

*Mission Permanente du  
Royaume du Maroc auprès  
des Nations Unies  
New York*



*Permanent Mission of the  
Kingdom of Morocco to the  
United Nations  
New York*

## **INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH SEMINAR**

# **Linguistic and Cultural Identity in Territorial Autonomy Regimes**

**New York, 1 July 2025**



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## **FOREWARD**

Since the presentation by the Kingdom of Morocco, on 11 April 2007, of the Moroccan Autonomy Initiative, international reflection on models of territorial autonomy has continued to evolve and develop.

This initiative, welcome by the Security Council as « serious and credible », and enjoying broad international support, having garnered the support of more than 120 countries, including three permanent members of the Council and more than two-thirds of the European Union Member States, is part of a vision resolutely oriented toward peace, security, stability and prosperity in the Moroccan Sahara region, within the framework of the Kingdom of Morocco's territorial integrity, national unity, and sovereignty.

Within this dynamic, the Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Morocco to the United Nations in New York has, since 2009, initiated a cycle of international comparative seminars aimed at examining the broadest range of experiences in territorial autonomy.

These meetings have made it possible to compare autonomy models implemented on five continents, to analyze their respective institutional frameworks and to identify the key factors underlying their success and sustainability.

This publication is part of this academic, comparative and inclusive approach. It brings together contributions from eminent international experts and scholars who have provided insightful and constructive analysis on the theme « Linguistic and cultural identity in territorial autonomy regimes ».

Through the examination of autonomy models implemented in the Basque Country, Corsica, Macao and Aruba, the seminar highlighted the diversity of institutional and legal approaches adopted to preserve and promote cultural and linguistic identities in these regions, while ensuring political stability and economic prosperity.

These comparative analyses enrich the reflection on the practical implementation of the Moroccan Autonomy Initiative, particularly in its dimensions related to the promotion and respect of the Hassani heritage and culture, in the framework of the linguistic pluralism enjoyed by the Kingdom of Morocco's twelve regions.

This collection is not merely a compilation of academic analyses, but also a concrete contribution to the international debate on modern autonomy models and their role in seeking just, lasting and pragmatic solutions to regional disputes, in full respect of the territorial integrity, unity, and national sovereignty of UN Member States.

**Omar HILALE**

**Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Morocco  
to the United Nations in New York**

## INTRODUCTION

**Dr Marc FINAUD<sup>1</sup>**

I am pleased to open this new on-line international research seminar on the topic “Linguistic and Cultural Identity in Regimes of Territorial Autonomy” organised by the Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Morocco to the United Nations in New York.

As you may remember, on 11 April 2007, the Kingdom of Morocco presented to the UN Secretary-General its “Initiative for Negotiating an Autonomy Statute for the Sahara Region” in order to break the stalemate in negotiations on the regional dispute about Sahara.<sup>2</sup> The UN Security Council in successive sixteen resolutions welcomed the “*serious and credible Moroccan efforts to move the process forward towards resolution*”. It also encouraged “*the parties to demonstrate further political will towards a solution including by expanding upon their discussion of each other’s proposals and recommitting to UN efforts in a spirit of realism and compromise*”, and encouraged “*neighbouring countries to make contributions to the political process; and stressing the importance of all concerned expanding on their positions in order to advance a solution.*”<sup>3</sup>

As a contribution to the discussion of the parties’ proposals, since 2009, Morocco initiated a series of international academic comparative seminars in person and on line on several aspects of territorial autonomy such as self-determination, human rights, institutions, natural resources, negotiations, regionalization, development models, the role of civil society, external relations, settlement of political disputes, legislative, judicial, and executive powers, attraction of foreign investment, etc.

The comparative studies included the cases of: Aceh in Indonesia, Andalusia and Catalonia in Spain, the Azores and Madeira in Portugal, Bangsamoro in the Philippines, the British Crown dependencies and Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom, the Caribbean island states, the Faroe Islands and Greenland in Denmark, North-East India, Iraqi Kurdistan, the autonomous regions of Italy including South Tyrol, the states of Mexico, New Caledonia in France, Newfoundland, Nunavut and Quebec in Canada, the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua, Puerto Rico in the United States, the provinces of Spain, Vojvodina in Serbia, Wallonia in Belgium, Zanzibar in Tanzania, etc.

The proceedings of those seminars have been published by Morocco and are available on a dedicated website ([www.academicautonomynetwork.com](http://www.academicautonomynetwork.com)).

We will focus today on the topic of “Linguistic and Cultural Identity in Regimes of Territorial Autonomy”. Our seminar will offer the opportunity to compare the regulations or practices in four more or less autonomous regions: the Spanish Basque Country, the French island of Corsica, the Chinese special administrative region of Macau, and the constituent country of Aruba within the Netherlands. In each case, we will look for similarities and differences with the Moroccan Initiative for the Autonomy of the Sahara Region regarding that aspect of linguistic and cultural identity.

The Initiative for the Autonomy of the Sahara Region includes several provisions that relate to cultural and linguistic identity:

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations Security Council, Document S/2007/206, 13 April 2007.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Security Council, Resolution S/RES/2756 (2024) of 31 October 2024.

- Art. 5: “[...] *the Sahara populations will themselves run their affairs democratically, through legislative, executive, and judicial bodies enjoying exclusive powers. They will have the financial resources needed for the Region’s development in all fields, and will take an active part in the nation’s economic, social and **cultural** life.*

- Art. 12: *In keeping with democratic principles and procedures, and acting through legislative, executive, and judicial bodies, the populations of the Sahara autonomous Region shall exercise powers, within the Region’s territorial boundaries, mainly over the following:*

○[...] *In the social sector: housing, **education**, health, employment, sports, social welfare, and social security;*

○**Cultural** affairs, including promotion of the Saharan Hassani **cultural heritage** [...]”

Despite a gradual shift from nomadism to urbanization, the Sahrawi populations have retained their *hassâniyya* dialect of Arabic as well as many aspects of Sahrawi identity and subjectivities (e.g., forms of dress, social customs, poetry and song, cultural festivals, and the continued use of tents in urban spaces for social gatherings). A Museum of Saharan Arts was founded at the headquarters of the House of Culture in Laayoune. The construction of a complex for craft industry has allowed for the raising in the level of education and expertise of the young craftsmen, and this sector is experiencing more growth and dynamism through its link and coordination with the tourism sector. All these activities are developed locally with the support of the Moroccan government (see: <http://www.sahara-culture.com/>).

Hassâniyya Arabic is a dialect of Maghrebi Arabic and is spoken across the Sahara region and is an important expression of Sahrawi identity within Morocco. This idiom gets its name from the Beni Hassan tribes that invaded the region in the 11th and 13th centuries and conquered the local Sanhaja Berber tribes. As a traditionally oral culture, sharing stories, fables, poems, and songs in Hassâniyya has been part of Saharawi society for centuries, and is often a part of the traditional Saharawi tea ceremony. Through oral accounts, the Saharawis have documented aspects of their daily life and their nomadic travels, as well as preserved their collective historical memories. The Saharawi oral tradition encompasses poetry, storytelling and the proverb. Proverbs are an integral part of educating children and reminding adults of morals and values.

Other languages spoken in the region include Berber languages as well as Spanish, inherited from the colonial period and mostly spoken by the older generation of Saharawis, that contribute to the linguistic diversity of the region along with the two official languages of Morocco: Modern Standard Arabic and Standard Moroccan Berber.

The Sahrawi cultural identity is therefore a mix of Arab, Berber, and local influences, shaped by their nomadic lifestyle and the historical context of colonization. The Moroccan Initiative for the Autonomy of the Sahara Region offers an opportunity for the populations of that region to preserve, to promote, and to make the best use of their linguistic and cultural identity.

In any case, it is now time to look at the experience of other autonomous regions that may be quite different from the situation in the Sahara Region but may also provide useful models that could inspire the future authorities of the autonomous Sahara Region.

We will focus on some questions such as the following ones:

1. In the statute of autonomy, does the regional government exert exclusive competences regarding education, preservation of the regional language, and culture or are these domains shared with the central government?

2. Does the regional government appoint personnel dealing with the preservation of regional cultural and linguistic identity alone or is this the prerogative of the central government? Is this power shared between both governments?

3. Are there institutional modalities for ensuring that regional cultural and linguistic identity is preserved also at the national level?

4. Does the national government have the power to prevent or suspend any regional activity related to the preservation of regional cultural and linguistic identity such as teaching the regional language in regional schools or allowing regional media to use and spread regional language and culture?

5. Is the regional language recognized as one of the national official languages or is it allowed to be taught and used only at the regional level?

# LINGUISTIC POLICIES IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY: A HISTORICAL APPROACH

Dr. Asier H. AGUIRRESAROBÉ<sup>4</sup>

## 1. Introduction

“We are witnessing one of the best-known examples of linguistic recovery [that of Basque in the Basque Autonomous Community], one that garners the greatest social consensus, the fastest percentage recovery of the language, and the deepest bilingualization at an early age”. So described the Catalan sociolinguist and lawyer Miquel Gros I Lladós the results produced by the linguistic policies undertaken by the Basque autonomous government ever since the promulgation of the Basque Statute of Autonomy in December 1979.<sup>5</sup> Gros I Lladós’ remarks would likely have astonished Sabino Arana, the father of Basque nationalism, who back in 1901 despaired about the survival of the *Euskera*, the Basque language: “When I start thinking [...] I clearly understand that it is disappearing: it will be gone before the end of the century that has just begun. [...] *Euskera* must be enough — but the truth is, it’s only good for talking about farming operations”.<sup>6</sup>

The disparity the remarks of the Catalan author in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century and Arana cannot be attributed solely to the passage of time. In the late early 20<sup>th</sup> century *Euskera* was widely perceived as the language of the rural world, a tongue marginalized from dynamic sectors and spaces by a stark functional diglossia. In contrast, it was now officially celebrated as “the unifying factor for all citizens of the Basque Country”.<sup>7</sup> This transformation prompts a crucial question: what had produced such a dramatic shift? How could a language that appeared to be so firmly set on the road to disappearance not only have been preserved, but also managed to come to be valued as the common heritage of all?

This essay will offer a critical assessment of the evolution of linguistic policies in the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) with particular attention to the ways in which these policies may provide comparative insights in relation to the “Initiative for negotiating an autonomy statute for the Sahara region”, first proposed by the Kingdom of Morocco in 2007. The decision to focus upon language is not far from arbitrary. While other aspects of Basque culture and heritage such as dance, dress, or particular occupations have undoubtedly contributed to Basque cultural identity, in modern times none of them come close to the emotional and political role played in this area by *Euskera*. Likewise, this approach highlights the certainty that the most important lessons to be learnt from cultural policies in the BAC — lessons that concern above all the preservation and societal promotion of the Basque language.

To pursue these goals, this essay will first present a historical overview of the role played by *Euskera* in the development of Basque identity, then to be followed by an analysis of the particular lines of policy carried out by the Basque autonomous government from 1979 onwards. Finally, it will establish a comparative between these and the proposed terms included in the ‘Initiative’ made by the Kingdom of Morocco with the objective of identifying key similarities and differences and evaluating

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Patxi Baztarrika, “El *Euskera*: un caso de revitalización,” in *La normalización social de las lenguas minoritarias*, ed. Javier Giralt and Francho Nagore (Zaragoza: Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza, 2019), 102.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Xabier Zabaltza, *Mater Vasconia. Lenguas, fueros y discursos nacionales en los países vascos* (San Sebastián: Hiria, 2005), 293.

<sup>7</sup> *Ley 10/1982, de 24 de noviembre, básica de normalización del uso del Euskera*. The text of the norm can be accessed in: <https://www.boe.es/buscar/pdf/2012/BOE-A-2012-5539-consolidado.pdf> (accessed 2/5/2025).

the potential relevance of the Basque linguistic policy model to the context of a hypothetical autonomous region in the Sahara.

## 2. An Overview of the History of Linguistic and Cultural Identity of the Basque Country

Culture has occupied a paradoxical position as a pillar of identity in the Western Pyrenees. For one, *Euskera*, the Basque language, is a non-Indo-European tongue for the most part unintelligible to speakers of the Romance languages that surround it. For this reason, a sense of cultural distance from neighbouring peoples has been a persistent feature of its speakers throughout recorded history. However, as we will see, political authorities and bodies of government in these territories have paid little attention to this distinctiveness, which in turn has meant that the language was largely excluded from the centres of political and cultural decision-making up until the modern era.

Prior to the Late Middle Ages, connections between *Euskera* and processes of identification are almost impossible to trace. The kingdom of Pamplona - later of Navarre -, which some authors and activists have characterized as a proto-“Basque State”,<sup>8</sup> did not actively promote any favourable policy towards Basque language and culture.<sup>9</sup> Rather, as an heir to ideological frameworks imported from more powerful monarchies such as the Castilian-Leonese kingdom or the Frankish realms to the north, its own self-image was constructed, first in Latin, and subsequently in Romance languages such as Navarrese Romance or Gascon.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, artistic and architectural expressions in the region closely followed stylistic conventions present in nearby regions.<sup>11</sup>

The Late Middle Ages were a crucial turning point for the development of political identities in the territories that now constitute the Basque region. During this period, borders became more stable and clearly defined. Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa, and Alava were incorporated into the Kingdom of Castille around the year 1200, and the Kingdom of Navarre was likewise annexed by this realm in 1512. On the northern side of the Pyrenees, too, the end of the Hundred Years War between the kingdoms of England and France spelled the end of the English suzerainty over Bayonne and its surroundings, facilitating the integration of these Basque-speaking territories to the French crown. This image reached completion between 1527-1529, when the appendage of the kingdom of Navarre north of the Pyrenees was abandoned by the Spanish Monarchy and came to be ruled by a local dynasty allied with France and, from 1620 onward, by the French Monarchy itself.<sup>12</sup>

While these political adjustments were undoubtedly important to the emergence of particular identities at both sides of the border, it is not less true that there were other social, economic, and ideological factors at play. In this regard, it is crucial to note that the 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, and early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries were marked by a very prolonged era of instability commonly referred to as the ‘Wars of the Bandos’.<sup>13</sup> However, to reduce this complex phenomenon to a mere series of military conflicts takes the risk of

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<sup>8</sup> Félix Placer, *La religión en Euskal Herria: Mitos, creencias e identidad en el tiempo y la tierra de los vascos* (Tafalla: Txalaparta, 2010), 54-5.

<sup>9</sup> Ricardo Cierbide, “El *Euskera* en la Navarra medieval en su contexto románico,” *Fontes linguae vasconum: Studia et documenta* 79 (1998): 502. Also, Zabaltza, *Mater Vasconia*, 51.

<sup>10</sup> José Luis Orella, “La gasconización medieval occidental del Reino de Navarra,” *Lurralde* 33 (2010): 180.

<sup>11</sup> Ángel J. Martín, “Del reino de Pamplona al Reino de Navarra,” *Príncipe de Viana* 227 (2002): 843.

<sup>12</sup> Alfredo Floristán, “Conquista e incorporación del Reino de Navarra a la Monarquía de España,” in *La diadema del rey. Vizcaya, Navarra, Aragón y Cerdeña en la Monarquía de España (siglos XVI-XVIII)*, ed. Jon Arrieta, Xavier Gil and Jesús Morales (Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco, 2017), 328-9.

<sup>13</sup> José Ángel García de Cortázar, “Álava, Guipúzcoa y Vizcaya en los siglos XIII a XV: de los valles a las provincias,” *Revista Internacional de los Estudios Vascos* 45, no.1 (2000): 199-200.

sidelining many developments crucial to the further process of Basque identity construction.<sup>14</sup> For one, a source of instability can be traced to the establishment of chartered towns beginning in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century. These urban centres largely operated under legal, social, political, and economic rules that were wholly foreign to the customary law of the land.<sup>15</sup> Secondly, the period witnessed significant social unrest resulting from the betterment of the economic conditions of the lower classes. This was in part due to an increasing involvement in northern European trade networks and the exportation of the region's high-quality iron.<sup>16</sup> Compounding these changes were the ambitions of local chieftains and magnates who, capitalizing on the weak grip which the various monarchies - Castilian, English, and Navarrese - exerted upon the region, sought to subjugate both cities and commoners to secure nobiliary titles for themselves and their descendants. This multifaceted confrontation, encompassing as it did armed episodes as well as social and political strife, was the cradle from which the key symbols of later Basque identity would emerge.

This was because the Wars of the Bandos, despite considerable territorial variation, resulted in the political articulation of stronger political, social, ideological, and legal bonds between the peoples of the Western Pyrenees and the respective monarchies to which they paid their allegiance.<sup>17</sup> In Gipuzkoa, Bizkaia, and Alava, the resistance of urban councils and rural communities to the ambitions of the magnates led, by the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, to the formation of a provincial system ruled by a territorial assembly. The ruling elites of these General Assemblies pursued, throughout the Early Modern Period, the attainment of three principal objectives: (1) to secure recognition of the provincial institutions as the sole legitimate representatives of these territories in dealings with the monarchy; (2) to obtain preferent access to the commercial opportunities opened by the territorial expansion of the Spanish Monarchy's imperial dominions in Europe and the Americas; and (3) to prevent commoners from wresting control over these Assemblies from the hands of the elite.

These three objectives had major consequences for the institutional development of Euskera and, more generally, Basque-cultural forms.<sup>18</sup> The new regimes, dominated by urban oligarchies, sought to bar commoners from accessing posts of responsibility by entrenching a clear-cut diglossia whereby Castilian was regarded as the language of trade, court, culture, law, and politics, while Basque was relegated to serve as the language of the peasantry and the rural world.<sup>19</sup> Paradoxically, in pursuit of their second objective, provincial institutions frequently endorsed the publication of legal and historical texts in which Euskera was regarded as one of the languages born from the tower of Babel and “*not barbarous nor diminished [...] but mysteriously deep and no less elegant in its sentences than the rest*

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<sup>14</sup> José Ramón Díaz de Durana, *La otra nobleza: escuderos e hidalgos sin nombre y sin historia. Hidalgos e hidalguía universal en el País Vasco al final de la Edad Media (1250-1525)* (Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco, 2004), 122.

<sup>15</sup> Javier García, "El Fuero de Vizcaya en la doctrina y en la práctica judicial castellanas," in Arrieta, Gil and Morales, *La diadema del rey*, 64. Also, José Antonio Marín, "¿Qué es un Pariente Mayor? El ejemplo de los señores de Oñaz y Loyola," in *La lucha de bandos en el País Vasco: de los Parientes Mayores a la Hidalguía Universal. Guipúzcoa, de los bandos a la Provincia (siglos XIV a XVI)*, ed. José Ramón Díaz de Durana (Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco, 1998), 216-7; and Carlos Martínez, *Casa, Provincia, Rey. Para una historia de la cultura del poder en el País Vasco* (Irun: Alberdania, 1993), 92-3.

<sup>16</sup> García de Cortázar, "Álava, Guipúzcoa y Vizcaya," 209-10.

<sup>17</sup> García de Cortázar, "Álava, Guipúzcoa y Vizcaya," 199-200; José Ángel Achón, "Los parientes mayores," *Iura Vasconiae* 3 (2006): 225.

<sup>18</sup> Céline Mounole and Joseba A. Lakarra, "El Euskera arcaico," in *Historia de la Lengua Vasca*, ed. Joaquín Gorrochategui, Iván Igartua and Joseba A. Lakarra (Vitoria-Gasteiz: Eusko Jaurilaritza, 2018), 391-2; Zabaltza, *Mater Vasconia*, 102-3.

<sup>19</sup> Mikel Azurmendi, *Y se limpie aquella tierra. Limpieza étnica y de sangre en el País Vasco (siglos XVI-XVIII)*. (Madrid: Taurus, 2000), 235; Martínez, *Casa, Provincia, Rey*, 15-6.

that can be found in Europe”.<sup>20</sup> To these propagandists of the provincial system, the antiquity and otherness of the Basque language constituted proof of the right that inhabitants of the Western Pyrenees - as “indigenous to Spain, pure and unmarred” - had to privilege.<sup>21</sup> Sadly for Euskera, though, these ideological outbursts - invariably written in Castilian - had no correspondence in practical attempts to improve the sociolinguistic reality of the region nor to elevate the social stature of the language.<sup>22</sup>

Divergence between the Castilian-oriented world of the political and economic elites and the Basque-speaking universe of the masses would only increase over time.<sup>23</sup> Particularly in territories directly bordering Castilian-speaking regions, Euskera experienced spatial and social regression.<sup>24</sup> By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the provincial system was ultimately abolished by the Spanish Liberal State, only the northern stretches of Alava and Navarre, as well as Gipuzkoa and Bizkaia, remained as strongholds of Basque south of the Pyrenees. The decline was further accelerated by the coming of large-scale industrialization from 1876 onward, centred around Bilbao, which attracted a massive influx of migrants from the rest of the Spanish State.<sup>25</sup> Without any need to learn Euskera to conduct themselves in the urban setting of Bilbao, and with little interaction with a Basque-speaking rural population largely cast aside by the industrializing process, the new migrants were perceived by many as direct threats to the future, not only of the Basque language, but also of Basque cultural identity as a whole.<sup>26</sup>

It was in this milieu that Basque nationalism was born in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Sabino Arana, its ideological founder, was a strong opponent of migration of Spaniards to work in the furnaces and shipyards of Bilbao, derogatorily referring to them as ‘maketos’. Making use of overtly racist and xenophobic language he depicted these ‘maketos’ as immoral, brutish, and polluting inferiors: “more than men, they resemble apes — little less beastlike than the gorilla: do not look in their faces for the expression of human intelligence or any virtue; their gaze reveals only idiocy and brutality”.<sup>27</sup> Arana’s declared proposal to reverse the situation was none other than the restoration of the provincial system of the Early Modern period, but now severing any ties with Spain.<sup>28</sup>

The movement created by Sabino Arana gained traction over the following decades, even after his death in 1903. The party he had founded, the *Partido Nacionalista Vasco* (Basque Nationalist Party, PNV) would remain the main advocate for Basque political rights; the flag he created alongside his brother would become the Basque national flag or *ikurriña*; and even the anthem of the Basque

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<sup>20</sup> Andrés de Poza, *De la Antigua lengua, poblaciones y comarcas de las Españas, en que de paso se tocan algunas cosas de la Cantabria* (Bilbao: Mathias Mares, 1587), XII, 32-3.

<sup>21</sup> Andrés de Poza, *Fuero de hidalguía Ad pragmáticas de Toro & Tordesillas*. (Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco, 1997), XIII, 223-5.

<sup>22</sup> This trend was overtly criticized by some Basque-speaking writers such as Joannes Etcheberri de Ziburu, who largely did so on the French-ruled territories of the north. Martínez, *Casa, Provincia, Rey*, 172-3.

<sup>23</sup> José María Imízcoz, “Costumbres en tensión. El proceso de la civilización en las tierras vascas, de las costumbres compartidas a la fractura de la comunidad (1700-1833),” in *Procesos de Civilización: Culturas de élites, culturas populares. Una historia de contrastes y tensiones (siglos XVI-XIX)*, ed. José María Imízcoz, Máximo García and Javier Esteban (Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco, 2019), 270-1.

<sup>24</sup> Blanca Urgell, “Primer vasco moderno,” in Gorrochategui, Igartua and Lakarra, *Historia de la Lengua Vasca*, 603.

<sup>25</sup> Zabaltza, *Mater Vasconia*, 181.

<sup>26</sup> Ludger Mees, *The Basque contention: ethnicity, politics, violence* (London - New York: Routledge, 2020), 55; Urgell, “Primer vasco moderno,” 609.

<sup>27</sup> Sabino Arana, *Bizkaitarra* n° 27 (31-5-1895), in *Arana Goiri'tar Sabin. Obras Completas de Arana-Goiri'tar Sabin* (Buenos Aires: Sabindiar-batza, 1965), 594-5.

<sup>28</sup> Sabino Arana, *Bizkaitarra* n° 11 (29-6-1894), in *Arana Goiri'tar Sabin*, 312.

Autonomous Community after 1979 would be one of Arana's creations.<sup>29</sup> More tellingly, even, is that the name given to Basque Autonomous Community from 1979 onward – *Euskadi* – is also one of his many neologisms.<sup>30</sup>

However, Arana's twist on nationalist ideology had a major consequence. As a movement poised on the restoration/creation of an independent state grounded on a racialized view of Basque identity, it also inherited from the previous provincial system a limited interest in the role played by language and culture. Functional *diglossia*, as he put it, was mostly for him and his followers a way of preventing the debilitating mixture of the races: "*if our invaders were to learn Euskera, we would have to abandon it, carefully archive its grammar and dictionary, and dedicate ourselves to speaking Russian, Norwegian, or any other language unknown to them, as long as we remained under their rule*".<sup>31</sup> In fact, Arana himself, although a native of Bizkaia, was not a native Basque-speaker, and only learned this language as an adult; his brother Luis, who later led the PNV, never learned the language at all.<sup>32</sup> It is not hard to see why such individuals, Castilian-speaking and stepped in urban cultural and social forms, often found it difficult to promote a cultural identity founded upon language that, by definition, would exclude them. While occasional lip service was paid to the dignity and importance of Euskera, the primary vehicles for the spread of the nationalist message was carried out through a furious production of pamphlets and newspapers almost-exclusively written in Castilian.<sup>33</sup> In other words, early Basque nationalism was, to a significant extent, the work of men and women who for the most part did not speak Basque.<sup>34</sup>

In contrast, the Basque territories on the French side of the border underwent a very different evolution. During the Early Modern period, representative institutions in this region never attained the level of autonomy and recognition of their southern counterparts. In 1789, during the French revolution, even these meagre sources of institutional and legal uniqueness were erased as part of the process of homogenization brought by the Revolutionary State. This rupture alone helps explain why attachment to a certain political order -which ran deep in the Spanish Basque provinces- was largely absent here. Instead, beginning in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, what emerged was a process of identity creation founded on language and culture, and which coalesced around the 'Flower Games' first organized by Antoine d'Abbadie in 1851. In these contests, Basque cultural expressions such as poetry, dance, songs, and literature were elevated as forming the soul of the Basque people, helping to cultivate a common sense of belonging that went beyond political boundaries.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there existed two primary strands of Basque nationalism: one which considered that Basqueness best expressed itself in a number of codes and institutions, and one that imagined it, instead, as being grounded in language and culture. During the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these two trends often intermingled, though not without giving rise to uneasy tensions. In 1908, for instance, the PNV proclaimed as one of its

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<sup>29</sup> Félix Luengo and Ander Delgado, "El árbol de Gernika. Vicisitudes del símbolo foral de los vascos," *Historia y Política: Ideas, procesos y movimientos sociales* 15 (2006): 24; José Luis De la Granja, *Ángel o demonio: Sabino Arana. El patriarca del nacionalismo vasco* (Madrid: Tecnos 2015), 246.

<sup>30</sup> Zabaltza, *Mater Vasconia*, 33.

<sup>31</sup> Sabino Arana, *Bizkaitarra* nº 16 (31-10-1894). In *Arana Goiri'tar Sabin*, 404.

<sup>32</sup> Zabaltza, *Mater Vasconia*, 282-3.

<sup>33</sup> Arana sought to excuse himself from this criticism by claiming that many 'preferred to read in a foreign language'. See Sabino Arana, *Bizkaitarra* nº 5 (29-1-1894). In *Arana Goiri'tar Sabin*, 200-1.

<sup>34</sup> Zabaltza, *Mater Vasconia*, 291.

<sup>35</sup> Urgell, "Primer vasco moderno," 598; Coro Rubio, *La identidad vasca en el siglo XIX. Discursos y agentes sociales* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2003), 287-8.

objectives to make “Euskera the only language of Euskadi”,<sup>36</sup> and also fostered the creation of folklore groups and other cultural associations. However, in reality these initiatives had less to do with the preservation and revitalization of authentic traditions than with using these as tools of political proselytism.<sup>37</sup> As one nationalist journal phrased it: “The children who hear the joy of the ancient dance and follow the paths of the homeland! Before reasoning reaches the heart, the sounds of a *txistu* do”.<sup>38</sup> Under the Second Spanish Republic, the three provinces of Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa, and Alava successfully negotiated the first Statute of Autonomy for the region in 1936. This Statute formally recognized the officiality of Euskera. However, the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) meant that almost none of its provisions were implemented before the autonomous government lost control of the territory in August 1937.

Ironically, Franco’s dictatorship (1936-1975) would contribute — albeit unintentionally — to elevate the social influence of Basque culture and language. In an attempt to punish Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa as ‘traitor provinces’ for siding with the Republic, and to implement his vision of a unified, monolingual Spain, the new regime launched an aggressive campaign to prevent the public use of Euskera as well as of cultural expressions that could be reminiscent of Basque nationalism.<sup>39</sup> *Txistus* - a type of Basque flute - and dance attires, for instance, were requisitioned under the pretext that those were useless in ‘the times of the ‘Viva España’’.<sup>40</sup> In successive norms published from 1938 to 1940, Basque names were banned, as was the use of Euskera in branding, advertisement, industry, toponyms, and even religious preaching.<sup>41</sup> These prohibitions were not met with passivity. Between 1956 to 1975, eleven states of emergency were declared in Spain—six of them affecting only Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa, with another three implemented nationwide.<sup>42</sup> In the efforts of cultural erasure made by the regime, as well as in the factional resistance to their application, it can be seen the extent to which, during the first years of the dictatorship, Euskera had come to be regarded, not as the patrimony of all inhabitants of the region, but rather as a political symbol wielded primarily by those aligned with nationalist aspirations.

This image would only change from the 1960s onwards. The gradual relaxation of the regime’s censorship and the publication of new books and periodicals in Basque, the creation of *Ikastolak* - private schools teaching Basque -, often under the protection of the Catholic Church, and the continuous efforts for the standardization of language all fostered a sense of linguistic and cultural revival. Meanwhile, a second industrial revolution, this time affecting also Alava and Navarre, further disrupted traditional social structures and demography. As had occurred during the earlier industrial boom in Bilbao, these transformations produced an acute sense of social and mental crisis.<sup>43</sup> Not by coincidence, the first public manifesto of the radical group *Euskadi ta Askatasuna* (Basque Homeland and Freedom, ETA) was published in 1959, and voices such as those of Federico Krutwig, author of a book called *Vasconia* (1962) began to embody the ideas of a new way of conceiving Basque identity. For Krutwig and others, the basis of nationality was not race, but language: “*When a people is deprived*

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<sup>36</sup> Zabaltza, *Mater Vasconia*, 120-1.

<sup>37</sup> Karlos Sánchez, ““Antes que los razonamientos llegaran al corazón los sonidos”: El folclore como medio de propaganda del primer nacionalismo vasco (1895-1939),” in *Discursos y prácticas musicales nacionalistas (1900-1970)*, ed. Pilar Ramos (Logroño: Universidad de La Rioja, 2012), 182.

<sup>38</sup> *Euzkadi* (2-7-1935). Quoted in Sánchez “Antes que los razonamientos,” 190.

<sup>39</sup> Mees, *The Basque contention*, 96.

<sup>40</sup> Sánchez, “Antes que los razonamientos”, 187.

<sup>41</sup> Zabaltza, *Mater Vasconia*, 131.

<sup>42</sup> Mees, *The Basque contention*, 95-6.

<sup>43</sup> Mees, *The Basque contention*, 97.

of its language, its mentality is altered".<sup>44</sup> He went further, asserting that "the duty of every Basque nationalist is to learn and use the Basque language always and on every occasion, without any excuse for omitting it. The Bizkaian and Basque essence lies almost exclusively in Euskara".<sup>45</sup>

It is not coincidental that this renewed valorisation of Euskera came precisely when autonomous political institutions had been dismantled: the mirror the situation held to that of the northern Basque Country after 1789 is indeed remarkable. And yet, broader global shifts contributed to this realignment. Key among these were the discrediting of discourses of nationhood based on race in post-war Europe and the rise of anti-colonial movements in Africa and Asia, both of which provided an intellectual framework that privileged more culturally-defined Basque nationalist markers.<sup>46</sup> Even many Basques who were not affiliated with nationalist movements sympathized with this novel, more radical and confrontational approach, which they viewed as an expression of resistance to the Francoist regime.<sup>47</sup>

After Franco's death in 1975, Spain began its transition toward a parliamentary democracy. The Constitution of 1978, nonetheless, met with considerable contestation in the Basque provinces, with the radical nationalist left campaigning against its approval and the PNV calling for abstention. As a result, in Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa 56% of the electorate abstained (for the 33% in Spain) whereas 21 and 29% of the voters, respectively, voted 'no' to the Constitution. In the meantime, ETA<sup>48</sup> continued its campaign of violence. Beginning in 1978, the organization published black lists of "enemies of our fatherland" and sought to "administer justice" to office holders for the Francoist regime, members of right-wing parties, police informants, and others.<sup>49</sup> In addition, ETA extorted the equivalent of 7 million euros between 1975 and 1986 from individuals under threat from its military arm.<sup>50</sup> It was against this backdrop of violence and political uncertainty that plans for the drafting of a Statute of Autonomy for the Basque provinces were set in motion.

A number of conclusions emerge from this brief historical overview. It can be observed that, while Euskera could play an important role in legitimizing both the provincial system of the Early Modern period and the first Basque nationalism of Sabino Arana, it remained nonetheless largely untouched by any concrete legal or institutional protection until the enactment of the Statute of 1979. Its distinctiveness - linguistically isolated and historically mysterious - made it a powerful rhetorical tool for asserting the claims to uniqueness of elites espousing very different political ideologies. Yet, in practice, these selected few frequently opted for upholding a stark *diglossic* hierarchy in which Euskera was relegated to the margins. This separation reinforced already-existing social cleavages, and distanced Basque-speakers - belonging mostly to unschooled rural populations - from the spheres of power controlled by Castilian-speaking individuals. As a result, Euskera was systematically excluded from the most dynamic activities and spaces, and this meant that when deeply transformative processes - like industrialization and its associated migratory flows - came to happen, the language could offer few practical or symbolic incentives for newcomers to adopt it. With Castilian and French providing clear social and economic benefits, and with Euskera thus increasingly associated with backwardness and rural lifestyles, loss of speakers was an almost inescapable result.

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<sup>44</sup> Fernando Sarrailh de Ihartza, *Vasconia* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Norbait, 1962), 10.

<sup>45</sup> Sarrailh de Ihartza, *Vasconia*, 27.

<sup>46</sup> Mees, *The Basque contention*, 103.

<sup>47</sup> Mees, *The Basque contention*, 108.

<sup>48</sup> ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna) was a Basque separatist and terrorist group active from 1959 to 2018.

<sup>49</sup> Mees, *The Basque contention*, 138-9.

<sup>50</sup> Mees, *The Basque contention*, 174-5; Aitzpea Leizaola, "Matching national stereotypes? Eating and drinking in the Basque borderland," *Anthropological Notebooks* 12, no.1, (2006): 82.

### 3. The Policies of the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) with regards to Linguistic and Cultural Identity

Before dwelling on the precise contents of the Statute of Autonomy of the Basque Country of 1979 it is essential to consider the specific situation of Euskera in those years, for this can shed some light upon the motivations and decisions embedded in this and other important documents concerning linguistic and cultural preservation.

As outlined in the previous historical sketch, Euskera had undergone a gradual yet steady regression in the number of its speakers since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, the systematic persecution of the language by the Francoist regime, paired with the profound, industrialization-induced demographic transformations that took place from the 1950s onward across the Basque provinces, accelerated this decline significantly. In 1800, Basque speakers in the provinces of Alava, Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa still made up approximately 76.8% of the population. By 1868, the figure had dropped to 69%, and by 1981 - just two years after the proclamation of the Statute - a mere 21.9% of the inhabitants of these territories spoke Euskera.<sup>51</sup> This means that, from being a majority language of the land, Basque had transitioned to the tongue of only a fifth of the population. In summary, “Euskera, in addition to becoming a minority language, has undergone a process of minoritisation and linguistic substitution”.<sup>52</sup>

Prospects, then, seemed not to bode well for the survival of the language, and political and legal measures to reverse the trend would have fallen short of attaining this goal if not for the emergence of private movements and associations bent on the preservation of the language during the final years of the dictatorship. These efforts included the establishment of folklore groups, private schools which taught Euskera to children, the emergence of Basque-speaking artists, and a movement for the unification and normalization of Basque dialects, all of which contributed to rendering Basque culture fashionable during the 1960s and 1970s. Paired with the evolution of conceptions of national identity, which increasingly positioned language as one of its crucial feature, this resurgence made it possible to see Euskera as a vital language of modernity and democracy in stark opposition to the stiff censorship of Franco’s regime.

Therefore, by the time the Statute of Autonomy of the Basque Country, which applied to the territories of Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa, and Alava, was promulgated in 1979, social and political conditions were ripe for a normative effort in favour of Euskera.<sup>53</sup> The Statute was ample in its concessions. The new Basque Autonomous Community was granted exclusive rights over important areas related to cultural development (art.10.7). With regards to education, it is important to note that although the Spanish State maintained some supervisory powers over the rules enacted by the Basque Government - among them, the right to inspect and declare rulings in accordance to constitutional law- all other competences were transferred to the BAC (art.16). The most important innovation of the text in terms of cultural governance, however, was the formal recognition of Euskera as an official language.

Baztarrika (2019) has argued that this recognition, far from being a natural consequence of the process of drafting a Statute of Autonomy, was rather a deliberate and purposeful decision by its framers. As he points out, there existed at least three potential approaches that could have been adopted: (1) regarding Basque-speakers as a linguistic minority, entitled to certain protective measures, within a predominantly Spanish-speaking society; (2) recognizing the co-officiality of Euskera *only* in those areas where it remained widely spoken in the late 1970s -such as most of Gipuzkoa, part of Bizkaia,

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<sup>51</sup> Juan Madariaga Orbea, *Sociedad y lengua vasca en los siglos xvii y xviii* (Bilbao: Euskaltzaindia, 2014).

<sup>52</sup> Baztarrika, "El Euskera," 94.

<sup>53</sup> *Ley Orgánica 3/1979, de 18 de diciembre, de Estatuto de Autonomía para el País Vasco*. The text of the norm can be accessed in: <https://www.boe.es/buscar/pdf/1979/BOE-A-1979-30177-consolidado.pdf> (accessed 2/5/2025).

and a small strip of territory in northern Alava-; or (3) making Euskera an equal in status to Spanish all across the territory of the BAC, regardless of the specific linguistic composition of its constituent regions. By opting for this last option, the ideologues of the Statute of Autonomy took the path of greatest resistance, for it implied commitment to a dual compromise: *“on the one hand, to rescue Euskara from its continued decline, and on the other, to enable its social growth—undertaking a long and difficult journey aimed at building a pluralistic, integrated, and egalitarian society also in linguistic terms”*.<sup>54</sup>

This double-pronged approach is clearly articulated within the text of the Statute itself. *“Euskera, the native language of the Basque People, will have, like Spanish, the status of an official language in the Basque Country, and all its inhabitants have the right to know and use both languages”* (Art 6.1). This provision was of course a stark repudiation of the set of prohibitions implemented in the preceding forty years by Francoism. More consequential for the future, however, would be the following point: *“The common institutions of the Autonomous Community, taking into account the socio-linguistic diversity of the Basque Country, shall guarantee the use of both languages by regulating their official status, and shall establish and regulate the necessary measures and means to ensure their knowledge”* (art. 6.2). This article created a normative space through which the social growth of Euskera could be regulated and encouraged, and thus allowed for the development of cultural policies that went beyond any view of Euskera as a mere heritage in need of preservation. Rather, it anticipated positive institutional actions, revolutionary for Basque society, by which knowledge of the language of a fifth of the population was to be extended to the remaining 80%.

This normative potential of the Statute would be operationalized by the so-called Law of Euskera of 1982.<sup>55</sup> The preamble of this legislation reiterated the double conceptualization of Euskera as *“the most visible and objective symbol of identity of our Community and an instrument for the full integration of the individual into it through its knowledge and use”*. However, the measures contained in the document focus squarely on the second interpretation. These included alphabetization of public administrative personnel in Euskera (art.14), establishment of a bilingual education system -which of course necessitated the creation of a cadre of Euskera-proficient educators- (art. 15), and promotion of media in Basque, most notably exemplified by the first airing of Euskal Telebista (Basque Television, ETB) on the 31 December 1982 (art.23). All of these initiatives were underpinned by the governmental vigilance over the unification and normalization of language (art.30), without which consistent usage would have been unfeasible. In all, the promulgation of the Law of Euskera and the various norms which expanded on its contents promoted a future in which Basque society would no longer be stratified by any functional diglossia but would develop into a genuinely bilingual community.

The revitalization of a threatened language, not to speak of its growth, is a huge task whose results cannot simply rest upon norms and legal dispositions. Certain regulations -concerning, for instance, the unification of the various dialects into a common *koine* or the standardization of writing conventions- are undoubtedly essential to guarantee the use of a language in the contemporary world. This is especially the case when that language aspires to serve as a means of communication in fields such as administration, research, university-level education, business, healthcare, media, or cultural dissemination, all of which require, among other things, specific vocabularies, codified grammars, and unambiguous meanings. And yet, many other factors, social, economic, and political can affect the chances of a language’s survival.

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<sup>54</sup> Baztarrika, “El Euskera,” 98-9.

<sup>55</sup> *Ley 10/1982, de 24 de noviembre, básica de normalización del uso del Euskera.*

In these areas, which largely concern the status of a language, the activity of the Basque Government has also been proactive. Measures in this regard have included, for instance, favouring the institutional use of Euskera, setting in motion educational programmes for both children and adults alike, subsidizing community-based initiatives of promotion and development of the language, extending quality seals to private companies that ensure the right of clients to be treated in Euskera, and endorsing the creation of a media ecosystem of radio, television, and IT endeavours where Euskera is both the primary language of communication and the guarantor of the viability of their business model.

The impact of these policies can be partially assessed thanks to the Sociolinguistic Surveys conducted every 5 years by the Department of Culture and Linguistic Policy of the Basque Government, beginning in 1991. The most recent of these was conducted in 2021 and its findings were first published in 2023.<sup>56</sup> These surveys are conducted not only in the BAC, but also in the Foral Community of Navarre (FCN) and in the Basque-speaking territories of the Northern Basque Country (NBC). Together, these constitute *Euskal Herria*, the territory inhabited by the Basque people. Given that the legal status of Euskera varies in each of these three spaces -with only partial recognition in Navarre and none whatsoever in the NBC- the diverging results obtained in these surveys can serve to illustrate the role that governmental endorsement plays in sustaining and revitalizing minority languages.

According to the first Sociolinguistic Survey, 528,251 people spoke Basque in 1991, a 22.3% of all inhabitants of these territories. Regional disparities, however, were stark. Whereas in the BAC the percentage of Basque-speakers was 24.1% and amounted to 26.4% in the NBC, in Navarre only 9.5% of the population spoke Euskera.

Fast forward to the VII Sociolinguistic Survey of 2021, and a significant transformation is evident. The total number of speakers had increased to 809,341 individuals, who represent a 30.2% of the population in the entirety of *Euskal Herria*. However, this average growth conceals vast local discrepancies. In Navarre Euskera has gained around 5 percentual points over this 30-year period, going from 9.5% in 1991 to 14.1% in 2021. In the NBC, on the other hand, where Euskera lacks any legal recognition, the figure has dropped from 26.4% of Basque-speakers to 20.1% over the same period. The combination of these two trends -modest increase in Navarre and sharp decline in the NBC- evidences that the greatest surge in new speakers of Euskera has taken place in the BAC, where percentages show an increase of 12 points, from 24.1% of the population to 36.2%. Percentages of speakers who report some comprehension of Euskera yet do not feel comfortable using it are also sensibly higher in the Basque Autonomous Community (18.6%) when compared to the data of the FCN (10.6%) and the NBC (9.4%).

Crucially, the explanation for this increase cannot be simply attributed to the natural growth of the Basque-speaking population of the BAC. In fact, the birth rate among this group in 2021 was lower than the average of the European Union. As in other nearby regions, the demographic growth of the overall population of *Euskal Herria* in the past 20 years owes much to the immigration of individuals born abroad, who in 2021 constituted 11.1% of the population of the BAC and 16.4% of that of the FCN. In other words, this indicates that the rise in the figures of speakers of Euskera and people capable of understanding it (in total, 54.8% of the population of the BAC) comes not from intergenerational

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<sup>56</sup> VII Sociolinguistic Survey (Vitoria-Gasteiz: Eusko Jaurlaritza, 2024). Available at: [https://euskarabidea.es/fitxategiak/ckfinder/files/Seventh\\_Sociolinguistic\\_Survey\\_2021.pdf](https://euskarabidea.es/fitxategiak/ckfinder/files/Seventh_Sociolinguistic_Survey_2021.pdf).

transmission, but rather from the extension of the language to groups beyond its traditional speaker base.

But, how? An important hint to determine the mechanisms behind the growth of Euskera comes from a deeper analysis of the results of the Sociolinguistic Survey, focusing especially on age distribution data. In 1991, the largest proportion of Basque-speakers was found among those aged 65 and over (28.5%) with results of low-20 percents for the rest of adults beyond 16. In 2021, on the contrary, those aged 65 and over proficient in Basque comprise only a 20% of the total, a proportion which gets progressively higher as age goes down and culminating in 57.9% for those aged 16 to 24. Once again, regional discrepancies are marked. While data from the FCN supports a modest yet noticeable trend towards the infusion of young blood into the language with 28% of those between 16-24 being Basque-speakers in 2021, in the NBC the proportions remain largely unaffected, which indicates a tendency towards gradual stagnation. These disparities once again underscore the effectiveness of proactive language policy in the BAC. In this sense, an astonishing 74.5% of those aged 16-24 (compared to the 12.4% of 1991) are now capable of communicating fluently in Euskera. The correlation between youth fluency and institutional support thus offers compelling evidence about the effectiveness that normative measures, especially the establishment of a bilingual education system, can have for the revitalization of a minority language.

However, taking the third alternative sketched by Baztarrika (2019) - that is, the extension of the officiality of a minority language to the whole territory of an autonomous region- requires ample and continued public support to render it viable. Figures from 1991 for the entirety of *Euskal Herria* already revealed a favourable environment, with support for measures such as proficiency in Euskera being mandatory for public administration roles or the inclusion of Euskera in all school curricula rising to 47.5% of endorsement, with only 20.9% of opposition. We can interpret these figures as reflective of the shift, apparent from the early 1970s onward, to regarding Euskera as a symbol of modern Basque society and its resistance to Francoist censorship and repression.

By 2021, this support had increased. Answers to the same questions across *Euskal Herria* display an even larger consensus in favour of the promotion of Euskera (56.5%) as well as the decline in the number of individuals overtly against it (13.7%). Once again, results evidence highest support and lower opposition rates for the promotion of Euskera in the BAC (67% and 6.8%, respectively). In contrast, Navarre is the only one among the three analysed spaces where opposition (37%) surpassed endorsement (30%). A probable explanation for these differences lies in the successful reframing of Euskera as the heritage of all inhabitants of the BAC, regardless of political cleavages, while in Navarre the promotion of the language is still widely regarded as a politically-directed action orchestrated by Basque nationalist institutions and movements.<sup>57</sup>

In all, the results attained by the linguistic policies of the Basque autonomous government from 1979 onward in regards to Euskera can be regarded generally as a success. In terms of the dual objectives of the linguistic policy as articulated in the Statute - namely, “*to rescue Euskara from its continued decline, and on the other, to enable its social growth*”-<sup>58</sup> achievements in the BAC largely vindicate the approach chosen by its drafters. The proportion and number of Basque-speakers, especially among younger generations, has significantly increased in comparison to that of nearby territories, as has the overall number of those proficient and those with some familiarity with the language. That such a revolutionary process -with its obvious ramifications for the lives of individuals

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<sup>57</sup> Asier H. Aguirresarobe, “Hand in hand: Consuming symbols, language and identity in post-ETA Basque society,” *Nations and Nationalism Early View* (2024): 11.

<sup>58</sup> Baztarrika, “El Euskera,” 98-9.

who have been pushed to learning Basque as adults to pursue their professional careers, for example- has failed to provoke mounting resistance, but has indeed met with growing support by the citizenry, can be attributed to several factors: (1) the positive revalorization of Euskera in the years preceding the Statute of Autonomy and the Law of Euskera of 1982; (2) the broadly enthusiastic adoption of the language by new speakers previously wholly detached from it; (3) the caution and foresight of public institutions in the BAC with regards to linguistic policy, detaching Euskera from political uses in favour of a ‘neutral’ officiality and allowing for a growing sense of the language as the common heritage of all the inhabitants of the territory. Officiality, in such an interpretation, can be understood as a way of diffusing internal political cleavages founded in linguistic difference, a conclusion that the case of FCN, where the promotion of Euskera is still framed in politico-ideological terms, appears to prove.

#### **4. The Moroccan ‘Initiative’ under the light of the Basque autonomous experience**

Having now outlined in some detail the precedents, circumstances, and consequences of the linguistic policies in the BAC since 1979, it is time for us to analyse our findings in connection to the “Initiative for negotiating an autonomy statute for the Sahara region” (hereafter, ‘Initiative’) first proposed in 2007 by the Kingdom of Morocco.

There are several points in the ‘Initiative’ that suggest a commitment to the cultural and linguistic protection of the specificity of the Sahara region. With regards to cultural attributions, the ‘Initiative’ acknowledges that the autonomous institutions of the Sahara would take part in the broader ‘cultural life’ of the nation of Morocco (art.5). Within the territory of the proposed autonomous region, the text also establishes the competence of regional authorities in ‘education’ and ‘cultural affairs’ (art. 12). This article contains the only direct mention to linguistic policy, focused on the ‘promotion of the Saharan Hassani cultural heritage’, which, among other things, implicitly includes the *hassâniyya* dialect of Arabic. These provisions echo Article 5 of the 2011 Constitution of the Kingdom of Morocco, which asserts that “*the State works for the preservation of hassâniyya as an integral component of the Moroccan cultural unity, as well as the protection of its speakers and of the practical cultural expression of Morocco*”.

A first observation, then, concerns the generalist and open-ended nature of the language employed in both the ‘Initiative’ and the constitutional text. It is clear that the first operates as a blueprint later to be expanded by further norms and clarifications in case of acceptance, and this vagueness leaves considerable room for interpretation. For this reason, all conclusions and comments drawn from this comparison are tentative and based only on speculative readings of this text.

In light of Baztarrika’s (2019) typology of three potential approaches to minority languages in autonomous regions, the text of the ‘Initiative’ is hard to categorize. The sole mention that could apply to language, that of Article 12, uses the term ‘promotion’, which seems to imply an aspirational orientation towards revitalization. However, lack of any direct proposal for the officiality of the *hassâniyya* dialect marks a stark difference with the paths taken by the writers of the Basque Statute of 1979. This absence ought to be read in combination with the provisions contained in Article 5 of the 2011 Constitution of the Kingdom of Morocco, which render Arabic and Tamazight the sole official languages of the State. In all, a combined reading of these norms appears to point towards an autonomous region in the Sahara in which the affairs of public administration would be conducted in the official languages of the Moroccan State.

References to *hassâniyya* as a ‘heritage’ in the ‘Initiative’ (art.12) to be ‘preserved’ according to the 2011 Constitution (art. 5) also lend support to this interpretation. In comparison with the dual approach embraced by Basque autonomous authorities since 1979 -namely, the preservation of the then-endangered Euskera alongside its social expansion- the Moroccan proposal tilts predominantly

towards the first one, with little normative space for proactive revitalization. In this sense, the ‘Initiative’ appears to propose a policy of *laissez faire* which would establish a *diglossic* arrangement wherein Arabic dominates the public sphere and the *hassâniyya* dialect is relegated to private and informal domains. This model closely resembles the legal situation that existed in the Basque Country prior to the enactment of the Statute, and it is to be expected that it could have similar consequences for the decline of the minority language. Even a regional officiality, constrained perhaps to certain *hassâniyya*-speaking territories similar to the recognition of Basque-speaking localities in the FCN would, as the example of this territory demonstrates, likely be insufficient on its own to redress the imbalances in status that would emerge over time between a public language of culture, business, and politics, and a language of the private sphere.

While some kind of recognition of its official nature might probably assist, not only in the preservation, but also in the growth in the number of speakers of *hassâniyya*, this is only one of the lessons to be extracted from the success of the Basque autonomous authorities in stopping the decline of Euskera. Another important factor concerns the central role played by the education system. On this front, too, the ‘Initiative’ is rather vague, merely noting that the regional authorities ‘shall exercise powers’ in education, without clarifying whether these would be exclusive or shared with the central government of Morocco. While in the case of the BAC these competences are not formally exclusive to the regional government, the Spanish State has largely only exercised a right of inspection and assurance of compliance with Constitutional law over these matters -even if its nominal capabilities could juridically be argued to be much ampler.<sup>59</sup> This has allowed the authorities of the BAC to freely pursue an assertive linguistic policy, including the introduction of Euskera as a mandatory subject -or a vehicular language of instruction- of the education system. This model has not only helped in arresting the previous declining trend, but has also created a new generation of speakers who largely support further advancement in the promotion of the language.

Nonetheless, the case of Euskera also reveals that a language must go through a series of transformations before it can serve as a means of communication in modern society. In this regard, the process of normalization and unification underwent by Euskera between the 1950s and 1960s can be read as a prerequisite for later institutional endeavours by the Basque autonomous government. This suggests that, prior to the introduction of the *hassâniyya* dialect to education - or an eventual recognition of official use in the administration- a comparable process would likely be necessary.

This point brings us to the most critical lesson to be extracted from the Basque case: the importance of popular support. Revolutionary procedures, like ‘imposing’ the language of a fifth of the population of a given region to the remaining 80%, can only be set in motion and sustained if they are rooted in a broader social consensus. In the Basque case, this was facilitated by the traumatic experience of Franco’s dictatorship and the valorisation of Euskera as a symbol of resistance. While this popular support can, as the case of the BAC shows, be expanded further thanks to the impact of education and cultural policies, it remains dubious whether it can be engineered from scratch. Thus, the applicability of the Basque model to the Saharan context hinges on the presence of a sufficient initial level endorsement for policies in favour of *hassâniyya*-focused policies.

## 5. Conclusions

This essay has offered a critical assessment of the evolution of linguistic policies in the Basque Autonomous Community and a comparison between these and the “Initiative for negotiating an

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<sup>59</sup> Manuel Aragón, "Las competencias del Estado y las comunidades autónomas sobre educación," *Revista Española de Derecho Constitucional* 98 (2013): 197.

autonomy statute for the Sahara region” proposed by the Kingdom of Morocco. To this end, it has sketched a historical overview of the role played by Euskera in the development of Basque identity, followed by an analysis of the particular lines of policy undertaken by the Basque autonomous government since 1979 and its measurable outcomes.

The findings presented highlight certain important features of the Basque model. First, it has underscored the severe minoritisation of Euskera in the 1970s and the conscious decision by the writers of the Statute to take the path of greater resistance. This involved as its ultimate destination a bilingual society, effectively extending what had become a minority language to four-fifths of the population of the autonomous territory. Second, it has described the broad array of measures put into action by the Basque autonomous government to attain this goal, from establishing knowledge of Euskera as a requisite for public servants to the establishment and subsidizing of television, radio, and online outlets. Among these, however, the most impactful has been the creation of a bilingual education system, resulting in 74.5% of adults between 16-24 being proficient Basque-speakers as of 2021. Finally, the Basque case has emphasized the role that popular support plays in the success of these legal and political measures. In this regard, although the experience of more than 40 years of linguistic policy appears to have furthered social endorsement for the promotion of Euskera in the BAC, this support was already substantial prior to the proclamation of the Statute of Autonomy.

The ‘Initiative’, viewed through the lens of these conclusions, appears to lack the necessary foundations to endorse a linguistic policy similar to that of the BAC. While general remarks are made in this document to the “promotion of the Saharan Hassani cultural heritage”, which includes the *hassâniyya* dialect, the possibility of this language becoming an official tongue in the administration is not contemplated. This omission, when read alongside the contents of Article 5 of the 2011 Constitution of the Kingdom of Morocco, suggests a model premised on the establishment of a functional *diglossia* in the hypothetical autonomous region in the Sahara. As evidenced by outcomes in other parts of *Euskal Herria* where Euskera falls short of official recognition, such an arrangement appears hardly sufficient to ensure the survival of the language and its growth. On the contrary, policies thus confined to ‘preservation’ tend to produce a distance in status that is unlikely to reverse the decline of the minority language.

Short of a decided move towards the officialization of bilingualism within the autonomous administration, however, the Moroccan ‘Initiative’ nonetheless leaves open alternative avenues for linguistic policy. Chief among these, in light of the Basque example, are the competences granted to the regional authorities over education, which could permit the introduction of *hassâniyya* as a mandatory subject -or a vehicular language of instruction- in schools. As the Basque case demonstrates, this measure can have great benefits for stopping the loss of a language and its acquisition by non-speakers. However, its efficacy depends on both internal and external factors. Internally, it would require the unification and normalization of varieties of the *hassâniyya* dialect. Externally, it would necessitate the collaboration of the central Moroccan government, especially in regards to the interpretation of any competence of overseeing and inspection in the educational domain. Here, the example of the Spanish central government, which has generally self-limited its interference, may also provide a valuable precedent. Above all, widespread support for these measures seems a precondition both for their continued sustenance as well as for their ultimate success.

A final point to be made concerns the challenges and shortcomings inherent in the Basque model of linguistic policy:

- First, there is the question of language use. Whereas results about the preservation and growth in the number of speakers of Euskera tend to tell a story of success, figures of widespread social use of

the language are less impressive overall. This suggests that linguistic policy has entered a different phase, one in which the main goal must rather be the adaptation of the language to the new realities produced by previous developments - such as the changing profile of speakers or the pressures of digital globalization- than simply the promotion of its visibility or accessibility.<sup>60</sup>

- A second obstacle stands in the relationship of Euskera as an official language in the BAC and the role played by the Spanish language in the State. In this regard, the future for Euskera may hinge on the recognition of the Spanish State as a plurilingual community, thus opening the door for a normative and legal development of its official attributions to the utmost level.

- Finally, a third challenge involves the financial cost of sustaining this ambitious linguistic project. In 2022, public institutions in the BAC allocated a total of 175 million euros for projects and activities to promote Euskera.<sup>61</sup> The Basque autonomous government, with 104.1 million euros, was the largest economic supporter of these endeavours. As the trend over time has been one of gradual increase in expenditure and commitment by the public institutions of the BAC, this of course also evidences the pressure upon resources that the Basque model of linguistic policy can entail. Once again, only widespread social support for a language's promotion appears capable of overcoming the expected reticence that taxpayers might feel about this allocation of funds.

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<sup>60</sup> Baztarrika, "El Euskera," 139.

<sup>61</sup> *Euskararen aurrekontu eta baliabide publikoen estatistika* (Vitoria-Gasteiz: Eusko Jaurlaritza, 2024). Available at: [https://www.euskadi.eus/contenidos/informacion/eas\\_ikerketak/es\\_def/adjuntos/Euskararen-aurrekontu-eta-baliabide-publikoen-estatistika-EAE-2022.pdf](https://www.euskadi.eus/contenidos/informacion/eas_ikerketak/es_def/adjuntos/Euskararen-aurrekontu-eta-baliabide-publikoen-estatistika-EAE-2022.pdf).

# MULTILINGUALISM AND LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN THE MACAU SPECIAL ADMINISTRATIVE REGION (SAR): AN EXAMPLE OF INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE PLANNING

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## Abstract

This paper examines Macau's multilingual language policy in the context of its post-handover governance under the "One Country, Two Systems" principle. Chinese and Portuguese remain official languages, while English and various community languages play increasingly important roles. Rather than experiencing a rupture following its political transition from Portuguese administration to a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China, Macau has preserved and further developed its bilingual governance, strategically reinforcing the institutional role of the Portuguese language. The chapter explores how language policy is implemented across education, public services, and everyday life, including the status of heritage languages such as *Patuá* and the linguistic practices of migrant communities. Drawing on historical, sociolinguistic, and policy perspectives, it analyses the interaction between state planning and local agency in shaping language education and social integration. A comparative lens includes multilingual regions with distinct governance arrangements — such as Portuguese-speaking African countries and Morocco's Initiative for the Autonomy of the Sahara Region — to assess the role of institutional capacity in shaping language policy outcomes. The paper concludes by reflecting on the implications of Macau's experience for inclusive multilingual planning, arguing that legal guarantees, educational investment, and community engagement are key to sustaining linguistic diversity in politically complex settings.

## Keywords

Macau; multilingualism; language policy and planning; language education; migrant languages.

## 1. Introduction

Located on China's southern coast near Hong Kong and across the Pearl River Delta from Guangdong Province, Macau is a small yet historically significant territory, home to approximately 680,000 residents and covering an area of just over 30 square kilometres. Administered by Portugal for more than four centuries, Macau represents one of the longest continuous European presences in East Asia. Between 1557 and 1999, it served as a crucial trading post linking China with Europe and other global regions, fostering extensive commercial exchanges alongside sustained cultural and linguistic interactions. On 20 December 1999, Macau returned to Chinese sovereignty, becoming a Special Administrative Region (SAR) governed under the constitutional principle of "One Country, Two Systems." This arrangement enables Macau to maintain its own legal system, currency, and official languages — Chinese and Portuguese — for 50 years following the handover.

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Given its unique historical trajectory and sociolinguistic makeup, Macau presents a unique case for examining language policies and multilingualism in a post-administrative, post-handover context. Rather than experiencing a sharp rupture with its linguistic past, as seen in many postcolonial settings, Macau has embraced a model of continuity, where both Portuguese and Chinese retain official status, and where multilingual competencies — including English and various community languages — are actively promoted. This makes Macau a noteworthy site to study how language education policies evolve in tandem with geopolitical, cultural, and local dynamics, particularly under the “One Country, Two Systems” principle.

Drawing from both macro-level language planning (as reflected in government policies and institutional frameworks) and micro-level implementation (as seen in schools and community practices), we examine how Macau deals with its multilingual identity amid broader Chinese geopolitical goals. For this, we need to point that the linguistic landscape of Macau is marked by the predominance of Cantonese in everyday communication, growing use of Mandarin (Putonghua) in administrative and economic spheres, institutional presence of Portuguese, and the practical necessity of English for tourism and global engagement. In addition, heritage languages such as *Patuá* (a Portuguese-based creole) and community languages like Tagalog, Thai, Vietnamese, and Bahasa Indonesia enrich the territory's linguistic landscape.

As pointed by Moody (2021), Macau's linguistic environment has been shaped over generations by a diverse blend of languages. Western languages became part of this landscape as Macau emerged as a central trading point between China and Europe in the 16th century. Additionally, the arrival of workers and merchants from South Asia, East Asia, Southeast Asia, and Africa introduced languages from those regions into the mix. People speaking various Chinese dialects were also attracted to Macau, drawn by opportunities for economic advancement and safety. Over the past five centuries, these many linguistic influences have played a crucial role in forming Macau's distinctive and resilient speech community. Overlooking this linguistic diversity means missing a fundamental aspect of what makes Macau unique: *“To ignore the myriad of languages that have influenced and defined the Macau ecology over the past 500 years is to ignore much of what makes Macau a unique and self-sustaining speech community”* (Moody, 2021, p. 15).

The handover of Macau to China in 1999 posed critical questions about language policy and identity in Macau. How would the official status of Portuguese and Chinese be negotiated in the post-handover era? Would Macau follow the pattern of linguistic shift observed in some postcolonial societies, where the former colonial language gradually loses prominence? These questions gain relevance in the context of Macau's complex multilingual environment, shaped by historical legacies, official bilingualism, and the presence of multiple community languages. From official communication to everyday interactions, a wide range of languages coexists, reflecting the territory's layered social and cultural dynamics.

Therefore, considering the complex language ecology of Macau, this paper is guided by five key objectives: (1) to provide a historical overview of language policy in Macau, from the late colonial period to the present; (2) to analyse the post-handover language education policies and their implications; (3) to integrate statistical and qualitative data on language use and education; (4) to discuss the challenges faced by different linguistic communities; and (5) to situate Macau within broader debates on language planning in multilingual and postcolonial contexts. The analysis draws upon data and frameworks from the authors' original research Amaro & Jatobá (ongoing), supplemented by insights from Pun (2025), Jatobá (2020), Amaro (2016), and relevant policy documents. By blending theoretical perspectives from language planning, sociolinguistics, and postcolonial studies, this chapter offers a multidimensional view of Macau's evolving linguistic

governance. It positions Macau not merely as a case of inherited bilingualism, but as an active site of negotiation where local agency, state planning, and global forces intersect in shaping language education policy.

2. Theoretical and Policy Framework

Macau’s case is theoretically significant because it contrasts with many postcolonial contexts — such as Algeria, Tanzania, or India — where the end of colonial rule led to either a marked decline in the use of the colonial language or complex tensions in language policy and identity. For instance, in Algeria, French remained widely used despite efforts to promote Arabic, often becoming a marker of elite status (Benrabah, 2013); in Tanzania, Kiswahili was promoted to foster national unity, reducing reliance on English (Mazrui & Mazrui, 1998); while in India, English persisted as a *lingua franca* but continues to generate debates over linguistic hierarchy and inclusion (Ramanathan, 2005).

Instead of experiencing a sharp decline in the colonial language or intense policy debates over linguistic identity, Macau has largely retained Portuguese as an official language alongside Chinese. Following its handover, the region has even intensified efforts to promote Portuguese language education and broaden multilingual competencies, positioning Portuguese not as a colonial remnant but as a strategic and cultural asset within its unique sociopolitical framework.

At the same time, Macau’s government and civil society have had to manage the relationship between Cantonese (the mother tongue of most locals), Mandarin (the official language of China, increasingly important in administration and business), English (the global language of tourism and commerce), *Patuá* (the endangered creole that embodies Macau’s unique Eurasian heritage), and a set of languages spoken by migrant communities. By the end of March 2025, 27% of Macau’s 687,900 inhabitants were non-resident workers. Although the majority come from Mainland China, a significant portion originates from countries such as the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Myanmar, and Nepal (Table 1). This growing linguistic diversity further complicates language governance and challenges the assumption that Macau operates solely within a Chinese–Portuguese bilingual framework.

Table 1. Non-Resident Workers in Macau by March 2025 (Public Security Police Force, 2025)

| Country/Region Number |         | Percentage |
|-----------------------|---------|------------|
| Mainland China        | 120,989 | 66.0%      |
| Philippines           | 31,430  | 17.0%      |
| Vietnam               | 8,232   | 4.5%       |
| Indonesia             | 7,676   | 4.2%       |
| Myanmar               | 4,463   | 2.4%       |
| Hong Kong             | 2,203   | 1.2%       |
| Nepal                 | 3,840   | 2.1%       |
| Thailand              | 918     | 0.5%       |
| India                 | 727     | 0.4%       |

|                |         |      |
|----------------|---------|------|
| Malaysia       | 572     | 0.3% |
| Taiwan Region  | 625     | 0.3% |
| United States  | 132     | 0.1% |
| United Kingdom | 114     | 0.1% |
| Japan          | 134     | 0.1% |
| Australia      | 105     | 0.1% |
| Korea          | 243     | 0.1% |
| Canada         | 99      | 0.1% |
| Singapore      | 57      | 0.1% |
| Others         | 809     | 4.4% |
| Total          | 183,368 |      |

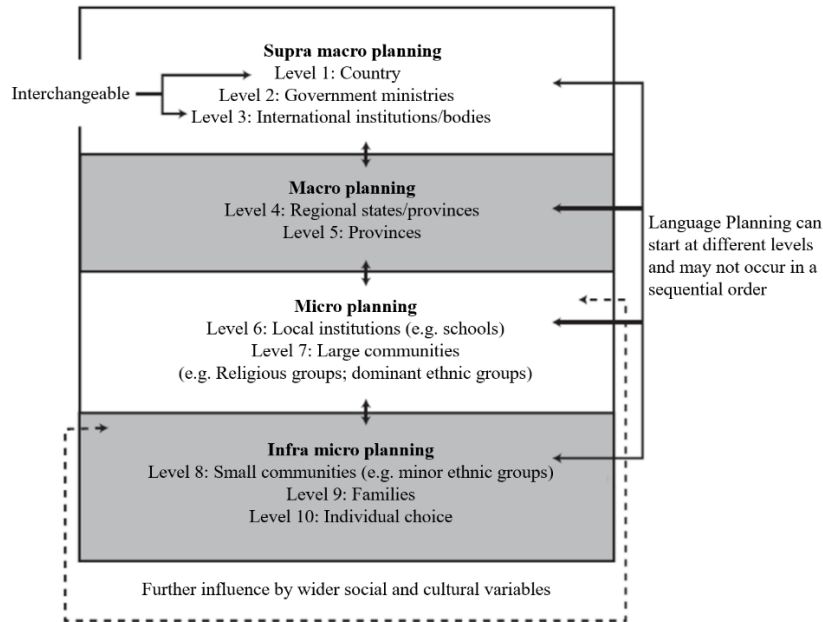
The notion of a “harmonious language life” (Zhang R. P., 2009) and “governance of global language life” (Zhang and Liu, 2017) promoted by Chinese scholars and policymakers (Zhang S., 2009) is especially relevant in this context: it calls for balancing multiple languages and dialects harmoniously in one society. This is particularly significant in China, where a wide array of regional dialects — such as Shanghainese, Hokkien, Hakka, and Sichuanese — coexist with *Putonghua*,<sup>64</sup> the national standard language. While Putonghua has been actively promoted for national unity and administrative cohesion, these dialects remain vital carriers of local identity and cultural heritage across provinces. The Chinese language policy framework acknowledges this diversity, even as it encourages the use of Putonghua in public domains. This underlying principle of unity without erasure informs broader efforts to create a linguistically inclusive society. This concept aligns with Macau’s post-handover strategy of embracing multilingualism as part of its identity and development, rather than enforcing linguistic homogeneity. In this context, Macau’s recognition of Portuguese, Cantonese, Mandarin, English, and community languages reflects a localized interpretation of the “harmonious language life,” where multiple linguistic identities are not only tolerated but strategically valued.

Our analysis draws upon a layered theoretical foundation that bridges the stages and levels of macro- and micro- language planning perspectives (Kheng & Baldauf, 2011; see figure 1 below), concepts of postcolonial multilingualism (Amaro, 2016), and China’s evolving linguistic governance strategies and language policies for foreign languages (Jatobá, 2020, 2023a, 2023b, 2024). Language

<sup>64</sup> Putonghua (普通话, Pǔtōnghuà, "common language"), refers to the standardized form of spoken Chinese promoted and taught throughout mainland China. It is based primarily on the pronunciation of the Beijing dialect and the grammar and vocabulary of northern dialects. The term "Mandarin" can refer more broadly to a group of related Chinese dialects spoken across northern and southwestern China, but in most international and educational contexts, "Mandarin" is used interchangeably with "Putonghua" to mean Standard Chinese — the official language of China. In this article, Putonghua and Mandarin are interchangeable terms.

policy and planning theory distinguishes between top-down (supra-macro and macro) policies and bottom-up (micro and infra-micro) implementations. Broad policies are interpreted and enacted by local agents, while local language issues or initiatives can, in turn, influence higher-level decision-making (Amaro & Jatobá, ongoing). These interdependent dynamics form a critical basis for understanding the fluidity of Macau’s policy landscape.

Figure 1. The four stages and 10 levels of macro and micro policy planning (Kheng & Baldauf, 2011, p. 940).



We also draw on the concept of language-in-education planning as a specific subset of language policy (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997) —pertinent because our study emphasizes language education. Language-in-education planning involves decisions about the medium of instruction, curriculum design for language subjects, and the promotion of certain languages through schooling. In Macau, language education and the *laissez faire* treatment of education (Moody, 2021; Lau, 2017) are a key arena where policy meets practice: “The *laissez faire* treatment of education, and particularly of educational language, allowed diversity to flourish without regulatory protections of that diversity” (Moody, 2021, p. 136). In addition, the theoretical perspective of localized agency in language planning (Baldauf, 2005; Bouchard & Glasgow, 2018; Hatoss, 2018; Johnson & Johnson, 2015; Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2021) suggests that even within a strong policy environment, local educators and communities can exercise agency to adapt or contest language policies to fit their needs.

China’s approach to language planning offers a distinctive contribution to global discussions on multilingual governance. Rather than treating language policy solely as a matter of education or communication, it is framed as a strategic element of national cohesion and cultural governance. This perspective is embedded in broader political objectives such as the construction of a unified yet pluralistic society. As Jatobá (2020) argues, China’s linguistic governance is highly institutionalized and explicitly articulated through official publications, including the *Language Situation in China* annual reports and the *bluebook* series. These documents systematically track linguistic trends and serve as instruments for shaping language education, promoting Putonghua, and managing the coexistence of regional dialects and minority languages under state oversight. This model reflects a

deliberate and centralized effort to regulate linguistic diversity in ways that support both national development goals and international positioning.

Language planning at the local level can also operate as a geopolitical instrument. The promotion of Portuguese in Macau — and in mainland Chinese universities (see Pires, 2022) — is not solely an educational initiative, but part of a broader strategy to develop linguistic expertise and international networks that support China's engagement with Portuguese-speaking countries such as Portugal, Brazil, Angola, and others (Jatobá, 2020). In this framework, Macau's language policy sits at the intersection of local and national priorities, while also serving as a tool of geopolitical strategy. The teaching of Portuguese is mobilized as a form of soft power aligned with China's leadership in South-South cooperation and North-South dialogue (Jatobá, 2023a, 2024).

Furthermore, our analysis integrates sociolinguistic theories concerning language attitudes, identity, and ecology (see Baker, 1992; Creese et al., 2010; Garrett, 2010; Haugen, 1972; Joseph, 2004, and Norton, 2013). A study by Yan (2017) found that Macau university students expressed the strongest integrative attachment to Chinese and viewed English as the most instrumentally useful language, while Portuguese ranked lower in both respects. This underscores the complex interplay of heritage, national affiliation, and global competitiveness in shaping language learning behaviours and policy reception.

Therefore, our theoretical lens allows us to interpret Macau not as an 'anomaly' but as a dynamic site where multilingualism is negotiated and co-constructed daily—both from *top-down* and *bottom-up* policies. The intersection of state planning, local agency, and international pressures makes Macau an important reference point for future studies in postcolonial and multilingual language education.

### **3. Historical Overview: Language Policy Before and After 1999**

The Portuguese first established a permanent settlement in Macau in the mid-16th century, formalizing their presence through an agreement with Chinese authorities in 1557. Under Portuguese administration, Macau operated under a functional diglossia: Portuguese was the high-prestige language of governance and law, while Cantonese served as the primary language of everyday communication among the local population. Throughout most of the 400 years of Portuguese administration, Portuguese language held official status but was fluently spoken by only a small elite, primarily members of the Macanese community and the civil service. Chinese, although the native language of the majority population, did not receive official recognition until the later years of Portuguese rule.

Education during the Portuguese era in Macau was divided along linguistic lines. Portuguese-medium schools primarily served Macanese families — a culturally mixed community of Portuguese and Asian descent rooted in Macau — as well as children of Portuguese expatriates and some local Chinese elites. However, despite these institutions, the Portuguese language remained largely confined to elite or administrative circles and was never as widely diffused among the Chinese population as English was in neighbouring Hong Kong. By the 1990s, only a small fraction of Macau's Chinese residents spoke Portuguese fluently. In contrast, Chinese-medium schools operated predominantly in Cantonese and were frequently run by local associations or Catholic missions. English also had a presence, influenced by Macau's proximity to British-ruled Hong Kong (1842–1997) and the international business community, either as the medium of instruction or as a foreign-language subject in certain elite private schools.

While many Macanese families were bilingual in Portuguese and Cantonese, the Macanese community constituted — and continues to represent—only a tiny fraction of Macau's overall

population (around 1–2%). Recognizing the limited diffusion of Portuguese among local Chinese residents, the Macau government introduced a policy of official bilingualism (Portuguese-Chinese) in 1991, aiming to prepare more bilingual professionals for the civil service in anticipation of the territory’s handover. Consequently, the 1990s witnessed deliberate efforts to encourage Chinese civil servants to learn Portuguese, complemented by the introduction of Portuguese language courses at the University of East Asia (now University of Macau) and other educational institutes.

A pivotal development occurred with the promulgation of Decree-Law No. 101/91/M in 1991, which established Chinese — both spoken and written — as a co-official language alongside Portuguese. This legal reform followed the 1987 Sino-Portuguese Joint Declaration, a bilateral agreement that outlined the terms for Macau’s handover to China in 1999. The decree reflected a shift toward greater linguistic inclusion as part of broader efforts to prepare the region for the forthcoming return (Amaro and Jatobá, ongoing). Therefore, during the 1990s, policy efforts emphasized the promotion of bilingualism within government and civil service structures. Training programs were introduced to nourish Chinese-Portuguese bilingual capabilities among civil servants.

The post-handover period marked a turning point in Macau’s language policy, culminating in the formal enshrinement of bilingualism in the Basic Law of the Macau Special Administrative Region (1993) — a foundational legal document adopted after the 1987 Sino-Portuguese Joint Declaration. Article 9 of the Basic Law guarantees the use of both Chinese and Portuguese in administration, legislation, and judicial proceedings, affirming their status as co-official languages. Yet, despite these constitutional assurances, Portuguese has remained a symbolic rather than widely used vernacular. Census data from 2011 and 2021 (Table 2) reveal that Portuguese is spoken at home by less than 1% of the population, while Cantonese continues to dominate everyday communication. Mandarin and other Chinese dialects represent just over 10% of usage combined, while English and Tagalog have grown due to the increasing presence of migrant and international communities. These figures reflect a complex sociolinguistic reality: one in which Cantonese anchors local identity, Mandarin and English expand in strategic domains, and Portuguese maintains institutional prestige without widespread community uptake.

Table 2. Home language use in Macau (DSEC 2011; 2021)

|                        | Census 2011 |         | Census 2021 |         |
|------------------------|-------------|---------|-------------|---------|
| Language               | Percentage  | Number  | Percentage  | Number  |
| Cantonese              | 81.3%       | 449,274 | 78.9%       | 537,981 |
| Other Chinese dialects | 5.5%        | 30,590  | 5.3%        | 36,032  |
| Mandarin               | 4.9%        | 27,129  | 4.6%        | 31,405  |
| English                | 2.2%        | 12,155  | 3.5%        | 23,635  |
| Tagalog                | 1.7%        | 9,415   | 2.8%        | 19,154  |
| Portuguese             | 0.7%        | 4,022   | 0.6%        | 3,949   |
| Others                 | 1.2%        | 6,546   | 1.7%        | 11,626  |

|              |      |                |      |                |
|--------------|------|----------------|------|----------------|
| N/A          | 2.4% | 13,372         | 2.6% | 18,288         |
| <b>Total</b> |      | <b>552,503</b> |      | <b>682,070</b> |

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At the same time, Macau’s strategic positioning as a commercial platform between China and the Portuguese-speaking world — reinforced by the establishment of the Forum for Economic and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (Forum Macau)<sup>65</sup> in 2003 — has significantly elevated the geopolitical value of Portuguese. As Jatobá (2020) notes, the region is not only viewed as a site of cultural heritage but also as a diplomatic asset within China’s global cooperation agenda. This has led to expanded investment in Portuguese language education both within Macau and in mainland China. However, the legal and symbolic continuity of Portuguese masks a more nuanced and uneven landscape at the level of language use, identity, and educational practice.

As Amaro & Jatobá (ongoing) observe, Macau’s educational institutions reflect this multilingual complexity through a diversity of instructional models — ranging from public and private to international schools — each with differing linguistic priorities. Language planning in the region unfolds across multiple levels, combining top-down government policies with bottom-up initiatives from schools and communities. While the colonial era favoured a *laissez-faire* approach to education, the post-handover period has seen a shift toward a more centralized and organized framework (Jatobá, in press). This transformation has aimed to integrate linguistic pluralism with broader goals of social cohesion and economic development. Yet, as Amaro (2016) points out, Portuguese continues to carry the symbolic residue of elite status, remaining largely disconnected from the lived linguistic experience of most residents. This disjunction gives rise to what some participants in her study described as Portuguese being “an official language only on paper.”

Mandarin has gained increasing prominence in Macau’s administrative and educational spheres, propelled by national integration policies and the region’s strategic role within the Greater Bay Area<sup>66</sup>. As noted by Pun (2025), younger generations in Macau often feel compelled to learn both Mandarin and English, languages associated with national mobility and global competitiveness. Portuguese, by contrast, is frequently perceived as peripheral. Local Chinese learners tend to engage with it instrumentally — viewing it to access scholarships, secure public sector jobs, or enter Portuguese-speaking markets, rather than as a language of cultural belonging.

Meanwhile, Amaro (2016) observes that many Portuguese nationals — particularly those who arrived before the handover — show limited interest in learning Cantonese or Mandarin, as they see little immediate benefit in doing so. This dynamic contributes to the persistence of both symbolic and practical enclaves, where linguistic boundaries reinforce social separation. Despite ongoing state

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<sup>65</sup> The Forum for Economic and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (Forum Macau) is a multilateral platform established in Macau in 2003 under a Chinese government initiative. Its primary purpose is to strengthen and facilitate economic, commercial, cultural, and developmental cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking countries—including Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Portugal, São Tomé and Príncipe, East Timor—leveraging Macau’s historical and linguistic connections to this Portuguese-speaking world. Many of these countries are also members of the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP).

<sup>66</sup> The Greater Bay Area (GBA) is an economically integrated initiative launched by the Chinese government aiming to foster closer economic collaboration, innovation, and infrastructure connectivity across nine major cities in Guangdong Province — including Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and Zhuhai — and the Special Administrative Regions (SARs) of Hong Kong and Macau. It is designed to create a globally competitive mega-region comparable to other major bay areas such as Tokyo Bay, San Francisco Bay Area, and New York metropolitan area.

support for Portuguese through initiatives such as scholarships, teacher recruitment, and cultural programming, Amaro highlights the enduring presence of a “glass wall” in intercultural relations. In this context, language serves not only as a communicative tool but also as a social marker and boundary. Portuguese continues to be associated with privilege and historical authority, yet it functions as a minoritarian language in daily life. This tension — between institutional prestige and limited societal integration — exemplifies the complex and often uneven terrain of multilingual coexistence in post-handover Macau.

Nevertheless, Portuguese continues to hold strategic value within Macau’s multilingual framework. As Jatobá (2020) and Amaro (2016) argue, the region stands for a hybrid model of postcolonial language governance — one that integrates historical continuity with national policy goals and local educational agency. Rather than being treated as a vestige of colonial rule, Portuguese has been repositioned as a resource for international cooperation and soft power, particularly in China’s engagement with the Portuguese-speaking countries. Its enduring presence in Macau signifies not stasis, but adaptation — what one interviewee in Amaro’s (2016) study described as “Macau still has a lot of Portugal,” (p. 11) referring less to demographic presence and more to symbolic and institutional continuity. In this sense, Macau’s post-handover language policy reflects a carefully managed process—one that preserves historical legacies, supports multilingual development, and aligns with the region’s evolving role within China’s broader geopolitical and cultural strategies.

#### **4. Multilingual Education and Language Governance in Macau**

##### **4.1 Instruction in Chinese and Portuguese**

Macau’s linguistic ecology has been shaped by its unique historical trajectory and its status as a SAR of China (Moody, 2021; Pun, 2025). Since the 1999 handover, “Chinese” — though not explicitly defined in the Basic Law of the Macau SAR — has typically referred to Cantonese for spoken communication and Standard Written Chinese (based on Mandarin) for official documents and public services. Cantonese continues to dominate everyday interactions, government operations, media information, and legislative proceedings. However, Mandarin has gained prominence in education and official communication, reflecting Macau’s growing integration with mainland China. Civil servants and teachers increasingly receive Mandarin training, and its use as a medium of instruction is expanding in schools.

The foundations of Macau’s post-handover language education policy were laid by the 2006 Basic Law of the Non-Tertiary Education System. This legal framework was followed by the release of the Requirements for Basic Academic Competencies in Regular Education of the Local School System, implemented from the 2015/2016 school year. These reforms aim to align educational goals with both the region’s sociolinguistic landscape and national strategic priorities. Language education is central to this vision. The government has set up clear competency benchmarks for six language categories: Chinese as a first and second language, Portuguese as both a medium of instruction and a second language, and English as a first and second language. The curriculum highlights that language learning is a key asset in building a harmonious society open to multicultural and multilingual spaces, such as Macau.

Special emphasis is placed on developing oral proficiency in both Cantonese and Mandarin, recognizing the local predominance of Cantonese and the national status of Mandarin. Students are also expected to master traditional Chinese characters — used in Macau — while gaining familiarity with simplified characters, officially adopted in mainland China. By the end of primary school, students are expected to recognize at least 3,000 commonly used characters and write 2,000. For learners of

Chinese as a second language, the targets are adjusted to 2,000 recognized and 800 written characters. These goals reflect Macau's dual commitment to linguistic preservation and national cohesion.

The Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) grants schools a certain degree of autonomy in deciding their language of instruction. While many schools continue to teach in Cantonese using traditional Chinese characters, others have introduced Mandarin streams in response to shifting language policies. Some schools have embraced more multilingual approaches. For instance, Escola Secundária Luso-Chinesa de Luís Gonzaga Gomes offers separate sections with Chinese or Portuguese as the medium of instruction, while Escola Oficial Zheng Guanying has adopted a trilingual curriculum combining Mandarin, Portuguese, and English. Currently, Macau's seven official schools, which are fully subsidized and free for local residents, provide bilingual education in Chinese and Portuguese. Among the 68 private schools, most also supported by government subsidies, 15 schools primarily use English as the language of instruction, with Chinese taught as a subject; two schools (one public and one private) follow trilingual models, and only two institutions (a kindergarten and a G1–G12 school) use Portuguese as the primary instructional language. The remaining 49 primarily teach in Chinese, offering Portuguese and/or English as additional languages (DSEDJ, 2025).

In the last two decades, the Macau government has made significant efforts to expand Portuguese language education. Schools and universities have introduced Portuguese-language programs designed to train bilingual professionals for careers in legal, administrative, and diplomatic fields (Pun, 2025). At the non-tertiary level, more than 3,000 Chinese students are currently learning Portuguese from an early age in Macau's public and private schools (Filipe, 2024). A new generation of learners is emerging, supported by government-sponsored initiatives such as summer language programs, exchange opportunities in Portugal, and regular language courses. According to DSEDJ, schools have autonomy in determining how Portuguese is taught — provided they meet the minimum benchmark of 150 instructional hours per year for Portuguese as a second language.

Of Macau's 10 tertiary education institutions, half now offer full undergraduate and postgraduate programs in Portuguese, while the remaining institutions include Portuguese as an optional language subject. The University of Macau and Macao Polytechnic University stand out in this landscape, offering comprehensive degree programs in Portuguese Studies, Translation, and Interpreting. These programs have experienced steady growth in enrolment, reinforcing Macau's strategic role as a cultural and linguistic bridge between China and the Portuguese-speaking world.

However, despite these structural supports, Portuguese language education in Macau continues to face persistent challenges — chief among them, the chronic shortage of qualified local teachers. As Pun (2025) notes, the region remains heavily dependent on external recruitment, which hampers efforts to develop a locally grounded and sustainable Portuguese language education system. This gap poses a significant obstacle to fully realizing the aims of Macau's bilingual policy, particularly in fostering long-term capacity and broader community ownership. Student perceptions further complicate this landscape. Portuguese is often viewed as more difficult than English and less immediately relevant — unless students are specifically pursuing careers in government, law, or public service. Motivation to learn the language tends to be instrumental rather than integrative, with many learners associating Portuguese with civil service exams or scholarship opportunities, rather than with everyday communication or cultural connection (Pun, 2025).

This disconnect between policy aspirations and classroom realities contributes to what Amaro (2016) terms a “discourse of difference as superiority” (p. 105)—a dynamic in which the official promotion of Portuguese, rather than fostering inclusion, can unintentionally reinforce social hierarchies and symbolic forms of exclusion. These hierarchies may be internalized by both students

and teachers, shaping not only language learning outcomes but also broader attitudes toward Portuguese and its speakers. This ambivalence extends into the professional sphere. Portuguese-speaking professionals often occupy privileged positions in sectors such as law, education, and public administration. Yet, as Jeong (2025) and Amaro (2016) observe, many expatriates working in Macau's Portuguese language domains show little interest in acquiring Cantonese or Mandarin, thereby reinforcing parallel social spheres and limiting opportunities for intercultural engagement. In this context, Portuguese tends to persist less as a dynamic, lived language and more as a symbol of heritage, status, and institutional prestige.

Nevertheless, there are emerging signs of adaptation and innovation. Efforts to introduce Portuguese earlier in the educational journey, support for Portuguese-language media, and cultural partnerships with Portuguese-speaking countries reflect a growing recognition that pedagogical and cultural investment are key to sustaining the language (Pun, 2025; Jatobá, 2020). The government also leverages cultural diplomacy to promote locally the identity of Portuguese-speaking countries through events like the Lusofonia Festival and the Portuguese-Speaking Countries Cultural Week<sup>67</sup>. These annual festivals reinforce Macau's identity as a platform for intercultural dialogue and soft power engagement.

Yet the future of Portuguese in Macau remains uncertain unless deeper structural and attitudinal shifts occur. As Amaro (2016) and Pun (2025) argue, the vitality of a language depends not just on institutional support but on whether it is embraced by the community it seeks to serve. The current situation reveals a paradox: Portuguese is officially central but socially peripheral—a language with legal weight but limited day-to-day utility for most of the population.

The sustainable development of Portuguese in Macau hinges on three interrelated priorities: the training and retention of qualified local teachers, the motivation and engagement of learners, and the broader societal valorisation of the language. As long as Portuguese is seen as a top-down imposition rather than a shared cultural asset, it risks remaining ornamental rather than organic. However, if policy, pedagogy, and perception can be aligned, Portuguese may evolve from a postcolonial remnant into a meaningful language of local belonging and international connection.

## **4.2 Instruction in English**

Although not an official language, English plays a crucial role in Macau's commercial, educational, and international spheres. Under Portuguese administration, English was not used for governance but maintained a steady presence in the business sector, largely due to Macau's proximity to Hong Kong and its position within regional trade networks. Since the 1999 handover, the city's rapid economic development—particularly in the hospitality, tourism, and gaming industries—has further elevated English as a practical and prestigious language.

Today, English is taught as a second language in all local schools, and at the tertiary level, it serves as the primary language of instruction for most courses outside of Chinese and Portuguese

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<sup>67</sup> The Lusofonia Festival and the Portuguese-Speaking Countries Cultural Week are annual cultural events held in Macau that celebrate the diversity of Lusophone (Portuguese-speaking) cultures. The Lusofonia Festival, organized by the Macao Government since 1998, features music, dance, food, and crafts from Portuguese-speaking communities residing in Macau and abroad. The Portuguese-Speaking Countries Cultural Week, typically coordinated alongside Forum Macau, showcases performances, exhibitions, and gastronomy from member countries, promoting mutual understanding and cultural exchange between China and the Portuguese-speaking world. Following the handover, a number of associations representing Portuguese-speaking countries and regions were created in Macau with government subsidies to strengthen cultural ties; these associations are regularly invited to participate in and display their heritage during these festivals.

studies. English proficiency is also a key requirement for admission to many postgraduate programs and is highly valued in professional sectors such as tourism, finance, and government liaison work. This widespread use enhances Macau's appeal as a global academic destination for both students and faculty, reinforcing its multilingual identity and international connectivity.

In addition to public and private local schools, several international institutions and English sections of traditional local schools use English as the main medium of instruction. Some of schools follow globally recognized curricula (e.g., IB, IGCSE) and attract both expatriate and local Chinese families seeking international academic pathways. This has contributed to English becoming associated with global mobility, elite education, and career advancement.

Among university students, code-switching between English and Cantonese is common in academic contexts. English is widely regarded as a gateway to global opportunities, and employers increasingly seek trilingual staff (Cantonese, Mandarin, and English). Public-facing materials — such as signage, museum displays, and tourism literature—are typically trilingual, reinforcing the practical necessity of English in a multilingual public sphere.

Nonetheless, disparities remain in English education across different school types. Students in international or elite private schools tend to achieve higher proficiency levels due to more intensive instruction and greater exposure. In contrast, learners in public schools often have limited opportunities to practice English outside the classroom, which can contribute to uneven outcomes in language learning.

From a policy perspective, support for English instruction aligns with Macau's strategic role within the Greater Bay Area, which emphasizes regional integration, international cooperation, and competitiveness. English is thus promoted not only as a global *lingua franca* but also as a tool for advancing Macau's position as a connector between China and the wider world.

### **4.3 Patuá preservation**

*Patuá*, also known as Macanese Creole, is a Portuguese-based creole that developed in Macau over four centuries of sustained intercultural contact between Portuguese settlers and diverse Asian communities, including Cantonese, Malay, Sinhalese, and Indian populations. The language reflects this rich cultural fusion: while its vocabulary is primarily rooted in Portuguese, its grammar, syntax, and phonology reveal strong influences from Asian languages. As a result, *Patuá* stands as a distinctive linguistic marker of Macau's Eurasian heritage and its long-standing history of multicultural coexistence (Larrea, 2021).

Historically, *Patuá* served as the home and community language of the Macanese and it functioned as a marker of identity and was widely spoken within Macanese households and social networks through the 19th century. However, over the 20th century, social prestige shifted toward English, Cantonese, and Standard Portuguese, leading to a sharp decline in transmission, especially after World War II.

Today, *Patuá* is classified as severely endangered by UNESCO. Fewer than a few dozen fluent speakers remain—most of them elderly—and “although it is not a factually dead language, *Patuá* has completely lost its place as a functional language for everyday communication” (Baxter cited by Carvalho, 2018). The creole is no longer used in daily life and lacks formal recognition in the education system or public institutions. Nonetheless, it remains a powerful symbol of Macanese identity and cultural heritage. Efforts to revitalize *Patuá* have largely taken cultural and symbolic forms. The most notable example is the annual *Patuá* theatre performance organized by the group *Dóci Papiçám di Macau*, which stages humorous and satirical plays annually that blend *Patuá* with Cantonese and

Portuguese. These performances — usually held during Macau’s Arts Festival — are well-attended and widely covered by local media, serving as a lively vehicle for preserving the creole and raising awareness among younger generations. In 2021, the Patuá Theatre was inscribed in the list of Macau’s Intangible Cultural Heritage.

*Patuá* has been gaining some symbolic institutional recognition, such as its inclusion in exhibitions, language festivals, and heritage projects. However, revitalization remains difficult without systematic language planning, intergenerational transmission, or integration into schools and media. As scholars like Larrea (2021) and Lee and Zhang (2021) note, *Patuá* survives more as an emblem of Macau’s plural identity than as a functioning language of communication. In the broader context of language policy in Macau, *Patuá* poses important questions about which languages are preserved, promoted, or marginalized, and how intangible heritage fits into a multilingual society where dominant languages serve national or economic goals. The case of *Patuá* sheds light on how language, identity, and collective memory are negotiated and preserved in the context of postcolonial and post-handover Macau.

## 5. Linguistic landscape

The concept of linguistic landscape refers to the visibility of written languages in public spaces — such as street signs, shopfronts, menus, advertisements, and public notices — and offers valuable insights into a community’s sociolinguistic realities and language hierarchies. As Landry and Bourhis (1997) argue, the linguistic landscape serves both informational and symbolic functions, signalling not only which languages are used but also which are valued or legitimized. In Macau, the linguistic landscape reflects its official bilingual framework (Chinese and Portuguese), its colonial past, and its evolving identity as a multilingual and multicultural society.

Government buildings, streets, public infrastructure, and official notices consistently feature bilingual Chinese–Portuguese signage, as mandated by law. Street names such as Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro (新馬路) or Rua do Campo (水坑尾街) exemplify this bilingual toponymy (figure 2). Trilingual signage — adding English to the official languages — is common in tourist areas, hotels, casinos, and international schools, aligning with Macau’s economic positioning in global tourism and trade (figure 3). These signs help reinforce Macau’s international appeal and reflect its colonial legacy and legal commitments.

Figure 2. Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro (credit: Jason Ma, 2011. Available at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/sharih/5602648007>)



Figure 3. Historic Center of Macau (credit: Xie Yuqing, 2024)



Beyond these top-down displays, the linguistic landscape also reveals the bottom-up realities of Macau's multicultural population. A growing number of migrant languages — such as Tagalog, Vietnamese, Indonesian, and Nepali — have become part of the everyday linguistic fabric. These languages are spoken by thousands of non-resident workers employed in sectors like domestic work, hospitality, caregiving, and construction, which are foundational to Macau's service-driven economy. In some neighbourhoods and workplaces, informal signage, posters, and business advertisements in these languages — particularly Tagalog, Thai and Bahasa Indonesia — can be seen, offering vital support for migrant communities (figures 4 to 6).

Figure 4. Thai restaurant (credit: Gonalo Lobo Pinheiro, 2025)



Figure 5. Parcel collection store (credit: Gonalo Lobo Pinheiro, 2025)



Figure 6. Association of Thais in Macau (credit: Gonalo Lobo Pinheiro, 2025)



However, these linguistic communities often face systematic marginalization. Public services, education, and health communication are still largely delivered under the assumption of a Chinese–Portuguese bilingual model, forcing migrant workers to rely on limited English, informal peer interpretation, or remain excluded from full participation in civic life. For instance, migrant children may struggle in schools with little or no support for their home languages, and their families frequently encounter barriers when accessing education, legal, or healthcare services.

Some progress has been made. During the COVID-19 pandemic, public health authorities began providing information in multiple migrant languages, including Tagalog and Bahasa Indonesia (Jatobá, 2023a), acknowledging for the first time the communicative needs of these communities during a public health emergency. Yet, such responses have remained exceptional and ad hoc, rather than forming part of a long-term inclusive strategy.

As Shohamy et al. (2010) emphasize, the linguistic landscape is never neutral — it reflects political decisions and power relations about who belongs and who is visible. In Macau, the dominance of Chinese and Portuguese in public signage reflects the legal and historical status of these languages, while the growing — but still unofficial — presence of migrant languages in informal spaces highlights

a mismatch between demographic realities and institutional recognition. Addressing this gap would require not only symbolic acknowledgment but also material investment in multilingual communication strategies, translation services, and education support.

Macau's linguistic landscape embodies the layered nature of its multilingualism: the *de jure* bilingualism of Chinese and Portuguese, the *de facto* trilingualism including English, and the invisible multilingualism of its migrant communities. As Landry and Bourhis (1997) and Shohamy et al. (2010) remind us, the languages made visible in public space both reflect and construct social hierarchies. A more community-sensitive approach to language governance — one that includes migrant and minority languages in both policy and practice — can help ensure that all members of Macau's multilingual society are seen, heard, and valued.

## **6. Comparative Reflections**

### **6.1 Postcolonial Comparisons: Macau and Former Portuguese Colonies**

Although Macau's history and current governing status differ significantly from those of many postcolonial regions and states, comparing its experience with former Portuguese colonies such as Cape Verde, East Timor, and São Tomé and Príncipe helps to illustrate how different governance models influence the development and implementation of language policies. Despite their status as sovereign nations, these countries share with Macau a colonial legacy of Portuguese rule and a complex, multilingual linguistic environment.

Unlike Macau, however, their post-independence language policies were shaped by acute structural limitations. Upon gaining sovereignty, these nations faced a severe shortage of trained professionals in public administration and education, along with limited international support for building inclusive multilingual frameworks. In this context, the continued use of Portuguese as the official and administrative language was not necessarily a matter of ideological preference, but rather a pragmatic response to the absence of viable alternatives and the urgent need to establish functioning state institutions.

Macau's postcolonial trajectory differs markedly. Rather than experiencing an abrupt break from colonial systems, the region transitioned under the "One Country, Two Systems" constitutional principle, which enabled institutional continuity and long-term planning. Portuguese gained renewed prominence after the handover in 1999 — not only as a symbolic colonial language but also as a tool of strategic diplomacy and soft power, especially in the context of China's engagement with the Portuguese-speaking countries.

Portuguese only became widely accessible in Macau's public schools after the handover, marking a shift from symbolic presence to functional expansion. Today, bilingualism is maintained through investments in teacher training, academic cooperation, and public sector employment opportunities. These distinctions underscore the importance of structured governance and international alignment in sustaining multilingual education policies.

Moreover, while Portuguese is spoken as a home language by only a small segment of Macau's population and remains largely associated with elite and administrative spheres, in countries such as Cape Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe, it serves as a postcolonial *lingua franca*. In these contexts, Portuguese coexists with widely spoken local languages like Kriolu and Forro, and plays a more prominent role in everyday communication. Although these countries face comparable challenges — such as limited teacher training, unequal access to education, and a persistent gap between official language policies and actual linguistic practices — the sociopolitical role of Portuguese differs markedly. Rather than functioning primarily as a tool of geopolitical diplomacy, as in Macau,

Portuguese in these nations often acts as a unifying national symbol that bridges diverse linguistic communities.

## **6.2 Territorial Autonomy and Language Rights: The Case of the Sahara Region**

Macau's language governance framework also shares features with other territorial autonomy models that seek to reconcile cultural and linguistic diversity within broader national frameworks. A relevant point of comparison is the Moroccan Initiative for the Autonomy of the Sahara Region, a political proposal launched in 2007 and currently under negotiation within the United Nations framework.

Both Macau and the Moroccan initiative envision a form of decentralized governance that preserves national sovereignty while granting local authorities the ability to manage cultural, social, and educational affairs. In Macau, the Basic Law guarantees official bilingualism in Chinese and Portuguese, which is operationalized across public administration, education, and legal systems. This arrangement allows for the coexistence of Cantonese, Mandarin, Portuguese, and English in both formal institutions and daily life, reinforcing Macau's status as a hub for tourism and China–Portuguese-speaking countries cooperation.

The Moroccan initiative similarly proposes that the Saharan population would exercise legislative, executive, and judicial powers within the region, including over education, cultural promotion, and heritage preservation. Articles 5 and 12 of the proposal specifically reference the protection of Saharan Hassani cultural heritage, including linguistic traditions such as *Ḥassānīya* Arabic, as well as the development of local institutions such as artisan training centres, museums, and cultural festivals.

However, there are notable differences in the level of institutionalization. While Macau's bilingualism is legally enshrined and implemented through stable governance, the linguistic dimensions of the Sahara autonomy proposal remain aspirational and subject to ongoing political negotiation. Educational and linguistic frameworks for *Ḥassānīya* Arabic and Amazigh, for example, still need to be fully articulated, resourced, and integrated into public systems.

It is important to clarify that the Moroccan proposal remains part of an evolving process within international diplomacy. This paper does not take a political position on the status of the Western Sahara but offers a comparative lens to explore how different governance models approach language rights in multilingual and multicultural contexts.

Table 3 provides a comparative summary of key dimensions of language policy and education in Macau and selected multilingual contexts, including Portuguese-speaking African countries (PALOP) and the Moroccan Initiative for the Autonomy of the Sahara Region. By organizing similarities and differences across areas such as official language policy, multilingual practices, teacher training, and policy implementation, the table highlights how different governance models respond to linguistic diversity. It underscores the relative institutional stability and strategic orientation of Macau's bilingual framework, while drawing attention to both shared challenges and divergent outcomes in other postcolonial and autonomous settings.

Table 3. Comparative Summary of Language Policy and Education (by the authors)

| Dimension                           | Macau SAR                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Portuguese-speaking African Countries (PALOP) | Moroccan Initiative for the Autonomy of the Sahara Region                                                                                                                     |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Language Policy</b>              | Chinese and Portuguese retained as the official language after independence, often due to bilingualism institutional limitations. Local languages remain Basic Law and marginalized or multilingualism is underrecognized. support in the education system.                                                |                                               | Proposal includes recognition of <i>Ḥassānīya</i> Arabic and cultural autonomy. Sovereignty remains with Morocco. Legal and educational systems yet to be defined in detail.  |
| <b>Multilingual Practice</b>        | Active use of Multilingualism in society; Cantonese, Portuguese dominates in administration and schooling. Local languages in often lack institutional education and integration. public life.                                                                                                             |                                               | <i>Ḥassānīya</i> Arabic is widely spoken; Amazigh is also present. Cultural expression supported, but language use in formal education is not yet systematized.               |
| <b>Heritage Community Languages</b> | Patuá, Tagalog, Creoles, such as Vietnamese, Kabuverdianu and Forro, Bahasa Indonesia, are widely spoken. and Nepali are present but have limited official support; maintained through community initiatives.                                                                                              |                                               | <i>Ḥassānīya</i> is a central component of Sahrawi identity. Cultural initiatives like festivals, museums, and artisan centres promote heritage but not formalized education. |
| <b>Language Attitudes</b>           | Cantonese is Portuguese is often viewed central to identity. as a tool for upward Mandarin valued mobility and migration. for integration. Local languages retain English seen as strong cultural value. global capital. Portuguese promoted for civil service but often seen as difficult or less useful. |                                               | <i>Ḥassānīya</i> Arabic carries strong cultural and emotional weight. Arabic and French dominate national administration. Aspirations exist for more local recognition.       |

|                              |                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                    |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Teacher Training</b>      | Significant investment in teachers. Chronic shortage of trained bilingual and external support for teachers (Chinese-Portuguese). Reliance on foreign Portuguese teachers still an issue. | Chronic shortage of trained teachers. Limited resources for systematic capacity building.                      | No formal system yet. Teacher training and language education would need to be established as part of the autonomy framework.                      |
| <b>Policy Implementation</b> | Strong legal basis with consistent application in education, legal, and administrative fields.                                                                                            | Often uneven or symbolic. Implementation capacity lags behind stated language policy goals.                    | Policy frameworks for language use remain aspirational. Cultural rights acknowledged but dependent on future implementation mechanisms.            |
| <b>Model Value</b>           | Considered a strong multilingual governance special administrative regions; balances national integration with local diversity.                                                           | Examples of postcolonial resilience, though often constrained by lack of resources and structural limitations. | Offers insights into autonomy-based governance. Highlights the need for clearly defined language policies tied to cultural and social development. |

## 7. Final Considerations

Macau offers a distinctive example of postcolonial language policy, where the transition from colonial rule to national integration was marked by continuity rather than disruption. Instead of discarding the language of the former colonial power, the Macau SAR maintained and strengthened Portuguese as a strategic and institutional asset. Its ongoing use reflects not colonial nostalgia, but a calculated decision by local and national authorities aligned with China's broader diplomatic and economic engagement with the Portuguese-speaking world.

Still, the coexistence of Portuguese with Chinese, English, and other languages, within Macau's multilingual environment reveals important tensions. As discussed in this chapter, there is a notable gap between official language policy and everyday language practices. Portuguese plays a central role in law, public administration, and education, but it is rarely used in daily interactions. Cantonese remains the dominant spoken language, while Mandarin and English continue to gain influence due to their growing relevance in national and international contexts. As such, Portuguese occupies a paradoxical position in Macau—legally prominent, yet socially marginal.

Drawing from the insights of Amaro (2016), Pun (2025), and Jatobá (2020, 2023a, 2023b), Macau's linguistic complexity emerges from a layered interplay of historical legacies, social

inequalities, and evolving regional dynamics. Challenges such as the shortage of local Portuguese-speaking teachers, students' limited motivation, and the persistent linguistic separation between expatriates and local communities illustrate the gap between institutional policy and lived experience. Still, these obstacles have prompted a range of responses—from curricular reforms and intercultural initiatives to earlier language instruction and stronger international academic partnerships.

These developments position Macau as a case for scholars and policymakers working in the fields of multilingual planning, postcolonial transitions, and language education. The city's experience shows that effective language policy requires more than legal designation — it must be embedded in everyday practice, supported by education systems, and sustained across generations. For Portuguese to remain a meaningful part of Macau's linguistic landscape, it must connect with local realities and community use. In this sense, Macau offers valuable lessons for understanding how multilingual systems can be shaped, adapted, and maintained in politically and culturally complex environments.

Macau proves how multilingual governance can be purposefully constructed rather than inherited or improvised. Its experience raises important questions for regions navigating complex linguistic realities under conditions of autonomy or postcolonial transition. Comparative studies could explore how different institutional and cultural factors — such as those in Western Sahara or Portuguese-speaking African countries — affect the sustainability of bilingual or multilingual systems. In contrast to settings where bilingualism is nominal, Macau's combination of legal guarantees, policy continuity, and educational investment has enabled Portuguese to remain institutionally protected despite its limited everyday use.

For policymakers, Macau offers several takeaways:

- i. Align language planning with geopolitical and economic strategies (e.g., Forum Macau for cooperation China-Portuguese-speaking countries);
- ii. Pair symbolic recognition with real investment in teacher training, scholarships, and curriculum development, and
- iii. Protect linguistic rights not only in law but in day-to-day implementation.

Macau's case reminds us that multilingualism is not just a demographic reality — it is a political and cultural choice. With deliberate planning and inclusive engagement, minority and heritage languages can become meaningful parts of a region's social and institutional fabric.

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# THE CORSICAN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Dr Dominique VERDONI<sup>68</sup>

## The Corsican language: a long-term confrontational process

Areas of practice such as teaching, the media, the administration, literature are areas where an official and institutionalized language is practiced. For a minority language, or more precisely for Corsican in our case, which is being marginalized, they are both a space for social upgrading to be occupied and a space for recognition to be conquered. Conflicts therefore break out when social, political or cultural demands cannot be managed by institutional mechanisms which, as they try to minimize and marginalize them, increase their subversive charge and their emotional charge. These types of conflicts, close to us those around "special French people" according to the classification authorized in the first status of Corsica of 1981, but also closer to us the one around the "yellow vests", the undocumented, they all reflect the emergence of a civil society that challenges the integration/exclusion logic of Republican states whose decisions crystallize identities in areas where social actors weren't anywhere to be found until now. Their convening power then depends on the ability of community activists - we could speak here of "communities of struggles" - to make social activists. To offset their weak lobbying power, since we are referring to marginals or minorities, and their lack of resources, they try to capitalize on emotions (nostalgia, loss of identity, feeling of dispossession, violence, desire to express themselves, will to live in dignity) to touch public opinion. Media coverage as well as all forms of artistic expression (singing, theatre, literature, cinema etc.) then play an important part.

Once this capital is mobilized, two themes emerge which cover the entire gamut of conflicts: status and identity. They reflect the twofold desire to directly partake in decision-making processes and to be recognized. These two "desires", these two popular wills sometimes contradict each other, or complement each other. In both cases they give rise to the project. The education, societal, training and economic project. The political and institutional recognition project.

However, knowing that a linguistic, historical, ethnic fact can amount to admitting difference, it is only the representation of said fact - which makes sense - that is a sign of identity, just like recognition alone confers status, in other words the right to expression and the diffusion of this cultural difference.

Given the spread of legitimate, organized, standardized cultures by institutions and the media, one is immediately struck by the fact that the words "regional languages and cultures" denote ambiguity, or possibly "exiguity", related to non-institutional knowledge which is denied the label "civilization" granted for instance to foreign languages. This is how some in France are taught English language and civilization and others regional language and culture. Could this mean that there is a hierarchy of knowledge, the indelible mark of an evolutionist and diffusionist 19th century on our mental representations of culture? Could this be the sight of a prioritization of national/regional languages in a mono-cultural Nation-State in the face of the cultural expressions of diversity?

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Looking into the common thread running through the linguistic claim in Corsica, a whole system slowly comes to light. If one adds to that the claims related to means of communication and dissemination that culture needs to spread and blossom, the true stakes appear: asking the French government for training tools meant to restore not only the heritage value of the Corsican language and culture, but above all its agency and its creative power. In addition to the need for a more comprehensive inventory and development of the ecological but, first and foremost, the social heritage, i.e. the linguistic, archeological, ethnological, historical heritage, access is also requested to sources of information, books, texts and hypertexts, media, multimedia, data bank as a form of interactive creativity. In other words, the idea is not only to receive but also to produce and disseminate. That is where incentives and promotion policies come into play in order to financially and technically support the development of innovative tools but also and above all to help disseminate these tools, to distribute them wherever culture is promoted: schools at all levels, libraries, media libraries, cultural centers, local associations, media, social media etc.

### **The Corsican language: the various stages of a difficult recognition process**

While it was excluded from the Deixonne Law<sup>69</sup> from 1951 to 1974, the Corsican language, then regarded as belonging to a foreign linguistic area (Italian), is granted 3 hours of teaching per week only in 1982 when the so-called Savary circular is published. Though it was considered by the French government as a political "laboratory", as confirmed by the three main laws adopted specially for Corsica (1982-1983; 1991; 2002), offering and generalizing teaching remain goals difficult to achieve, though they were set during the visit by the national Education Minister, Lionel Jospin in 1988.

Compared to other marginalized languages, the teaching of Corsican is developing in an original way, within a complex and tolerant scheme. Indeed:

- It doesn't consider that conflict, such as in the case of Catalan (where the goal was to replace Castilian with Catalan) can only be solved by returning to monolingualism, if that was ever the case in Corsica (Latin, Tuscan, Ligurian... are languages which for many centuries co-existed with Corsican). The teaching of Corsican rests on managing bi-plurilingualism (Corsican-French + other languages of the communities living in Corsica and built on immigration.)
- While teaching standards are a given, unlike most less widespread languages (Catalan, Basque, Breton, Occitan...) which adopted standards based on a chosen variety, Corsican decided to respect the varieties of which it is composed and to adopt a "polynomic" approach;
- National education and public service were chosen as main places of teaching to ensure access to all and to innovate in an education system deemed too ethno-centered. The generalization of access means anyone, no matter their origin, can partake in the project of a language that is not unique but common, without discrimination. However, for the past few years, due to academic difficulties related to implementation, private teaching has been developing among others through immersion (Association Scola Corsa accredited by the Ministry of National Education).

### **Successive legislative developments in Corsica**

In the light of the demand for Corsican, the position of the State, enshrined in the Constitution dated 4 October 1958, which in its current version states in article 2 that "*the language of the Republic is French (...)*", reveals a principled hostility to any real recognition of the status of the Corsican

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<sup>69</sup> Law No. 51-46 of 11 January 1951 (Journal officiel of the French Republic dated 13 January 1951, page 483) on the teaching of local languages and dialects, drafted by MP Maurice Deixonne, is the first French law which authorizes optional teaching of France's regional languages (Basque, Breton, Catalan, Occitan).

language, even if, due to power relations in the second part of the 20th century, its position was somehow softened through the recognition of the heritage value of so-called "regional" minority languages, followed by the "languages of France" (see the creation of the competitive exam of Agregation of the languages of France in 2018). Besides, the implementation of the Deixonne Law to Corsican in 1974 quickly ran up against the absolute protection of the use of French in keeping with Law No. 94-665 dated 4 August 1994 on the use of the French language, the so-called Toulon Law. From article 1 onwards, it is stated that:

*“As the language of the Republic under the Constitution, the French language is a key feature of France's personality and heritage.”*

Article 2 specifies that:

*“In the designation, offer, presentation, instructions for use or utilization, description of the scope and conditions of warranty of a good, product or service, as well as in invoices and receipts, the use of the French language is mandatory.”*

The same provisions apply to all written, spoken or audiovisual advertising:

*“Any inscription or announcement on public roads, in a space open to the public or in any public transport and meant to inform the public must be in French” (article 3).*

The same goes for each and every official act of everyday life detailed in the law.

In Corsica, at the level of universities, following the reopening in 1981 of the Università di Corsica Pasquale Paoli (closed after the French conquest in the 18th century, in June 1769), the first undergraduate degree in regional studies was created (the Diplôme d'études universitaires générales, DEUG), followed by a complete cycle of university education including a doctoral thesis. In 1991, a competitive exam was launched to recruit secondary school teachers (middle and high schools), with the creation of the secondary school teaching certificate (CAPES) in Corsican (monovalent, whereas other CAPES in regional languages are bivalent, in other words they include Breton + one more subject taught). In 2001 another competitive exam was created for future first degree bilingual teachers (preschools and elementary schools for children aged 3 to 10) and then in 2018 a teaching degree (agrégation) in France's languages, including Corsican.

It is worth noting that the CAPES in Corsican, though it includes a set of specific tests, evolved in 2021, notably with the introduction of a common exam called "Becoming a teacher" organized in French. A negotiation is currently under way between the Università di Corsica and the Ministry of National Education via the Rectorate of the Academy of Corsica in order to decide on the new tests to be offered for the 2026 competitive exam.

Whereas with every major step in the evolution of the island's regulations Corsican developed, it has nevertheless never been granted any legal status.

In 1983, the Assembly of Corsica unanimously adopted the following motion:

*“The Assembly of Corsica, in accordance with the law on decentralization of Corsica, is entrusted with the daunting task of drafting a "cultural policy" which is similar to a cultural rescue plan. It has duly noted the fundamental nature of the language as cement of culture, as well as the need to urgently implement a policy of cultural re-appropriation that translates the Assembly's determination to return its language to its people. Being aware of the historical responsibilities entrusted to it, the Assembly of Corsica decided to commit to a policy of bilingualism in the framework of a three-year plan to be elaborated in consultation with the State, bilingualism at all levels from preschool to university. Bilingualism, which is very satisfactorily practiced in many regions of the*

world and, closer to us, in Europe, shall be studied in its contemporary applications, its functioning [...] As early as at the start of the next school year, an accelerated training of trainers course [...] and the teaching of the language will be time-based in keeping with the principle of compulsory education [...]. This definition of our Assembly's cultural policy with regards to the language will require coordination with the State in order, as the case may be, to harmonize the legal and regulatory provisions which may hinder the coherent implementation of that specific status, possibly resorting to article 27. At the same time, as of now, the use of Corsican will be generalized to name all places, villages, towns, for information purposes, in audiovisual training as we as in of public life.”

This motion, which remained unheeded, was followed by another one, again adopted unanimously on 26 June 1992 on the officialization of the Corsican language.

- Law No. 91-428 dated 14 May 1991 on the status of the territorial collectivity of Corsica thus established that:

*“In accordance with the national policy on higher education, the President of the Executive Council presents the Assembly of Corsica with proposals on higher education and on university research efforts, based on the opinion of the university of Corsica. On that basis, the Assembly of Corsica, depending on its priorities in terms of cultural, economic and social development, and after having consulted with Corsica's economic, social and cultural council, establishes the training map for higher education and university research efforts. This map becomes final when an agreement is signed between the territorial collectivity of Corsica, the State and the university of Corsica. (...) On the basis of a proposal by the Executive Council, which will hear the views of the Economic, Social and Cultural Council of Corsica, the Assembly determines what additional educational activities are to be organized by the territorial collectivity of Corsica. (...) The Assembly adopts, under the same conditions, a plan to develop Corsican language and culture teaching, which includes the modalities to integrate this teaching in the academic curriculum. These modalities are subject to an agreement between the territorial collectivity of Corsica and the State. (...) The territorial collectivity of Corsica, after consultation with the Economic, Social and Cultural Council of Corsica, signs specific agreements with the public audiovisual companies established in Corsica in order to promote the production of television and broadcasting programs aimed at developing the Corsican language and culture and to be broadcasted in Corsica. It can also, with the help of the State, foster initiatives and promote actions in the fields of creation and communication with any public or private person that is a citizen of any Member State of the European Community and its Mediterranean neighbors.*

- Law No. 2002-92 dated 22 January 2002 on Corsica complemented these provisions:

In section 4 of chapter II, first title of book III, second part of the code of education, article L. 312-11-1 was inserted as follows:

*“Art. L. 312-11-1. The Corsican language is a subject taught within normal school hours in the preschools and the elementary schools of Corsica.”*

The second subparagraph of article L. 4424-5 of the General Local Authorities Code is replaced by two subparagraphs as follows:

*“The Assembly, under the same conditions, adopts a plan to develop Corsican language and culture teaching, whose implementation shall be governed through an agreement between the territorial collectivity of Corsica and the State. This agreement provides for the necessary support measures, such as with regards to initial training and continuous training of teachers.”*

*“The territorial collectivity of Corsica, after consultation with the Economic, Social and Cultural Council of Corsica, signs specific agreements with the public audiovisual companies established in Corsica in order to promote the production of television and broadcasting programs aimed at developing the Corsican language and culture and to be broadcasted in Corsica.”*

With regards to the Constitution, since 25 July 2008, the Constitution contains article 75-1 which, though devoid of any normative weight, states that:

*“Regional languages belong to France's heritage.”*

Nevertheless, the Constitutional Council was quick to add, on the occasion of a priority preliminary ruling on constitutionality, that:

*“This article (75-1) does not establish a right or a freedom guaranteed by the Constitution”* (decision dated 20 May 2011, 2011-130QPC).

In the same vein, the Constitutional Council censured, in decision DC2021818 dated 31 May 2022, certain provisions of the Law on heritage protection of "regional languages" and on their promotion, regarding the teaching of "regional languages (so-called Molac Law), the indigenous languages of various territories of mainland France and of overseas territories, as well as the right to use them.

However, while the new rules of procedure of the Assembly of Corsica, endorsed by deliberation on 16 December 2021, just like that of the Executive Council of Corsica adopted on 8 February 2022, provide that: *"debates are held in Corsican and in French"*, while controlling legality, the Prefect of Corsica, in a management letter dated 10 February 2022, found the use of Corsican to be inadmissible, just like the notion of "people of Corsica", indicating that the two provisions are "contrary to the Constitution". The action thus demanded that the regulation be revised:

*"by removing any mention to the people of Corsica and imposing the Corsican language as language of debate".*

The administrative tribunal of Bastia thus annulled the rules of procedure of the Assembly of Corsica. After this decision was challenged before the Court of Appeal of Marseille, the latter upheld the decision to annul. The Assembly of Corsica later brought the matter to the Council of State but in its decision dated 5 June 2025, the Council of State again ruled that in accordance with the Constitution:

*"private individuals, in their relations with the public administration and with public services, cannot claim the right to use a language other than French."*

This decision by the Council of State is currently being challenged by the Assembly of Corsica before the European Court of Human Rights.

### **The basis for recognition**

We here wish to come back to the main analysis and proposals related to glottopolitics developed in 2011 in the report presented to the French Minister of the Interior by the Università di Corsica Pasquale Paoli, (*Mission universitaire de réflexion stratégique pour fonder le droit à l'avenir de la Corse*, contributors: Jean-Baptiste Calendini, Jacques Thiers, Dominique Verdoni, Paul-Marie Romani, Louis Orsini and Don Mathieu Santini).<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Available on the site of the Università di Corsica Pasquale Paoli at <https://studia.universita.corsica/plugins/actu/actu-front.php?id=923>.

## 1. Establishment of a general framework ensuring co-official status:

For this to work, ideological tensions need to be set aside and the operational framework of the linguistic policy needs to be adapted to the particular situation of Corsican without any automatic impact on other French situations. Subject to this caveat, co-official status is a genuine resource because:

- While granting official status to the language we want to support, such recognition is geographically limited to the region where the vitality of the language in question has been confirmed. In our case, the island of Corsica, the territory of the collectivity that already enjoys its own competences and for which a new request for institutional progress was presented in 2025.

- It encourages a positive perception which turns the language hitherto marginalized into a useful resource for the future. Indeed, to public opinion, officialization is seen as guaranteeing sustainability.

- It offers the indispensable legal framework needed for any genuine bilingualism policy, since it guarantees that Corsican used in the public space does not compete with French and removes the threat to the unity of the Republic perceived by some.

- Moreover, it is worth noting that the adoption of this measure would in no way alter the longstanding debate on the fact that, besides its international references, this approach enjoys the strong support of French speakers and French academics working in the field of social linguistic and linguistic interchange.

- Public opinion overall seems open to this measure. The successive victories (in different polls) of autonomist and nationalist movements, such as in the Assembly of Corsica since 2015, mean a new allocation of seats and responsibilities in the Assembly of Corsica, a tighter definition ("official">"co-official" status); the island's public opinion which is regularly taken into account, the declarations, the testimonies, the attitudes and the trends studied by researchers reveal a strong acceptance of the notion, opponents are now reduced to expressing rhetorical positions exclusively inspired by a clash of ideologies.

It is thus crucial and urgent to:

- Make sure Corsican is again perceived as a means to identify with an original culture accepted as a core value of sustainable development in harmony with inherited heritage (know-how and soft skills at the local and global level);

- Strengthen intergenerational transmission, within families obviously, but also within society as a whole by ensuring its general dissemination;

- Provide all residents with effective access to an active and lively practice of the Corsican language, without preferences or discrimination based on origin and/or other grounds;

- Ensure the language is treated on an equal footing with the other languages (first and foremost French, naturally) so as to quell any possible conflict of a linguistic nature;

- Boost the impact of controlled bilingualism to foster the development of individuals and of society;

- Promote the role of language related industries (translation, publishing, cultural and tourism development, e-learning, AI-based learning) in the development of the language, as well as that of Euro-Mediterranean cultural and economic spaces using Romance languages.

Intended evolution:

It is therefore crucial that the Corsican language be granted co-official status without which individual and collective efforts would not bring about the expected results. It would appear that only co-official status would guarantee expected results.

It is nevertheless worth noting that while that status strengthens bilingualism and progressively eradicates frustrations and conflicts while establishing (through controlled bilingualism) new rapports between Corsican and French, nothing would be solved if one stuck to principles alone. The form and implementing modalities of the measure thus need to be the foundations on which the future is built while avoiding external constraints, systematic spirit and citizen disempowerment.

Ultimately, the real status of co-official languages depends first and foremost on the situation in the territory. Generally speaking, when there are co-official languages, it is the situation in the territory that shapes the rights and freedoms related to the use of languages. The promotion and the vitality of the regional language also mainly depend on the value attributed to the region in question by politicians.

Consequently, attention must be drawn to a few crucial points:

- The co-official status of the Corsican language can be defined as originating from the consideration given to Corsica's very own interests. It is therefore not an end in itself but a measure meant to:

- Stem the erosion in spoken Corsican,
- Consolidate the progress made in the use of the language in public spaces,
- Allow citizens to control all language facilities at the disposal of the residents of Corsica.

- Its primary goal is to ensure effective implementation of a regional language policy and access to plurilingualism for each citizen without exception and discrimination.

- This function must allow for progressive objectives, precise practical modalities, and periodic assessment.

- On this basis, from a social point of view, the goal of the latest survey commissioned by the Collectivity of Corsica (Collectivité de Corse, CDC) in order to gauge the vitality of the language on the territory of Corsica in 2021, that covered a panel of qualified individuals questioned to fine tune the questions to be put to a representative sample of the population (1500 adults from all the micro-regions of the island, of various ages and as many men as women), was to confirm or rebut some 15 working hypotheses meant to define the perception of competences, of use, of learning resources and to assess the representation of the Corsican language in Corsica. Let us recall some of its main findings: over 40% of respondents wanted to answer in Corsican; 30% declared themselves bilingual; 13% stated that they spoke and understood the language well; 20% said they understood it well and spoke it a little; 63% are considered "speakers in the large sense of the term"; added to these 20% of "passive speakers" who understand the language but don't speak it. The language is perceived as an essential defining element of society and considered necessary: 71% of respondents consider that co-official status is a must.

It thus clearly appears that to be effective, the measure requires political and social consensus without which it will bring only limited results which will be insufficient to overcome the above-mentioned situation of conflict and fragmentation. Once the framework for co-official status is established, it is essential to organize a citizens' debate around the detail of the implementing measures. Following that debate, the decisions made by the Assembly of Corsica will be like a collective and

personal commitment. They will therefore help ensure accountability of those involved at various levels.

## 2. Cultural citizenship

The people of Corsica experienced dual culture for a long time: Latin/Romance languages, Tuscan/Ligurian/Corsican, French/Tuscan/Corsican, French/Corsican; monolingualism is a recent impoverishment.

Having for a long time been touted as the only legal, viable and valid citizenship, the French citizenship had ended up occupying all available mental and social space, going as far as establishing itself as a super-ethnic group disqualifying any other identification process. Many to this day still defend a monolithic and exclusive vision of this type of citizenship. When confronted with a definition of insularity that is just as normative, the perpetuation of opposition, perceived as normal political order on a territory considered difficult at the margins, is inevitable. This type of confrontation is naturally particularly detrimental to the latter, but recent history has shown that the use of force is nevertheless no longer the solution to solve that type of problem.

Indeed, this situation can lead to the most stylized form of conflict, i.e. revolt. A revolt erupts when the space for civic agreements shrinks. When moral order or policing grow stronger. When minorities then have the feeling they have been the target of institutional violence through dispossession of what they are. "Intermediate spaces" then connect to more underground areas to become sites of impulse and resistance, possibly even sites of guerrilla, that infringe upon public order.

By carrying such social meaning, institutions are no longer challenged only via political bodies, but first and foremost through civil society. From the middle of the 1980s, the idea of a crisis of the French model spread, revealing firstly the concerns related to the functioning of institutions: isn't the Republic's ability to integrate different cultures, including, by the way, those related to immigration, more and more limited? Failed socialization, or lack of access within the nation to genuine citizenship are symptoms of the Republic's lost social efficiency. It then becomes necessary to consider overhauling what can be undone or repaired, the economy and culture, the State, the society and cultural identities, the educational system and social actors, in order to underscore what is at stakes with such reconfiguration.

Corsica is faced with major immigration flows. From a cultural point of view, the current situation reflects multiplicity to the extent that it would be reckless not to look into the question from the viewpoint of education and training. While, from a social point of view, mixing multiples is more promising than accepting conflict, in the Academy of Corsica, where a high proportion of students have a migrant background, all the ingredients are there to compel it to adopt that contract, knowing that the very recognition of our culture is at stakes, as a minority culture, as well as that of other participating cultures.

It thus seems reasonable and useful to give the various phenomena discussed above a public face. They all refer to a "Corsican being" that hinges on two strong given:

- The obvious determination of Corsicans to ensure sustainability of their identity and heritage without breaking the traditional link to their land. This willingness stretches across society, above and beyond groups and ideologies;

- Regular integration of immigration from outside the island which needs to share that identity, individually feels that need and expresses its desire to do so. It is worth noting that among the various identity referents, access to the Corsican language is, in this population group, all the more explicitly

requested that it is pervasive in the current discourse about identity. And yet, through apparent paradox, this demand can be more subdued in the families that originate on the island.

In the report on Corsica's institutional evolution presented on 11 October 2021 and drafted by Wanda Mastor, holder of an agrégation of law, public law professor at the university of Toulouse Capitole (now professor at the Università di Corsica), requested by Gilles Simeoni, President of the Executive Council of the Collectivity of Corsica (contract number 2021JUR03), it is said that:

*“Comparative law provides conclusive evidence of the absence of incompatibility between the indivisible nature, possibly the unitary nature, of the Republic, and the recognition of regional languages within it. A review of European constitutions and of the decisions by constitutional courts highlights various significant elements. Comparative law teaches us that, from a legal point of view, the question of languages can be dealt with from two angles: first, that of the form of the State. The link between State unity and unilinguism is as obvious as that between a composite State (regional or federal) and multilingualism. Second, that of the rights of speakers. Here, regional languages are traditionally negatively associated with non-discrimination; and positively associated with the linguistic rights conferred upon said speakers.” (...)*

*In short, several basic approaches vis-a-vis regional languages can be observed in contemporary Europe. Most neighboring countries grant regional languages different legal status. Sometimes, a majority language and minority languages coexist, that benefit from protective measures. In this case, regional languages are only recognized within a clearly identified territory. In other words, they do not compete with the majority language at the national level. It is no more and no less than the expression of the right to be different. It is the right to differentiation, to use a term currently preferred by the French Government. Other countries have chosen official bilingualism, which can take several forms. This status grants citizens, in principle at least, the choice to use any of the official languages in their dealings with the State. Co-official status can apply at the level of the entire territory (such as in Belgium and in Switzerland, for instance) or only on part of that territory (such as in Spain and in Italy).*

Intended evolution:

Respond to urgent societal needs in order to move from a situation one has to endure (multiculturalism) to a situation that is chosen (interculturality).

What kind of educational responses can be appropriate considering the cultural heterogeneity of our society?

- The mono-cultural option: it is the State's responsibility to ensure socialization of all citizens in the "national culture" where all members of ethnic groups must blend into while abandoning their ethnic affiliation;
- The multicultural option: it is the State's responsibility to help all ethnic groups preserve their cultural heritage;
- The intercultural option: the State must adopt measures to encourage harmonious relations between various ethnic groups by multiplying opportunities for exchange and collaboration between the members of these groups.

Leaving behind Jacobin universalism to move towards intercultural pedagogy requires setting aside the idea of a single culture to build a common culture. Widening the range of references used in order to develop a new educational model whose knowledge needs to be (re)defined and whose evolutions lead to new knowledge.

### 3. Bilingual education:

- Seen as the product of the social and cultural context taken as a whole;
- Studied from the viewpoint of the meaning that this context carries;

#### Interculturality:

- All processes - psychological, interpersonal, institutional - generated by the interaction between cultures.

What knowledge is contained in intercultural competence?

- Learning bi-plurilingualism;
- Education for "decentring".

Cultural democracy as a framework?

- This project introduces the concept of cultural citizenship as opposed to the concept of political citizenship or social citizenship. This implies not seeing culture in elitist terms and rather fostering the development of cultural diversity at the level of the territories as well as at the level of individuals and groups.

- By recognizing and guaranteeing the rights of citizens to fully enjoy a culture different from the dominant culture of the State they belong to.

The notion of "cultural citizenship" is directly related to the notion of cultural rights. It introduces the notion of collective rights in culture and in certain cases it means an effort to revitalize indigenous cultures and communities.

It isn't incompatible with the now widespread idea of a European cultural identity based on people accessing socio-cultural and artistic events that stem from the public policies of nation-states and from their international cooperation programs. It actually completes the picture since its intervention reconciles the personal dimension and identification with the group, through the territory and inherited cultural heritage.

It may then be possible to realize that much needed connection between the Corsican language and the acquisition of new spheres of social competences, hoping that institutional political recognition wasn't too long coming and that speakers were not the victims of glottophagy, since they didn't benefit from "glottopolitics". In this respect, one can only regret the lack of linguistic planning between the State and the Collectivity of Corsica, and the lack of training plans National Education staff recruited by the State.

Indeed, in Corsica's statute, in January 2002 the State did not transfer all competencies to the Collectivity of Corsica (CDC) in the field of education, even though, in line with its enhanced competencies, the CDC has the authority to put forward a plan for the Corsican language but without granting it status. The Law dated 22 January 2002 on Corsica provides that "the Corsican language is taught during the regular timetable of preschools and primary schools in Corsica". This article does not say how this teaching will be integrated into the schools' timetable, how many hours the language will be taught, and it doesn't deal with the teaching of Corsican in secondary schools. In its decision dated 17 January 2002, le Constitutional Council nevertheless recalls that such teaching "*isn't mandatory [...] for students or for teachers*" and it considers that this provision is consistent with the Constitution "*provided that the teaching of the Corsican language, both in principle and in its implementing modalities, is optional in nature*". The CDC's linguistic policy is subject to the authorization of the

State's government. For the time being, the Corsican language and culture benefit from preservation and promotion measures, as State heritage. Since 2008, the drafter has chosen to recognize regional languages: article 40 of Constitutional Law No. 2008-724 dated 23 July 2008 introduces a new article 75-1 in Title XII which provides that "*Regional languages are part of France's heritage*". However, in 2011 the Constitutional Council decided that such recognition "*does not establish a right or a freedom guaranteed by the Constitution*". Law No. 2021-641 dated 21 May 2021 on the protection of regional languages as aspects of cultural heritage and their promotion, contains additional measures to protect and promote regional languages, such as in the fields of teaching and public services. The Constitutional Council censured two provisions because it considered that they were contrary to article 2 of the Constitution:

- The teaching of regional languages through immersion, which involves using the regional language as "*primary language of instruction and as language of communication within the educational establishment*";

- The use of diacritical marks in civil status records which "*recognizes the right of individuals to use a language other than French in their dealings with the administration and public services*".

Finally, the Corsican language is also used in the media: certain programs are available in Corsican, notably on regional channel France 3 Corsica or on radio Ici RCFM (*Radio Corse Frequenza Mora*), a local radio station of Radio France.

By way of conclusion, the ability to suggest standards adjustments entrusted to the Collectivity of Corsica coexists with the civil law constitutional framework on the possibility to initiate experiments. These procedures, conceived as responses to the requests for territorial differentiation, have limitations. Consequently, to this day, a request is pending in Corsica to reopen an autonomy process, for from an institutional point of view its status is incomplete. A draft constitutional text is being prepared, especially following the events of 2022. On 2 March 2022, Yvan Colonna, who served a life sentence in Arles for murdering Prefect Claude Érignac, was violently assaulted by a fellow prisoner. Placed in induced coma, he died on 21 March 2022. His assault, followed by the announcement of his death aroused strong emotions in Corsica's society. In response to the calls by high-school students, students, nationalist organizations or trade unions, large scale population demonstrations were staged in Corti, Bastia and Ajaccio on 6 March, 13 March and 3 April 2022 to the rallying cries of *Ghjustizia è Libertà* (Justice and Freedom). Yvan Colonna's tragic death thus sparked substantial mobilizations, especially among the young population of Corsica, which led the Government to open an unprecedented round of talks with the island's elected representatives that launched the "Beauvau process". The mobilization of the spring of 2022 highlighted the political demands carried by part of Corsica's youth and relayed by the elected representatives of the collectivity, confirming the resurgence of Corsica's nationalist movement. In addition to demanding that an investigation be launched into the death of Yvan Colonna, the demands related also to the repatriation to Corsica of Corsican activists incarcerated for violent actions.

More broadly, many demonstrators demanded then and still demand the recognition of the people of Corsica via the island's autonomy or its independence, co-official status for the Corsican language (only ensured at the regional level for now), the generalization of bi-plurilingualism and the authorization (not just on an experimental basis) to practice teaching through immersion.

In sum, Corsica, which is attached to France by the Treaty of Versailles of 1768, was administered in the same conditions as other parts of the national territory for over two centuries. It is Law No. 82-214 dated 2 March 1982 conferring special status on the region of Corsica which, for the first time, granted the region a status different from that of other regions. That law was then replaced

by Law No. 91-428 dated 13 May 1991 on the status of the Corsica territorial collectivity, followed by Law No. 2022-92 dated 22 January 2002 on Corsica.

These three laws were referred to the Constitutional Council for review. The first was declared not unconstitutional in decision No. 82-138 DC dated 25 February 1982. Furthermore, in decisions No. 91-290 DC dated 9 May 1991 and No. 2001-454 DC dated 17 January 2002, the Council declared that several important provisions of the laws of 1991 and 2002 were unconstitutional. Two main ideas emerge from the three decisions of the Constitutional Council:

- Corsica is a specific territorial collectivity;
- Corsica is an integral part of the Republic.

Based on the provisions of article 72 of the Constitution, the Constitutional Council admitted that Corsica could be granted a specific status, but that such status should remain that of a territorial collectivity, reconciling the principle of local authorities administrative freedom and State prerogatives.

To this day, Corsica still doesn't have an autonomy status despite the various changes in status that occurred since 1981. It remains a region, though it is exempt from ordinary law but only in so far as it is endowed with adaptation power. It is an exception in the Mediterranean compared to its island neighbors: Sicily and Sardinia have been autonomous since 1948; Cyprus gained independence in 1959, and Malta in 1964; the islands of Madeira and Azores have been autonomous since 1976 and the Balearic Islands since 1983.

For more information on the situation in Corsica, please refer to the information report we drew on to prepare this document, presented in keeping with article 145 of the rules of procedure by the Committee on constitutional laws, legislation and administration of the republic, at the end of a fact-finding mission on "*the institutional future of Corsica*"<sup>71</sup>.

## **Comparison with the Moroccan Initiative for the autonomy of the Sahara Region**

### **Question 1:**

The Moroccan Initiative for the Autonomy of the Sahara provides, in article 5, that: [...] *the Sahara populations will themselves run their affairs democratically, through legislative, executive and judicial bodies enjoying exclusive powers. They will have the financial resources needed for the region's development in all fields and will take an active part in the nation's economic, social and cultural life*". How does Corsica's current level of autonomy compare to such a status?

**Answer:** Corsica's status gives it the ability to adapt the laws adopted by the National Assembly. The Assembly of Corsica has no legislative power. The judicial sphere remains a sovereign power. However, the Collectivity of Corsica (CDC) has a president of its executive branch surrounded by advisors who, within the spheres of competencies of Corsica, exercise their decision-making power.

### **Question 2:**

Among the exclusive powers that the Sahara populations should exercise under the autonomy status there is education and cultural affairs, including the promotion of the Saharan Hassani cultural heritage, which includes the dialect spoken by indigenous populations. Do you think that such status and such competencies over Corsica's culture and language would be compatible with Corsica belonging in the French Republic?

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<sup>71</sup> Available at [https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/17/rapports/cion\\_lois/117b1466\\_rapport-information#](https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/17/rapports/cion_lois/117b1466_rapport-information#)

**Answer:** In France, education remains a sovereign power. Even following the transfer of competencies in 2002, including in the fields of heritage, culture and training, the CDC can only submit proposals. On various occasions, the Constitutional Council censured the provisions on the teaching of the Corsican language and recalled that the French language is the only language of the Republic. To ensure compatibility, the Constitution would need to be revised.

### **Question 3:**

Even though in Morocco the only two official languages are standard modern Arabic and standard Moroccan Berber, the regional language of the Sahara, the Hassâniyya, is freely practiced in the region, including in schools and in the media, and the preservation of the region's cultural heritage is materially and financially supported by the central Government. Do you think such a system could be applicable in Corsica?

**Answer:** So long as the Corsican language remains optional, such a system already exists, but the lack of goal-based planning partly compromises the promotion and dissemination of the Corsican language.

### **Question 4:**

The Moroccan project provides that, when adopted and confirmed by referendum, the autonomy status for the Sahara Region will be institutionalized and written in the Constitution of the Kingdom, which will ensure its sustainability. Do you think, considering the reservations raised so far by the French Government, the French Parliament or the French Constitutional Council, that the constitutionalization of Corsica's autonomy and of the recognition of the Corsican language should be guaranteed in France?

**Answer:** The "Beauvau Process<sup>72</sup>" that opened in 2022 foresees a meeting of Congress (the two chambers of the French parliament) in order to insert in a new article of the Constitution a new status for Corsica which would transform it from a decentralized region to an autonomous region with legislative powers in certain areas and subject to constitutional review. An organic law is in the process of being drafted. In practice, as things stand, when a law is adopted at the national level, the Assembly of Corsica must demonstrate that it is not adapted to Corsica and must require its modification for Corsica. This is a time consuming procedure that has encountered regulatory limitations in its implementation. The Beauvau Process suggested proceeding the other way round: the Assembly of Corsica legislates in the areas under its purview as established in its status and the Constitutional Council ensures constitutional review. As for Corsica's language and culture, the recent positions adopted by the State in Corsica, through the Rector of the Academy, give cause for hope that especially from a linguistic point of view, the teaching of Corsican will be available to everyone just like immersion learning. On the ground, the situation is progressing, giving hope that a new institutional milestone be reached via the Beauvau Process.

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<sup>72</sup> In Paris, the Place Beauvau is the headquarters of the Ministry of the interior, which is negotiating a new autonomy status for Corsica with its representatives.

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## LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL IDENTITY OF ARUBA (THE NETHERLANDS)

**Dr Marc FINAUD<sup>73</sup>**

Aruba is a Caribbean island north of Venezuela which became in 1986 a “constituent country of the Netherlands” together with the Netherlands itself and two other Caribbean islands, Curaçao and Sint Maarten.

It is a relatively small territory of 179 km<sup>2</sup>, and a population of around 125,000 people who benefit from the Dutch citizenship but constitute a group characterized by its ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious diversity, mainly as a result of centuries of invasions, colonization, and migration on top of indigenous populations.

### **A Complex History of Migration and Colonization**

The name of the country probably comes from an ancient Amerindian language spoken on the coast of Venezuela and in the neighbouring Caribbean islands. Archaeological findings suggest that early human migration and cultural exchange were already part of the cultural pattern of Archaic Indians at an early stage. Those Archaic Indians were replaced from the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD by the Caquetío Indians who belonged to the Arawak people and established chiefdoms, a primitive form of kingdoms, based on the political and religious alliances between indigenous communities than on the military control. Those Indians brought with them ceramics and agriculture that developed the economy along with regional trade, especially in salt, canoes, beads, and tobacco.

The Spanish conquistadors interrupted this process of expansion at the time of the European contact (AD 1499–1535). The Caquetío population was incorporated into the Spanish colonial empire around 1500. In 1501, Alonso De Ojeda acquired the exclusive right to exploit the current Venezuelan coastal area including Aruba and, from his base in the peninsula of Guajira between Colombia and Venezuela, he conducted trade and raids, including slave hunts. Most of the Caquetío people were taken to Hispaniola as forced labourers. Many of them died on the way or later in the gold mines by the Spanish colonizers or during a devastating smallpox epidemic. Later on, new Indians migrated from the mainland to Aruba. But exploitation of the West Indian islands proved unprofitable, and Spanish settlers moved elsewhere while other European nations (England, France, the Netherlands, and Denmark) explored the possibilities of piracy and trade on the Caribbean islands.

The Dutch began to be active in the trade of salt needed for their fish preservation and cheese industry. In 1634 they landed in Aruba and discovered its potential in extracting salt. But, during the 17th century, the Dutch fought three wars with England and the resulting peace treaty led to a weakening of the Dutch supremacy with a lasting impact on regional trade. Nevertheless, the Caribbean islands eventually regained stability and prosperity, and experiencing fewer changes in colonial holdings for centuries.

The British Empire took control of Aruba during the Napoleonic Wars, holding it from 1806 to 1816, after which it was returned to Dutch authority by a new treaty. Aruba was integrated into the Colony of Curaçao and Dependencies. Throughout the 19th century, the island's economy evolved,

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centred around gold, phosphate, and the aloe vera industry. However, despite these economic activities, Aruba continued to be a relatively underdeveloped and economically disadvantaged region during this period. It was only from the 1920s that crude oil from Venezuela began to be refined in Aruba, bringing greater prosperity to the island.

After World War II, in 1947, Aruba formulated its first constitution for Aruba's status as an autonomous state within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. By 1954, the Charter of the Kingdom of the Netherlands was established, providing a framework for relations between Aruba and the rest of the Kingdom. That created the Netherlands Antilles, which united all of the Dutch colonies in the Caribbean into one administrative structure. However, many Arubans were unhappy with the arrangement, because the policy was perceived as being dominated by Curaçao whose population was mainly made of descendants of African slaves.

In the 1970s, Aruba sought greater autonomy and even adopted its own flag and national anthem. In 1977, a referendum was held with the support of the United Nations in which 82% of the participants voted for complete independence from the Netherlands. After a general strike, the Netherlands accepted to work with Aruba on a report towards independence. In 1983, Aruba reached an official agreement within the Kingdom for its independence, to be developed in a series of steps as the Crown granted increasing autonomy. In 1985, Aruba's constitution was unanimously approved.

In 1986, Aruba seceded from the Netherlands Antilles and, after a general election for its first parliament, it officially became a "constituent country" of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, with full independence planned for 1996. But in 1990, at Aruba's request, Aruba, the Netherlands, and the other Dutch Caribbean islands decided to postpone indefinitely Aruba's transition to full independence. The constitutional provision scheduling Aruba's complete independence was rescinded in 1995. However, it was decided that the process could be revived after another referendum. After Aruba's oil refinery had closed in 1985, the island had lost its economic wealth that motivated the drive for independence and turned to tourism as a main source of revenue.

### **An Ethnically, Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Society**

In terms of country of birth, only two thirds of Aruba's population are Aruban; the rest is shared between the Netherlands (ca. 5%), Latin American or Caribbean countries (20%, with refugees from Venezuela since 2019 reaching 15%), China (1%) and other origins (6%). Aruba's population is primarily descended from Caquetío Indians, Dutch settlers, Spanish settlers, enslaved Africans and to a lesser extent other groups who have settled on Aruba over time, including Venezuelans, Colombians, Dominicans, Portuguese, Greeks, Italians, English, French, Germans, West Indians, Indo-Caribbeans, Chinese, Filipinos, Koreans, Javanese, Levantine Arabs and Sephardic Jews.

Aruba is a multilingual society. The official languages are Dutch and Papiamentu, a Creole language based mainly on Spanish and Portuguese that also incorporates words from the Caquetío language, Dutch, various West-African languages and English. While Dutch is the sole language for all administration and legal matters, Papiamentu is the predominant language used in Aruba. English and Spanish are also widely spoken on the island, their usage having grown due to tourism and immigration. Other common languages spoken, based on the size of their community, include Portuguese, Chinese, French and German.

In recent years, the Aruba government has shown an increased interest in acknowledging the cultural and historical importance of Papiamentu. Although spoken Papiamentu is fairly similar among the several Caribbean islands, the spelling differs in Aruba compared to Curaçao and Bonaire.

Due to the colonial history and the proximity of Spanish colonies such as Venezuela and Colombia, Spanish became an important language in the 18th century. Today, about 13% of the population speak Spanish natively. The use of English dates to the early 19th century, when the British ruled those Caribbean islands.

In terms of religion, also due to colonization, Roman Catholicism is the dominant religion, followed by approximately 75% of the population. A diverse range of other religions are practiced, including Protestantism, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, and African diaspora religions.

### **An Extensive Autonomy in Preserving Linguistic and Cultural Identity**

In the relationship between Aruba and the Netherlands, matters such as foreign affairs and defence are handled by the Netherlands. Aruba is one of the overseas countries and territories (OCT) of the European Union (EU) and maintains economic and cultural relations with the EU and the United States. Although not officially a part of the EU, Aruba does receive support from the European Development Fund. Aruba is also a member of several international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and Interpol.

Domestically, Aruba is governed by a 21-member Parliament elected by direct, popular vote to serve a four-year term, and an eight-member Cabinet. The Governor of Aruba, who both represents the monarch and heads the government, is appointed for a six-year term by the Dutch monarch, and Aruba's Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister are indirectly elected by the Parliament for four-year terms. The local government has jurisdiction over most domestic affairs, including education, healthcare, and infrastructure. Aruba is represented by a Minister Plenipotentiary in The Hague.

Aruba's judicial system is based on the Netherlands model with a Court of First Instance, a Joint Court of Justice of Aruba, Curaçao, Sint Maarten, and of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba, and the Supreme Court of Justice of the Netherlands. The Aruba Police Force is the law enforcement agency and operates district precincts in four cities. However, there are differences with the rest of the Kingdom of the Netherlands such as not being part of the Law Enforcement Council, a legal entity based on a Kingdom Act of 2010, and not having an ombudsman.

Cultural ownership of Aruba is a rich legacy from its diverse history. The island's culture is a blend of indigenous, African, and European influences, with a strong presence of Dutch heritage. Festivities, music, and culinary traditions are integral aspects of Aruban culture. Events like Carnival and Dia di Betico celebrate the island's heritage and foster a sense of community among residents. The preservation and promotion of cultural heritage are essential components of Aruba's identity. There are many media (newspapers, radio and TV stations) in the main local language.

Regarding education, historically, Dutch was not widely spoken on the island, except within colonial administration, and its usage increased in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Students in Curaçao, Aruba, and Bonaire were predominantly taught in Spanish until the late 18th century. Dutch now serves as the primary language of instruction, with Papiamentu taught as a subject in the lower grades of secondary education.

The educational system mirrors the Dutch education structure with public national education financed by the government of Aruba. The education landscape includes a mix of public and private institutions. The University of Aruba is the national university and, in addition, Aruba hosts three medical schools.

In the governmental structure of Aruba, Culture is attached to the Ministry of Finance that oversees, among others, the Archaeological Museum, the Cultural Fund, the UNESCO Committee, the

Union of Cultural Organisations, the Music School, the History Museum, and the Monuments Office. Education is managed by Ministry of Education and Sports, that includes the Sports Union, the National Library, the Idiom Project, the Pedagogical Institute, Multilingual Schools, Science and Sustainable Development, the University of Aruba, etc.

In sum, this blend of autonomy and connection to the Netherlands defines Aruba's unique status today, allowing the island to preserve its cultural heritage while also enjoying the benefits of being part of a larger, stable nation.

### **Comparison with the Moroccan Initiative for the Autonomy of the Sahara Region**

According to the Moroccan Initiative for the Autonomy of the Sahara Region, and more specifically its provisions relating to cultural and linguistic identity:

- Art. 5: “[...] *the Sahara populations will themselves run their affairs democratically, through legislative, executive, and judicial bodies enjoying exclusive powers. They will have the financial resources needed for the Region’s development in all fields, and will take an active part in the nation’s economic, social and **cultural** life.*

- Art. 12: *In keeping with democratic principles and procedures, and acting through legislative, executive, and judicial bodies, the populations of the Sahara autonomous Region shall exercise powers, within the Region’s territorial boundaries, mainly over the following:*

○[...] *In the social sector: housing, **education**, health, employment, sports, social welfare, and social security;*

○**Cultural** affairs, including promotion of the Saharan Hassani **cultural heritage** [...]”

There are some **similarities** between Aruba and the Sahara Region:

- Both are an integral part of the Kingdom to which they belong with the population enjoying the same citizenship as in those Kingdoms.

- At the same time, they both enjoy or will enjoy a widespread autonomy that includes the cultural heritage, languages, and education but excludes foreign policy and defence.

- As an exception to the Kingdom’s exclusive competence over foreign affairs, Aruba’s status allowed it to become a full member of some international organisations such as the IMF, Interpol or regional organisations in the Caribbean and an associated state of UNESCO, while the Sahara Region would be consulted by the Moroccan government on international issues that may affect it and would be allowed, in consultation with the government, to establish cooperation relations with foreign Regions to foster interregional dialogue and cooperation.

- They both elect their Parliament and, indirectly, their government that enact legislation and regulations including on education and culture, while the King appoints his representative to the autonomous entity.

- In order to apply its policy, including on education and culture, the autonomous region benefits from its own resources, including taxation and proceeds from natural resources, but can also receive assistance from the central government (and the European Union in the case of Aruba).

- The local languages or dialects in the autonomous region are protected by law and freely practiced in local education, cultural activities, business activities, the media, etc.

There are also **differences** between Aruba and the Sahara Region:

- Aruba is an island separated from the Netherlands by 4,000 km while the Sahara Region is an integral part of Morocco's land territory with full continuity in access.

- In Morocco, in addition to the Kingdom's competence on foreign affairs and defence, the King also keeps his religious prerogatives while in Aruba the Dutch authorities have no religious competences.

- Aruba keeps its own flag, its own anthem, and its own currency, while in Morocco the Kingdom keeps exclusive jurisdiction over the attributes of sovereignty, especially the flag, the national anthem and the currency.

- In Morocco, the King's representative to the Sahara Region only represents the State there but does not lead the local government, unlike in Aruba.

- In terms of language, culture, and religion, each autonomous region has a heritage from its own specific history where colonization played a role. However, in the case of Aruba, there is probably more diversity due to the pre-historic and neo-Indian migrations of indigenous populations followed by waves of colonial influences, while in the Sahara Region, the Saharawi populations are ethnically more homogenous, their languages are less numerous since the use of the national language is widespread, and they only have one religion, the same as in the rest of the Kingdom.

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## CONCLUSION

**Dr Marc FINAUD<sup>74</sup>**

I wish to thank the experts who contributed to this international research seminar on the topic “Linguistic and Cultural Identity in Regimes of Territorial Autonomy” organised by the Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Morocco to the United Nations in New York.

We had a chance to compare the regulations or practices in four more or less autonomous regions: the Spanish Basque Country, the French island of Corsica, the Chinese Special Administrative Region of Macau, and the constituent country of Aruba within the Netherlands. In each case, we addressed similarities and differences with the Moroccan Initiative for the Autonomy of the Sahara Region regarding that aspect of linguistic and cultural identity.

I will not repeat the points made by the speakers because each case is different as a result of history, colonization, cultural influences, migration of population, etc. There are a number of similarities between those cases and the status proposed by Morocco for the Sahara Region: they all have a more or less advanced system of internal autonomy while foreign policy and defence remains in the hands of the central government as well as the symbols of sovereignty (the flag, the anthem, and the currency) with some exceptions in the cases of Aruba and the Basque Country. There are also exceptions regarding international relations since Morocco will consult the Sahara Region on matters concerning it and will allow cooperation with other regions while Aruba is a member of international or regional organisations and Macau has the opportunity to develop relations with Portuguese-speaking countries.

Regarding the topic of our attention, cultural and linguistic identity, we also see a lot of specificity and diversity in the processes leading to a more or less advanced form of autonomy. But there are two main elements that were mentioned in the various presentations:

- First, the idea of recognition of the regional cultural and linguistic identity, possibly institutionally or constitutionally, in a statute or an agreement giving a special status to the regional specificities, preferably on an equal status (we can see this in Macau where Portuguese is an official language although it is a minority language, but also in the Basque Country where the Basque language is now a majority language);

- The other key aspect is not only allowing, protecting, or preserving the regional language and culture, but also giving the regional authorities the right and the resources to promote this specificity through linguistic policy, education, cultural activities, which requires resources. It is important for such resources to be provided either by the regional authorities (like in the Moroccan Initiative) or by the central government or both (like in Corsica where the State provides the teachers and the administrative framework).

I think this seminar has demonstrated the importance of cultural and linguistic identity and specificity in regimes of territorial autonomy. In the cases we addressed previously, this issue did not come up all the time because, sometimes, you may have regional autonomy without speaking a different language, but in many cases, this is a key component of identity that needs to be recognized as a result of efforts, sometimes as a result of conflict for this autonomy to be recognized.

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