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## Certifying a minority language: a first description of the Sardinian case

### *Abstract*

The paper presents the results of the University of Cagliari project aimed at creating the first linguistic certification of the Sardinian language (level C1). The paper describes the theoretical assumptions, work phases, critical issues, and the choices that led to the development of the proposal, as well as the structure of the examination. In the specific case of a non-standardized language with remarkable geographical variation, such as Sardinian, it will be shown how the linguistic certification process also represents a fundamental moment for rethinking and promoting linguistic learning and teacher training.

### *Keywords*

language testing; non-standardized minority languages; Sardinian; language policy.

### *1. Certification and teaching of minority languages*

#### *1.1 General critical issues*

As part of the activities dedicated to the enhancement of Sardinian language, a project for the certification of Sardinian (level C1) has recently been launched, as one of the initiatives envisaged in the agreement signed in 2021 between the University of Cagliari (henceforth UniCa), specifically the Department of Humanities, Languages and Cultural Heritage and the University Language Centre<sup>2</sup>, and the Autonomous Region of Sardinia (RAS). The UniCa-RAS Plan 2021-24 is the op-

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<sup>1</sup> The article is the result of joint work and close collaboration between the authors. Within a common and shared conception and elaboration, however, paragraphs 2.3, 2.3.1, 2.3.2 should be attributed to Giulia I. Grosso; to Antonietta Marra paragraphs 1.1, 2.2, 2.3.3; to Giulia Murgia paragraphs 1.2 and 2.1. Paragraph 3 is to be attributed to the three authors, who thank all the members of the UniCa team who collaborated on the project described here.

<sup>2</sup> See Regional language policy plan (Resolution No. 34/16 of 07.07.2020), and also R.L. No. 22/2018. Among the other activities envisaged by the agreement, we mention here some of them: Sardinian language workshops included in the L10-Literature and LM14-LM15 Classical and Modern Philologies and Literatures degree courses and addressed to the whole University; high-level training path for the teaching of Sardinian, through the activation of a Level II Master's degree.

erational dimension of this agreement and is part of the Regional Language Policy Plan 2020-24 (RAS 2020).

With regard to this certification (henceforth CertSarC1), the UniCa-RAS plan responds to a normative need that arose with the promulgation of the Regional Law (R.L.) 22/2018 (*Discipline of regional language policy*, RAS 2018), which in Article 9 provides for the establishment of a language certification system for the Sardinian language (and for the Catalan of Alghero)<sup>3</sup>. This would be issued by qualified entities and constructed on the basis of the criteria of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for languages. This C1 certification is required to work in local language offices (Art. 11), and to be allowed to teach the Sardinian language as part of the school curriculum (Art. 20)<sup>4</sup>.

In formulating a proposal that meets the requirements of the R.L. for the Sardinian language, the UniCa working group<sup>5</sup> was not only faced with the difficulties posed in general by the initiation of a certification process, but in addition it was necessary to find solutions to work on minority language varieties. As it is often the case, minority language varieties present a limited degree of elaboration (with the consequent lack of lexical coverage of certain semantic areas, especially for the more formal communicative contexts away from everyday life; Kloss 1952, Marra 2001, Dell'Aquila, Iannàccaro 2004, 92-95) and reduced standardization<sup>6</sup>. Consequently, one of the first issues to be considered in a certification process is undoubtedly the crucial choice of which language to certify. As a matter of fact, we know that even highly standardized languages present determined variation in use, first and foremost because of the geographical factor<sup>7</sup>. For varieties with a low degree of standardization, of course, this problem is far greater, as the main decision of the entire process (that is: which language variety is to be tested and certified) is not facilitated by the frequent scarcity of reference texts such as dictionaries, descriptive and pedagogical grammars, etc. Adding to this central and, clearly, wide-ranging problem, are issues related to the graphic representation of language. They are difficult to untangle both in the presence of diverse writing traditions that have a certain diffusion and recognition, and can even represent identity features (see Dell'Aquila,

<sup>3</sup> Proficiency in Sardinia's other minority varieties – namely Sassarese, Gallurese and Tabarchino – is attested by the relevant RAS department, which appoints an evaluation commission for this purpose.

<sup>4</sup> The situation is different for those who offer extracurricular teaching workshops in the Sardinian language (but also in Catalan Algherese, Sassarese, Gallurese or Tabarchino): for them, a “certification” of adequate competence in oral skills alone is deemed sufficient. So far, RAS (through the relevant department) has established an oral language certification of minority languages and alloglot varieties, called “Nara-mi”.

<sup>5</sup> The group is composed, in addition to the three authors of this paper, of UniCa colleagues Simone Ciccolone, Olga Denti, Luisanna Fodde, Immacolata Pinto, Nicoletta Puddu, Ignazio E. Putzu, Maurizio Viridis, and Sardinian language expert collaborators Antonio Cordella, Giovanna Dessi, Gianfranco Fronteddu, Maria Elena Onano, Carminu Pintore, and Bruna Siriu. We also availed ourselves of the collaboration of the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science.

<sup>6</sup> See, among others, Dell'Aquila, Iannàccaro (2004), Cordin (2011), Dal Negro, Marra (2013), Luise, Vicario (2021), Fiorentini (2022).

<sup>7</sup> Among the various works see at least the volume edited by Cerruti, Crocco, Marzo (2017).

Iannàccaro 2004, 76, about what they call “flag characters”), and in their absence. Last but not least, minority languages often lack reference teaching tools, first and foremost syllabi, which, as we shall see (sec. 2), are essential for the certification process. Textbooks, grammar reference books, dictionaries, and materials for testing and possible assessment of learning are all in short supply (Iannàccaro, Fiorentini 2021, Marra 2021).

The certification process for Sardinian C1, therefore, required discussion and the identification of solutions to these problematic issues, before the group could operationally work on creating the certification tests (sec. 2).

## 1.2 The specificities of the Sardinian case

When discussing what to test in the CertSarC1, the research team took several factors into account regarding the internal linguistic history (such as typological profile, phono-morphological and syntactic pattern, definition of the main geographic dialectal groupings) and the external linguistic history of Sardinian (including writing traditions and communicative usages, planning initiatives and language policy)<sup>8</sup>.

As far as the internal linguistic history is concerned, briefly what can be remembered here is that Sardinian linguistics divides the linguistic domain of the island into two main macro-varieties, traditionally known as *Logudorese*, for the northern variety, and *Campidanese*, for the southern variety (see Fig. 1). These are identified due to the thickening of a substantial number of isoglosses that cut through the centre of Sardinia and divide the island roughly into two halves. When looking at the dialectological picture in more detail, we note, moreover, that the northern half of Sardinia has within it a central-eastern area, which is considered more conservative, taking the name of *Nuorese*, and that in the central area there is a large median area, an amphizona (Virdis 1988, Putzu 2017).

With regard to the external linguistic history, and observing the use of the Sardinian language in diachrony, the sedimentation of a cultured writing tradition is recorded dating back to the Middle Ages (Maninchedda 2012, Virdis 2019). Over time, with respect to literary, religious and bureaucratic uses, two sub-standards of reference have formed, a northern one, based on the so-called common or central *Logudorese*, and a southern one, based on the upper-class variety of Cagliari (Virdis 1988, Paulis 2001).

From the aftermath of the Second World War, after extensive debates on language policy and planning issues that also involved civil society, RAS itself was the promoter in 2001 of a first proposal for a standard (*Limba Sarda Unificada* – LSU 2001), which was followed in 2006 by a second proposal (*Limba Sarda Comuna* – LSC 2006), which is currently in use for the needs of the regional government. These proposals were accompanied by heated controversy because they were not considered representative of all varieties, especially the southern ones. For these reasons, alternative proposals to LSC were subsequently elaborated, i.e. the so called *Arrègulas* (Comitau 2009), a pluricentric model, initially developed for the *Campidanese* area, then also extended to the *Logudorese*

<sup>8</sup> For an overview of issues related to the Sardinian language, see Blasco Ferrer, Koch, Marzo (2017).

area (Comitau 2019). The standardization process for the Sardinian language, at present, has not yet been fully completed (Marzo 2017; Mereu 2024)<sup>9</sup>.

Fig. 1. – *Map of Sardinian varieties (Viridis 1988, 905).*



<sup>9</sup> The same R.L. 22/2018 in Article 8 provides for the establishment of a *Consulta de su sardu*, composed of a group of experts called to develop «a proposal for a linguistic standard and orthographic norm» that takes into account «the Campidanese and Logudorese historical and literary macro-varieties, the languages spread in individual local communities, the reference standards adopted by the Region with an experimental character for the written language output of the Regional Administration and the outcomes of its experimentation» (the English translation is ours). This provision, at present, has not yet been implemented.

## 2. *UniCa's response: the structure of CertSarC1*

### 2.1 Guidelines for orthographic conventions in CertSarC1

In initiating the certification process, the UniCa research team took into account the complexity of the geographical framework just described, both in selecting and distributing the input texts used for the construction of the tests and in identifying the criteria for assessing candidates' skills and abilities. We sought to reconcile two needs:

- on the one hand, it was deemed necessary to take a position of protecting and promoting the different Sardinian language varieties;
- on the other hand, we tried to address the need for shared criteria of standardization as well as the expendability of the certification throughout the region.

Therefore, in adherence to these guiding principles, it was decided that all geographical varieties of Sardinian should be included in the examination, with the sole exclusion, for input texts, of written and oral productions that presented excessively characterized linguistic traits from a diatopic point of view. This choice is also linked to the specific C1 level that the UniCa team was asked to test and evaluate: the idea being, in fact, that Sardinian speakers who will be certified as C1 (and therefore can become Sardinian language teachers or operators in language offices, see sec. 1.1) should have plurilingual competences, at least regarding receptive skills; so they should understand also other diatopic varieties than the variety they speak (Council of Europe 2018, 28-30). The certified C1 Sardinian speakers should possess, in short, intercomprehension skills in reading and listening (Bonvino, Garbarino 2022). As we shall see, in the certification, such intercomprehension skills are tested through a balanced distribution of varieties in the structure of the tests (see sec. 2.2).

The choice of graphic norms for the assessment of tests requiring the use of the written form was particularly delicate. It was decided that the main reference models now established in the writing community (*LSC* and *Arrègulas*) would be integrated and that a graphemic repertoire, clarified and extended by the UniCa team, would have been available to the candidates. This approach allowed, for example, candidates to the use of graphemes which were felt as “identity characters” by some speakers (as already mentioned in sec. 1.1). One example is the grapheme <x> which represents the voiced post-alveolar fricative sound [ʒ] used in the southern area writing tradition. In addition, representation was also given to the *LSC*, which was adopted in the test instructions. It was then decided to intervene minimally, where necessary, in the written texts used as input in order to regularize their appearance (elimination of paragodic vowels, regularization of verbal desinences, insertion of graphic accentuation, regularization of punctuation, etc.), while the so-called “author’s” texts, belonging to the literary tradition, were preserved in their original form.



2.2 The distribution of varieties

The structure of the certification was originally conceived by the UniCa team and included in the RAS public notice on the certification of knowledge of historical minority languages spoken in Sardinia. It is aligned with the structure of the recognized certifications of the main European languages and includes five parts: reading comprehension, listening, written production, oral production (monologic and dialogic interaction) and analysis of communication structures. Each section is made up of different sub-tests, as clarified further on (see section 2.3.3).

For the construction of the tests, the first step was to select the written or spoken input texts within a text database preliminarily created, where each text was assigned to the northern or the southern variety group (see sec. 2.3.1). This, however, was not always an easy task, especially for those varieties of the central area (the amphizona, see sec.1.2), which are more difficult to ascribe dialectologically.

Taking this into account, the UniCa team then organized the reception skills tests (reading and listening) and the communication structure analysis test in such a way that all candidates would have the largest number of written and oral texts in the varieties belonging to their linguistic macro-area and a smaller number of texts from the other linguistic macro-area. The texts are distributed as evenly as possible within the “Candidate’s Notebook”<sup>10</sup> (called *cartulàrios*). When registering, the candidates are asked to indicate their chosen variety of Sardinian, marking only, generically, whether they would prefer the *cartulàriu* (centre-) north, which includes a predominant number of texts in the northern and the central-northern varieties, or the *cartulàriu* (centre-)south, with predominance of texts in the southern and the central-southern varieties. *Cartulàrios* are structured as follows (Fig. 2):

Fig. 2 – *Distribution of varieties in candidates’ notebooks*

	<i>Cartulàriu (centre-)north</i>	<i>Cartulàriu (centre-)south</i>
<i>Listening (3 sub-tests)</i>	2 sub-tests in (centre-) northern varieties and 1 sub-test in other variety	2 sub-tests in (centre-) southern varieties and 1 sub-test in other variety
<i>Reading (3 sub-tests)</i>	2 sub-tests in (centre-) northern varieties and 1 sub-test in other variety	2 sub-tests in (centre-) southern varieties and 1 sub-test in other variety
<i>Analysis of communication structures (4 sub-tests)</i>	2 sub-tests in (centre-) northern varieties and 2 sub-tests in other variety	2 sub-tests in (centre-) southern varieties and 2 sub-tests in other variety

<sup>10</sup> “Candidate’s Notebook – *cartulàriu*” refers to the booklet in which the materials needed to take the certification exam are collected. The CertSarC1 is administered on PCs through the use of the Moodle learning platform; therefore, the booklet is presented in a digital version.



Finally, in the written and oral production activities, candidates are given the opportunity to use any preferred variety of Sardinian.

### 2.3 Steps in the construction of CertSarC1

Having addressed the issues described above and made the necessary theoretical and methodological choices, therefore, the process of designing and building CertSarC1 was organized in five stages:

1. text collection and database construction;
2. definition of the *Reference Level Description* and construction of the C1 syllabus<sup>11</sup>;
3. definition of the exam construct;
4. development of the exam: texts selection, item construction, scoring, item pre-testing, test processing);
5. re-entry of the validated items into the database and processing of the final tests.

Concurrently, glottodidactic training of Sardinian language expert collaborators was conducted with specific focus on language testing (especially familiarization with CEFR descriptors), so that they could work as item writers, test administrators and evaluators. Training was conducted by members of the UniCa team who are experts in glottodidactics and by trainers from the Centre for Certification of Italian as a foreign language (CILS) of the University for Foreigners of Siena<sup>12</sup>.

#### 2.3.1 Construction of the text database and criteria for text selection

The first, preliminary phase consisted of creating a database containing texts of various types in the different varieties of Sardinian, since there was no similar tool that could be used for the purpose of constructing CertSarC1. The database, which is being continuously updated, is the reference repository for the selection of the input texts for each test.

Starting from an initial collection of existing material, texts were surveyed, archived and tagged. The texts come from: archives of local and national radio and television broadcasters, e.g., the digital archive available online *Sardegna Digital Library*<sup>13</sup>; websites of local authorities such as municipalities, RAS and other entities; online newspapers, news sites, e.g., Rai Sardegna; Youtube channels, pages of associations, organizations and social networks frequented by communities of

<sup>11</sup> The construction of the C1 syllabus for Sardinian is part of a more general work of the UniCa team, which is developing syllabi for all CEFR levels.

<sup>12</sup> We would like to take this opportunity to thank the CILS centre members for their contribution: Sabrina Machetti and Paola Masillo for their very helpful training activities and stimulating scientific discussions; Anna Bandini and Laura Sprugnoli for their valuable suggestions regarding scoring and statistical item analysis.

We are also very grateful to Nick Saville, who generously shared his expertise on language testing and is a constant reference person in our work on certifying Sardinian language.

<sup>13</sup> <<https://www.sardegнадigitallibrary.it>>.

Sardinian speakers and writers; private and anonymized communications, e.g., e-mail, Whatsapp messages.

Each text entered into the database was annotated indicating its content, macro-variety of belonging, specific geographical area of reference, textual type and genre, usability by level (according to CEFR criteria), medium-related dimensions, functions, and morpho-syntactic, lexical, cultural and sociolinguistic features.

The criteria for the choice of the texts to be included in the certification tests have been typology, informativeness and relevance to the learner, according to the most recent literature (Machetti, Vedovelli 2024), and the main international associations of language testing's guidelines<sup>14</sup>.

### 2.3.2 Defining the profiles of the Reference Level Descriptions (RLDs) for the Sardinian language and the test construct

Contextually, another preliminary operation in the construction of the exam was the definition of the Reference Level Description (RLDs)<sup>15</sup> for Sardinian. As is well known, the CEFR, in fact, is potentially applicable to any language, but the descriptors do not refer to any particular language. It was therefore necessary, for the benefit of teachers, evaluators, syllabus designers and authors of teaching materials, to construct descriptions for the Sardinian language, as has been done for other languages in the past<sup>16</sup>.

The creation of the RLDs for Sardinian, carried out by UniCa team<sup>17</sup>, is an ongoing process and it is based, for the time being, on an intuitive method. It uses the pioneering operation of linking the elements that define the RLDs itself (derived at the moment only from the texts in the database) with the procedures and evaluation criteria of CertSarC1<sup>18</sup>. According to the principles of the manual *Relating Language Examination to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR)* (Council of Europe 2009), this procedure involved an analysis of the different texts in the archive in order to

<sup>14</sup> See i.e. the *Manual for language test development and examining* (ALTE 2011) and the *Principles of good practice* (ALTE 2020).

<sup>15</sup> RLDs are “structured inventories of words and “norms” of a language deemed necessary to produce oral and written texts corresponding to the CEFR descriptor scales. For each level, the RLDs provide an inventory of the language forms to be mastered: text types, functions and elements of the grammar of meaning (such as the expression of the concepts of space and quantity), the different forms for the levels of the system, and the cultural and cross-cultural aspects of language learning”.

<sup>16</sup> According to the Council of Europe (<<https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/reference-level-descriptions#:~:text=Reference%20levels%20identify%20the%20forms,level%2C%20from%20A1%20to%20C2>>>), RLDs creation work has been carried out for only a few languages including: Croatian, Czech, English, French, German, Georgian, Italian, Lithuanian, Portuguese, Spanish, Turkish (still work in progress) and others.

<sup>17</sup> We are very thankful to prof. Jean Claude Beacco (Council of Europe) for accepting to supervise our proposal.

<sup>18</sup> For further details regarding this procedure, see the website *Relating language curricula, tests and examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference* (RELANG): <<https://relang.ecml.at>>.

produce language descriptions that merge in the RLDs and identify characteristics of different genres of text.

In the future, the UniCa team plans to expand the database by collecting additional authentic texts, teaching materials and the productions of the examined candidates. In this way it will be possible to complete the procedure: the intuitive method (based precisely on the work of specialists, native speakers and language experts) and the partially qualitative method already used will be complemented by refining the qualitative method and adopting the quantitative method, e.g. using frequency lists<sup>19</sup>. This will allow the continuous validation of the collected contents of the descriptive categories of the RLDs.

Based on the descriptors of the CEFR and of the Companion Volume, with which the UniCa team has provided familiarization, and on the basis of the creation of the RLDs, the specification phase<sup>20</sup> was then carried out.

In parallel, the syllabi were defined, by consulting pre-existing models for Italian (in particular Benucci 2007, Spinelli, Parizzi 2010, Enti certificatori 2011, among others). In relation to the context in which the CertSarC1 was conceived, as with any other test, prior to developing, implementing and administering the exam, it was first necessary to define the purpose for which the test is constructed: verify the status of the candidates' linguistic-communicative competence with respect to the varieties of the Sardinian language<sup>21</sup>, in the situations and contexts described. Next, criteria and techniques for constructing the test and the sub-tests were selected. The test content was then identified by selecting texts from the database described above (sec. 2.2.1), choosing techniques for testing receptive skills and, finally, deciding on the types of tasks for testing productive skills. At the same time, the evaluation criteria and related scores were defined, as well as the procedure of administering the examination. The process of validation was carried throughout the different steps of test creation, and implementation of the test (ALTE 2011).

### 2.3.3 Test construction and evaluation

As already mentioned in section 2.2, each exam consists of five parts: listening, reading, written production, analysis of communication structures and oral production, modelled on CILS examination. The textual types chosen include those provided by the C1 level within the CEFR.

<sup>19</sup> According to the CEFR-J model for the RLDs, see Tono (2019).

<sup>20</sup> The specification phase is aimed at "increase the awareness of the importance of a good content analysis of examinations; become familiar with and use the CEFR in planning and describing language examinations; describe and analyse in a detailed way the content of an examination or test; provide evidence of the quality of the examination or test; provide evidence of the relation between examinations/tests and the CEFR; provide guidance for item writers; increase the transparency for teachers, testers, examination users and test takers about the content and quality of the examination or test and its relationship to the CEFR", according to the model proposed in Noijons, Bérešová, Breton, Szabó (2011, 36).

<sup>21</sup> In our case, the main, but not exclusive target audiences may be, as mentioned in sec. 1, school teachers and local language operators.

For listening comprehension, there are 3 objective sub-tests (2 multiple-choice tasks and 1 information detection task), constructed using input texts such as reviews, commentaries, descriptions of professional activities, radio interviews and conversations.

For reading comprehension, there are 3 objective sub-tests (1 multiple-choice task, 1 information identification task, 1 text reordering task) with input texts from, for example, books, newspapers, magazines, fiction, catalogues, instructions, public announcements, articles on scientific or literary topics aimed at a wide audience, and interviews.

For the section on communication structure analysis, the 4 objective sub-tests are clozes (testing the use of connectives, vocabulary, verb forms) and sentence transformation. Input texts include, among others, public notices, municipal regulations, literary texts and newspaper articles.

Finally, the production sub-tests, both oral and written, require the candidate to complete authentic tasks in specific contexts. For the written production, two sub-tests are foreseen, a themed task and a structured task; for the oral production, a dialogue with the examiner and a monologue on a given subject are required.

The tests have undergone pre-testing sessions<sup>22</sup>: a qualitative analysis of the results of the pre-test highlighted the need to redistribute the varieties according to the different task types and the need to use audio that, although authentic, had less background noise.

Furthermore, the quantitative analysis of the items indicated criticalities for some of them in relation to facility and discrimination indexes and distractor efficiency. The critical items have been removed and substituted.

So far four certification sessions have been administered: September 2022, September 2023, February and May 2024, with a total of about 400 candidates.

Concerning tests' evaluation, it is a particularly delicate and complex process in the case of a non-standardized language such as Sardinian. Therefore it was necessary to put a process into place that would ensure inter-rater reliability by comparing all the results of the subjective tests by all the evaluators in the case of the first session, and by comparing all the results of the tests by two evaluators from the second session onward. If there was any doubt, the entire committee was involved in checking the assessment.

The evaluation of objective evidence also posed a challenge for the working group because of the will to represent all the local varieties. In the case of the vocabulary tests, for example, geosynonyms were included in the solutions and thus considered eligible. Finally, in written and oral productions, where the candidates were free to use their variety, apart from the commonly adopted evaluation criteria for the assessment, candidates' performances were also evaluated on how consistent their use was with respect to the chosen variety.

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<sup>22</sup> The pre-testing sessions have been administered to a small sample (17 subjects), given the small number of Sardinian speakers available for the session and not interested in achieving the C1 Sardinian certification.

### 3. *Challenges and future prospects*

The creation of this examination has led the team to reflect on the three main testing features, namely validity, reliability, and impact. Concerning the first criterion, validity, the purpose for which the examination was created has allowed the identification of specific contexts of use and functions, and a user profile which currently is partly defined by the R.L. 22/2018. This profile will have to be modified as the certification becomes more widespread, especially for the other proficiency levels. The definition of communicative competence in the Sardinian language (and thus the identification of a language model) has also made the team reflect on the varieties in use. This is a particularly serious topic for a minority language with low standardization such as Sardinian, as internal variation, although being a great asset, is at the same time an enormous challenge in an assessment process.

Regarding reliability, that concerns the empirical aspects of the evaluation process, it is necessary to highlight that the greatest critical issues are related precisely to the lack of a language standard. Our proposal is the construction of flexible assessment instruments, i.e. with reference to the different macro-varieties, different geosynonyms were incorporated in the lexical choices of communication structure analysis tests, both for content and function word.

Finally, regarding the social impact, for Sardinian to have a certification procedure that meets quality criteria for this type of assessment is undoubtedly of great importance in terms of language policy and planning<sup>23</sup> just as it is for other minority languages with long and important experience in language implementation and standardization processes (such as Friulian and Ladino, for example<sup>24</sup>). The certified language, in some way, increases its social value (Bourdieu 1982) and its visibility within the repertoire. It can represent therefore, one of the levers to promote sociolinguistic vitality (UNESCO 2003, Strubell 1999).

The challenge for Sardinian, as well as for other minority languages, is to find a balance between the protection of diversity and variation<sup>25</sup>, and the need to identify linguistic reference models that allow a shared assessment of competences. In this regard, the structure of CertSarC1 may provide an opportunity to investigate the feasibility of a solution to this challenge that seems to us to provide the advantage of a ‘unity in diversity’, a gradual trend towards the creation of reference models without losing the specificity and richness of Sardinian variation, in a perspective of a factual polynomic choice (Marcellesi 1987).

Moreover, on this point, the results of CertSarC1 may provide information for the debated issue of intercomprehension between language varieties of Sardinian. This is an important topic in Sardinia, where opposing tendencies (on the one hand

<sup>23</sup> On the ethical issues raised by the social impact of language testing, see at least Shohamy (1997, 2017); Mac Namara, Roever (2006), ILTA Guidelines (ILTA 2000), ALTE (2020), Barni (2023).

<sup>24</sup> Cordin (2011), Luise, Vicario (2021), Fusco (2022).

<sup>25</sup> Diversity and variation are key elements for the individual and social identity recognition of that language, which is fundamental for its preservation, use and intergenerational transmission. See at least Dorian (1981), Edwards (2010, 2012), Fishman (1989), Schalley, Eisenclas (2020).

pan-Sardinian standardization and on the other its outright rejection) too often arise on a purely ideological level.

In terms of individual impact, the CertSarC1 can certainly be called a high-stake test, that is, a test that has «a strong impact on the life and future of candidates»<sup>26</sup> (Machetti and Vedovelli 2024, 106), since according to the R.L. already mentioned, it constitutes a gateway to the professions of local language operators and Sardinian language teachers in schools, and can be mandatory for local public tenders and competitions. This is why it is strongly marked by principles of both individual (for all the subjects involved), and social responsibility. One of these is surely the contribution to the “normalization” of the use of the Sardinian language by expanding the domains and contexts of use.

Finally, the certification tool and related processes represent a great opportunity for language research, teaching and training. As well known and proven, working on language assessment means developing reference tools that compel metalinguistic reflection and linguistic formalization. The materials collected for test preparation and candidates’ oral and written productions can be also a valuable resource for corpus planning (Callies, Götz 2015). This database of texts, in fact, can highlight forms that are widespread and accepted by competent speakers, but which are not yet included in grammatical and lexical descriptions, and which can also become the subject for further research, even for varieties of Sardinian that have not yet, or only partially, been documented and studied.

In terms of (positive) washback effect, it is easy to understand what the impact of this resource can represent for teaching purposes: from the continuous refinement of the definition of the RLDs for the Sardinian language and of the process of alignment to CEFR, to the construction of reference texts (descriptive and pedagogical grammars) and teaching tools.

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<sup>26</sup> The translation is ours.



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