*, based on the choice of pupils’ families, who can decide whether they wish to make use of the opportunity to have Friulian taught to their children or not (Cisilino 2014). However, the UNESCO’s Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger (Moseley 2010) categorises Friulian as “definitely endangered”, a label which is given to those languages that are “no longer being learned as the mother tongue by children in the home” (UNESCO 2003).

The overall picture emerging from the most recent sociolinguistic survey carried out in 2014 by the University of Udine and commissioned by the Regional Agency for the Friulian Language (ARLeF 2015) is not negative. The Friulian-speaking area roughly corresponds to the former provinces of Udine, Pordenone and Gorizia, and figures for Friulian speakers vary between 420,000 (35% ca. of the total population of the Region) and 600,000 (49% ca.), depending on whether occasional speakers of Friulian are added to those who speak it regularly or not (ARLeF 2015: 41). Among the most interesting findings, two stand out: first, the active language use loss rate has decreased by one third since the previous survey (Picco 2001) and, second, the “generation shift”, i.e., the fact that the younger generation (18-29 y.o.) actively uses the language more than older ones (subjects in their thirties and forties), a fact that —it is hypothesised— may be linked with the introduction of Friulian in compulsory education, a circumstance which may have contributed to the elevation of its status (ARLeF 2015: 6). Nevertheless, nowadays Friulian is spoken above all in mountain, hilly and rural areas (Vicario 2011) and by the elderly population: the majority of those who speak the language are subjects aged 60 or above, and the average age of the Friulian speaker is 53 (ARLeF 2015: 7).

According to the most recent regional statistics, 80.47% of the regional territory (173 municipalities, out of a total of 215) is inhabited by the Friulian-speaking community, 2.79% (6 municipalities) by the German-speaking community, and 14.88% (32 municipalities) by the Slovene-speaking community. There are 21 municipalities (9.77%) where no historic linguistic minority is present (Regione Autonoma FVG 2020: 308). In order to offer a richer picture of the sociolinguistic framework characterising FVG, we ought not to forget to mention the presence of quite a few local and regional language varieties, deriving from flows of people from other regions of Italy, as well as a number of other languages, generally spoken by ethnic groups from different countries (Fusco 2019: 168). To complete the description, English as a *global* language (Graddol 2006) should also be

² Law 15 December 1999, n. 482. *Norme in materia di tutela delle minoranze linguistiche storiche*, Roma, Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, n. 297.

³ Regional Law 18 December 2007, n. 29. *Norme per la tutela, valorizzazione e promozione della lingua friulana*, Trieste, Bollettino Ufficiale Regionale, n. 52.

⁴ For a complete overview of the laws for the protection of the Friulian language see Cisilino (2014).

included. Not only is it omnipresent in many international specialist domains regarding business, technology, academic communication to name a few, but also it is the most frequently studied language in compulsory schools: according to Eurostat,⁵ in Italy in 2018 93.9% of upper secondary students learnt English as a foreign language.

In light of the figures presented so far, it does not seem incorrect to say that for quite a number of citizens of FVG *English* is an L3, after *Italian* and *Friulian*. These three languages represent the main languages to which our attention is drawn in the present research.

3. Research aim and research questions

As previously stated, the aim of the overall research is to understand whether elders and young adults could be successfully involved in language learning and teaching within an intergenerational perspective. More specifically, in light of the characteristics of the context illustrated above (par. 2), our broad *aim* is to understand whether an intergenerational language learning experience where the young ‘tandem-teach’ English to the elderly and the elderly ‘tandem-teach’ Friulian to the young could be feasible, while at the same time drawing implications for classroom practice.

The present contribution mainly focusses on the *first phase* of the research which consists in a quantitative investigation on elders’ and young adults’ habits of use and perceptions —perceived citizenship, perceived competence, perceived importance, attitudes— with reference to the languages they are mainly in contact with in their everyday life, i.e., Italian-national majority language, Friulian-local minority language, English-international global language. This investigation aims at answering the following research questions:

RQ 1) What *profiles* characterise the elders’ and the young adults’ samples with respect to these subjects’ habits of language use and perceptions on the languages they are in contact with?

RQ 2) Do the elders’ and the young adults’ profiles *differ* significantly? If so, in what ways?

4. Methodology

The overall research is of a mixed nature; it can be labelled as an “interview study facilitated by preceding questionnaire survey (quan→QUAL)” (Dörnyei 2007: 172).

This contribution focusses on the first, *quan*, exploratory phase of the research, whereas in Bier (forthcoming) the main *QUAL* phase is dealt with. Findings from the *quan* phase informed the strategy adopted to purposefully identify interviewees for the subsequent *QUAL* phase.

4.1 Participants

A total of 157 subjects took part in the questionnaire survey. Of these, 66 are young adults, aged between 18 and 22, almost all students (87.9%), and 91 are elderly people, aged 63⁶ or above, almost all retired (84.6%). There is a predominance of female respondents in the Y group, and of male respondents in the E group (Table 1).

Table 1. Age group and gender

			F	M	Total
Group Y (young adults)	66	42.04%	69.70%	30.30%	100%
Group E (elderly)	91	57.96%	41.76%	58.24%	100%
Total	157	100%			

⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/education-and-training/data/database> (last access: June 16, 2021).

⁶ In line with Cardona and Luise (2019a: 7), 63 years of age is considered as the threshold of the beginning of old age.

The great majority of respondents are from the area of Udine (Table 2), live in small villages with less than 20.000 inhabitants (Table 3) and the language mainly spoken in their communities is Friulian (Table 4); these figures seem to align with the existing literature (cf. par. 2).

Table 2. Province where respondents are from

	Gorizia	Pordenone	Udine	Total
Group Y	3.03%	13.64%	83.33%	100%
Group E	2.20%	24.18%	73.63%	100%

Table 3. Inhabitants in the town/village where respondents live

	Less than 20.000	Between 20.000 and 50.000	More than 50.000	Total
Group Y	92.42%	4.55%	3.00%	100%
Group E	73.63%	3.30%	23.08%	100%

Table 4. Language mainly spoken in the town/village where respondents live

	Mainly Friulian	Mainly Italian	Other	Total
Group Y	66.67%	27.27%	6.06%	100%
Group E	58.24%	37.36%	4.40%	100%

4.2 Research methods

The survey took place in the spring-summer of 2020 and was carried out by means of an online questionnaire (based on Baker 1992 and on Lasagabaster, Huguet 2007), created and administered through *EUSurvey*.⁷ Before the main data collection, the instrument was submitted to a pilot test (Dörnyei 2010) which gave consistent results: high correlation indexes were obtained after administering the pilot questionnaire twice, three weeks apart.

Respondents were reached in two main ways: first, a video-invitation⁸ to take part in the survey was shared on the researcher's Facebook page; second, thanks to an ongoing collaboration between the researcher and the *Friulian Philological Society*,⁹ an e-mail invitation was sent to the Society's members a) who matched the age requirements, and b) who work as teachers in upper-secondary schools. The latter were kindly asked to invite their students to participate in the survey.

The questionnaire is organised into *four main sections*: the first section aims at gathering general demographic information on respondents (e.g., gender, provenance, inhabitants and language mainly spoken in their city/village, etc.); the second section aims at collecting data on respondents' perceived competence in their languages, the age when they started learning said languages and whether they attended (or wished to attend) language lessons; the third section aims at inquiring into respondents' habits of language use, with special regard to Italian, Friulian and English; lastly, the fourth section includes two sets of multi-item scales. The first set of three scales (Scales 4.1, 4.3, 4.5, Appendix 1) gauges the perceived importance of the three target languages, whereas the second set (Scales 4.2, 4.4, 4.6, Appendix 1) targets respondents' attitudes towards the same languages.¹⁰

5. Analysis

⁷ <https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/home/welcome> (last access: June 16, 2021).

⁸ This is the link to the video-invitation: <https://vimeo.com/417233950> (last access: June 16, 2021).

⁹ <http://www.filologicafriulana.it/> (last access: June 16, 2021).

¹⁰ These scales have been adapted from the questionnaire used by Lasagabaster and Huguet (2007) in their survey on language use and attitudes in nine European bilingual contexts.

The data collected via the questionnaire were analysed by means of both descriptive and inferential statistics. *Microsoft Excel* for Mac and *R* (R Core Team 2019; Winter 2019) were used to carry out all analytical operations.

More specifically, data from questionnaire sections 1-2-3 were submitted to frequency count and then organised in graphs, whereas data from multi-item scales of section 4 were submitted to independent samples t-tests. Prior to carrying out inferential parametric statistics with said scales, they were checked for internal consistency and for normality of distribution: the internal consistency of all scales was good¹¹ and the variables corresponding to the average score in Scales 4.1, 4.3, 4.5 were normally distributed. Instead, the distribution of the average score variables for Scales 4.2, 4.4, 4.6 was not perfectly normal and therefore these variables were non-linearly transformed.¹² Finally, all the variables (from 4.1 to 4.6) were centred and standardised.

6. Findings and discussion

In this section, findings will be presented and discussed with reference to the Research Questions previously formulated (par. 3). Thus, the *characteristics* —in terms of habits of language use and perceptions— of each of the two categories involved, elderly and young adults, will be illustrated (RQ 1), and special attention will be drawn to their most significant *differences* (RQ 2).

6.1 Main findings from descriptive statistics

In this section, findings from descriptive statistics (i.e., frequency count) performed on data from questionnaire sections 1-2-3 will be presented and discussed.

6.1.1 Perceived citizenship and mother tongue

With a view to making a comparison with the ARLeF findings (2015: 36-40), the last question in section 1 asked respondents what citizenship they most strongly identified with, and the same mutually exclusive answer options as in the ARLeF survey were provided (i.e., Italian, Friulian, European, of FVG). Nearly half the E group say they feel they are Friulian citizens, and a good percentage also declare feeling as European citizens. As for Y respondents, answers are more evenly distributed, with a relative majority of subjects declaring they feel they are Italian citizens, followed by those who feel they are Friulian and European citizens, in equal percentages (Graph 1).¹³

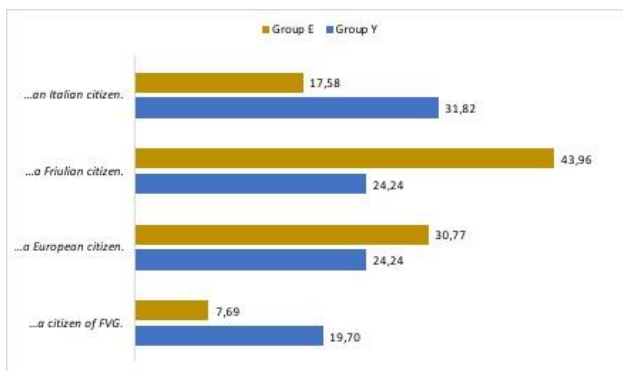
These findings only partially agree with those presented by ARLeF (2015: 40): while there is agreement about the “Friulian sub-sample”, characterised in both studies by the highest average age, there does not seem to be a direct correspondence about the “European sub-sample”. In the ARLeF research, the European sub-sample is characterised by the lowest average age, which is not the case here; our findings show that the sub-sample which, on average, is the youngest is the Italian one.

¹¹ Cronbach’s alpha: 0.94 (Scale 4.1), 0.91 (S. 4.3), 0.92 (S. 4.5); 0.89 (S. 4.2), 0.76 (S. 4.4), 0.85 (S. 4.6).

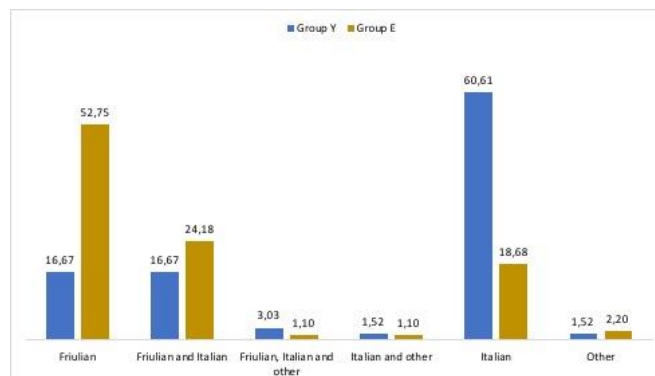
¹² Scale 4.2: reflect and logarithm; Scales 4.4 and 4.6: reflect and square root.

¹³ In all Graphs, figures are shown in percentage terms, calculated on the age group total (Group Y=66, Group E=91).

As regards mother tongue, the difference between the two groups is quite remarkable, with the majority of elder respondents indicating Friulian and the majority of young respondents indicating Italian (Graph 2).



Graph 1. Perceived citizenship

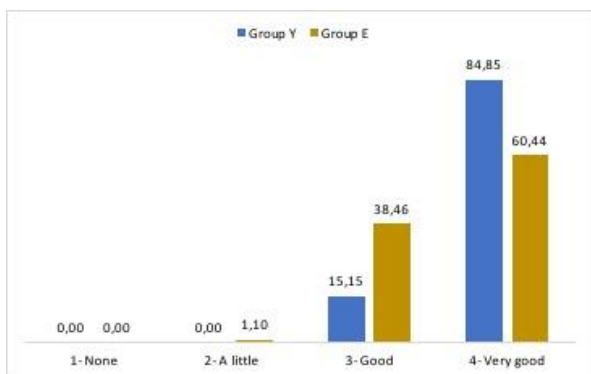


Graph 2. Mother tongue

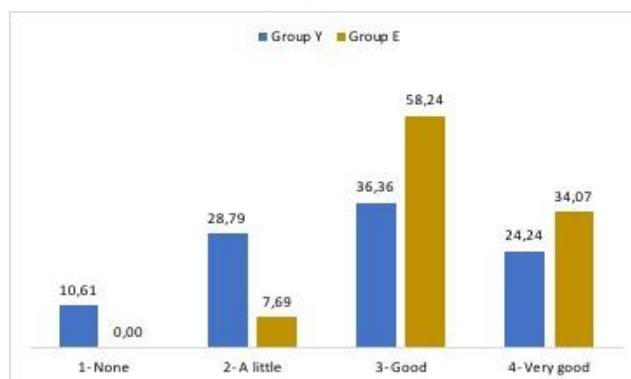
It seems that a mild correspondence exists between the subjects’ perceived citizenship (cf. Graph 1) and their mother tongue.

6.1.2 Perceived language competence and age of acquisition

Coherently with the findings just presented, young adults perceive a much higher competence in Italian (Graph 3) and a lower one in Friulian (Graph 4). Moreover, it ought to be noticed that there is a good percentage of Y respondents that say they have *no* competence at all in Friulian (10.61%). More than half of E respondents, instead, declare having a *good* competence in the minority language, and a slightly lower percentage a *very good* competence: this is quite an interesting finding, considering that the majority of the elderly declare that Friulian is their mother tongue (cf. Graph 2); this issue will be further explored below.

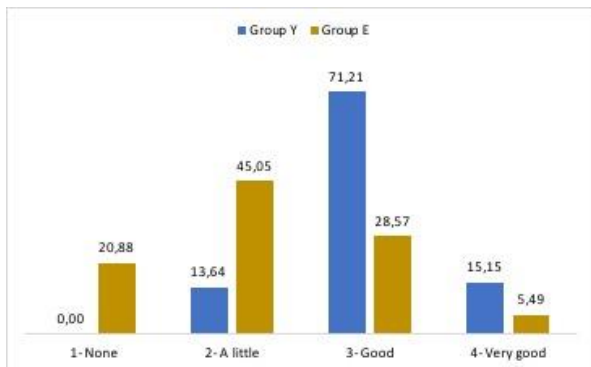


Graph 3. Perceived competence in Italian



Graph 4. Perceived competence in Friulian

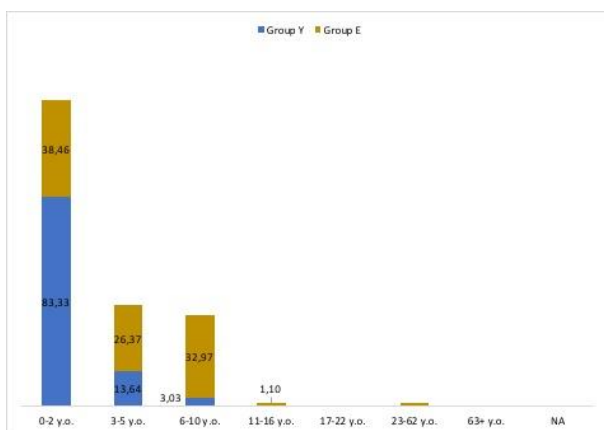
As far as English is concerned, Graph 5 shows that the vast majority of Y subjects clusters around *good* competence, while E respondents are more evenly distributed towards the middle-low end of the spectrum. It ought to be noticed that —just like what happened for the young with Friulian (cf. Graph 4)— there is a good percentage of elder respondents that say they have *no* competence at all in English (20.88%).



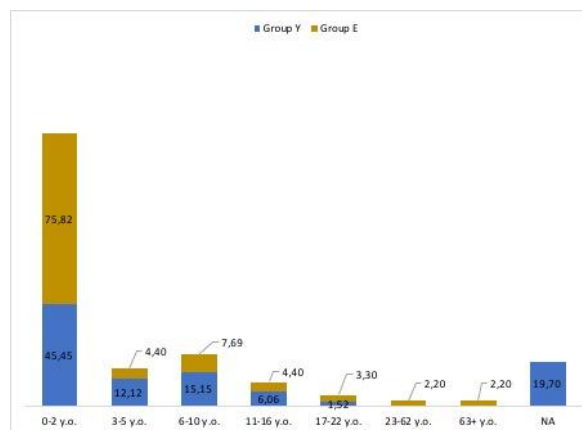
Graph 5. Perceived competence in English

As regards the age when respondents started learning these languages:

- the vast majority of elderly respondents (75.82%) started learning Friulian at birth (Graph 7); instead, the overwhelming majority of young adults (83.33%) started learning Italian at birth (Graph 6). However, among these subjects we also find good percentages of both elders (23.08%) and young adults (34.85%) who started learning both Italian and Friulian at birth;
- during kindergarten (3-5 y.o.) and primary school (6-10 y.o.), virtually all the young started learning English, whereas the relative majority of elderly respondents started learning English in secondary school (11-16 y.o.) (Graph 8).¹⁴ In this period, the young started learning German (Graph 9), which seems to be a popular second foreign language (after English) offered in secondary schools in FVG (see also Graph 13 below);
- in the range between 3 to 10 years old, when almost all Y subjects started learning English (Graph 8), more than half of the E group were instead beginning with Italian (Graph 6).

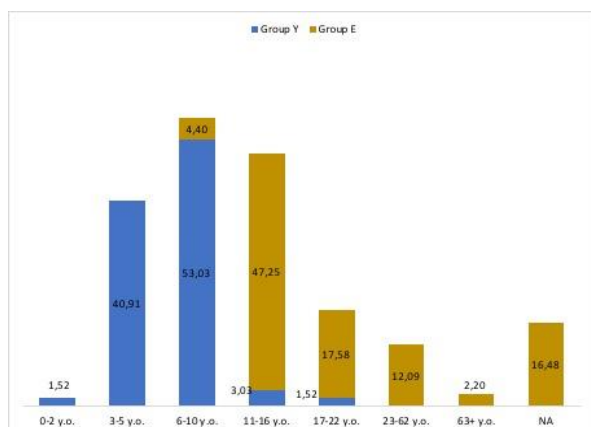


Graph 6. When did you start learning Italian?

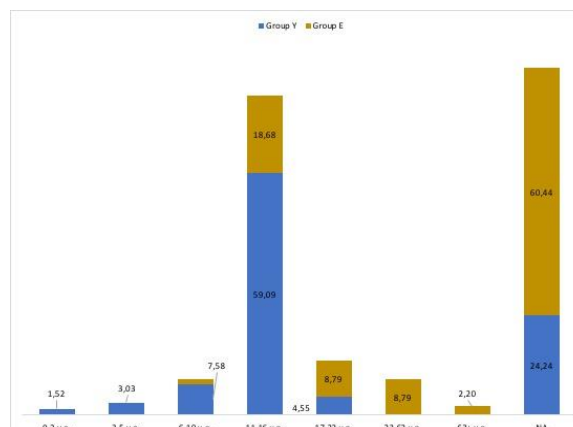


Graph 7. When did you start learning Friulian?

¹⁴ This finding is in line with what was recently found by Cardona and Luise (2019a): the majority of their elderly interviewees were bilingual in Italian and in a Venetan dialect, and started learning their first foreign language — French, in the majority of cases— when they were 11-12 years old (i.e., in lower-secondary school). In our sample, elderly respondents declaring they started learning French when they were 11 years old are 23.07%, whereas those who learnt it but did not specify when are 37.36%.



Graph 8. When did you start learning English?



Graph 9. When did you start learning German?

As we have already noticed for perceived competence (cf. Graphs 4, 5), here as well another important difference between the two groups can be observed: there is a good percentage of Y subjects (19.70%) who have never started learning Friulian while nobody in the E group is in the same situation (Graph 7); on the other hand, we see that there is a good percentage of elders (16.48%) who have never started learning English while nobody in the Y group is in the same situation (Graph 8).

6.1.3 Language lesson attendance and wish to attend a language course in the future

As for language lessons attendance, there is a striking majority of respondents in both groups who declare having attended lessons of Italian¹⁵ and English (Graphs 10, 12). There is also a good percentage of subjects who have attended lessons of German (Graph 13).¹⁶

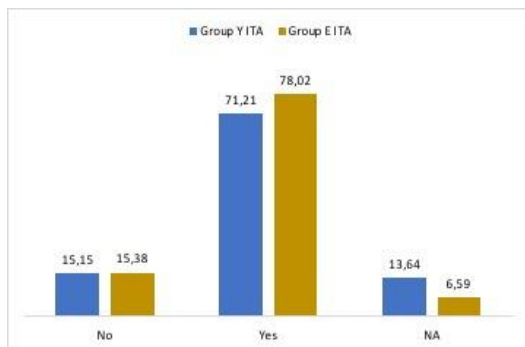
As for Friulian (Graph 11), more than half in both groups declare *not* having attended lessons. However, among those who have, the percentage is higher for the elderly (38.46% vs. 28.79%). The fact that more than half of the young say they have not attended lessons of Friulian is quite interesting and it may be explained by *either* of these two circumstances:

- the families of these young respondents *chose not* to make use of the opportunity to have Friulian taught to their children in compulsory school (as per Regional Law 29/2007, see par. 2);
- these young adults *did* attend Friulian lessons in compulsory school but *either* do not remember *or* they do remember but do *not* regard that school experience as actual ‘lessons’ of Friulian.¹⁷

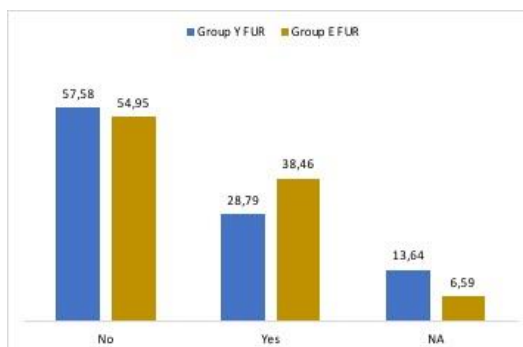
¹⁵ The fact that some respondents declare *not* having attended lessons of Italian (Graph 10) appears quite odd, given that all of them went through compulsory schooling in Italy. It could be attributed to an inaccurate interpretation by respondents of the expression “lessons of”, which may have been equated with “language course”, traditionally associated with ‘foreign’ languages. As we shall see, the same may apply with reference to Friulian.

¹⁶ Almost nobody in our sample declared any competence or attended lessons of Slovene, and that is why graphs about that language are not shown.

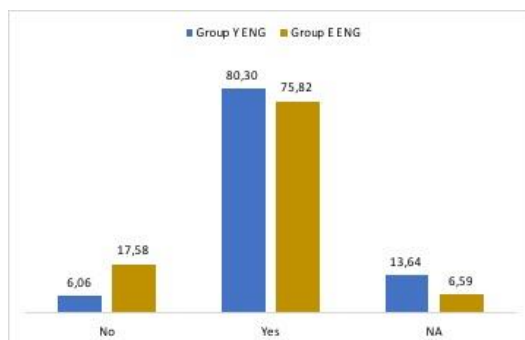
¹⁷ The same reasoning applied with reference to Italian lesson attendance (i.e., inaccurate interpretation, see footnote 15) may be valid here.



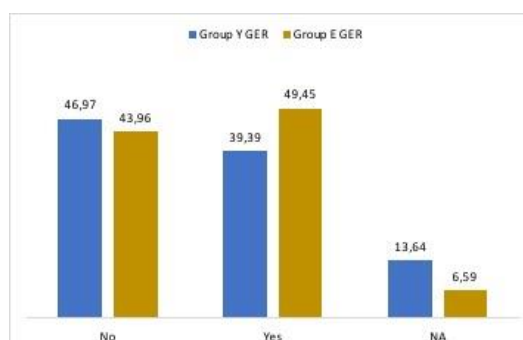
Graph 10. Have you attended lessons of Italian?



Graph 11. Have you attended lessons of Friulian?



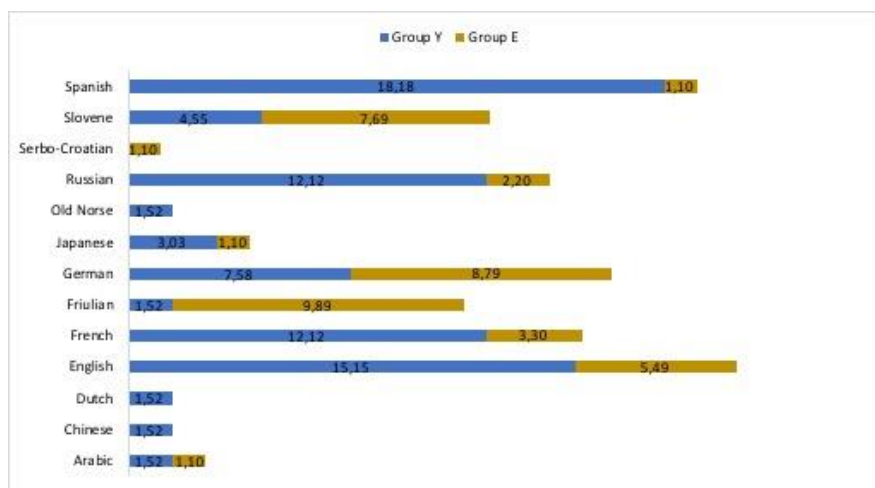
Graph 12. Have you attended lessons of English?



Graph 13. Have you attended lessons of German?

The percentage of subjects wishing to attend a language course in the future is much higher in the Y group (80.30% vs. 58.24%). Looking at Graph 14, we notice that young adults mostly choose Spanish as the language they wish to study. English is the second most frequent choice, French and Russian third. Only one respondent (1.52%) wishes to attend a course of Friulian. As for elder respondents wishing to attend a language course in the future, the relative majority chooses Friulian as the language they wish to study, and German and Slovene are the second and third most frequent choices. English comes fourth. This is coherent with what was said before about mother tongue and perceived competence. Although the majority of the elders say that Friulian is their mother tongue (cf. Graph 2), not all of them declare having a *very good* competence in the language (cf. Graph 4): this is because Friulian has always been mainly a *spoken* language for them, they are not used to write in Friulian (cf. ARLeF 2015: 19) and in its written form they have virtually no competence. That is why so many of them wishes to attend a course of Friulian: to learn how to write in the standard language.¹⁸ Confirmation of this is also found in phase two interviews (Bier forthcoming).

¹⁸ The Friulian-speaking area is characterised by the coexistence of several mutually intelligible *local varieties* of Friulian (Benincà, Vanelli 2016), especially common in their spoken form, with the *standard language*, for which the official spelling exists (ARLeF 2017).



Graph 14. What language would you like to study in the future?

Reading Graph 14, it appears therefore that the elderly have a higher interest in the languages that are spoken in the area (i.e., Friulian, German, Slovene), an interest that does not seem to be shared by young adults, whose preferences are for more international languages, Spanish and English.

6.1.4 Language use with specific people and for specific actions

As for the languages used with specific people, there seems to be quite a clear pattern of preference for Friulian over Italian for exchanges within the wider family (i.e., parents, siblings, grandparents, partner) for elder respondents, whereas for the young Italian is the language mostly used. Friulian is used slightly more often by the young with their father and grandparents (Graphs A15).¹⁹

A similar pattern of preference for Friulian over Italian, especially for the E group, is also seen in communicative exchanges with friends and neighbours (Graphs A16), whereas a less evident pattern is detected in elders' exchanges with colleagues and shopkeepers (Graphs A17), where a mix of Friulian and Italian seems to be common. As for the Y group, Italian appears to be by far the most frequently used language in all these situations.

The pattern changes, for elder subjects as well, in communicative exchanges with grandchildren, nieces and nephews, where Italian is mostly used (Graph A18).

Lastly, there appears to be a distinct predominance of Italian, for both groups, in more formal exchanges, i.e., with teachers and in offices (Graphs A19).

As for the languages used for specific activities (Graphs A20), from the data collected it seems that for elder respondents Italian is the most used language, followed at a distance by Friulian; English is the least used language, except when listening to songs, when it is slightly more common, in addition to Italian and Friulian.

For young adults too Italian is the most used language but it is immediately followed by English, which is more frequently used when listening to songs and more or less on a par with Italian when surfing the internet and using social media. Friulian is the least used language, except —just like what happened for the elders with English— when listening to songs, when it is slightly more common, in addition to English and Italian.

6.2 Main findings from inferential statistics

In this section, findings from inferential statistics (i.e., t-tests) performed on data from questionnaire section 4 will be presented and discussed.

¹⁹ Due to space limitations, Graphs from A15 to A20 are not displayed here; they are in Appendix 2.

6.2.1 Perceived importance of the three languages in contact: results from t-tests

Two-sample t-tests showed that there is a significant, large difference in perceived importance of Friulian between the young, who score lower, and elder subjects (Table A1).²⁰ There is also a significant, moderate difference in perceived importance of Italian between the young, who score higher this time, and elder subjects (Table A2). Finally, there is a significant, moderate difference in perceived importance of English between the young, who, again, score higher, and elder subjects (Table A3).

6.2.2 Attitudes towards the three languages in contact: results from t-tests

There is a significant, large difference in attitudes towards Friulian between the young, who score lower, and elder subjects (Table A4). A non-significant difference between the two groups is found when comparing the attitudes towards Italian (Table A5). Then, there is a significant, large difference in attitudes towards English between the young, who score higher, and elder subjects (Table A6).

With a view to taking a closer look on subjects' attitudes towards the local minority language, Friulian, a series of independent-samples t-tests were carried out maintaining the young/elder main grouping but splitting the two groups further based on the following three dichotomic variables:

- whether they use *Friulian in the family*, i.e., with father/mother/siblings (or not)
- whether they have *attended lessons of Friulian* (or not)
- whether they feel they are *Friulian citizens* (or not), or *Italian citizens* (or not), or *European citizens* (or not)

In both young and elder respondents, there is a significant difference between those who use Friulian in the family, who show more positive attitudes towards the language, and those who do not. For the elders the magnitude of the difference is moderate, whereas for the young it is very large (Tables A7, A8): this finding is particularly noteworthy and also in line with the literature, which shows that home language, together with the linguistic model followed at school (i.e., degree of presence of the minority language), are crucial variables influencing subjects' attitudes towards the language itself (Lasagabaster 2017: 586).

For E respondents only, there is a significant, moderate difference between those who have attended lessons of Friulian, who show more positive attitudes towards the language, and those who have not (Table A10). As for young adults, instead, it appears that those few who do have attended lessons show attitudes towards Friulian that are *not* significantly different from those shown by subjects who have not had the same experience (Table A9). Together with what was seen before about these subjects' Friulian lesson attendance (par. 6.1.3), this is quite an interesting finding as a) it apparently does *not* align with previous research (cf. Lasagabaster 2017: *supra*) and b) might be interpreted as an indication that the school provision in the minority language is not effective enough to produce a significant impact on students' attitudes towards the language itself.

A finding that could be expected and that is in line with previous research (ARLeF 2015) is the significant, large difference between those who declare Friulian citizenship, who show more positive attitudes towards the language, and those who do not, in both age groups (Tables A11, A12).

For elder respondents only, there is a significant, large difference between those who feel they are Italian citizens, who show less positive attitudes towards Friulian, and those who do not (Table A14). For young adults, the difference in the means is not significant (Table A13).

Lastly, for the Y group only, there is a significant, large difference between those who feel they are European citizens, who show less positive attitudes towards Friulian, and those who do not

²⁰ Due to space limitations, detailed output from t-tests (Tables from A1 to A22) is not displayed here; it is available online: <https://tinyurl.com/53nsh6a> (last access: June 16, 2021).

(Table A15). This is another interesting finding as it appears that, for young adults, being a European citizen is associated with *less* positive attitudes towards the local minority language. For the elderly, instead, the difference is not significant (Table A16).

To take a closer look on subjects' attitudes towards the global language, English, a series of independent-samples t-tests were carried out in the same fashion, i.e., maintaining the young/elder main grouping but splitting the two groups further based on subjects' perceived citizenship.

A finding that, once again, could be expected, is that there is a significant, moderate difference between those who feel they are Friulian citizens, who show less positive attitudes towards English, and those who do not, in both age groups (Tables A17, A18). This seems to resemble what Baker (1992) calls "bunker attitude", an unfavourable disposition found in minority language speakers who believe that majority languages represent a threat to the survival of the minority language (see Lasagabaster 2005).

In both Y and E respondents, there is a non-significant difference in attitudes towards English between those who declare Italian citizenship and those who do not (Tables A19, A20).

Finally, for the elderly only, there is a significant, moderate difference between those who feel they are European citizens, who show more positive attitudes towards English, and those who do not (Table A22). This is an interesting finding as it appears that, for the elders, being a European citizen is associated with *more* positive attitudes towards the global language. For young adults, contrary to what happened with attitudes towards Friulian, the difference in the means does not reach statistical significance (Table A21).

7. Conclusions

Before drawing some preliminary, tentative conclusions, the *limitations* of the present survey study need to be acknowledged. The main weakness regards the sampling strategy adopted: as random-sampling was out-of-reach, convenience sampling and snowball sampling were adopted instead (Dörnyei 2007: 98). Furthermore, as data collection took place during the Covid-lockdown period, a very delicate moment for the whole country, Italy, the two samples involved were rather small and not entirely representative of the whole populations of reference. Therefore, due to non-perfect generalisability, our findings should be treated with caution.

At the end of the first phase of our wider research, the *main findings* of the preliminary survey could be concisely summarised as follows. As far as young adults are concerned, not only do they perceive and declare quite a high competence in the global language, English, they also use it rather often, show positive attitudes and attach a high instrumental value to it. It seems, however, that the same cannot be said for Friulian, in which, on average, they declare lower competence and harbour milder feelings. Those who use it in the family and, predictably, those who declare feeling as Friulian citizens are the ones who show more favourable dispositions towards the minority language. Nonetheless, unlike what is reported in the literature (e.g., Lasagabaster 2017), Friulian lesson attendance has been found to exert *no* significant effect on young adults' attitudes, a circumstance that leads to surmise that the effectiveness of the current school provision in the minority language (i.e., 30 hours a year, maximum) is rather limited. As far as elders are concerned, instead, more or less the reverse situation appears to be true; on average, they declare good competence and favourable dispositions towards the local minority language, Friulian, that they use frequently and with a variety of people. On the opposite, English is associated with less perceived importance and less positive attitudes, except for those who feel as European citizens, who harbour more positive feelings towards the global language.

In light of both the stated objective of the overall research —i.e., to understand whether elders and young adults could be successfully involved in language learning and teaching within an intergenerational perspective— and the survey findings presented here, it could be said that the prospect of engaging the two categories of subjects in intergenerational language learning experiences

could represent, in theory at least, a good starting point. Given that their profiles are somehow *complementary*, the young could tandem-teach English to the elderly while the elderly could tandem-teach Friulian to the young.

However, the complexities of the overall picture need to be duly acknowledged and taken into careful consideration when planning for practice. For example, while research reveals that the elderly might welcome the idea of intergenerational learning (Schmidt-Hertha 2014) and, by extension, of sharing the experience of language learning with young adults, the same might not be true for young adults themselves:

“it can often be observed that the ones supposed to learn seem to be less interested in participating than the ones supposed to teach [...] There still is a lack of studies on the willingness of younger generations to participate in intergenerational learning.” (Schmidt-Hertha 2014: 147, 149)

As far as language learning (and teaching) is specifically concerned, Ramírez Gómez warns that, although intergenerational interaction may be attractive for older learners, “an interesting or entertaining class is not necessarily an effective class” (Ramírez Gómez 2016: 5). She recommends a) taking the cognitive and developmental differences between the two categories of subjects into careful consideration, b) creating language courses specifically dedicated for older adults, and c) organising activities that promote intergenerational interaction as *extra-curricular* options (Ramírez Gómez 2016: 174-175). Discussing their Cognitive-Emotional Scaffolding Model, Cardona and Luise, in turn, highlight the importance of capitalising on elders’ life *experiences and emotions*, adopting a cognitive-emotional approach that targets the totality of the person (Cardona, Luise 2019a: 102), a holistic approach of which young adults may benefit as well.

Extra-curricular project-oriented *language* activities, where language objectives are pursued *together* with other common aims, may be a viable solution for intergenerational learning, taking all the above recommendations into account. For example, *gardening* (see Hake 2014) could be a suitable non-formal learning environment for elders and young adults to collaborate on a common goal while at the same time working on the two target languages, Friulian and English. Careful planning is needed though, in order to address all the issues that might arise. Among these, as far as Friulian is concerned, one aspect that is worthy of consideration is the type of language that could be employed in such activities: elder participants may well be proficient in a local variety of Friulian (Benincà, Vanelli 2016) in its *spoken* form, but, looking at research findings (par. 6.1.2; ARLeF 2015), the same does not seem to be true if the standard *written* language is contemplated. Furthermore, a potentially negatively impacting issue regards young adults’ attitudes towards the minority language, which, as appears from the data discussed in the present article, are not as positive as those shown by elders. This means that while elders might welcome a learning experience of this kind, the same might not be true for young adults (cf. Schmidt-Hertha 2014, *supra*).

Given the power of language attitudes, which “affect the success or failure of entire minority language planning strategies” (Ó Riagáin 2008: 329), the issue of young adults’ mild attitudes towards Friulian —notwithstanding the normative framework presented earlier (par. 2)— needs to be carefully pondered, and evidence-based plans for targeted interventions should be put in place in order for the situation to improve. More specifically, empirical research is needed in order to ascertain the characteristics of the current educational provision in/through Friulian and its impact on students’ attitudes towards the language in different school levels. Moreover, a more in-depth qualitative exploration of the interrelationships between the *language selves* (cf. Pavlenko 2006; Cardona, Luise 2019a) of plurilingual subjects living in FVG is also necessary, as it could shed light on both young adults’ and elders’ motivation for language learning (Bier forthcoming).

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Appendix 1. Multi-item questionnaire scales (English version)

S4.1-3-5 How important do you think $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{FRIULIAN (4.1)} \\ \text{ITALIAN (4.3)} \\ \text{ENGLISH (4.5)} \end{array} \right\}$ **is for doing the following actions?**

- 4.1-3-5a = [Make friends]
- 4.1-3-5b = [Read]
- 4.1-3-5c = [Write]
- 4.1-3-5d = [Watch TV]
- 4.1-3-5e = [Get a job]
- 4.1-3-5f = [Be liked]
- 4.1-3-5g = [Live in Friuli-Venezia Giulia]
- 4.1-3-5h = [Bring up children]
- 4.1-3-5i = [Go shopping]
- 4.1-3-5l = [Make phone calls]
- 4.1-3-5m = [Pass exams]
- 4.1-3-5n = [Be accepted in the community]
- 4.1-3-5o = [Talk to colleagues at the study/workplace]
- 4.1-3-5p = [Talk to friends]
- 4.1-3-5q = [Talk to people]

Answer options for each item: 1- Not important (*score=0*)
 2- A little important (*score=30*)
 3- Important (*score=70*)
 4- Very important (*score=100*)

S4.2-4-6 How much do you agree with the following statements about $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{FRIULIAN (4.2)} \\ \text{ITALIAN (4.4)} \\ \text{ENGLISH (4.6)} \end{array} \right\}$ **?**

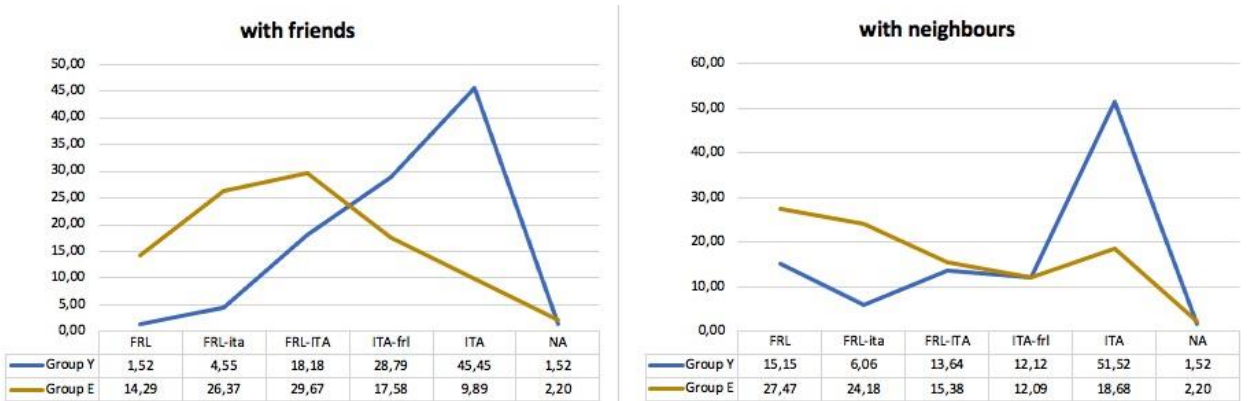
- 4.2-4-6a = [I like hearing Friulian/Italian/English spoken.]
- 4.2-4-6b = [Friulian/Italian/English should be taught to all pupils in Friuli-Venezia Giulia.]
- 4.2-4-6c = [I like speaking Friulian/Italian/English.]
- 4.2-4-6d = [Friulian/Italian/English is an easy language to learn.]
- 4.2-4-6e = [There are few languages more useful to learn than Friulian/Italian/English.]
- 4.2-4-6f = [I prefer to be taught in Friulian/Italian/English.]
- 4.2-4-6g = [Learning Friulian/Italian/English enriches my cultural knowledge.]
- 4.2-4-6h = [I would not mind marrying a Friulian/Italian/English speaker.]
- 4.2-4-6i = [Friulian/Italian/English is a language worth learning.]
- 4.2-4-6l = [If I had children, I would like them to be Friulian/Italian/English speakers regardless of other languages they may know.]

Answer options for each item: 1- Strongly disagree (*score=0*)
 2- Disagree (*score=20*)
 3- Partially disagree (*score=40*)
 4- Partially agree (*score=60*)
 5- Agree (*score=80*)
 6- Strongly agree (*score=100*)

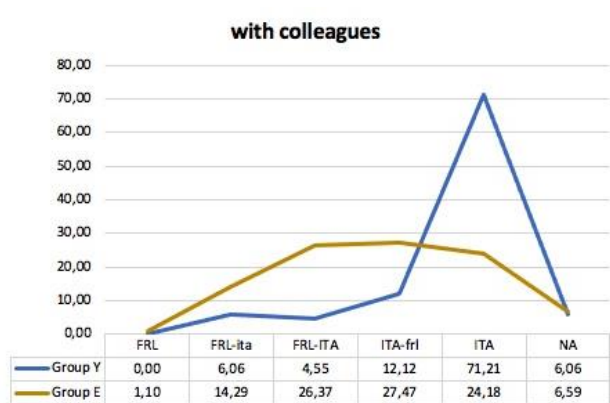
Appendix 2. Language use with specific people and for specific actions (par. 6.1.4)—Graphs



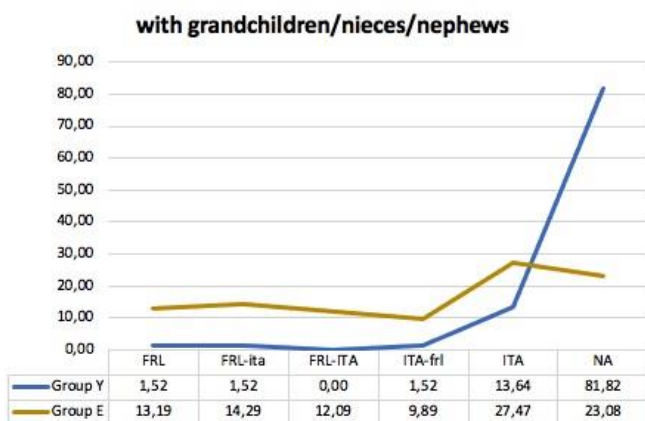
Graphs A15. Exchanges within the wider family (parents, siblings, grandparents, partner)



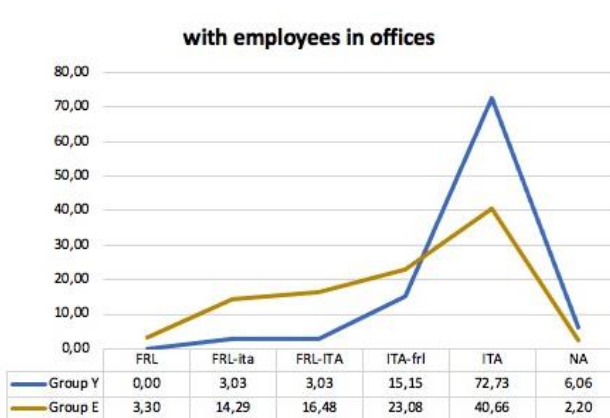
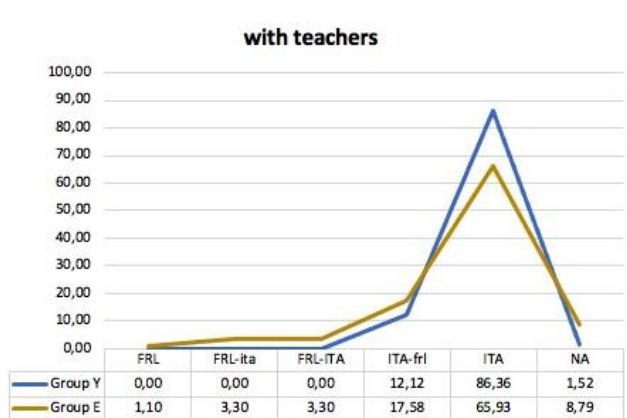
Graphs A16. Exchanges with friends and neighbours



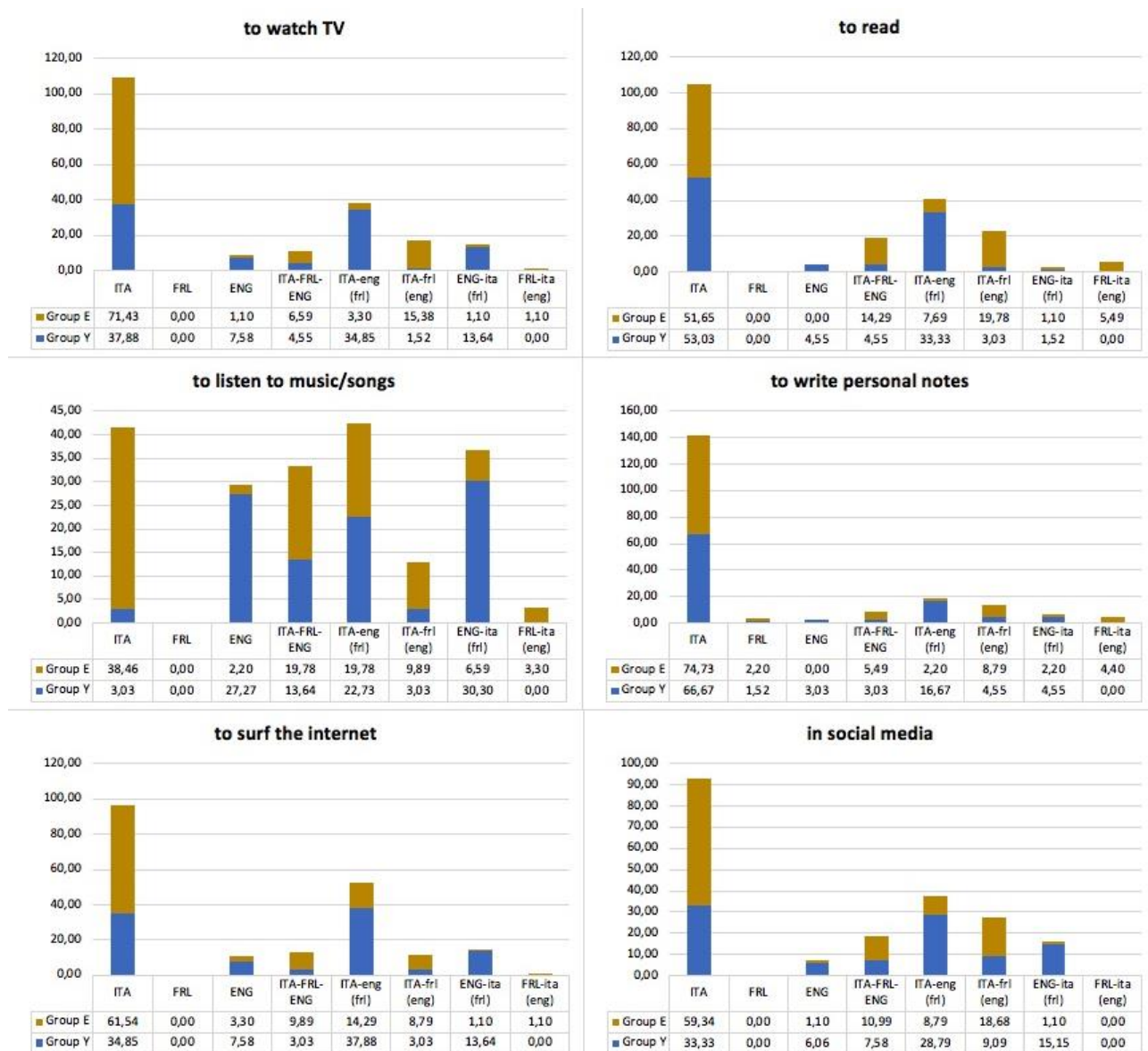
Graphs A17. Exchanges with colleagues and shopkeepers



Graph A18. Exchanges with grandchildren/nieces/nephews



Graphs A19. Exchanges with teachers and with employees in offices



Graphs A20. Language/s used to do specific activities