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Language and identity: Current issues, attitudes and challenges in South Tyrol

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Introduction

"After years and years, we are still discussing the issue of bilingual street signs in the mountains, instead of thinking about how to collaborate by exploiting the richness of a land where two different cultures coexist. The biggest problem is therefore mental closure and the fear of opening up to what is different from us..."
(Excerpt from survey)

The Autonomous Province of Bolzano-Bozen (hereinafter South Tyrol) is located in northern Italy and differentiates itself from other Italian regions. The inhabitants of South Tyrol are, scientifically defined, a territorially multilingual society with autonomous status in a state defined as monolingual. Three official languages are spoken in this territory which is what makes South Tyrol so unique. Even though it is an Italian province, the predominant language in South Tyrol is German, and approximately 65% of the population there has German as a mother tongue. Besides German, and Italian there is also a small Ladin speaking minority. In terms of numbers, around 70% of the population are German-speaking, 26% Italian speaking, and 4% Ladin speaking. The emergence of this multicultural agglomeration has consequences in the everyday life of over half a million people, which was not necessarily voluntary. The reason why South Tyrol finds itself in this particular environment, is a result of Italy's annexation of South Tyrol in the aftermath of World War I. South Tyrol was part of the Habsburg Empire for centuries. The German and Ladin speaking population became a minority in a foreign land. In the years following the annexation co-living resulted in tensions between the German- and Italian speaking people. In 1972 the Second Autonomy Statute "formally brought peace between the German-speaking population and the Italian-speaking community" (Vettori et al. 2021).

Nowadays, the South Tyrolean system is globally discussed to be a model for solving interethnic tensions and ethnic diversity in contexts raging from Bosnia-Herzegovina to Tibet (Carlá, 2018). In the present day, the territory is a province with a high quality of life, thanks to a growing economy. Although the peaceful coexistence of the three ethnic and linguistic groups has improved significantly over the last 25 years, challenges remain. Major studies that were carried out in the last two decades found that the relationship between the three language groups rarely goes beyond that of coexistence. German-, Italian- and Ladin-

speaking South Tyroleans still live much more side by side than with each other (Weger, 2010). "Living apart in the same room" (Carlá 2007) is still the rule for many and is especially the case for the relationship between the two major language groups, German and Italian. For instance, at 18 years of age the inhabitants need to decide which language groups they belong to, and the school system is strictly divided by language.

As a South Tyrolean, I know this feeling of distance very well, which was my motivation to take a closer look at South Tyrol, its history and cultural diversity in the context of this work. I was born and grew up in a German-speaking family in Bolzano, the capital city of the region. Even though I have always lived in a city with a majority Italian population, contact with the Italian speaking group was very little. I attended 12 years of school in my mother tongue, watched German speaking TV, read German newspapers, listened to German songs, and mostly had German-speaking friends. The little Italian I spoke I used mainly during the Italian lessons at school. From the age of 16 on I started to become friends with Italian-speakers and only at the age of 18 I felt totally comfortable in speaking the other language. After having grown up in a German speaking bubble as an Italian national, I have realized that multiculturalism should be more embraced. Now, I see the living in a multilingual context as an enriching opportunity and that instead of fighting it, we should find solutions in order to encourage this pluralism of identities. Multicultural environments exist all over the world, and it is therefore important to research and start dialogues about the struggle that many people, like me, feel.

The aim of this contribution is to illustrate and discuss the current issues and attitudes of the multilingual society in South Tyrol. Here the focus lies especially on the two biggest language groups: the German and Italian. In order to provide an internal perspective on multilingualism in South Tyrol in 2022, I decided to carry out a survey regarding language perception, language identity and feelings of cohabitation in order to update previous research. The main question that arises is whether there have been significant improvements within the past years? Therefore, questions such as (1) How did the language identities evolve since 1918 in South Tyrol? (2) What is the connection between language and identity and how does it affect a community? (3) Which language do inhabitants prefer in their daily life? (4) What is the level of interaction between the two language groups? (5) What are the main reasons for the distance between the two language communities? and finally (6) What

are the main challenges and issues in this multilingual society? will be answered throughout the work.

Because of the complexity of the topic and the need to explain the history of South Tyrol, a deliberate decision was taken not to write a separate section with a literature review, but to embed a review of the key authors, books and documents into the discussion and explanation sections of *Chapter 1: Language and Identity*, *Chapter 2: Then and Now*, and the first section of *Chapter 3. Previous Studies*. It is hoped that this approach will aid the reader in both understanding the context, as well as getting a grasp of the key authors, books and documents, without a lot of repetition. However, the reader will certainly notice that authors like Carla, Abel and Vettori and documents like the Sprachbarometer 2004, Sprachbarometer 2014, and Kolipsi I and II are repeatedly cited, as these have been, and still are, the key texts for the study of language issues in South Tyrol.

The dissertation is divided into five sections. It begins with a theoretical discussion of the concept of language and identity and how they are connected to each other. The second section gives an historical, linguistic and legal background of South Tyrol. Which includes a brief overview of the history of South Tyrol beginning in 1918. Furthermore, the work describes the current state of South Tyrol, by presenting the current situation of language use and intergroup relations of the South Tyrolean population. Aspects of language policy will be pointed out. The third section presents the empirical part of the work. A pilot study provides a snapshot of how the South Tyrolean population perceives language identity, language use, and ethnic cohabitation in Spring 2022. In order to perceive if there have been changes regarding the past, the main results are being compared with two previous studies from the Autonomous Province of Bolzano and the Eurac Research Institute (hereinafter EURAC). An overall discussion further explores the issue of toponyms, the Italian feeling of unease, and lastly the monolingual school system. Finally, the conclusion of the thesis will sum up the key takeaways and offer prospective directions for future research on this subject.

CHAPTER 1: LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

After explaining the goals and aims of this study, a theoretical discussion will follow which will define the key terms and assumptions.

Using a spoken language is one of the keyways in which an individual presents themselves to others, and in doing so, language becomes a means of exploring, discovering, and expressing self-identity. Some social scientists even argue that it is the most important. This function of language is true for any language spoken in any part of the world, but the issue of language and identity becomes increasingly complicated as more languages interact in an environment – whether it is relating to a family, community region or nation – and are added to 'the mix'. In South Tyrol, where three languages interact – Italian, German and Ladin – this complexity is especially the case. There, we can see that social, psychological and philosophical issues such as Belonging, Home and Identity, and managing these issues in a personal, social and practical way, can cause division, conflict and discomfort. If Language diversity is not managed properly, identity issues are likely to cause deep social division and result in conflicts. This was seen in the 1960s in South Tyrol, where people died because of identity disagreement and division.

As *language* and *identity* are terms and concepts that are going to be used repeatedly in this work, it is essential to define and establish an understanding of these terms, and their correlation, before proceeding.

1.1. Language and identity – a definition

According to Krumm (2020), the term identity can refer to the individual person and denote what makes that person distinctive (personal identity, ego identity). In this context, language is considered a central identity forming-element. Every utterance is a speech act. With language, every speaker reveals parts of his or her identity. Among other things, a person expresses his or her own inner self through his or her speech acts. The German émigré philosopher of language Ernst Cassirer says that language can also be imagined as "an abundance of the most diverse ways of expressing the self" (Fussenegger, 2012). In other words, language is therefore a medium of self-expression, the presentation of one's own identity, which everyone shapes themselves through their choices. (Thim-Mabrey, 2003).

However, identity is not only composed of the personal identity but also of the social

one. Here, language plays again a significant role because, in addition to presenting one's own identity, language also serves as an essential link between the individual and the community (Fussenegger, 2012). Linguistic agreements create groups in that it can constitute the social and the society, conveying ideas of a common world in which it represents individuality and collectivity as it were as an expression of "I" and "we" (Fussenegger, 2012). Between the individual and the social system, and vice versa, it serves as a door to mediation (Naglo, 2007). The human being gives himself an identity through several group affiliations. "The" or "one" identity does not exist (Fix, 2003). Group-related identities exist in several forms, such as clothing, hairstyles or language. They are an essential characteristic that helps to shape a group, the behaviour that emerges from it, and the attitudes cherished within it (Fussenegger, 2012). In addition, they are an important means of expression to simultaneously distinguish oneself from other groups and thus to maintain oneself. The group members essentially share in the identity-forming traits of the group (Oppenrieder, 2003).

1.2.Group identity through language

In this work, the focus will lay on group identity through language. According to the sociolinguist Heinrich Löffler (1998), "The identification or identity that is linked to language always refers to a group identity, i.e. to several people who have common characteristics and who feel that they belong together, as a group, because of these common characteristics. This characteristic can also be language [...]. Language acts as a badge for groups, comparable to a costume " (Löffler, 1998).

Language not only indicates belonging to a group, but it also serves, like other identity-forming traits, to distinguish oneself from others. Creating linguistic differences therefore also has a strong identitary function. Individuals use language in such a way that they are as consistent as possible with a group and at the same time are perceived as being consistent and different from others (Franceschini, 2003). Language, this essential characteristic of a group, can thus not only have a limiting but also an excluding effect. The common, distinct form of communication marks genuine membership with regard to the ingroup, while a failure to use certain language forms or terms indicates outsider status.

In the case of linguistic minorities such as the South Tyroleans, it has been shown that language makes the underlying values and norms of the group accessible and thus

enables solidarity within the respective cultural framework (Fussenegger, 2012). Minority languages or smaller languages in particular thus gain the status of a resource in the sense of a special marking of the respective group (Naglo, 2007). The ability to speak a language alone says nothing about belonging to a language group. But on the other hand, rudimentary knowledge of a language can be enough to associate oneself with it and, above all, serve as a political symbol of belonging. A change to another language group is only possible with difficulty or under extreme conditions. (Löffler, 1998). Thus, in social groups that define themselves through a common language, historical continuity can be conveyed across generations through language (Naglo, 2007).

Historically, group identity through language has not always been decisive for nation-building. The identity of a language community only became important for nation-building in Europe since the French Revolution (Thim-Mabrey, 2003). In the 19th century, this trend intensified in Europe; large political-social groupings in particular saw languages as creating identity (Fussenegger, 2012). In addition to the functional value of a unified language, as it facilitates convenient communication, there was also its symbolic power, as it represents the "unity of this entity" itself - externally as well as internally (Oppenrieder, 2003). In Europe, language thus played a major role in the construction of national identities and the commonality of language was seen as a significant feature of ethnic identification. National languages served as evidence of a nation; without them, the young nation-states could not come into being. The opinion prevailed that a nation must have its own language in order to be able to call itself a nation (Fussenegger, 2012).

As a result, language increasingly took on the function for language groups to distinguish themselves from others and at the same time to integrate internally. Language thus gained decisive political importance and considerable potential in connection with the formation of nations and collective identities. It became a prerequisite for sovereign nation states (ibid.). National written culture and the recording of history in one's own language arose primarily as a result of national motivation (ibid.). It should be noted, however, that language is considered a necessary but not sufficient condition for the formation of an ethnic "we" consciousness. Therefore, different ethnic groups can also have a common language (Naglo, 2007).

Since the beginning of the 20th century, minorities have been particularly affected by the ever-increasing emphasis on language as an identity-forming feature of a nation

(Fussenegger, 2012). Before and after the First World War, conflicts arose between the majority peoples and the minorities, which stood in the way of Johann Gottfried Herder's idea of the connection between nation, history, thought and language (Fussenegger, 2021). Minority languages, their speakers or use, were now seen negatively by the majority of the population and discriminated against. As minorities in Europe struggled to survive during the fascist era, language minorities such as the South Tyroleans became aware that their language was an important part of their identity as a "group-bound, social means of affirming and securing identity" (Fix, 2003). For ethnicity is all the more strongly related to the symbolic power of a language when an ethnic minority sees its language or culture restricted or threatened by a dominant majority (Naglo, 2007). It is interesting that linguistic identity often seems to become important to members of a language minority only when it is questioned or no longer exists (Fussenegger, 2012). In countries such as Ireland or Wales, which is part of Great Britain, for example, the inhabitants are proud of their original, Celtic language in order to distinguish their own identity from that of English. They promote it culturally, socially and politically, although a clear majority of the population there has long used English as their first language or has it as their mother tongue (Siguan, 2001).

Finally, the relationship between the language majority and the language minority, and vice versa, should be discussed. It is partly shaped by different points of view and is therefore full of conflict. Minorities often isolate themselves from the outside world, from the majority people, through their language, among other things (Fussenegger, 2012).

The following picture emerges: people feel they belong to various spatial areas, to a social class, a political attitude - to a religion - to a club -- or even to a language, one of the first characteristics that the counterpart perceives (Fussenegger, 2012). The latter characteristic is an essential part of the identity of South Tyroleans in particular. "Language forms an essential basis of the self-understanding of peoples and ethnic minorities as well as of smaller and larger, regional or social groups. The need to feel represented on a linguistic level, the need for identity through language and language identity is a genuinely human one that arises in living together with others" (Tim-Mabrey, 2003). As mentioned above, it is often assumed, that people document their belonging to the nation through the use of the common (or national) language. If language and the feeling of belonging to a certain grouping do not coincide with an individual's nationality, this means potential conflict with

regard to regional and national identity" (Riehl, 2009). Because of this, the phenomenon of language contact in plurilingual societies can lead to a conflict of "ethnic identity". Abel and Vettori (2012) described South Tyrol as "a region characterized by the presence of several languages in the territory with institutional multilingualism but largely monolingually oriented subsocieties". The previously mentioned problem of a discrepancy between regional and national identity is therefore strongly pronounced in the case of South Tyrol.

CHAPTER 2: SOUTH TYROL – THEN AND NOW (Historical, linguistic, and legal background)

2.1. Historical Background of South Tyrol

Due to its geographical position as a border region between Austria and Italy, i.e., between the German and Italian cultural areas, South Tyrol has always been a territory of multiethnicity. German-, Italian- and Ladin speaking populations have lived together in the area for centuries. In order to understand the convergence of the language groups of the present, a historical overview is crucial. The history of today's South Tyrol began when Tyrol was separated after the First World War and South Tyrol became part of Italy. What followed was a series of tensions and negotiations leading up to today's autonomy system.

2.1.1. 1919-1922: From the Division of Tyrol to Fascist Denationalisation policy

At the beginning of the 20th century, South Tyrol was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire together with today's Trentino, North and East Tyrol (Carlá, 2018). Belonging to the Austro-Hungarian Empire for over 500 years, the German speaking inhabitants made up the majority of the population[1]. With the signing of the Peace Treaty of Saint Germain on 10 September 1919, South Tyrol, together with the neighbouring Italian-speaking Trentino, became part of Italy as a "spoil of war" [2] (Steininger, 2017). The German-speaking South Tyroleans now found themselves in the middle of the construction of the Italian state nation (Südtiroler Landesregierung, 2019). After a brief period of tolerant politics for the inhabitants of South Tyrol, Fascism rose to power in Italy in 1922 and the new government began a campaign of Italianization of the territory (Carlá, 2007). Fascism in South Tyrol can be divided into three major categories. The first step after Tyrol's separation was the systematic subjugation of what had been a regional majority in South Tyrol but was now a minority within Italy by Italian Fascists (Steininger, 2017). On 15 July 1922, the Roveretan nationalist Ettore Tolomei announced a 32-point programme for the Italianisation of the country. The programme sought for the exclusive use of the Italian language in public life. German-

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[1] In 1910, 251,451 people lived in what is now South Tyrol, 89% of them Germans, 2.9% Italians, 3.7% Ladins and 10,770 others (Peterlini 1996).
[2] The area had been promised to Italy in the 1915 Treaty of London for entering the war alongside the Allies.

speaking public officials were fired or transferred, German was prohibited, and punished in school, family and place names were translated into Italian [3], only Italian was permitted in offices, public places, and public inscriptions, and for a short time the German-language press was eliminated completely (Carlá, 2012). In particular, the ban on German-language schools and the resulting obligation to teach exclusively in Italian provoked resistance and drew international attention (Südtiroler Landesregierung, 2019). In order to provide the children with a basic level of German language skills, illegal catacomb schools were organised from 1925 onwards.

Despite the detailed Italianisation programme, the resounding success hoped for by Rome failed to materialise. The strength of the South Tyroleans' resistance to fascism had been underestimated. Recognising the inadequacy of their previous policy, in the mid-1930s the fascist rulers resorted to a different method characterised by a strong majorisation. Through mass immigration of Italians, mostly from the south, the fascist rulers tried to reverse the language group ratio. (Steininger, 2017). The public sphere, but above all cities and larger centres were occupied by Italians from the South which were to a large extent civil servants and employees, military personnel, and railway workers. Furthermore, industrial zones were established in the largest South Tyrolean cities, such as Bolzano, Merano, and Bressanone. This process, which included major Italian companies like Falk, Montecatini, and Lancia revolutionized the region's economy (Carlá, 2012). This approach had a significant impact on the city of Bolzano which was formerly a modest pre-industrial town. The city grew into a major industrial city, with new areas populated primarily by Italian families, drastically expanding its city boundaries. The German-speaking population was not welcome in the new industrial enterprises and therefore unable to find work. During these years it also lost control of the most important economic sectors. Immediately before the harvest, 300 hectares of meadows were expropriated, and large urban residential buildings and fascist buildings were erected in spaces where previously agriculture had been practiced (Südtiroler Landesregierung, 2019). Only 5% of the 2800 dwellings built between 1935 and 1941 were assigned to German-speaking people. The city's population rose to 65,553 in 1943 as a result of the entry of Italian citizens, who accounted for 30.3 percent of the city's 32,679 people in

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[3] For each local German name, Ettore Tolomei constructed a Latin root. According to Kollmann its constructed place and field names account for approximately 200. They are still officially valid today (together with the German language versions and in some cases the Ladin versions). For a detailed list see the Website Prontuario dei nomi locali dell'Alto Adige, at https://www.mori.bz.it/toponomastica/index.htm.

1921 (Carlá, 2007). In the whole territory, the Italian population increased from 7,000 in 1910 to over 100,000 in 1943, accounting for one-third of the population of South Tyrol (Pristinger, 1978).

2.1.2. 1939-1945: The Hitler-Mussolini Agreement, Option and War

The third phase occurred with the rise of National Socialism in Germany, and with the Hitler-Mussolini Agreement of 1939: the *Option*. The events preceding Austria's annexation in March 1938 boosted the hope of many South Tyroleans of a return to Austria even more Südtiroler Landesregierung, 2019). Therefore, Mussolini and Hitler tried to find a solution to the "South Tyrol issue". The *option* agreement gave the German-speaking population the choice of either resettling in the *German Reich* or remaining in South Tyrol with the prospect of being Italianised, namely, to adopt the Italian language and culture (Südtiroler Landesregierung, 2019). Eighty-six percent of South Tyroleans decided to leave their homeland and join "Greater Germany." This major decision of the South Tyroleans tore whole families apart (Peterlini, 1996). The so-called optants were accommodated in 1940 and 1941, mainly in North Tyrol, but were not given a settlement of their own, and instead were accommodated wherever the opportunity arose [4]. The resettlement of many emigrants was later stalled by the war, so that in the end only 70,000 optants were resettled (Kramer, 1981). In the following years Mussolini was overthrown and the German Wehrmacht occupied a large part of Italy.

2.1.3. 1945-1948: The Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement and the First Autonomy

Following WWII, renewed discussions concerning South Tyrol's fate emerged. In response to the South Tyrolean demand for self-determination and Austrian irredentist claims, the Great Powers decided to maintain the existing border between Italy and Austria at the Brenner Pass, and pressed Rome and Vienna to reach an agreement that would end the conflicts between the two governments (Carlá, 2018). During the peace negotiations between the Allies and Italy in Paris (1946/47), the representatives of Italy and Austria were invited to work out an agreement for the protection of this minority in joint negotiations (Südtiroler Landesregierung, 2019. The result was the *Gruber - Degasperi Agreement* signed in Paris on 5 September 1946 by the Italian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Alcide Degasperi

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[4] At the beginning the emigrants were promised the same property.

and the Austrian Foreign Minister Karl Gruber, also known as the *Treaty of Paris* [5]. The Treaty insured South Tyrol comprehensive legislative and administrative powers to protect the German-speaking minority (Carlá, 2007). Education was now allowed to take place in German again, public offices, street signs as well as place names were made completely bilingual and Italianised family names were returned to their original names.

The National Constituent Assembly elected on 2 June 1946 adopted the Autonomous Statute of the Region of Trentino - Tyrol on 31 January 1948, based on the Treaty of Paris (Südtiroler Landesregierung, 2019). However, this statute did not meet the expectations of the political representation of the South Tyroleans, as the autonomous powers were not as numerous as expected, but above all because autonomy was not granted to the Province of Bolzano alone, but together with the Province of Trento, where the German speaking population was a minority (ibid.). Furthermore, various partial provisions of the Paris Treaty were either being implemented very slowly or not at all. A distrustful atmosphere developed. The German-speaking people began to accuse the Italian government of eroding the De Gasperi–Gruber Agreement's protection and asserted their right to self-determination (Carlá, 2007).

2.1.4. 1957-1960: From Sigmundskron to the U.N.

The *Südtiroler Volkspartei* (SVP) protested against the limited autonomy and submitted a letter of complaint to the Roman government in 1954. Austria, as a co-signatory of the 1956 Paris Treaty, also became active and proposed negotiations at expert level. However, Italy rejected the negotiations demanded by Austria. An announced direct state subsidy for the construction of over a thousand social housing units in Bolzano aroused fears of Italian infiltration among the German-speaking group (Carlá, 2007). Consequently, the SVP responded with a large protest rally in Sigmundskron on 17 November 1957, calling for autonomy solely limited to South Tyrol (Südtiroler Landtag, 2002). Meanwhile, a separatist movement arose, resorting to violent measures such as bomb assaults on symbols of the Italian presence, including devastating attacks on electric power pylons and trains (Carlá, 2018). The aim of the explosive attacks was to draw the world's attention to the problem. These explosive attacks prompted a harsh response from the Italian government. However, violence in South Tyrol did not escalate, with about thirty people being killed between 1988

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[5] The Gruber – Degasperi Agreement is the basis of South Tyrol's autonomous powers.

and 1989 (Carlá, 2018). The Austrian government addressed the South Tyrol issue before the United Nations General Assembly in 1960 and 1961. The Assembly reiterated that shifting national borders is impossible and urged the parties to reach an agreement using the peace instruments offered by the UN.
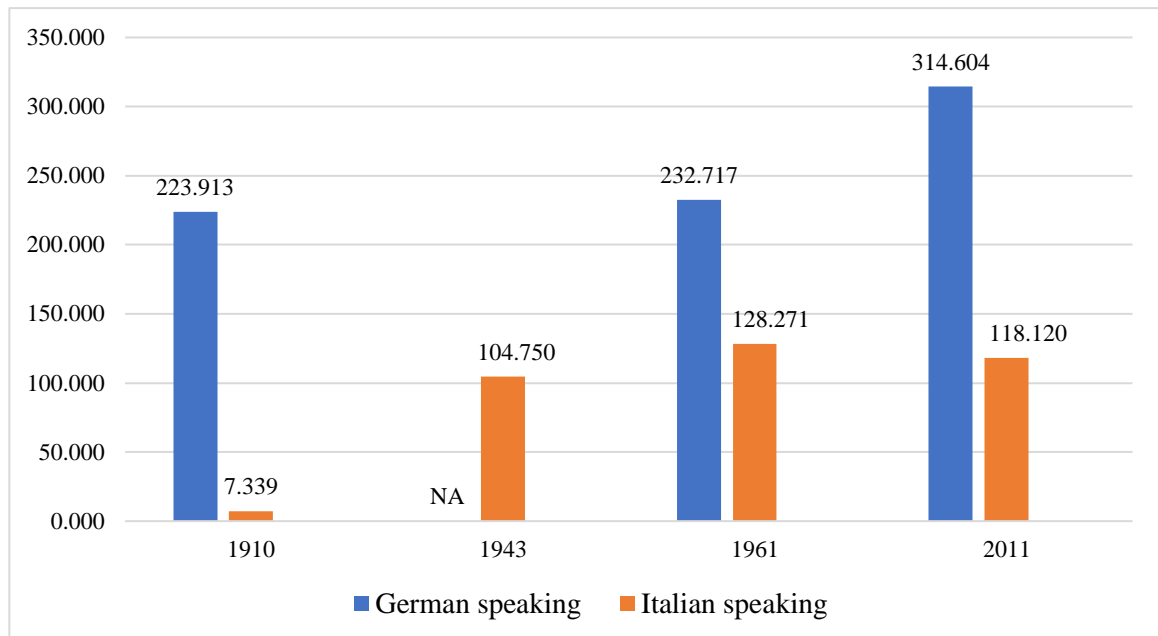
2.1.5. 1969-1992: From the "Package" to today's Second Autonomy Statute

Following the U.N. resolution 1947 (XV), the Italian State signed a new agreement with representatives of the German-speaking population in South Tyrol to ensure linguistic diversity is protected (Carlá, 2018). It formed a research panel (named the *Commission of the Nineteen*) comprising of representatives from the various language communities in South Tyrol (Carlá, 2007). In 1969 the *South Tyrol Package* was initiated, which contained 137 measures for the protection of minorities in South Tyrol. This transferred the majority of legislative and administrative powers from the Autonomous Region of Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol to the Autonomous Province of Bolzano. Furthermore, the package expanded the number of particular safeguards designed to protect German-speakers. Rome enacted the Second Autonomy Statute in 1972. However, it took more than 20 years to fully execute. Before the United Nations in 1992, Italy and Austria stated that the dispute had been resolved. In the following years, a few more additions to the statute were added, which furthermore strengthened the protection of each individual group. The Second Statute of Autonomy is still in force today and is considered the cornerstone of South Tyrolean autonomy (Center for Autonomy Experience 2021).

The South Tyrolean population has experienced many historical events and changes since 1918. These happening have shaped today's demographical situation. Due to the *option*, the number of German-speaking inhabitants of South Tyrol fell drastically in the 1940s, while the proportion of Italians increased significantly due to the Italianisation measures and strong immigration after the Second World War. Nevertheless, the German language group continued to form the majority (see figure 1). However, especially the period under fascism has left traces in the collective consciousness of the South Tyroleans. These had a significant impact on relations between the Italian and German-speaking populations which can still be felt today. The historical background has influenced the identity constructions of all three population groups in South Tyrol and decisively shapes the ethnic relationship between the language groups on a legal as well as on an identitary and everyday practical level. Before

analysing the institutional mechanisms for the protection of minorities, the current demographic and linguistic trends of South Tyrol will be presented in the next section.

Figure 1: Trend German and linguistic groups in South Tyrol 1910-2011 (absolute numbers)

NA: not available.

Graph by author (Data source: ASTAT and Pristinger 1978)

2.2.   Current sociolinguistic situation

South Tyrol now has 530,000 inhabitants, which corresponds to around 0.5 percent of the Italian population (ASTAT, 2021). According to the 2011 census [6] (ASTAT, 2020, p. 15), German speakers (or people who identified with the German language group) account for 69% and are the biggest language group. Historically, it goes back to the Germanic, Alemannic and Bavarian tribes that crossed what is now South Tyrol at the time of the migration of the peoples and partly settled there (Autonomous Province of South Tyrol, 2022). The second biggest language group is the Italian one, which accounts for 26%. Culturally and historically, it is also the youngest in the country. Ladin speakers [7] make up

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[6] Every ten years, the Provincial Institute for Statistics ASTAT conducts the statistical survey on the population of the three language groups in South Tyrol. It is used to keep the proportional allocation of public spaces and resources up to date.

[7] The Ladin language group is considered the oldest in the country. Ladin is a neo-Latin or Romance language. After the conquest of the Alpine regions by the Roman Empire in 15 BC, the local population

the smallest language group and accounts for 5%. Within South Tyrol, the German language group is the majority, which is why Baur (2009) calls it the "dominant minority ". The members of the Italian language group, on the other hand, are "members of the majority in the state and, on the other hand, they are a (numerical) minority in the province" (Czernilofsky, 2003).
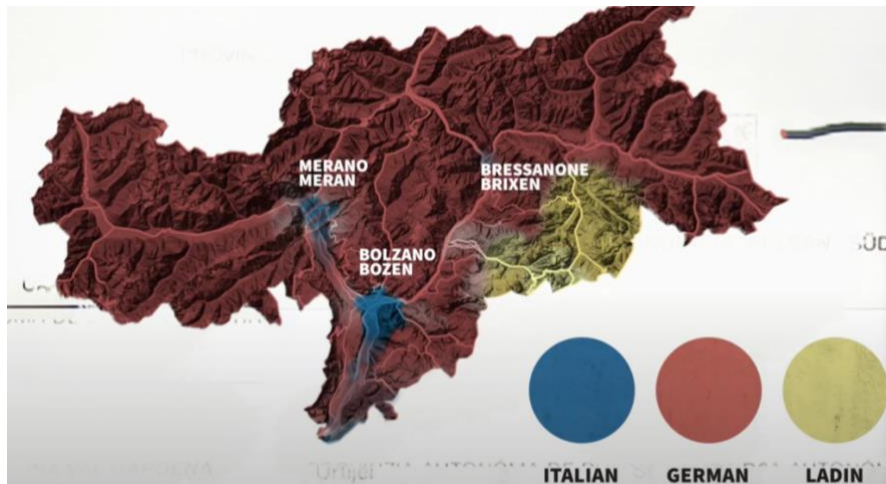
Furthermore, South Tyrol is marked by a territorial difference regarding the language groups. Whilst the German-speaking population lives scattered throughout the province, the Italian language group is mainly located in the cities and large settlement areas of the province (see figure 2). In the capital city Bolzano, 3 out of 4 of the inhabitants are Italian speaking. As a result, the natural interaction between the two linguistic groups is quite rare and is more likely to occur in larger cities, as will be discussed later. The Ladin language group mainly resides in the valleys of the two Dolomites [8].

With regards to the language use there is a distinction between the public- and private domain. Whilst the language use in the public domain is regulated by law, there are no regulations in the private sphere and e.g., families, private businesses, and private media are free to choose their language or languages of communication (Center for Autonomy Experience, 2021). An aspect worth noting is that in South Tyrol the German language usage has different language levels ranging from the dialect to the standard language. In general, in standard usage, the German speaking population uses the dialect, while in written forms or in very few official situations the standard German is used (Lanthaler, 1990). Here the plural noun dialects should be used, since South Tyrol does not form a uniform dialect area. As Egger (2001) pointed out, there are clear differences between the dialects in the east (Val Pusteria), the centre (Valle Isarco and Val D'Adige) and the west (Vipiteno). Thus, there is multilingualism not only in terms of language groups, but also within the German language as there are different varieties. However, in order to not complicate things, during the work the singular noun is going to be used. The Italian language is spoken mainly as standard Italian. In South Tyrol there are also varieties and dialects within Italian, although these are much less noticeable than in the German language. (Egger, 1977).

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adopted the vernacular Latin of the officials and soldiers, but without completely abandoning their own language (Autonome Provinz Bozen, 2022).

[8] The unique condition of the Ladin-speaking people is not a significant focus of this research; hence it is not discussed in depth in this contribution.

Figure 2: Language distribution in South Tyrol

(Source: image detail from video by Center of Autonomy Experience, 2021)

Until the mid-1990s, referring to South Tyrol's diversity meant referring to its three historical language groups. Since then, the number of inhabitants with foreign citizenship who have decided to make South Tyrol their new home is constantly increasing. The Province is now home to people from 138 countries. The number of foreign citizens has nearly tripled in the last two decades, from 16,000 in 2002 to over 52,000 in 2017, accounting for nearly 10% of the total population (ASTAT 2020). Albanians (11.4%), Germans (8.8%), Pakistani (7.2%), and Moroccans (7.0%) are the most common nationalities (Center for Autonomy Experience, 2021). This migrating population not only contributes to the region's cultural richness, but it also raises new problems and challenges.

2.3. Institutional mechanisms for the protection of linguistic groups

The province has been cited as a model for coping with ethnic diversity and settling ethnic conflicts in a variety of contexts (Carlá, 2018). The updated 1972 Statute includes many institutional structures for managing South Tyrol's linguistic diversity. Before deeper analysing the institutional mechanisms for the protection of minorities, it is important to state that the Autonomous Province of South Tyrol enjoys territorial autonomy with its German-speaking minority within Italy. It is one of the five Italian regions with a special autonomy[9]. It has extended legislative and executive powers. There is a distinction between primary and secondary competencies as well as competencies of the state (Autonomous Province of

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[9] The five regions with a special autonomy are Trentino-Alto Adige, Aosta-Valley, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Sicily and Sardinia.

South Tyrol, 2017). In matters of local interest, the autonomous authority has full legislative and executive power. These include for inter alia culture, kindergartens, tourism, local transport, health and social services and housing. The legislations in the province must however conform with the principles of the Italian constitution and the European Union (Autonomous Province of South Tyrol, 2017). Therefore, it possesses a specific system regarding the collection of taxes. In fact, unlike other Italian regions, the province obtains 90 percent of the taxes collected in South Tyrol in order to finance the range of areas where it has extended legislative and administrative powers. Aside from territorial autonomy, certain statutes grant particular rights to members of minority groups. These statutes were introduced in order to mitigate the effects of historical discrimination and the potential disadvantages that come with being a minority. (Carlá 2007). The foundation upon which South Tyrol's institutionalised ethnic governance rests is power sharing between its main linguistic groups, which ensures that the linguistic groups have access to political power and decision-making processes, and a system of complex balances between contrasting principles (Alber et al. 2016). The latter govern the use of minority languages in a variety of social contexts (Carlá 2007). Among the most important provisions regarding language rights are participation of all ethnic groups in the political decision-making process, the establishment of linguistic equality, the Ethnic Proportions Decree, the Declaration as to Linguistic origin and the bilingualism examination (Ebner, 2016).

2.3.1. Power language policies

First and foremost, the participation of all South Tyrolean ethnic groups in the autonomous authority's legislative, executive, and judiciary authorities is assured (Casonato, 1998). The provincial parliament is an "ethnic coalition government" and must correspond to the numerical ratio of the language groups in the provincial parliament. Members of the Provincial Parliament (*Consiglio Provinciale- Südtiroler Landtag*), who are elected through a proportional representation system, are distinguished not only by their political positions, but also by their linguistic affiliation (Carlá, 2007). Candidates must declare their linguistic group while running for office in this regard (Carlá, 2007). Furthermore, the president of the provincial parliament rotates between members of the different language groups and the provincial government has two vice-presidents, of whom one should belong to the German-speaking group and one to the Italian-speaking group (Carlá, 2018). In addition, if the

principle of equal rights for all language groups is considered to be endangered by a particular language group, the members of the provincial council can demand a separate vote according to language groups or a legal norm can be challenged before the Constitutional Court (Autonomous Province of South Tyrol, 2022).

2.3.2. Ethnic proportionality

The *quota system*, which has become one of the autonomy's most distinctive features, dictates that German, Italian, and Ladin speakers shall be considered in specific fields based on their numerical strength within the population (Lantschner, Poddeschi, 2008). The quotas were introduced to balance Italian domination of the public sector and resources, which was a consequence of Italianisation policies during fascist times. German and Ladin speakers were largely excluded from specific positions and social housing benefits throughout. For instance, when the Second Autonomy Statute took effect in 1972, less than 10% of civil personnel in the state government were German or Ladin speakers (ibid.).

The application of the quota system in public administration is the most well-known and is considered the quota system *strictu sensu* (Lantschner, Poddeschi, 2008) The same system also applies to the allocation of financial resources (for example, in the fields of culture, housing and education) and the composition of certain political organs as already stated above (ibid.).

The numerical strength is calculated on a *declaration of linguistic affiliation* (see appendix). These are based on a person's free choice of language affiliation, independent of ethnicity. The first language affiliation declaration is compulsory and anonymous. It is part of the Italian census, and it is used to determine the numerical strength of each linguistic group in the province, as well as to apportion public funds and jobs. There is also a second declaration of language affiliation which is in principle, voluntary but not anonymous (Südiroler Landesregierung, 2019). This declaration must be submitted by anyone who wishes to seek for a public sector employment, receive government financing, or run for a political office. It is possible to alter the declaration. This modification, however, takes two years to take effect in order to prevent abuse (Center for Autonomy Experience, 2021). In 1991, a fourth affiliation, the category of "other," was introduced to the three already existing ones of German, Italian, and Ladin. This category was created for those who cannot or do not want to join or identify with one of the conventional three language groups - German,

Italian, or Ladin – for various reasons. This if for example the case for people with a bilingual family background or migrants. If a person who identifies as other wants to seek for a government employment or get government money, they must still belong to one of the three traditional language groups. As a result, this other category has been criticised as insufficient and purely symbolic (Center for Autonomy Experience, 2021). The quota system in public sector employment has been handled more leniently in recent years, primarily out of necessity and especially for highly skilled jobs (Abel et al. 2012). In practice, this means that if a qualified candidate cannot be found, the position can be filled by a candidate from another language group. These "off-quota job grants" will be refunded through one of the subsequent selection procedures. The meritocratic principle may dominate in some specific instances, such as executive positions and highly specialised professional profiles (Alber et al., 2016).

2.3.3. Autonomy for each language group and the right to mother tongue

Article 99 of the Autonomy Statute states that "In the Region, the German language is equal to the Italian language, which is the official language of the State." For instance, topographical names have special measures and all public signs, such as road markers, should be bilingual (see figure 3) [10] (De Vergottini, 1986). In terms of the German language's status "German-speaking people of the Province of Bolzano/Bozen have the right to use their native language in dealings with judicial offices and public administration organs and offices," according to Article 100 (translation of originally German citation by Abel, Vettori, 2012). This is especially true in cultural and educational policy. There is a system of separated schools, based on monolingual instruction, as well as separated cultural offices (Alber et al. 2016). According to Article 10 of the Autonomony Statute "In the Province of Bolzano/Bozen children shall be educated from nursery to secondary level in their mother tongue, i.e. in Italian or German, by teachers whose mother tongue is also the language of tuition," (translation of originally German citation by Vettori et al. 2012). The learning of the second language (either German or Italian) is required in primary schools and secondary schools. Pupils in Ladin schools are thought all three languages. The schools are run by education departments that are divided into groups based on language and are relatively self-

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[10] In the Ladin valley they have to be trilingual (German, Italian, Ladin).

contained. Furthermore, the statute guarantees access to electronic media items in terms of language rights (Carlá, 2007). Indeed, the Bolzano-based local branch of the public radio-television network is required to broadcast programs, including news in German. In South Tyrol, two separate versions of *RAI 3* [11] are transmitted on two different frequencies (ibid.). One version of RAI 3 transmits only Italian programs, whereas the other broadcasts both Italian and German programs. Furthermore, the Statute mandates that the government of South Tyrol builds and maintains a network to ensure the reception of foreign radio and television programes from German-speaking nations (Carlá, 2007). In addition, press outlets are ensured in the native language. Daily newspapers published in German receive special subsidies from the Italian Government.

Figure 3: Example of bilingual street sign in South Tyrol

(Source: BBC 2017)

2.3.4. Bilingualism test

In order to ensure that one's mother tongue can be spoken in public offices, in the public sector, the "bilingualism test" (*patentino*) is a legally anchored requirement. It is a prerequisite for people who want to work in the public sector to take the bilingualism exam. The exam is proof of fluency in both Italian and German. The four language levels of the bilingualism exam are C1, B2, B1, A2. These correspond to the required knowledge prescribed for the various job profiles in public administration, depending on the study title.

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[11] Rai 3 is the third Italian television channel belonging to the public service *Radiotelevisione Italiana* (RAI).

At all levels, the four competences reading, listening, writing and speaking are tested [12]. The exam can only be taken in Bozen/Bolzano (Abel et al. 2012.). Once passed, the certificate is valid for a lifetime. Even though the bilingualism test is only compulsory for public jobs, bilingual candidates are preferred to monolingual candidates in all fields of work in South Tyrol (Peterlini, 1996).

In recent years due to a judgment by the European Court of Justice pressure has grown to accepts other proofs and certificates for the admittance to the public service. New regulations have been in place since 2010 recognizing a number of language certificates or combinations of school and university diplomas as alternatives to the bilingualism examination (Abel et al., 2012).

All these policies, along with additional legislative provisions, serve to safeguard minorities and govern language. The institutional arrangements in South Tyrol have ensured widespread use of minority languages and preservation of the German linguistic minority, which has since abandoned most separatist tendencies and lives peacefully in an Italian South Tyrol (Carla, 2007). On the other hand, it has established a regime in which the two language communities are separated in most elements of political and social life, starting from the city council's structure up to the organisation of cultural and educational system. Only a few important cultural, musical, artistic, and museum organizations deviate from this separation principle. Some in South Tyrolean society have begun to doubt the time limit of some of these policies. Different proposals for reforming the ethnic quota system or the regulations governing the public examination are frequently being examined.

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[12] An exception is the A2 level examination, which is only conducted in oral form. For more detailed information, visit the website of the Office for Bilingualism and Trilingualism Examinations, at https://www.provinz.bz.it/bildung-sprache/zweisprachigkeit/default.asp

CHAPTER 3: STUDY ON LANGUAGE PERCEPTION, LANGUAGE IDENTITY AND CULTURAL CONTACT IN SOUTH TYROL

3.1. Previous studies

South Tyrol is a rich source of sociological research due to its pronounced ethnic diversity. How people belonging to different language groups use their different languages in everyday life and what attitudes they have towards multilingualism and the coexistence of language groups has been studied by various researchers and the Province of Bolzano in recent years. This section presents the results of the ASTAT *Sprachbarometer 2014* (hereinafter Linguistic barometer of South Tyrol) which was previously carried out in 2004 and last carried out in 2014. The study examined the language use and language habits of 1,514 South Tyroleans (Gossetti et al., 2015). Part of the study was also devoted to analysing the "climate" of coexistence and linguistic trends. (Südtiroler Sprachbarometer, 2014). In summary, the Linguistic Barometer data revealed that favourable developments in comparison to the past are visible, but the success story of South Tyrol still has flaws regarding ethnic disputes. As Carlá wrote in in *Peace in South Tyrol and the Limits of Consociationalism,* the data shows that "there is peaceful coexistence and mutual acceptance among linguistic groups and that the possibility of a recurrence of violence is unlikely". "On the other hand, the data indicates that also institutional procedures in South Tyrol to preserve minorities have resulted in a bilingual territory but not a fully multilingual population" (Carlá, 2018). Furthermore, the majority of the inhabitants "still live in their own language circles and develop in their own cultural worlds", and many ethical issues persist, particularly among the Italian-speaking community. In addition, there is a distinct sense of belonging. Likewise, the *Kolipsi Studies* carried out for EURAC Research found some critical aspects regarding the language competences among South Tyrolean high school students. Kolipsi I carried out bay Abel, Vettori and Wisniewski in 2012 was the first study to gather substantial empirical evidence suggesting that "bilingualism in South Tyrolean schools is neither sufficient nor widespread", followed by Kolipsi II in 2017 (Abel et al., 2021). The goal of the study was to assess a "representative sample of Italian- and German-speaking students enrolled in the fourth year of all upper secondary schools in the South Tyrol's second language, Italian or German" (Abel et al., 2021). In addition to the linguistic component, the study inspected and analysed the psychosocial and sociolinguistic factors

that most influence how people approach and learn the L2[13] in South Tyrol. The Kolipsi test was carried out both orally and in writing (Abel et al., 2012)[14]. In the subsequent section the results of the aforementioned studies are repeatedly compared with those of the following study.

3.2. Survey Carried Out for this Thesis

3.2.1. Survey description and methodology

The study sought to investigate the linguistic habits of the South Tyrolean population and how the linguistic and cultural contact of the different languages are perceived in Spring 2022. The study was carried out in the form of an online questionnaire and the data collected is primary data that was explicitly collected for the research purpose of this study. As the work intended to focus on the linguistic and cultural contact of the two major language groups, German and Italian, throughout the survey the questions mostly concerned those two language groups. In order to allow for a partial comparison of the results with previous studies, the *Language Barometer Study* of 2014 by the Province of South Tyrol, was used as a template for the development of the questions. Whilst some questions are based on those of the Language Barometer, others were developed specifically for this survey. The survey included objective measures such as age, gender and residence, as well as subjective self-assessments and perceptions regarding language use and linguistic and cultural coexistence. The subjective elements of the survey were divided into seven topics as the follows: 1) *knowledge and use of the second language*, 2) *degree of intergroup friendship*, 3) *sense of belonging,* 4) *opinions on coexistence, multilingualism and cultural diversity*, 5) *data on bilingual families*, 6) *language policy*, 7) *feelings of being disadvantaged*.

The survey is composed of closed- (in the form of multiple-choice) and open-ended questions or comments. Despite the answers to the former being mandatory, answers to the open-ended questions and offering further comment optional. This mixture of questions was used in order to have both a high response rate, which is usually the case for close ended questions, and at the same time gain deeper and new insights by using open ended questions. The survey was composed of a total of 42 questions. However, due to the of special filters,

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[13] The term L2 stands for language 2 and is corresponds to process by which people learn a second language.
[14] All of the assessments were standardised and corresponded to the levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, with B2 being the objective level for students finishing upper secondary school (Abel et al., 2021).

certain questions were only shown to a percentage of those who contributed to the survey, so in the end, the number of questions varied from participant to participant. For the creation of the questionnaire the online tool *SoSci* was used. The platform offers the possibility to create questionnaires in different languages, whereby it is possible to choose the language at the beginning of the survey. It also offers the possibility to switch between languages at any time while the respondents are filling in the questionnaire. This was particularly important for this study, as the questionnaire was addressed to South Tyroleans who were exclusively German or Italian first language speakers and who grew up bilingually. Therefore, the questions were written in both German and Italian and entered into the online portal[15]. The questionnaire was presented to a control group in advance in order to check the questions for possible misunderstandings based on translation and to ensure a sensitive approach to the cultural situation. This group consisted of four people of different generations and language groups.

The participants were recruited through a link that was sent to the author's family, friends and acquaintances, who were also asked to forward the questionnaire if they wished. It was then compatible on both PC and smartphone. Therefore, those who chose to take part in this survey were not decided previously. As previously mentioned above, the respondents could choose the language version before starting the survey. At the beginning of the survey, all participants were given a description of the study to inform them about the purpose and motivation for collecting the data. The questions were arranged on different pages. Furthermore, during the process, respondents were informed about the progress of the survey. The survey was online for four days during which the survey was conducted 246 times. Initially the intention was to have the survey up for longer and a response rate of 100, but, as it proved so popular, the author chose to close it after a high response rate was reached. This decision was also taken in order to be able to analyse all of the responses, open questions and comments included. Only records that reached the penultimate page and had less than 10% as missing answers have been counted, as a result, 193 records were processed. [16] For the evaluation the spreadsheet programme *Excel* and the statistical software *SPSS Statistics* were used. Before analysing the results, the stated place of residence of each questionnaire was checked and incorrect information as well as answers from people who

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[15] Due to the author's lack of language skills, the Ladin language could not be included in the survey.
[16] This criterion was chosen as the last page contained two open-ended questions that could be answered voluntarily.

have resided in South Tyrol for less than ten years were removed in order to guarantee the authenticity and validity of the study.

3.3. Key results and preliminary analysis

The study collected data on over 40 questions. The following section presents the key results of the questionnaire, whereby only relevant exemplary questions relative to the discussion are being presented. In the process, they will repeatedly be compared with results from previous studies.

3.3.1. Respondents

The first part of the questionnaire included biographical questions about the participants. Of the 193 respondents the number is made up of 96 women and 95 men and two people who ticked the option "no indication". They were divided into three age groups. 50.8% of the respondents are 16-35 years old, 39.4% are 35-59 years old and 9.8 % are 60 or older (see figure 4). The majority of the respondents were born in Bolzano (73%). The remaining places of birth vary between cities such as Bressanone, Merano, Vipiteno and other smaller localities. Most of the immigrants moved to South Tyrol for reasons of work and/or love or because one of their parents was South Tyrolean. Most of the respondents also currently live in Bolzano. The rest of the respondents largely live in cities or small villages, which for the most part, are located in the surrounding areas of Bolzano.

Figure 4: Demographic representation

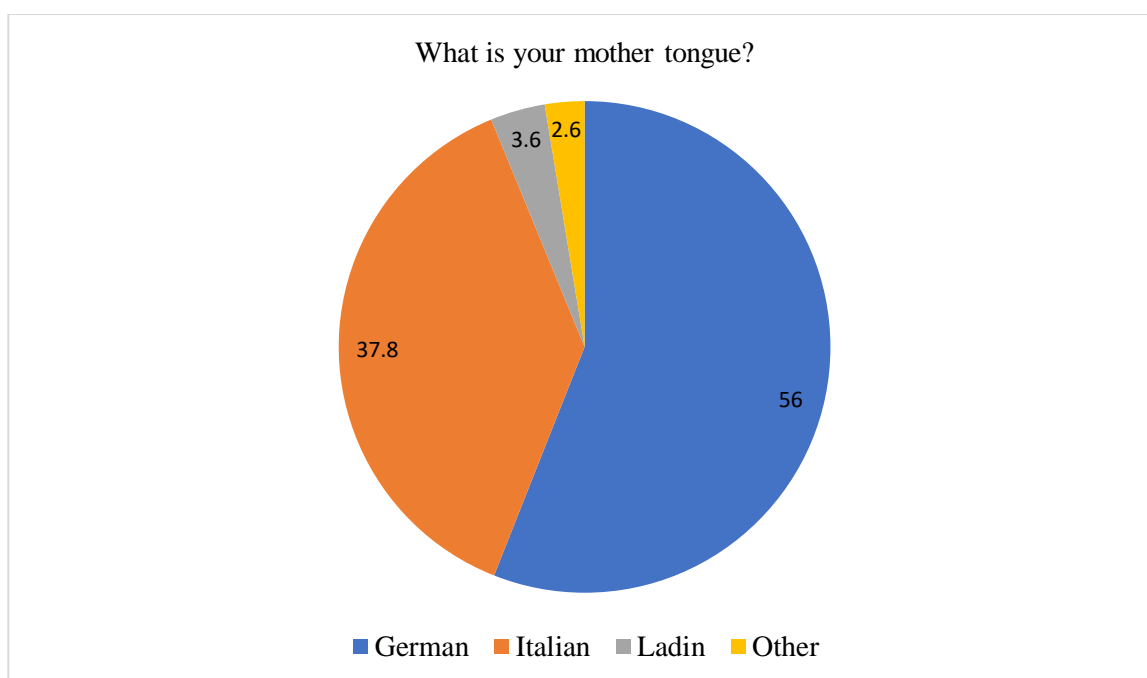| Age group	Female	Male	No indication	Total
16-34	49	47	2	98
35-59	41	35	0	76
60+	6	13	0	19
Total	96	95	2	193

3.3.2. Knowledge and use of second language

Bilingualism is the foundation for personal communication among individuals belonging to different groups, as Ornella Buson (1992) points out, and thus reflects the potential of the

South Tyrolean community to converse with one another (Carlá, 2018). Of the 193 respondents, two thirds indicate the German language as their mother tongue and thus form the majority. The remaining respondents are divided into Italian-speaking, Ladin-speaking and "other". 37.8% state Italian as their mother tongue and are therefore the second biggest group (see figure 5). Seven pick Ladin as their mother tongue. The five people who indicate "other" defined themselves as bilingual in the combination of German-Italian. Most monolingual respondents cite family situation (chosen 137 times) or the language they use most often in everyday life (chosen 101 times) as reasons for choosing their first language. According to this, most participants' answers were influenced by the language spoken by their parents or by the situations they most often find themselves in every day. Others, on the other hand, opted for the language in which they have the highest linguistic competence (97 times). The least chosen option was influence by educational background with 49 times [17].

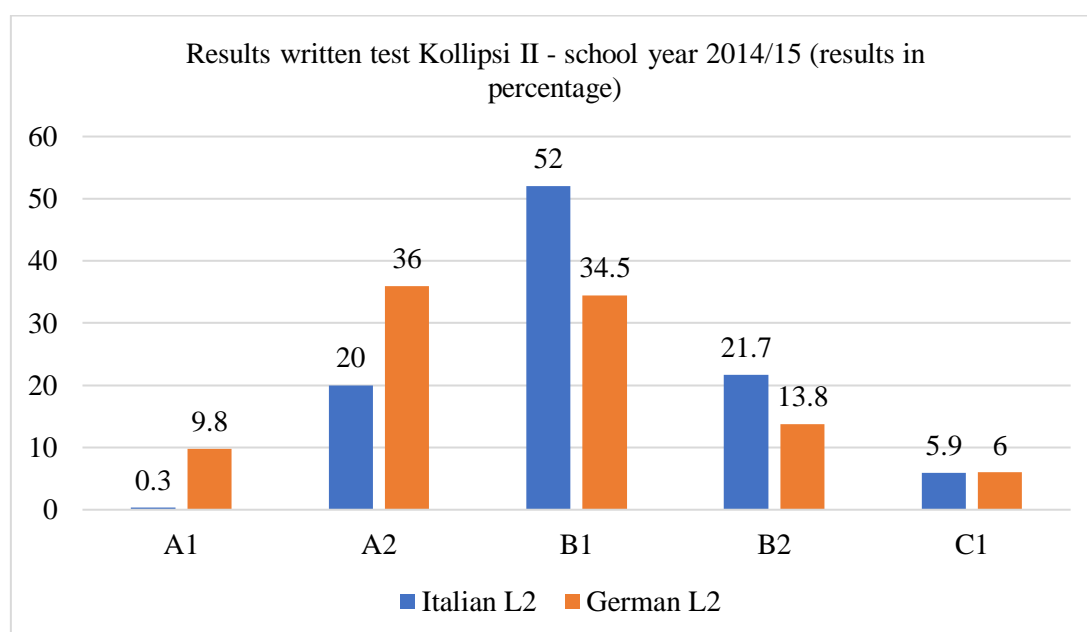**Figure 5:** Mother tongue distribution (in percentage)

This part of the questionnaire also dealt with the language skills of the participants which were ranged according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The data reveals that around 30% of the German-speaking respondents have almost native

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[17] For this question multiple answers could be selected.

speaker proficiency (C2) in the other language and a little more than a quarter can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes (C1). 30.14% of the Italian-speaking group indicate that can have regular interactions with native speakers with a degree of fluency and spontaneity (B2 level). 24.66% have professional language skills (C1 level). These indications show that in general, the German speaking population has higher language competences in the other language than the Italian-speaking population (see figure 6). The participants here had to self-assess their linguistic competences. Therefore, one must take these results with a grain of salt. In fact, in summary, the Kolipsi I study showed, that the students with Italian as a second language achieved an average B1 (46%) and B2 (41.1%) level, while those with German as a second language were at A2 and B1 levels. The comparison of data with the results of Kolipsi II of 2017 suggest a further decline in their abilities, especially within the students with Italian as a second language. As an illustration, for the target language Italian, the B1 level was still the most popular (52%) in the latest study, but the A2 level has expanded significantly (20%), to the point where it is virtually on par with the B2 level with 21.7%. (Abel et al. 2021). A comparison of the results for the target language German likewise reveals a drop in proficiency which is more limited. Yet what needs to be considered is that the proficiency of the Italian students in the German language in Kolipsi I was already quite low.

Figure 6: L2 competences in 2014

L2 = second language acquisition (Graph by author - data from Abel et al., 2021)

Hence, in a way, the German speaking group's degree of integration within the South Tyrolean society is more enlarged than that of the Italian speaking populations. However, what needs to be considered again, is that, as previously mentioned in the section *Current sociolinguistic situation*, the German language group tends to communicate in dialects rather than in the standard German. This makes it therefore difficult for the Italian-population to interact and practice the standard German they learn in school.

3.3.3. Degree of intergroup friendship

The degree of intergroup friendship reflects whether the South Tyrolean language groups just coexist or are intertwined in their everyday lives and social interactions (Carla, 2018). The data shows that both language groups have limited friendship contacts with the other language group. 75.07% of the German-speaking group has mostly friends from the same language group, while this is true for 78.01% of the Italian-speaking group (see figure 7). Overall, only 23.8% of people have an equal number of friends of both language groups, whereby the German-group slightly performs better (23.15% versus 19.18%). According to the *contact hypothesis* "Friendship development and the resulting sensation of intimacy cause a more fundamental change in the perspective of the other group, thus lessening the distance between the 'I' and the 'other.'" (Abel et al., 2012) This theory was developed by G. Allport in 1954 and states that frequent contact with members of the other group under certain conditions[18], for example other ethnic minorities, reduces prejudice against these groups (Van Dick, 2021). According to some recent study the effect is strongly linked to the specific contact of a friendship connection. According to the extended contact hypothesis, also knowing that an in-group member has a close relationship with an out-group member can lead to more favourable intergroup attitudes (Wright et al., 1997). Comparing this data with the past, no improvement can be witnessed. In 2004, three quarters of the populations had most of their friends in their own language group. In 2014 this number improved changing into two-thirds of the population. Therefore, intergroup friendship remains narrow. There has even been a regression from 2014. It must be remembered that the society of South Tyrol is characterized in part by 'spatial isolation' among the language groups. The Italian speaking group is mostly centred in the urban regions whereas the German-speaking group

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[18] Equal group status within the context, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and authoritative support are Allport's four conditions for optimal intergroup contact (Abel, et al.2021).

is mostly situated in rural areas. (Carlá, 2018). What stands out, is that around 67 percent does not think that is difficult to make friends with members of the other group. However, as stated above, cross-group friendships are limited. What also needs to be noted is that even though most of the respondents were born or live in Bolzano, which is the city with the most intercultural contact, friendships with people from another language are few. Therefore, it appears, that there remains little interest in creating cross-group friendships.

Figure 7: Cross-group friendship (expressed in frequencies)

Your friends are mostly of:	German	Italian	Ladin	Other	Total
German mother tongue	80	2	2	2	86
Italian mother tongue	3	57	0	1	61
Approximately the same	25	14	5	2	46
Total	108	73	7	5	193

Linguistic groups

3.3.4. Sense of belonging

Regarding the territorial, ethnical and national identity there are considerable differences between the two language groups in this respect. The latter is clearly evident with regard to territorial-ethnical identification. The majority (61.11%) of the members of the German see themselves as "*South Tyroleans*"[19] and have thus developed something like a specific "national consciousness", which distinguishes itself both from the state of Italy as a whole and from Austria. The remaining percentage 38,8 percentage identify with terms such as "*Italian*" (12.04%), "*European*" (12.04%) or "*Citizen of the world*". In contrast, the majority of the members of the Italian language group choose the designation "Italian" (60%), i.e. they see belonging to Italy as essential. Other relatively frequent self-identications are "*Alto Atesino*" (20.55%), "*South Tyrolean of Italian language*" (13.70%) and "Citizen of the world" and "South Tyrolean" with both 8%.

In *Südtiroler Sprachbarometer* 2004 Barometer one in two Italians (52.5%) declared that they feel fully Italian. One Italian in seven felt like an Italian-speaking South Tyrolean, and one in ten as an "*Alto Atesino*". The strong cosmopolitan attitude on the part of Italians was reflected in the preference for the answers "cosmopolitan" (8.6%) and "*European*"

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[19] "South Tyrolean" is the translation for the German term "Südtiroler".

(7.5%). At the same time, 85.6% of German speakers declare themselves to be "*South Tyroleans*". The cosmopolitan attitude of the German language group is not as strong compared to the Italian: 3.6% feel "*European*" and 1.0% feel "*cosmopolitan*".

It is worth noting that in Spring 2022 more people have chosen post-national, cosmopolitan definitions like "European" or "Citizen of the world" than in 2004. This trend could also be observed in the Linguistic Barometer 2014. As Carlá noted in *Peace in South Tyrol and the Limits of Consociationalism* of 2018 "for the future, part of the South Tyrolean society seems to have taken a slow path toward the development of a common identity and post-ethnic sense of belonging, but substantial differences among the linguistic groups remain". This is also highlighted by these results. There have been improvements regarding the development of a common identity, however, differences remain. Direct comparisons between the data of 2014 and this survey are not possible since in 2014 multiple answers were possible.

Figure 8: Sense of belonging in Spring 2022 (expressed in frequencies)

Linguistic groups

Identification	German	Italian	Ladin	Other	Total
South Tyrolean	66	6	3	3	78
Italian	13	32	1	2	48
Alto Atesino	-	15	-	-	15
South Tyrolean of Italian language	1	10	-	-	11
South Tyrolean of Ladin language	-	-	2	-	2
Tyrolean	1	-	-	-	1
Austrian	-	-	-	-	-
German	1	-	-	-	
European	13	2	-	-	15
Citizen of the world	7	6	1	-	14
Other	6	2	-	-	8
Total	108	73	7	5	193

The identification Ladin and Not interested were left out in this question. (Table created by author)

3.3.5. Opinions on coexistence, multilingualism and cultural diversity

The majority of the respondents perceive the co-existence of the linguistic groups, multilingualism and cultural diversity as positive. In general, this is also the section where most improvements could be observed. Just over three quarters see coexistence as a significant enrichment. As shown in figure 9 only 2% perceive it as a major problem. In the years 1991 and 2004 this share was still bigger with 38 and 11.1 percentages respectively. The positive feelings regarding cohabitation are also felt within the older generations. 15 out of 19 people who are 60 or older find living together very enriching. Furthermore, compared to the general situation 10 years ago, the coexistence of the language groups has improved for part for both linguistic groups (49.2%) and 46.6% has positive expectations for the future. 44% thinks that the situation has neither improved nor worsened. Here, South Tyroleans are more positive than in 2014, where only one third thought that living together would get better (see figure 10). Knowledge of one or more languages is also highly valued by many. Just over 60 percent see it as a personal enrichment and 30 percent as an advantage.

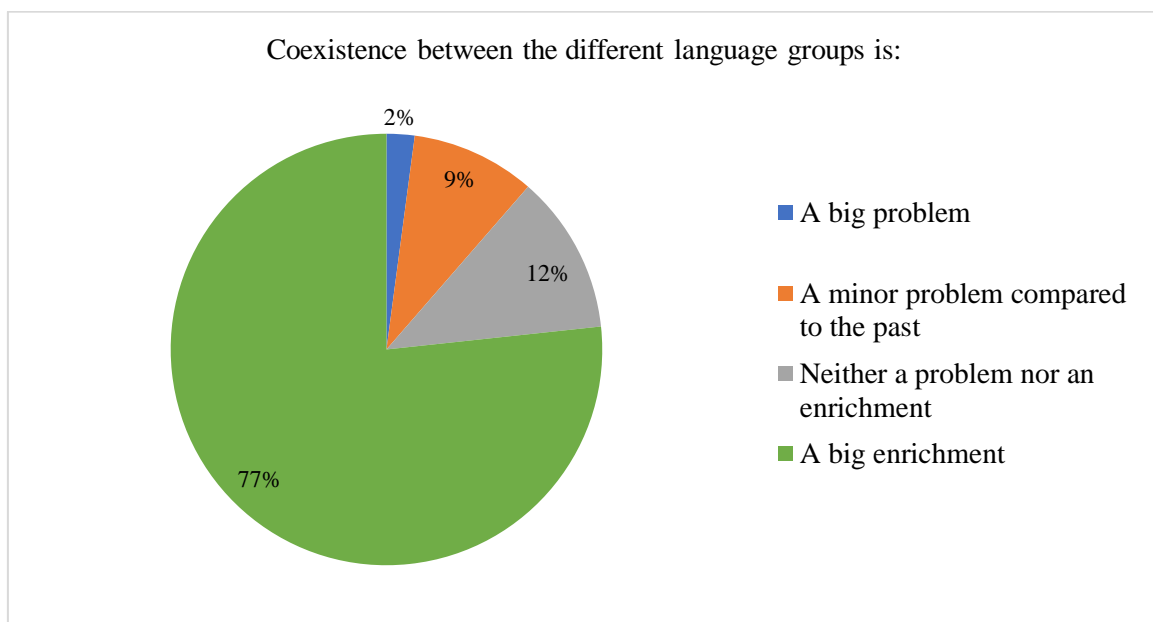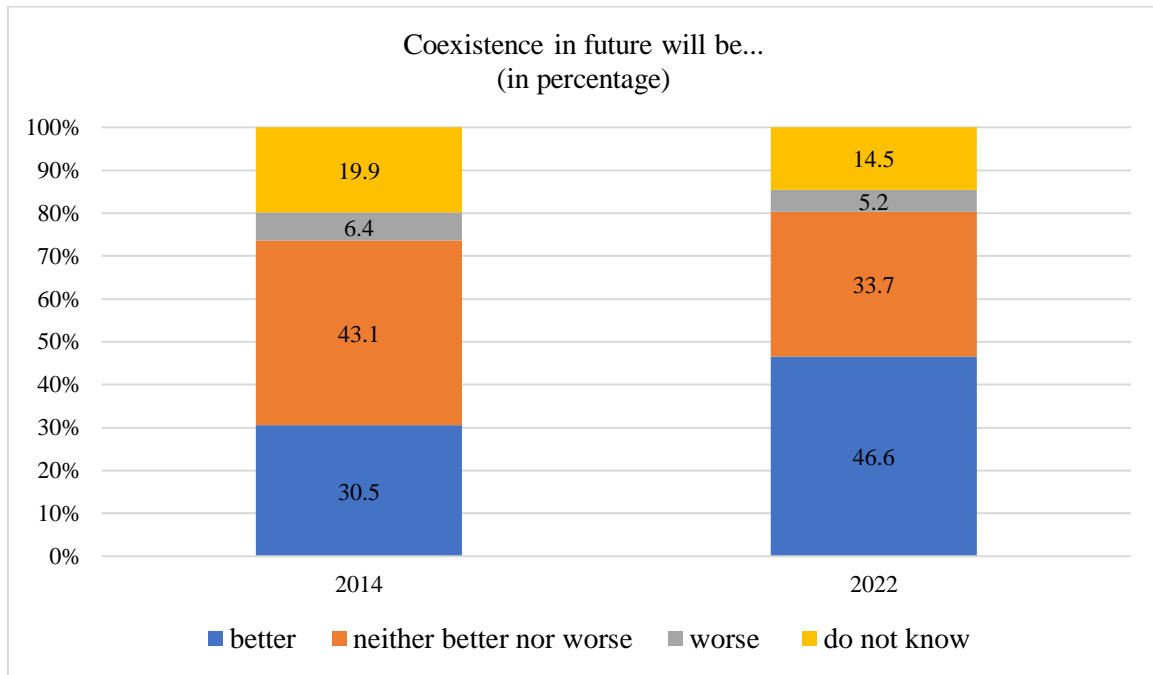**Figure 9:** Perceptions regarding coexistence

Figure 10: Future expectations regarding coexistence

Coexistence in future will be...
(in percentage)

	2014	2022
do not know	19.9	14.5
worse	6.4	5.2
neither better nor worse	43.1	33.7
better	30.5	46.6

■ better ■ neither better nor worse ■ worse ■ do not know

Graph by author (Data: Sprachbarometer 2014 and self-conducted study)

As previously identified in Chapter 2, a special feature of the linguistic landscape of South Tyrol is the prevalence of dialects. As recently as 2001, the linguist Kurt Egger wrote that the dialects have an unchallenged position as the everyday language of the German-speaking population. Due to the increasing development of all valleys and villages with well-developed roads and the increasing commuter mobility between the countryside and the city, but above all due to the modern media, noticeable differences are becoming less pronounced, but they remain important (Sprachbarometer, 2014). In addition, there is a tendency towards a revival of minority languages that can be observed in Europe and worldwide (Gerhards, 2011). The Sprachbarometer 2014 found a clear, if not strong, increase in German-language dialects, especially in younger age groups. This trend is also perceived by those surveyed. In the survey, respondents were asked how important it is to know the most common languages, namely High German, German dialect [20], Italian and Ladin in South Tyrol for a successful cohabitation. Whilst the Italian language is perceived as the most important language in order to ensure an amiable togetherness between the language groups, the German dialect is almost on the same position as the Standard German. On the one hand, dialects can be seen as a valued tradition and cultural wealth. On the other hand, dialects can

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[20] For organisational reasons, the German dialect was used as singular, even though, as already previously mentioned there are varieties.

also be a handicap, for members of all language groups. The Sprachbarometer study in 2014 found that the knowledge of dialects is much less widespread than that of high-level languages. Therefore, the following question further explores whether learning German dialect is perceived as difficult and what the possible reasons for this are [21]. Of the participants who know the German dialect a little or not at all, it is mainly Italian participants who leave a comment on the difficulty of learning it. Many point out that High German is learned at school, but dialect is spoken in private life. Then again, others draw attention to the different dialects that vary from valley to valley and consequently also have different intonations, and that there are no grammatical rules about it. Still others find that learning the dialect is especially difficult for foreigners. Furthermore, the fact that in order to learn the German dialect, one must have close contact with people who have spoken it since childhood, which is not always a choice that is possible, is mentioned.

3.3.6. Data on bilingual families

This section focused on data of ethnic intermarriages which are considered to create beneficial social contact and social cohesion among communities in sociological literature (Smits, 2010). According to Buiting and Pokriefke, the ratio of couples with an Italian and a German partner has remained constant over the decades, standing at 7% in 2015 (Carlá, 2018). From the 193 respondents 41 people come from a bilingual family, which corresponds to approximately 20%. 35 of them come from the combination German-Italian and it is therefore the most common mix. 27 of them speak both German and Italian at home. The six remaining mixed couples combinations are German-Ladin, German-another language and Italian-Ladin. In addition, the study revealed, that children from mixed Italian-German backgrounds are more likely to favor German as their mother tongue and 26 out of 35 have also selected it in *the language group affiliation declaration*. Only one person selected the option "*other*". According to the poll, the majority of these people adapt to the South Tyrolean linguistic categorisation system, but do not sympathize with it. The majority (20 out of 32) is bothered by having to choose a language for the language group affiliation declaration.

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[21] Because the Italian dialects are not very pronounced in South Tyrol, they were omitted from the survey.

3.3.7. Language policy

Three aspects of the language policies were examined. The first aspect was *the declaration of linguistic affiliation* which is often criticised for creating a "total separation" between the language groups. In the last language group affiliation declaration, 111 participants chose German and 65 Italian. More than 68% of the of respondents were not bothered by having to choose a language. In the survey the respondents were also asked if the identify as bilingual. Of the 193 respondents 95 people (accounting to 49,49%) identify as bilingual. Of the 95 people who identify themselves as bilingual, 65 people (67.7%) would have liked to have the option "bilingual". In other words, although many bilingual respondents did not mind the choice in the language group affiliation statement, more than half of them would still like to have the choice "bilingual" in the language group affiliation statement. Another aspect which was considered is the *bilingualism exam*. 65.8% of those surveyed have already once undertaken the bilingualism exam where 31.6 % have reached the C1 level. Lastly, also the educational system was touched, which still today is separated. As shown in figure 11, in total, a little more than 60% would like to have a bilingual school system. With regards to the introduction of the teaching of some subjects in the other language, almost 60 percent would agree with it strongly and a further approximately 26 percent in favor. This implies that more than the half of the respondents favour a bilingual school system or a more integrated learning by teaching the content of a given subject in the other language.

Figure 11: To what extent would you agree with a bilingual school system: (expressed in frequencies)

Linguistic groups

Ranking	German	Italian	Ladin	Other	Total
Very much	64	47	4	3	118
Somewhat	25	21	1	1	48
In part	10	4	1	1	16
Not at all	6	1	1	-	8
Do not know	3	-	-	-	3
Total	108	73	7	5	193

3.3.8. Feelings of being disadvantaged

The period of time during fascism until the German occupation in 1943 has left deep traces in the collective consciousness regarding and resulted in ethnic grievances. Although the South Tyrol system for minorities protection has promoted the establishment of a favourable environment for cohabitation and linguistic variety, it has not fully addressed all the language groups' grievances (Carlá, 2018). The permanence of ethnic resentments is reflected in the presence of feelings of disadvantage, indicating that linguistic groups continue to consider themselves in opposition and competition. Previous studies have shown that especially the Italian speaking language group perceives that it is in disadvantage in a variety of areas of public life (Südtiroler Sprachbarometer, 2014). This trend was confirmed in the survey. As shown in figure 12, more than 30 percent of the Italian speaking group feel disadvantaged or discriminated against, while just over 10 percent of the other language group feels this way. 31 people answered the question in which situation or situations. The Italian group often indicates the labour sector here. The German-speaking group, on the other hand, complains about the lack of German language skills of the Italian-speaking group. For example, that Italian tends to be spoken more in public offices, even if the client is a native German speaker. Both groups also feel disadvantaged in moments of socialisation. In addition, two Italian speaking respondents also mention the *ethnic proportionality system* and the *bilingualism examination*.

Figure 12: Feelings of being disadvantaged (expressed in frequencies)

	Linguistic groups				
Accordance	German	Italian	Ladin	Other	Total
Yes	12	27	1	1	41
No	92	35	5	3	135
Do not know	4	11	1	1	17
Total	108	73	7	5	193

In summary to this point, the large majority of both language groups does not feel at disadvantage or discriminated against (69.9%). Compared to the past, there is a favourable development visible (see figure 13). In a 1991 survey, 78.1 percent of the Italian-speaking group and 38.2 percent of the German-speaking group felt at a disadvantage in general or in specific areas (Carlá, 2018). The percentage of Italian-speakers was 69.1 percent in 2004. In

2014, just under 60% of Italian-speakers felt discriminated against in general (and particularly in job and professional occupations). Only a little more than 20% of German speakers shared these sentiments. It appears that with the time the grievances are slowly diminishing, and the two groups are more becoming more harmonious. Nevertheless, the tensions and problems have not fully faded away.

Figure 13: Feelings of being disadvantaged (1991-2022)

Do think that your language group is disadvantaged/discriminated against?

	1991	2004	2014	2022
German language group	38.2	17.5	22.4	11.11
Italian language group	78.1	69.1	60	36.7

Graph by author (Data source: Sprachbarometer 2004, Sprachbarometer 2014)

3.3.9. Final questions

Finally, after having gone through the main part of the survey, respondents were asked to offer their opinion concerning the climate of cohabitation in terms of interethnic harmony, cooperation and integration. As previously mentioned, the response to open questions was voluntary and therefore fewer results were obtained. However, the results are still significant and highlight crucial aspects to be considered. In the first question respondents were asked whether they believe that there is a "distance" between the two linguistic groups. If they believe that this distance is true, they were asked to identify the major problems that lead to this cultural distance.

About 40% of the respondents find that the origin of the distance mainly lies in the segregated educational system, which starts already from the kindergarten.

"Distance persists in many but not all cases, the fundamental problem is that not even the institutions are committed to improving coexistence between the two language groups. Strong criticism goes to the failure to create a bilingual school system.[22]"

Furthermore, many others see the main problem in the linguistic barriers.

"There is a huge distance. The biggest problem is the lack of language skills."

Three interviewees here also point out the use of South Tyrolean dialect by the German speaking population and complain about the difficulty of communication for Italian residents who only learned High German at school.

"Unfortunately, the German language itself is the problem. At school, the children learn written German, but in everyday life they would need the dialect"

On top of that, single cases also criticise the living conditions in South Tyrol for Italian-speaking citizens. They feel discriminated against and describe living together as difficult from their point of view:

"Perhaps the fact that Germans are mostly too anchored to their own traditions; with their attitudes they never seem to question themselves and Italians are 'afraid' to expose themselves in German, because then they are sure to be judged if they make mistakes."

Another comment which shows this feeling of discomfort is the following:

"I think that the German language group always feels threatened and there is no real desire for integration, for fear of losing their identity. The Italian language

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[22] The following comment excerpts were translated from either German or Italian by the author.

group experiences the need for the bilingualism certificate as an obstacle to their
personal and professional development. "

Feelings of unease are also emerging from the German population. Three individuals blame "*little interest of the Italian Group in the German language*" or "*The lacking German skills*" for the distance.

Some state that history also plays a crucial role in creating separation. Two respondents claim that the main problem was how their family talked about the other language group, stating that division is still being fermented.

"I think there is a huge gulf between the two groups, which has its roots in the
separation of the schools. Then of course there is the cultural-historical baggage
of mutual hatred that is passed on intergenerationally."

On the other hand, some explain that the two cultures are very different and have distinct cultures and traditions. Many also think that the ethnic groups are separated because of the demographic situation in South Tyrol, which was already anticipated in the theoretical contribution. The territorial distribution contributes to the separation of the two language groups.

"The problem is the old divisionist politics that fortunately few young people
support today. In Bolzano it works well, in the larger towns too, outside the
historical background often gets in the way."

Furthermore, feelings such as "*shame*", "*fear*", "*insecurity*", and "*stubbornness*" are being mentioned. Many also blame the lack of contact which results in discrimination and stereotyping.

In the last question of the survey the respondents could leave suggestions for the improvement of the coexistence of the two cultures to create a more harmonious and less distant environment. About 60% of the respondents are in favour of multilingual educational institutions and define the structural change of these areas through the introduction of a bilingual system as their greatest concern in order to improve cultural coexistence. One respondent argues for the introduction of the German dialect as a subject in Italian schools.

On top of that a large part of the respondents also wish for bilingual culture associations such as leisure and sports clubs in the comments. According to the commentors, in South Tyrol there need to be common places where sporting and cultural activities can be carried out.

Around 25% of the respondents state that they would like to see more sensitivity for the history of South Tyrol and that everyone should understand the background of the bilingual character of the region. It is believed that a reappraisal of historical events and a dialogue based on reciprocal respect could solve many intercultural problems. On the other hand, a minority (5.55%) would like to see the *declaration of linguistic affiliation* and the *ethnic quota system* the abolished.

> *"First and foremost, it is the family that must set an example and make people understand that every culture/language is interesting. Get to know diversity and respect it. The family could for example attend some theatre performances in the other language, visit some Germanic and Italian cities. Apart from the family, the school has a fundamental role, here in my opinion perhaps subjects should be taught in the mother tongue, the second language should be taught by native speakers and spread over more hours. I am not sure that a bilingual school can be the solution, because it could be to the detriment of other no less important subjects."*

Before moving to a general discussion of the results, a brief summary of the key results is presented. The survey shows that:

- With two thirds, the German speaking group is the majority. Most of the respondents chose their mother tongue because of the family situation or because it is the language that they use most often in everyday life.
- Language skills are scarce. The German speaking group has slightl higher L2 knowledge than the Italian one.
- Cross-group friendship is limited. Comparing the data with the past, no improvement can be witnessed.
- The sense of belonging differs according to the language group. Most of the German speakers choose "South Tyrolean", while most of the Italian speakers choose "Italian". However, also cosmopolitan terms are popular.

- The majority of the respondents perceive the co-existence of the linguistic groups, multilingualism and cultural diversity as positive.

- The Italian language is perceived as the most important language in order to ensure an amiable togetherness between the language groups. However, the respondents also acknowledge the growing importance of the German dialect. The learning of the German dialect is a challenge for many Italian speaking inhabitants.

- 20% of the respondents come from a bilingual family, whereby the combination German-Italian is the most common mix. The majority speaks both languages at home.

- Children from mixed Italian-German backgrounds are more likely to favor German as their mother tongue and select it in *the language group affiliation declaration*. The majority of these people adapt to the South Tyrolean linguistic categorisation system, but do not sympathize with it.

- More than half of the respondents were not bothered by having to choose a language in *the declaration of linguistic affiliation.* The most chosen language group is the German one.

- Almost half of the respondents identify as bilingual. Even though they did not have difficulties in choosing a language group, they would like to have the option bilingual in the declaration of linguistic affiliation.

- More than the half of the respondents favour a bilingual school system or a more integrated learning by teaching the content of a given subject in the other language.

- Especially the Italian speaking language group perceives that it is in disadvantage in a variety of areas of public life. However, compared to the past, there is a favourable development visible.

- About 40% of the respondents believe that the monolingual school system is the origin for the distance between the language groups. Among the other factors are for instance the lack of language skills or stereotyping.

3.4. Discussion of the results

The above analysis shows that improvements were noted in some areas, and in others, not. The findings make it particularly clear that a positive trend can be detected in most of the above-mentioned areas. This is particularly the case for the feelings towards coexistence, multilingualism and cultural diversity. Regardless of the age group, people see it positively and look optimistically to the future. This is also the area where most of the improvements took place. A positive trend indicating increased collaboration, engagement, and mutual acceptance among the linguistic groupings. At the same time, the data shows that feelings of disadvantage suggest that tensions remain and that South Tyroleans have yet to overcome ethnic divisions. In particular, the comments in the last two questions make this clear, where some of the respondents mentioned feelings of prejudice and discrimination. In other words, conceptual barriers between language groupings are noticed, as well as some tensions and disputes. In this regard, three issues are going to be analysed further.

First of all, as Luigi Blanco points out, the Italian and German ethnic-linguistic groups have cultivated, and continue to cultivate, partly separate identity profiles and memories which are competing. As the data shows, there are significant disparities between the two language groups in terms of territorial, ethnic, and national identity. An illustration is the story of Piazza Vittoria (in English Victory Square) and its Victory Monument, which has often been discussed within the past two decades. Inaugurated in Bolzano in 1928 and firmly desired by Mussolini as a bulwark of Italianism, on whose pediment the words „Hic patriae fines. Siste signa. Hinc ceteros excoluimus lingua, le-gibus, artibus“ which translates into "Here the boundaries of the homeland. Plant the insignia. From here we educated all others with language, laws, arts" (Blanco 2006). In 2001 the municipal administration of Bolzano had decided to change the name of Victory Square into Peace Square. However, a popular referendum, promoted in Bolzano by the party representing the majority of the Italian language group (Alleanza Nazionale), reinstated the name of Victory Square. 62% of the residents (majority Italian language group) of Bolzano rejected the new name. (Ansa, 2021). The ground floor of the Victory Monument now houses a museum that recalls the history of South Tyrol in the 20th century.

This is issue is also reflected in the ongoing debate about the bilingual toponyms. The majority of Italian toponyms were created during the Fascist era by Ettore Tolomei. As a result, a segment of the German-speaking populace would like to erase some of them,

which they see as an unreasonable burden. In 2012, a provincial ordinance mandated that minor geographical designations, such as mountaintops, be written exclusively in German. The Italian government, on the other hand, filed an appeal with the Italian Institutional Court, claiming that the measure breached the Statute's bilingualism principle. Villages and the German-speaking *Alpenverein Südtirol* (the body in charge of mountain trails) took the initiative to use exclusively German in their (public) signs during the time that the decision was still pending, causing outrage among the Italian-speaking community (Carlá, 2008). In 2019 the Provincial Council has repealed the 2012 ordinance. However, the discussion did not end here. In an auction in February 2020 followers of the *Südtiroler Schützenbund* (a voluntary organisation for the preservation of Tyrolean tradition*)*, covered 600 place-name signs with stickers stating, "DNA since 97 Years". According to the *Südtiroler Schützenbund* (2020), they wanted to point out "an injustice of almost one hundred years".

Second, the data reveals that part of both language groups feels a disadvantage or discriminated against. This is especially the case for the Italian language group. These feelings have decreased in the past years, but its mention is very relevant. The survey revealed that 30 percent of the Italian speaking group feel disadvantaged or discriminated against. A specific term was introduced for this issue, namely the *disagio* which in English translates into *unease*. Since the 1990s, the Italian-speaking group has felt *disagio* over its status in South Tyrol, which has manifested itself in a variety of ways, including the notion that the group is at a disadvantage (Carlá, 2008). The members of the Italian language group are "members of the majority in the state and, on the other hand, they are a (numerical) minority in the province" (Czernilofsky, 2003). Therefore, Pichler (2008) describes the Italian language group's *disagio* as "the fear of an "overpowering German-speaking population or politics" and as a "perceived unequal distribution of power and opportunities". Specifically, Pichler writes that the central issue is the feeling of being the "*eternal runner-up*". Scholars found out that for instance, the ethnic proportionality, which assigns many top posts in the public service to the German language group leaves members of the Italian language group with only vice posts. The disagio demonstrates how the South Tyrol model maintains the linguistic divide.

Third, the data reveals that language skills are unsatisfactory and that cross-groups friendships are limited. Together with the different geographical distribution, the education system, which is separated by language, has often been blamed for the scarce knowledge of

the second language and the limited contact between the two groups in the final comments of the survey. Even though, the second language is taught from the first school year, meaning that it is taught for 12 years and around 2,000 hours, the linguistic skills are scarce (Abel, Colombo, 2021).

The current school format with separate schools for each language group and instruction in the student's mother tongue was established by the end of 1945 following the request of German-speaking instructors (Abel, Colombo, 2021). In the recent years, there have been sporadic attempts by various groups and instructors to establish or intensify contact between the language groups (Weger, 2010). A couple of years ago, the *Content and Language Integrated Learning* methodology (hereinafter CLIL) was introduced. CLIL is a method of teaching pupils a subject while also learning a second language. Furthermore, there is also the possibility of attending a school in another language for a semester or a whole school year in the penultimate school year of supper secondary school. The aim of the project is to get to know the two national school systems better and to gain valuable insights into the culture, way of life and way of thinking of the other language group (Weger, 2010). In addition, a motion by the Greens was approved in 2014 in order to develop a sense of unity among the ethnic groups (Abel, Colombo, 2021). The provincial council is now tasked with "adopting, as a guideline for new school infrastructures, the establishment of common school buildings for both language groups, to promote constant and everyday contact between children and young people from both language groups" (ibid.). Proposals for a bilingual school system, however, have been met with criticism, especially from the German-speaking society, which sometimes fear assimilation and "the end of German minority" (ibid). Others justify it with the deterioration of teaching quality. Some parents, particularly Italian speakers, have solved the problem by enrolling their children in schools of the other language. The provincial administration took administrative efforts to curb this development in 2017 (Carlá, 2018).

Furthermore, the linguistically segregated cultural sector is often criticised for being responsible for the above-mentioned issues. This was also shown by the survey. The cultural offices are separated in language and regards the financing. Many cultural events and organisations still address only one group. However, there is an increase in initiatives that

are being organised in cooperation. An example for this is the awareness campaign for multilingualism *#multilingual* [23]

This suggests that on issues such as the school system and toponyms, it seems that part of the language groups are at still odds with each other and calls to change major aspects of the system (such as deviating from the principle of bilingual toponyms or modifying the school system) collide with the urge to defend the group. However, what is also worth noting is that in some respects there is an opening up among the population, as more initiatives are being undertaken in order bring the two language groups together.

3.5.   Limitations of the study

Although 193 people participated in the study, the organisational framework of the survey offers a comparatively small insight into the situation when comparing the number of respondents with the population of South Tyrol, 533,597 (ASTAT 2020). What needs to be noted here, is that the survey was online for only four days. If the study had been online for longer, it is likely that more people would have participated in the study. In addition, it must be considered that the anonymous character of the study on the one hand gave security to be able to share one's own thoughts and suggestions without the risk of confrontation, but on the other hand there was no possibility for the author to ask follow-up questions and to deepen themes expressed in the case of particularly detailed answers. Furthermore, as the answering to the open questions and leaving comments was voluntary, they were only answered by about 65% of the respondents. More answers to open questions would have been desirable as especially those provided interesting insight in the situation. Therefore, the answers to loose-end questions and comments should be mandatory for a future study. Additionally, a future study would need to analyse the attitudes and perceptions of the more isolated, predominantly German-speaking valleys and language perceptions, which due to its online nature, had limited reach. The questionnaire mostly extended to those living in Bolzano and its surroundings. This is also the case for Ladin-speaking citizens. A stronger inclusion of Ladin would benefit this thesis to get a holistic overview of the language contact of three languages and cultures in South Tyrol. The study also revealed that the assessment of cultural and linguistic coexistence depends mainly on subjective experiences and can

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[23] For further details regarding the awareness campaign *#multilingual* and its initiatives visit: https://www.provinz.bz.it/bildung-sprache/sprachen/initiativen-multilingual.asp.

differ from individual to individual and should therefore not be generalised on a big scale. Nevertheless, did the study prove very successful. Many people engaged with it in such a short time and offered answers to more than 40 questions about such a complicated topic as language identity in a multilingual habitat. The study made it possible to have insightful and valid perspectives of many individuals about a topic which is highly relevant in the 21st century, not only in South Tyrol but around the globe.

Conclusion and Recommendations

1. A model to follow?

The purpose of this dissertation was to investigate the current attitudes and perceptions of the South Tyrolean population regarding language identity, language use and cohabitation. This was carried out through a pilot study which has given detailed insight in the perception and attitudes of South Tyrolean society in Spring 2022.

Based on the quantitative and qualitative analysis, it can be concluded that positive trends and improvements regarding the perception of cultural diversity are existent. However, the research has also confirmed that the South Tyrolean society is still largely linguistically and culturally divided. The division is displayed through several factors. As has been shown, linguistic skills are scarce, and the linguistic groups often do not mingle. Most of the people have friends within their own language group. In addition, even though grievances have diminished radically in the past 30 years, the data of the study suggests that perceptions of inferiority persist, implying that tensions continue to occur due to multiple reasons. Among these are for instance, the South Tyrolean autonomy itself that contributes strongly to the separation of the two language groups through the strict threefold institutional division in several sectors. Secondly, because of the region's demographic dispersion, private life could and still can be lived in a monolingual manner in many circumstances.

Nevertheless, there are many positive developments. This is especially true when it comes to feelings like coexistence, multilingualism, and cultural diversity. People, regardless of their age group, express their desire for the language groups to truly live together and collaborate more. This is especially the case for the establishment of an integrated language teaching approach.

Based on these conclusions, the challenge for the next years will be to create initiatives and changes which transforms South Tyrol into a society where citizens are no longer afraid of losing their identity and are living together instead of next to each other. This should firstly happen at the institutional level. Considering the role of education in promoting cultural development and mutual understanding, the education and cultural system is likely to be the appropriate starting point for a new trend toward a more inclusive autonomy. Many steps have already been taken in this direction. An example for this is the project *Second Language Year - Un' anno in L2 - N ann te L2, L3* or the *CLIL teaching*

method. These are good approaches. Nevertheless, there is still much room for improvement. The study has also pointed out that lack of tolerance or the way of living bilingualism seem to be based more on individual experiences and social environment. Therefore, changes do not only need to come from the institutional level but it requires the involvement of numerous parties to overcome suspicions of others and create strong relationships among the language groups. Parents should, for instance, act as role models and encourage their children to get in contact with the other language group by supporting the children to learn the other language and influence their attitudes towards the other community.

As Alexander Langer said in 1996 "The more we have to do one with the other, the better we will understand each other". The key takeaway is that everyone must work together in order to create a society that embraces the chances of living in a province with such a unique background. The challenge in the next few years will therefore be to promote as much social, cultural, and linguistic interaction between the linguistic communities as possible. The goal that future generations do not feel the struggle of being excluded in their own homeland and fully embrace the richness it offers, seems appropriate.

2. Future directions

The voluntary offering of multiple comments and thoughts by almost 65% of the respondents shows that there is a need for further discussion and that the topic is a 'sore point' for many. To better understand the implications of these results, it would be interesting to conduct follow-up interviews in order to find out, through participant observation in conversation, what attitudes towards other speakers and the respective languages can be gathered. The advantage of this approach would be the possibility to clarify ambiguities directly and to address perceived problems and conflicts.

In addition, a future study could be carried out focusing specifically on high school students. The last *Kolipsi study* was carried out in 2017. A new study would therefore be useful to see how the language skills of high school students have evolved.

Furthermore, South Tyrol is an example of contact between different cultures and languages. Especially in Italian territory, there are other areas where different languages have influenced each other. Further scientific work could therefore deal with language perception in the Aosta Valley or in Friuli Venezia Giulia and work out to what extent there are positive or negative perceptions there. Subsequently, the results should be compared with

those from South Tyrol in order to determine to what extent there are similarities and also differences.

Finally, further research could be carried out regarding a bilingual school system. The majority of the respondents were in favour of the introduction of a bilingual education system, or the introduction of the teaching of some subjects in another language. This was also the case for increasingly multilingual leisure activities. Therefore, in the future it would be useful to further analyse the situation and the given conditions in order to determine whether progress has been made in this respect and in which direction it is going.

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Appendix

Form for declaration of linguistic affiliation [24]

A/1

Dichiarazione di appartenenza o aggregazione a gruppo linguistico resa al 14° Censimento generale della popolazione ai sensi dell'art. 89 dello statuto speciale per il Trentino-Alto Adige.	Erklärung über die Zugehörigkeit oder Zuordnung zu einer Sprachgruppe, die im Sinne von Art. 89 des Sonderstatutes für die Region Trentino-Südtirol anlässlich der 14. Volkszählung abgegeben wird.	Declarazion de partegnenza o de agregazion a n grup linguistich, fata en ocajion dla 14. cumpededa generala dla popolazion aldò dl art. 89 dl statut spezial per la Region Trentin-Südtirol.

Comune di
Gemeinde
Comun de _____

Dichiaro di appartenere al gruppo linguistico sotto indicato barrando la casella:	Durch Ankreuzen des entsprechenden Kästchens erkläre ich, folgender Sprachgruppe anzugehören:	Con encrojé l cadrel relatif declareii de partegnì al grup linguistich:
☐ italiano	☐ der italienischen	☐ talian
☐ tedesco	☐ der deutschen	☐ todesch
☐ ladino	☐ der ladinischen	☐ ladin

<div align="center">

O P P U R E   O D E R   O Z E N Z A

</div>

Dichiaro di non appartenere ad alcuno dei predetti gruppi linguistici, ossia di essere "altro", e di aggregarmi (ai fini dell'esercizio dei diritti ed interessi legittimi collegati dalla legge all'appartenenza ad uno dei tre gruppi linguistici e della determinazione della consistenza proporzionale dei gruppi stessi) barrando una delle sotto indicate caselle:	Ich erkläre, keiner der drei genannten Sprachgruppen anzugehören bzw. „anders Erklärender" zu sein und (zur Wahrnehmung der Rechte und der rechtlich geschützten Interessen, die gesetzlich an die Zugehörigkeit zu einer der drei Sprachgruppen gebunden sind, und zur Festlegung des proporzmäßig relevanten Bestandes der einzelnen Sprachgruppen) durch Ankreuzen eines der unten angeführten Kästchen mich der folgenden Sprachgruppe zuzuordnen:	le declareie de ne partegnì a degun di trei grups linguistics nominés dessoura, ma de m'aratè „auter", y de m'agreghé (ai fins dla valenza de derc y di interesc legitims conliés dala lege ala partegnenza a un di trei grups linguistics y per la determinazion dl'amonta proporzionala di singui grups), encrojan un di cadrei chilò dessot, al grup linguistich:
☐ italiano	☐ der italienischen	☐ talian
☐ tedesco	☐ der deutschen	☐ todesch
☐ ladino	☐ der ladinischen	☐ ladin

....	....	....
Scheda relativa a (cognome e nome) Zählblatt der/des (Zu- und Vorname) Sfuei de cumpededa de (cognom y inom)	nato/a il geboren am nasciù/uda ai	Sottoscrizione del dichiarante Unterschrift der erklärenden Person Sotscrizion dla persona declaranta

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[24] Source: ASTAT: http://www.provincia.bz.it/astat/download/Gruppi-linguistici.pdf, p.3