

**Ninth United Nations Conference on the
Standardization of Geographical Names**

New York, 21 - 30 August 2007

Item 9(a) of the provisional agenda*

National standardization: Field collection of names

Brief Notes on the Normalization of the Sardinian Language (Italy)

Submitted by Italy **

* E/CONF.98/1.

** Prepared by Salvatore ARCA and Andrea CANTILE, Italian Military Geographic Institute, Italy.

Brief notes on the normalization of the Sardinian Language (Italy)

In the Autonomous region of Sardinia, the following languages are spoken: four different Sardinian dialects, a Catalan dialect, which is spoken in the town of Alghero and in its outskirts, and two Ligurian dialects that are spoken in the municipality of Carloforte (on the island of San Pietro) and at Calasetta on the island of Sant'Antioco respectively.

The two islands speaking different languages, namely the Catalan and the Ligurian, which also belong to the group of Romance languages, are offshoots of a past inheritance: the Catalan is the offshoot of the conquest of Alghero by the Aragonese in 1353, while the Ligurian dialects date back to the arrival of a group of Genoese refugees on the island of Sant'Antioco in the sixteenth century and from the granting of the island of San Pietro to a group of Ligurian exiles by Carlo Emanuele III of Savoy (Turin 1701-1773) in 1736.

The four Sardinian dialects are idioms of the neo-Latin language group which derives from Latin. They differ from one another in several phonetic and lexical aspects. However, on the whole, due to the insular nature of the territory, they have variously maintained a certain archaic form, while not being insulated from the Italian language. Moreover, they have assimilated recent neologisms. Depending on the areas where these dialects are spoken, they are named respectively: Campidanese, Lugodorese, Gallurese and Sassarese.

The Campidanese dialect, which is named after Campidano ("vast field"), a plain extending between the provinces of Cagliari and Oristano, is spoken throughout almost all of the southern part of Sardinia and on the southeastern coast of Ogliastra in the province of Nuoro.

The Lugodorese dialect, whose name derives from Lugodoro ("place of Torres", namely the territory of Porto Torres, the main city of one of the four ancient administrative districts of Sardinia), is spoken in the north central area of the island. It is considered to be the literary form of the Sardinian language.

The Gallurese dialect, whose name derives from the cock on the coat of arms of the noble Visconti family from Lombardy, the ancient owners of the place, is spoken throughout Gallura ("the land of the cock"), that is, the northeastern part of the island.

The Sassarese dialect, which is named after the town of Sassari, the main city of the province with the same name, is spoken in Sassari, in its outskirts and in the extreme northwestern part of Sardinia.

The Campidanese, the Gallurese and the Sassarese dialects have undergone several linguistic variations with many opportunities for lexical enrichment because of more frequent exchanges with other cultures. The Logudorese dialect, on the other hand, owing to the nature of its territory which is secluded and nestled in the impervious Sardinian hinterland, has not been much affected by external influences. It represents, therefore, a perfect instance of linguistic conservatism, by maintaining its most ancient form.

The peculiarity of the Sardinian linguistics, as compared with other idioms existing in Italy, is associated with the history of the island. The first contacts with the Latin language date back to 238 B. C. even though linguistic penetration into the interior of the island was actually very slow and met with strong opposition. After passing under the Control of the Eastern Roman Empire in 476, the language and culture did not mingle, as a result of the invasions by the Vandals. At the outset of the second millennium, Sardinia fell within the orbit of influence of the Pisans and the Genoese, and then, from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries, it became open to the influence of the Catalans and the Castilians. The spreading of the Italian language began with the ascension of the Kingdom of Sardinia under the House of Savoy in 1720.

In short, the Campidanese, the Logudorese, the Gallurese, and the Sassarese dialects represent, (though differently in relation to one another), the linguistic result of the complex mingling of these cultures. Thus, because of the peculiarity of the Sardinian territory, the dialects have been able to maintain traces of pre-Roman idioms; within these idioms linguists detect Punic (as well as Libyan and Ligurian) elements. An example is the word “zìppiri” which means rosemary.

On the whole, nowadays, the four Sardinian dialects are spoken by nearly half a million people. However, due to prevailing differences among the forms of the dialects themselves and the absence of a unified linguistic form, linguists have retained a cautious stance about acknowledging Sardinian as having the status of a language as such.

In a recent past, considerable progress has been made towards normalizing the language with the establishment of special Offices (*Ufitziu de sa limba sarda*) for the Sardinian language in the various Sardinian provinces, among which the Office in the Province of Nuoro has turned out to be at the forefront of such activity. This Office has outlined a broad “Linguistic Policy Plan” financed by the President of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Italy. Within this framework, the Office has carried out a huge editing effort for linguistic dissemination and unification. In particular, this office has established a special scientific board for the coordination of efforts. It has provided for the activation of a linguistic window to cater to the needs of civil services, institutes, firms, and state-owned enterprises. It has established a dedicated web site and a toll-free number. It has disseminated a series of dictionaries of such topics as: orthography, synonyms, toponymy, and anthroponymy; and also a monolingual dictionary in Sardinian, an Italian/Sardinian dictionary; an automatic spell-checker, a text analyser, a rhyming dictionary, jargon dictionaries, nomenclature tables, conversation textbooks and textbooks aimed at distance learning, formularies and miscellaneous promotional/advertising material.

Other efforts have been made by the various Province Offices which have started several cultural activities and publications, each within its own competence, all aimed at defining a locally-unified linguistic structure and disseminating it throughout the territory. However, coordination of efforts at a regional level has always been scant.

The difficulties, which have so far hindered the process of linguistic unification, essentially stem from fear of exclusion. In other words, the fact that one of the four dialects should be chosen as a basis for the unification, has systematically met resistance by those who fear being excluded. In the past this has always resulted in giving up any attempt at jointly-based unification.

A new element in the Sardinian linguistic landscape has been introduced by a recent resolution of the Regional Council of Sardinia to adopt a common Sardinian language (*Limba Sard Comuna*) as a result of the preparatory work by the Committee established with decision n. 20/15 of May 9, 2005, by the same Regional Council. This Committee had operated in light of the progress already made in this field, as well as in the implementation of special documents and regulations such as *The European Chart of regional and minority languages*, which was adopted by the European Council on June 29, 1992, the *Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights*, decreed by the United Nations on June 9, 1996, Sardinian Regional Law n. 27 of October 15, 1997, *Promotion and Appreciation of Sardinian Culture and Language*, the

Italian national law n. 482 of December 15, 1999, *Regulatory Directives on the protection of historical linguistic minorities*, and the Presidential Decree n. 345 of May 2, 2001, *Guidelines for the Enforcement of Law n.482 of December 15, 1999*.

The aim of the above provision is to define and assert a unified language for the Sardinian Region's exclusively administrative purposes, as for the written form, as well as to enable the island dwellers to use the spoken language along their traditional lines and to consider local linguistic differences as an additional element of cultural riches to be safeguarded.

This operation of linguistic unification implied the adoption in 2006, (on an experimental basis), of a *Limba Sarda Comuna*, susceptible, in the near future, to changes and improvements imposed by usage and comparison, which, while implying unilateral use of *Limba Sarda Comuna* by the Region for its basic texts, laws and resolutions, will not require of the provinces a compulsory and exclusive use of such language.

In this first configuration, the *Limba Sarda Comuna* appears to be a natural variable of the language spoken in the island's central area with changes in the use of articles, pronouns and some verbs. Its structure has been defined by adopting special criteria aimed at ensuring uniformity, univocity and consistency. Thus, special rules have been established for the graphical display of phonemes with definition of related graphemes, rules of spelling, phonetics, use of articles, the construction of the plural, adjectives, pronouns, adverbs as well as verbal phrases, conjunctions, indefinite pronouns, numerals, verbs

(auxiliary, regular and irregular), word formation, lexicon (hereditary, terminology and neologisms).

The above provision surely is a praiseworthy effort to overcome local dialect barriers and to create a unified language, on the one hand. On the other hand, however, it might paradoxically represent an obstacle for the purposes of toponymy, because of obvious difficulties of pronunciation and writing of geographic names of different kinds (micro and macrotoponymy) pre-existing the formation of a unified language.

In order to avoid any confusion from the standpoint of phonetics and spelling in the use of toponymy, it becomes necessary to proceed to a systematic identification of all Sardinian toponyms and their normalization, taking into account the different phonetic and orthographic peculiarities of the four Sardinian dialects in connection with the mores, traditions and the

local history, also in accordance with the recommendation in the U.N. Resolution n. 36 on “Problems of minority languages” approved at the 2nd U.N. Conference on Standardization of Geographical names (London May 10-31, 1972). The expressed recommendation called on member States to adopt a “common spelling in writing all geographic names in minority languages; to use such spelling in normalizing names of places located within their territories, which derive from the same minority language”; to publish normalized names in their official maps and national catalogues.

In light of the rules established, with the assertion of an effective and shared *Limba Sarda Comuna*, it will therefore be essential that, in the near future, arrangements are made in coordination with national and local institutions for using normalized toponyms in the official national cartography, in technical cartography, in geographic and toponymic databases, in atlases and in geographic and tourist publications, as well as in road signs, etc.

*Salvatore ARCA and Andrea Cantile
Italian Military Geographic Institute*