

Northern Sardinian dialect variation:

A diachronic phonological argument for the dialect distinction of Maddalenino

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In Italy, there is still much debate over what constitutes a dialect and a minor language. Most linguists, who are not themselves Italian, are quicker to differentiate between the two. In Italian libraries, however, many books still persist in calling, what are generally now accepted as minor languages elsewhere, dialects of Italian. This paper focuses on the languages of Corsica and Sardinia, specifically Maddalenino as a distinct dialect of Corsican, based on the differences in phonology from other Corsican and Sardinian dialects. Corsican was accepted as its own branch of the Italo-Romance language group in 1988 (Blackwood, 2004). The importance of minority language protection is recognized in the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*<sup>3</sup> (which Italy has signed but not yet ratified) and Sardinian specifically is recognized as being a minority language in law 482 of the Italian Constitution.<sup>1</sup> According to Repetti (2000:1), the minor languages in Italy are “daughter languages of Latin and sister languages of each other, of standard Italian, and of other Romance languages.”

At the time of Unification, in 1861, only an estimated 2.5-10% of the population living in the geographic region of Italy spoke what is considered today to be Italian. There is an “unprecedented urgency” to study and catalogue minor languages in Italy (Repetti, 2000:2). Dialect speakers are emigrating from rural to urban areas on a more frequent basis every passing year. Within a few generations, most dialects will be Italianized to such an extent that only traces remain of the original. While Italian is used as a common language of communication, many Italian citizens consider preservation of dialects and minor languages to be an important part of their heritage and culture. In a 2007 survey, almost 70% of Sardinians described themselves as active users of at least one local language (Tufi, 2013).

The dialects of the geographic area of Northern Sardinia are now considered to be dialects of Corsican language rather than Sardinian (see figure 1). They are regionally recognized by Sardinian law as separate from the Sardinian language.<sup>2</sup> The northwestern area speaks Sassarese, a mix of Corsican, Logudorese, Genoese Italian and standard Italian. The northernmost part of Sardinia speaks Gallurese, an older phase of meridional Corsican with a strong lexical influence from Sardinian (Wagner, 1951). Maddalenino, spoken exclusively on the small archipelago of La Maddalena, consists of mostly meridional Corsican with Ligurian or Genoese influence brought down from Bonifacio, with some influence from standard Italian and Gallurese (Maxia, 2009). According to de Martino, the Italianization in La Maddalena is more extensive than other Sardinian locales (2006).

The dialect examples that follow are used from the extensive works Renzo de Martino has written on the subject.

### Rhotacism

Rhotacism from the archaic Genoese influence, particular to Ligurian dialects in general, passed on to Sassarese and Bonifacino, and so, also to Maddalenino.

/l/ → [ɾ] / V\_\_C

#### Maddalenino from Genoese dialect

*barbuttà* [baɾbutːta]

*farsu* [faɾsu] or [faɾzu]

*quarchi* [kwaɾki]

*surdatu* [suɾdatu]

#### Standard Italian

*balbettare* [balbetːtare]

*falso* [falso]

*qualche* [kwalke]

*soldato* [soldato]

#### Maddalenino from Bonifacino

*barconu* [baɾkonu]

*quarcosa* [kwaɾkoza]

#### Standard Italian

*balcone* [balcone]

*qualcosa* [kwalkoza]

The [ɾ] derived from rhotacism is less trilled than the etymological [r]. In these dialects, it is necessary to distinguish, for example, the difference between *Parma* [parma] and *parma* [paɾma], the pronunciation in Maddalenino for the Standard Italian word, *palma* [palma]. Some Italian linguists describe it as sounding like a cross between a [l] and a [r].

### Opening of [e]

/e/ → [a]/\_\_[r]

#### Maddalenino

*arimàni* [arimani]

(from Latin: *heri mane*)

*ciarbeddhu* [tʃarbedːdʰu]

*marcatu* [markatu]

*argogliu* [argolːɰu]

#### Standard Italian

*ieri* [jeri]

*cervello* [tʃervelːlo]

*mercato* [merkato]

*orgoglio* [orgolːɰo]

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In Gallurese, the [e] goes to [a] before [l] as well as [r]. De Martino theorizes that when this rule does not apply, in both Maddalenino and Gallurese, i.e. the [e] is not changed, the words are most likely more recent introductions from standard Italian (59).

### Nasalization of liquid before [t]

/l/ → [n]/\_\_\_\_[t]

#### Maddalenino

antru [antru]

#### Standard Italian

altro [altro]

Occasionally the nasalization weakens the voiceless alveolar stop, and it passes to the corresponding voiced alveolar stop. [d] → [t]/[n]\_\_\_\_\_

[-voice] → [+voice]/[+nasal]\_\_\_\_\_

#### Maddalenino

monda [monda]

#### Standard Italian

molto [molto]

### Vocalic prosthesis with [r]

In many dialects, words in Standard Italian that begin with the trilled [r], have a vowel put before them, most often an [a]. The vowel is followed by phonotactic gemination in some dialects, including Gallurese and Maddalenino. In Meridional Corsican it is generally not geminated, aradicassi [aradikas:si], which in standard Italian is radicansi [radikarsi].

/r/ → [ar: r]/\_\_\_\_\_word

#### Maddalenino

arrubà [ar:ruba]

#### Standard Italian

rubare [rubare]

In Meridional Corsican it is generally not geminated, aradicassi [aradikas:si], which in standard Italian is radicansi [radikarsi].

### Interchanging of liquids

This can be seen also in the evolution from Latin to vulgar Italian arbore [arbore] → albero [albero].

/l/ → [r]/V\_\_\_\_C

**Cl, Fl, Pl liquid -> glide**

Sardinian dialects, other than common Logudorese, conserve the original Latin liquid [l] after the stops, [k] and [p], and the fricative, [f], all voiceless. In general, most Italian and Corsican dialects, including Maddalenino, turn the liquid into a glide.

[l] -> [j]/[k][p][f]\_\_\_\_\_V

Latin	Maddalenino	Sardinian	Standard Italian
<i>clericus</i>	<i>chiericu</i> [kjeriku]	<i>clericu</i> [kleriku]	<i>chierico</i> [kjeriko]
<i>ecclesia</i>	<i>ghjesgia</i> [gjeʒa]	<i>clesia</i> [klezja]	<i>chiesa</i> [kjeza]
<i>floris</i>	<i>fiori</i> [fjori]	<i>flori</i> [flori]	<i>fiore</i> [fjore]
<i>flamma</i>	<i>fiara</i> [fjara]	<i>flamma</i> [flam:ma]	<i>fiamma</i> [fjam:ma]
<i>flumen</i>	<i>fiumi</i> [fjumi]	<i>flumini</i> [flumini]	<i>fiume</i> [fjume]
<i>placere</i>	<i>piasgè</i> [pjaʒe]	<i>plaghere</i> [plagere]	<i>piacere</i> [pjatʃere]
<i>platea</i>	<i>piazza</i> [pjat:tʃa]	<i>plazza</i> [plat:tʃa]	<i>piazza</i> [pjat:tʃa]
<i>plenus</i>	<i>pienu</i> [pjenu]	<i>plenu</i> [plenu]	<i>pieno</i> [pjeno]

In common Logudorese, the [l] from Latin goes to [r], after [k], [p] and [f].

Ex. *ecclesia* -> *cresia* [krezja]

**Retroflexion**

[l:l], [ʎ] -> [d:d]

Not very common to Italian dialects, this rule is present in Sardinian, Gallurese, Sicilian and Meridional Corsican. Most other Corsican dialects persist with the geminated [l], *bellu* not *beddhu*, as well as the palatal lateral approximant [ʎ], *fogliu* [foʎu] not *foddhu* [fɔd:du], as in Gallurese. In Standard Italian, the [ʎ] is a self-geminant (Canipa, ). The retroflex, geminated [d:d] is a very common sound in Maddalenino.

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### Maddalenino

*meddhu* [mɛd:ɖu]

*fiddholu* [fid:ɖolu]

*beddhu* [bɛd:ɖu]

### Standard Italian

*miglio* [mɛλ:lo]

*figliolo* [fiλ:lolo]

*bello* [bɛl:lo]

### Exceptions

Words corresponding to Standard Italian endings, -oglio, -ogio/-ggio, in Maddalenino, go to [g:gju]. In Gallurese they sometimes go to [d:ɖu], other times to [ʃu].

### Maddalenino

*vogghju* [vog:gju]

*fogghju* [fog:gju]

*rilogghju* [rilog:gju]

*magghju* [mag:gju]

### Gallurese

*voddhu* [vod:ɖu]

*foddhu* [fod:ɖu]

*rilociu* [rilotʃu]

-

### Standard Italian

*voglio* [vɔλ:lo]

*foglio* [fɔλ:lo]

*orologio* [oroloʒo]

*maggio* [mad:ʒo]

There are also instances of changes such as, *olio* [oʎo] is *ogliu* [oʎu] in Maddalenino and *ociu* [otʃu] in Gallurese.

### Lenition

In Maddalenino deletion of the [v] can occur. However, it is not a consistent rule. Either version of the word is understood and acceptable.

### Maddalenino

*lavatu* [lavatu] or *laatu* [la:atu]

*favori* [favori] or *faori* [faori]

*arrivatu* [arrivatu] or *arriatu* [arriatu]

### Standard Italian

*lavato* [lavato]

*favore* [favore]

*arrivato* [arrivato]

### Metathesis

This phonetic phenomenon is common in many languages, especially in the environment of liquids [l] and [r]. It consists of the transposing of phonemes with each other. Many Italian

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words went through this transformation from the Latin. Some examples of metathesis in Maddalenino follow:

### **Maddalenino**

*stacca* [stakka]

*drintu* [drintu]

*crobu* [krobu] & *crou* [krou]

*gamezzenu* [gamɛd:ʒenu]

*grillanda* [gril:landa]

### **Standard Italian**

*tasca* [taska]

*dentro* [dentro]

*corvo* [kɔrvo]

*magazzino* [magad:ʒino]

*ghirlanda* [girlanda]

The Bonifacino for the Italian, *corvo*, is *crovu* [krovu]. The Gallurese is *colbu* [kolbu], there is no transposing of sounds. The [v] is devoiced and the liquid [l] goes to [r], as is common in Gallurese.

### **Voicing and devoicing of bilabial stop [b] → [v], [v] → [b]**

There is a small amount in Maddalenino of [v]→[b] and [b]→[v], as well as Corsican dialects, other than Gallurese and Sassarese. It is very common in Sardinian, and it is the Sardinian influence in Sassarese and Gallurese, that passes on this rule.

### **[str] → [ʃ]**

In general, Gallurese and Northern Corsican conserve the [str] from standard Italian. It is particular to Maddalenino, for the [str] to become the voiceless alveopalatal fricative [ʃ], especially in function words. Ex. *nosciu, noscia, nosci* [nɔʃi, -a, -u]; *vosciu, voscia, vosci* [vɔʃi, -a, -u]. Certain Ligurian vernaculars also have this, but it is not one of the more common dialectal occurrences. Occasionally dialects of Meridional Corsican will pronounce it with the [ʃ], mostly the ones with more contact with La Maddalena. It is more commonly pronounced as a geminated [s], *nossu* [nɔs:su] and *vossu* [vɔs:su] in the southern part of Corsica.

### **Alveopalatal affricates [tʃ] and [dʒ]**

The alveopalatal affricates [tʃ] and [dʒ] transformed from the Latin suffixes, *-sius, -sia, -sium*, in Corsican dialects, Gallurese, Sassarese and Maddalenino, into the voiced alveopalatal fricative [ʒ]. This is not a sound common to dialects of Italian, other than the Ligurian (Genoese) dialects, most likely whence they originated in the Corsican dialects.

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### Maddalenino

*basgiu* [baʒu]

*casgiu* [caʒu]

*ragiunà* [raʒuna]

### Standard Italian

*bacio* [batʃo]

*formaggio* [fɔrmaːdʒo]

*raggione* [radʒone]

In most Italian dialects, the [tʃ] and [dʒ] go to the voiceless alveopalatal fricative [ʃ]. In the Roman dialect, *riceve* [ritʃeve] from Standard Italian is *arisceve* [ariʃeve]. Notice the [a] before the [r] discussed previously. In archaic Tuscan Italian, *bruciare* [bruʃare], now *bruciare* [brutʃare] in Standard Italian, is *brusgià* [bruʒa] in Maddalenino.

### Intervocalic voicing of velar: /k/ -> [g]/V\_\_V

In Maddalenino, more than other Corsican dialects, the voiceless [k] becomes voiced intervocalically.

### Maddalenino

*siguru* [siguru]

### Standard Italian

*sicuro* [sikuro]

### Velars with semi-vowels: [kw] and [gw]

The voiceless velar [k] paired with the semi-vowel [w] is a common construction and is generally conserved in standard Italian. The voiced counterpart [g] paired with [w] is not very common to Latin, and is never word initial. The [gw] sound, however, is very common in Italian and Corsican dialects.

Sardinian dialects and Gallurese, more often than not, do not conserve the [kw] from Latin pronunciation, or the [gw] from Italian. They are reduced to [k] and [g], the voiceless and voiced velar.

Ex. *liquori* [likwori] -> *licori* [likori]; *languente* [langwente] -> *langhenti* [langenti]

In the Sardinian dialect, Logudorese, the [g] even goes to [b], *limba* [limba] from the Latin, *lingua*, one of the few instances of the [gw] in Latin. Necessarily, in these instances, the nasal [ŋ] becomes the bilabial nasal [m] before a bilabial stop [b]. In Gallurese, *lingua* is *linga* [liŋa], in Bonifacino, *lengua* [lɛŋwa], in Maddalenino and generally most other Corsican dialects, they preserve the original Latin, *lingua* [liŋwa].

In general, islands conserve more language structures. In the case of La Maddalena, perhaps from being such a small island, less than twenty square miles, a large portion of the



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island is a port town. It is in a strategic geographic position, therefore the island has always seen a great deal of outsiders. In La Maddalena, there is a double influence on the language, both direct and indirect. Dialect speakers borrow terms and expressions and increasingly use the common language to communicate with people from other places. There exists '*maddaleninità*,' a certain recognizable Maddalena quality to the speech patterns of those who are from there.

Old Maddalenino survives in literary works, mostly poetry. However, it is not commonly spoken as an everyday dialect any longer. Children study a limited amount of poetry at school, but most of them do not speak Maddalenino while at home with their families. La Maddalena is more of a *dilalia*, the dialect is only used rarely and mostly overlapping or mixing with Italian, as opposed to a *diglossia* (Iannàccaro, Dell'Aquila, 2011). UNESCO classifies it as critically endangered, meaning that, mostly older generations can speak it and it's not actively used in homes (Moseley, 2010).

The minority languages of Corsican and Sardinian are similar in many ways, having had many of the same linguistic influences. They differ from each other enough, however, that they are considered separate. Where it gets even more fuzzy is in determining dialects of said minority languages. La Maddalena, although politically a part of Sardinia, is situated between Corsica and Sardinia, and has many more linguistic influences from the Corsican language. Maddalenino is a distinct dialect of Corsican, as its phonology differs in some distinct ways from other Corsican and Sardinian dialects. It is its own special mix of linguistic influences not found as a whole in any other dialects. There are also certain lexical and morphological differences not discussed in this paper between the differing dialects of these minority languages.

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Figure 1



[http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lingua\\_sarda](http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lingua_sarda)

Notes

**1. Italian Constitution, Art. 6, Law n. 482, 12/15/1999**

Art. 2 “In attuazione dell’articolo 6 della Costituzione e in armonia con i principi generali stabiliti dagli organismi europei e internazionali, la Repubblica tutela la lingua e la cultura delle popolazioni albanesi, catalane, germaniche, greche, slovene e croate e di quelle parlanti il francese, il franco-provenzale, il friulano, il ladino, l’occitano e il sardo”.

Translation: In actuation of article 6 of the Constitution and in harmony with the principles generally established by the european and international entities, the Republic protects the language and culture of the populations of Albanians, Catalans, Germanics, Greeks, Slovenians and Croatians, and those speaking French, franco-provenzale, Friulano, Ladino, Occitano and Sardinian.

Retrieved from <http://www.parlamento.it/parlam/leggi/994821.htm>

**2. Regional Law of the Autonomous Region of Sardinia n. 26, 10/15/1997: Promotion and Validation of the Sardinian language and culture.**

Art. 2, Par. 4 “La medesima valenza attribuita alla cultura ed alla lingua sarda è riconosciuta con riferimento al territorio interessato, alla cultura ed alla lingua catalana di Alghero, al tabarchino delle isole del Sulcis, al dialetto sassarese e a quello gallurese.”

Translation: The validity attributed to Sardinian language and culture is recognized in reference to the interested territory, to the culture and Catalan language of Alghero, the Tabarchino of the Sulcis Islands and the Sassarese and Gallurese dialects.

Retrieved from [http://www.regione.sardegna.it/documenti/1\\_72\\_20060418160308.pdf](http://www.regione.sardegna.it/documenti/1_72_20060418160308.pdf)

**3. European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages CETS No.: 148**

“Considering that the aim of the Council of Europe is to achieve a greater unity between its members, particularly for the purpose of safeguarding and realising the ideals and principles which are their common heritage;

Considering that the protection of the historical regional or minority languages of Europe, some of which are in danger of eventual extinction, contributes to the maintenance and development of Europe’s cultural wealth and traditions;

Considering that the right to use a regional or minority language in private and public life is an inalienable right conforming to the principles embodied in the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and according to the spirit of the Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of Human Rights.”

Retrieved from <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/148.htm>

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