MULTILINGUALISM IN AN ELECTION CAMPAIGN: THE TRANSITORY LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF THE SOUTH TYROL

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1. INTRODUCTION

"Once the box of language in spaces has opened, endless opportunities for its use are available as infinite ways of 'seeing' come forth" (Shohamy, Gorter, 2009: 2).

Back in 2009, the linguists used these words to emphasise the enormous potential and infinite variety of ways of understanding the Linguistic Landscape (LL hereafter) present in the spaces and places of a given territory. This is particularly true of the Autonomous Province Bozen/Bolzano - Südtirol, which is the focus of this study. As is well known, the linguistic policy of this province mandates the use of German alongside Italian in all official contexts.

All forms of expression – both official and private – are therefore affected in some way, from toponymy to billboards, from shop signs to restaurant menus, from public notices to election posters, and even graffiti and murals.

Various studies have so far analysed the LL of this particular territory[3] but in this study, similar to that of Barni, Bagna (2016: 56):

> the focus is not on the 'traditional' LL in which the visibility of signs remains present over time (resulting in long-term visibility), but in the transitory and dynamic nature of the LL as it is displayed during a single meet, in other words, a temporary representational occupation of a specific area.

Specifically, we will focus on the "transitory linguistic landscape" (Hanauer, 2012) visible during the campaign for the provincial elections on 22 October 2023.

The data were collected on-site during the final week of the campaign. This constitutes an ephemeral LL, as is typical for such contexts (Shohamy, Gorter, 2009; Petkova, 2017). Photographs were taken using the Lingscape app[4] and compiled into the corpus LL-Politics_Südtirol.

This qualitative study analyses a selection of photographs depicting mono- and multilingual signs, as will be demonstrated later. The analysis focuses on one particular manifestation of the LL: election posters. It begins with an examination of the language

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[3] Cf. Crestani (2019); Dal Negro (2008); Palermo (2022); Palermo, Sgambati (2024); Plank (2006); Sgambati (2024); Veronesi (2021).

[4] The Lingscape APP (https://lingscape-app.uni.lu), developed at the University of Luxembourg and made available since 2016, is one of the most popular for collecting sign photos (Purschke, 2017, 2018; Gorter, Cenoz, 2024).

choices made by the competing political parties. The focus then shifts to the multilingualism present in these posters, which is analysed using Reh's (2004) model for the pragmatic organisation of multilingual written texts, as well as the frameworks developed by Kress, van Leeuwen (2006) and Scollon, Scollon (2003) for the visual composition of multilingual and multimodal written texts.

The analysis is followed by some political-linguistic reflections on the choices made by the parties, with the aim of examining the relationship between multilingualism and politics. Specifically, the study seeks to determine whether the linguistic subdivision characteristic of the autonomous province is also reflected in the electoral LL surveyed, and to what extent the parties' communicative strategies correspond to the linguistic composition of their candidate lists.

Prior to data collection, and in line with Backhaus's recommendations (2007: 65), the survey area was delineated by selecting the five most populous municipalities in the province. According to the ASTAT census of December 2021, these municipalities – Bolzano/Bozen, Merano/Meran, Bressanone/Brixen, Laives/Leifers, and Brunico/Bruneck – together account for 38.5% of the province's total population.

2. THE CORPUS LL-POLITICS_SÜDTIROL

Although some studies on the LL also include material found online (cf. Crestani, 2019), and although political discourse has increasingly shifted toward television and the web – a phenomenon often described as mediatisation (cf. Mazzoleni, 2012; Novelli, 2021; Di Pace, Pannain, 2023) – this study focuses exclusively on LL material found in public open spaces. This decision aligns with the widely accepted definition of the LL (cf., among others, Landry, Bourhis, 1994; Gorter, Cenoz, 2024).

The first step involved surveying all relevant material present in the selected areas. Display panels, stickers, flyers, election posters, and so-called «sails» (advertisements mounted on cars, motorcycles, or bicycles) were identified and photographed.

For the collection and classification of material, the Lingscape App was chosen. In addition to enabling geolocation of the images and the creation of individual records with various taxonomies (with the potential for later enrichment), the app allows for the documentation of any sign containing written text or «lettering» (Gorter, Cenoz, 2024: 103).

The total number of photos currently collected in the LL-Politics_Südtirol corpus amounts to 1063[5]. For the purpose of this analysis, the focus was narrowed to election posters during the administrative elections 2023 only. The resulting analytical corpus therefore consists of 403 images of signs.

The multilingualism observed on election posters was analysed using the model developed by Reh (2004: 1-41) for the description and categorisation of multilingual signs, originally applied to material collected in Lira Town, Uganda (2000 - 2002). This model, which has been widely adopted in subsequent LL studies, also underpins the Distribution taxonomy used in the Lingscape app.

The Distribution taxonomy describes the pragmatic organisation of multilingualism within a sign – specifically, how information is translated across languages. All four of Reh's rewriting strategies were found in our corpus: complementary, duplicating, fragmentary, and overlapping. As will be shown in the analysis of multilingual election

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[5] The photos of the signs described in this contribution are freely accessible on the Lingscape APP website. By entering the name of the project 'LL-Politics_Südtirol' and using the appropriate search function for the given ID, it will be possible to display all occurrences documenting the specific type of posters detected.

posters, the Distribution taxonomy closely interacts with the Dominance taxonomy, which examines the hierarchical relationships among languages within a sign. This hierarchy is typically established through visual, material, and semiotic features such as size, position, form, and colour. For this aspect of the analysis, we draw on the visual models developed by Kress, van Leeuwen (2006) and Scollon, Scollon (2003).

Additional taxonomies considered in this study include Directedness, Composition, and Linguality[6]. Both realisations of Directedness were observed in the South Tyrolean LL, namely top-down and bottom-up communication (Ben-Rafael *et al.*, 2006: 14).

Top-down political communication refers to messages initiated by institutions or government bodies. In our corpus, examples include the publication of official electoral lists [ID 90958] and general election information [ID 91188; ID 91300]. These materials are particularly relevant, as they display candidates' linguistic affiliation (German, Italian, or Ladin) alongside personal data, in accordance with the province's language-group identification policies. Bottom-up communication, by contrast, occurs on two main levels (Seargeant *et al.*, 2023: 1). The first involves political parties and candidates, who use language to promote their platforms, propose policies, and appeal to voters. The second includes activist groups, protesters, and independent media, who engage in commentary, critique, and resistance to official narratives. This study focuses exclusively on the first form of bottom-up communication – namely, that produced by politicians and parties in their efforts to mobilise electoral support.

3. LANGUAGE STRATEGIES IN SOUTH TYROL'S 2023 ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS

In the context of the 2023 provincial elections in the South Tyrol (cf. Atz, Pallaver, 2024), political parties displayed a broad array of communication strategies, which significantly characterized the electoral LL of the region. The traditional use of campaign posters was also a key component of this electoral discourse, as these visual tools were strategically employed by parties to communicate their political messages[7]. One notable feature of the electoral landscape was the distinct approach to language use on these posters. Some parties adhered strictly to one language, either German or Italian, depending on their ideal demographic target, reinforcing the linguistic boundaries that define South Tyrol's political and cultural divisions. In contrast, other parties opted for bilingual or, in a few exceptional cases, even trilingual communication, integrating both German and Italian, and occasionally Ladin, into their messaging. These bilingual and multilingual strategies varied in the degree of linguistic integration, with some posters clearly privileging one language over the others, while others employed a more balanced approach. The choice of language on election posters thus became a significant aspect of how each party positioned itself within the local political, social, and cultural context, reflecting not only the party's ideological stance but also its understanding of the region's complex linguistic identity.

3.1. *Rejection of traditional campaigning: The strategy in absentia of the JWA-List*

Among the various strategies employed by political groups, a particularly striking and unconventional approach was adopted by the list of Jürgen Wirth Anderlan (JWA). This

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[6] A selection was made from the 22 taxonomies present by default on the Lingscape APP. For a full description see Palermo (2022: 101-108).
[7] For further insights into specific linguistic features of election campaigns, reference may be made, among others, to Girnth (2015); Klein (2017); Niehr (2014).

party took the radical step of completely forgoing the use of traditional election posters. The decision to reject posters altogether represents a clear departure from the well-established conventions of traditional political campaigning, where visual presence in the form of posters has long been a standard practice (cf. Efing, 2005; Pappert, 2017). Instead of using printed materials, the JWA-List focused its efforts on a more direct, personal form of communication, namely door-to-door campaigning, complemented by a significant online presence. This approach, which could be described as a strategy *in absentia*, was not merely an oversight or logistical decision; it was a deliberate and calculated choice that allowed the party to distinguish itself from the conventional practices of other political groups.

The symbolism of this absence was reinforced through the party's spokesperson, who, during a press conference, publicly articulated their opposition to the use of election posters. In a visually striking gesture, the spokesperson presented a canvas instead of a traditional printed poster, explicitly stating their stance of being *gegen Wahlplakate* (against election posters). This provocative move not only called attention to the party's deliberate rejection of mainstream political campaigning but also signaled a critical stance towards the very practice of election advertising. As a result, during a field survey of the LL in South Tyrol, no trace of the JWA party was found in the form of traditional campaign posters, marking an absence that itself became a powerful and disruptive form of communication [ID 91429]. This strategic omission is aligned with the theoretical insights offered by Seargeant *et al.* (2023: 21), who argue that the meaning of a sign is never isolated but is always shaped by its emplacement within the physical world. In this context, the absence of posters becomes an active form of communication. By choosing not to participate in the visual landscape, JWA effectively created a visual void, which served to amplify their message. The absence of posters, rather than being neutral or inconsequential, acted as a powerful visual statement. It disrupted the traditional understanding of what a political campaign should look like, challenging the established norms of electoral marketing and positioning the JWA as a radically alternative force within the local political sphere.

3.2. *Monolingual German posters*

In the 2023 provincial elections of the South Tyrol, four of the sixteen political parties that ran adopted a strategy of using an exclusively monolingual German *Linguality*, reflecting their focus on the region's German-speaking electorate. This approach not only reinforced the parties' target demographic but also underscored their political and cultural positioning within the region. The parties utilizing this monolingual German strategy included *Die Freiheitlichen, Süd-Tiroler Freiheit* (STF), *Südtiroler Volkspartei* (SVP), and *Für Südtirol mit Widmann*. Each of these parties employed distinct styles and messages in their posters, carefully crafting their visual and textual content to resonate with their electorate and assert their political identity. From populist appeals to regionalist rhetoric and pragmatic calls to action, these posters reflected the diverse ways in which these parties with exclusively German-speaking or predominantly German-speaking candidate lists sought to communicate with voters. Each party emphasized different aspects of regional identity, governance, and social issues, tailoring their messages to resonate with their target electorate.

3.2.1. *Die Freiheitlichen: Populist messaging and ambiguity*

For Die Freiheitlichen, two types of posters were identified, which are interdependent both in terms of graphic design and conceptual elements. Both feature a *Composition* that includes a slogan (*text*) and a logo (*image+text*) but exclude images of candidates or other illustrative visuals. The first poster [ID 90965] featured the slogan *DAMIT SIE NICHT GLEICH WEITER MACHEN KÖNNEN!* (So that they cannot continue in the same way!), which played on the ambiguity of the word *gleich*, suggesting both a temporal (immediately) and modal meaning (in the same way). This created an invitation to voters to see it as a call to prevent the political establishment from continuing its actions as before.

The second poster [ID 90976] adopted a more direct approach, using the possessive phrase *DEINE HEIMAT. DEIN GELD. DEINE ZUKUNFT.* (Your homeland. Your money. Your future.), creating a personal connection with voters. The poster also included the motto *SÜDTIROL KANN'S BESSER* (South Tyrol can do better). The use of colloquial language, such as the contraction *kann's*, contributed to a more informal, populist tone, reinforcing the appeal to individual responsibility. The phrase *ES LIEGT AN DIR!* (It's up to you!) emphasized personal accountability, distancing the party from any direct responsibility. Together, the two posters conveyed a clear populist message to the electorate, urging them to take action and portraying the party as a voice of opposition to the political establishment (cf. Gannuscio, 2019).

3.2.2. *Süd-Tiroler Freiheit: Regionalist appeals and controversial imagery*

Süd-Tiroler Freiheit (STF) used posters, which featured clear regionalist themes. Their most widespread poster [ID 91467] displayed Sven Knoll, the party's lead candidate, and featured the slogan *MEHR FREIHEIT!* (More freedom!). The visual elements, including the dominant red and white color palette, evoked both the South Tyrol and Austrian flags, reinforcing the party's focus on regional autonomy. The personal appeal was underscored by the slogan *Es liegt an Deiner Stimme* (It's up to your vote), which directly addressed the voter, urging them to take action.

STF's second poster [ID 91237], which depicted a controversial image of a black man holding a knife and a distressed white woman, caused public outrage. The accompanying slogans, such as *KRIMINELLE AUSLÄNDER ABSCHIEBEN!* (Deport criminal foreigners!), *Einwanderungsstopp* (A stop to immigration) and *Süd-Tirol wieder sicher machen!* (Make South Tyrol safe again!), invoked fear and positioned immigrants as a threat to local safety. This poster, with its vivid portrayal of violence and fear, was torn down in many locations, reflecting the backlash against STF's inflammatory rhetoric.

3.2.3. *Südtiroler Volkspartei: Continuity and stability*

Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP), the South Tyrol's largest and most established political party, also relied on monolingual German posters. The first poster [ID 91395] featured *Composition* with a prominent photograph of the lead candidate, and the slogan *Ich bitte um eure Stimme für die Südtiroler Volkspartei* (I ask for your vote for the Südtiroler Volkspartei). The use of informal pronouns, like *eure*, established a sense of closeness and trust with the electorate. The second poster [ID 91417] presented a more formal tone with the slogan *Südtirol muss regierbar bleiben* (South Tyrol must remain governable), emphasizing the party's role in maintaining regional stability and governance.

3.2.4. *Für Südtirol mit Widmann: Professionals and pragmatism*

Although the list Für Südtirol mit Widmann included candidates from Italian and Ladin backgrounds alongside German-speaking candidates, their campaign posters were exclusively in German. Two distinct types of posters were identified, typically displayed together. The first poster [ID 90986] featured a *Composition* dominated by photographs, accompanied by the party logo and text elements. The central message, *MACHEN!* (Take action!), served as a call to action, reinforced by visual elements such as candidate portraits and their professional backgrounds. The color palette, with shades of pink reminiscent of the Dolomites, added a local touch.

The second poster [ID 90972] has an entirely text-based composition, featuring the slogan *FÜR SÜDTIROL* (For South Tyrol) along with a representation of a ballot sheet, where the party's logo was marked with a cross and four preferential choices. Part of the accompanying text emphasized intelligent decision-making and concrete actions with the phrase *KLUG ENTSCHEIDEN – KONKRET HANDELN* (Decide wisely – Act concretely). The inclusion of a QR code linking to the party's program highlighted the party's pragmatic, forward-looking approach.

3.3. *Monolingual Italian posters*

Among the political groups contesting elections in the South Tyrol, the *Centro Destra* list and *La Civica* adopted a monolingual Italian approach to their electoral communication. Despite having a minimal representation of German-speaking candidates, both parties opted to communicate exclusively in Italian, emphasizing their focus on the Italian-speaking electorate in the region.

3.3.1. *Centro Destra: Populist appeals and local identity*

The electoral posters, which can be divided into two main categories, focus either on the party's message or on individual candidates. The first category includes the most common poster [ID 91397], which is entirely text-based, with the logo simply reading "CENTRO DESTRA" within a blue circle and a slogan which emphasizes healthcare and prioritizing residents, using populist rhetoric to foster a "we" vs. "them" narrative. Another poster [ID 90973] shifts focus to immigration, with the slogan *STOP/SBARCHI!* (Stop Landings!) on a red background, employing alarmist rhetoric typical of populist discourse, framing immigration as a threat to local values. A third poster [ID 91247] in this first category presents all 35 candidates, with the slogan *VINCE/LA SQUADRA* (The Team Wins), emphasizing unity and collective strength.

The second category, focused on individual candidates, features traditional formats with candidate photographs and personalized slogans. The recurring slogan *A MERANO/VOTA UN/MERANESE* [ID 91168] (In Merano, Vote for a Meranese) and *A BOLZANO/VOTA UN/BOLZANINO* [ID 91422] (In Bolzano, Vote for a Bolzanino) reinforces local identity. Notably, even when campaigning for female candidates, the slogan remains in the masculine form [cf. ID 91479]. In Bressanone, the slogan changes to *A BRESSANONE VOTA/CHI SI IMPEGNA/PER BRESSANONE* [ID 91313] (In Bressanone, vote for the candidate committed to Bressanone), likely due to candidate Angelo Baffo's non-local origins.

3.3.2. *La Civica: Collective action and regional identity*

The party's posters can be categorized into three main types, all of which emphasize the themes of collective action and the future of the South Tyrol. The most common poster [ID 91407] presents the half-length photo of lead candidate Angelo Gennaccaro in the center, with the party logo positioned below. The slogan *Costruiamo insieme / il futuro / dell'Alto Adige* (Let's Build Together / the Future / of the South Tyrol) is placed prominently, using the first-person plural to stress collective action and participation in shaping the region's future. The choice of this inclusive language emphasizes a vision of shared responsibility, though it intentionally leaves the concept of "future" open to broad interpretation.

Another poster [ID 91319] features the party logo and slogan in the top half, with a group photo of all 35 candidates in the lower section. This design further reinforces the collective theme, underlining unity and cohesion within the party. Additionally, the party employed dynamic advertising,

utilizing electronic displays in train stations [ID 90955] and mobile billboards [ID 90987] to reach voters in public spaces.

3.4. *Bilingual posters with German dominance*

Enzian, *Team K*, and *Vita* opted for bilingual communication in their electoral posters, with a clear dominance of the German language. The decision to prioritize German in the bilingual content of their campaign materials is influenced by several factors, primarily related to the demographic composition of the province and the strategic goals of each party.

The dominance of German can be seen in various aspects, such as the positioning of the text, typographic choices, and the overall visual hierarchy. For example, in many of these posters, the German text appears first, placed in a more prominent position, and often in larger or bolder fonts compared to the Italian counterpart. By foregrounding German, these parties seek to engage their primary electorate – German-speaking voters – while still ensuring that their messages are accessible also to the Italian-speaking electorate. Through the strategic use of German, these parties not only aim to connect with their core supporters but also manage to position themselves within the broader political landscape of the South Tyrol, where both languages hold official status, but German remains more prominent in everyday communication.

3.4.1. *Enzian: Honesty and personal engagement*

Although there are some variations in Enzian's election posters depending on the candidates depicted, they all follow a consistent graphic model. This includes the party's logo *(image + text)* at the top, with the electoral slogan in German *Ehrliche Politik für die Menschen* (Honest politics for the people) positioned to the left of the logo and in Italian *Una politica sincera per i cittadini* (A sincere politics for the citizens) on its right. Beneath the logo, six selected candidates' photographs are displayed, with their names listed. These photographs vary depending on the poster's location. At the bottom of the poster, the party's website is followed by the electoral slogan, first in German and then in Italian: *Deine Zukunft in deinen Händen*! / *Il tuo futuro nelle tue mani!"* (Your future in your hands!). The dominance of German is evident both in the placement of the text and typographic choices. The German slogan is positioned on the left, giving it priority in the reading order for both language communities. Consistently, the German slogan is placed above the Italian one, reinforcing its visibility. Additionally, the German text is written in dark blue bold font, while the Italian translation appears in a lighter blue and is written in regular typeface, further reinforcing the German dominance. Both the German and Italian slogans use the second-person singular form, creating a personal tone that directly addresses the voter. This fosters a sense of involvement, implying that the voter holds the power to determine their future. In the German slogan, the word *ehrlich* can be interpreted in several ways: it can mean honest (morally upright), sincere (authentic in speech or sentiment), or

irreproachable/loyal (in interpersonal relationships). In this context, the first meaning seems to be the most relevant. In contrast, the Italian translation uses *sincera* (sincere), which shifts the focus away from the notion of honesty and instead emphasizes sincerity as the key trait. Another key difference lies in the use of *für die Menschen* (for the people) in German, which conveys a more inclusive, collective tone. In Italian, however, *per i cittadini* (for the citizens) is used, which carries a slightly more formal and distanced tone.

3.4.2. *Team K: Regional identity and personal connection*

Team K's posters show a variety of formats, but a common design includes photos of two or three candidates (*image*), accompanied by their names (*text*) and the party's logo (*image + text*) [ID 90959]. These posters are minimalistic in their textual elements, with only the date "22.10." and a graphical element, which is a circle with a cross inside to symbolize voting. Although there are few textual elements beyond the names of the candidates, the poster can be considered monolingual in German, as the date is presented in the typical German format. The second type of Team K poster registered in the LL also follows a similar pattern. It features a full-body photo of a candidate, accompanied by textual elements [ID 91230]. The distinctive feature of this type of poster is the absence of the party logo. Instead, the poster displays the candidates' names and their professions. The slogan *FÜR DEIN SÜDTIROL* (For your South Tyrol) appears prominently in the upper part of the poster, written in black text on a yellow background. While the text is in black, the pronoun *DEIN* (your) is highlighted in red, creating a visual contrast with the hashtag #MEINSÜDTIROL (#MYSOUTHTYROL) positioned in the lower left corner. This slogan, like the others observed, addresses the voter directly using the second-person singular. Its use is visually reinforced by the red color, and the inclusion of the hashtag in German further emphasizes the party's connection with its German-speaking electorate. A notable feature of Team K's campaign is the occasional appearance of bilingual posters. When an Italian-speaking candidate is featured, their profession is written in Italian, thus introducing bilingualism even within a primarily German-language poster [ID 91303].

In some cases, Team K also features a more explicit bilingual approach, where the above-mentioned German slogan is paired with its Italian translation UN ALTO ADIGE PER TE (A South Tyrol for you), and the hashtag is mirrored with "#ILMIOALTOADIGE" [ID 91137]. The *Dominance* of German is once again clear in the layout, with the German slogan positioned above the Italian one, and the German hashtag on the left and the Italian hashtag on the right. Additionally, the font size of the German slogan is larger than that of the Italian version, further reinforcing the linguistic hierarchy.

An interesting aspect of this bilingual poster is the discrepancy in the translation of the slogan. The German slogan literally translates to "For your South Tyrol", emphasizing a personal connection and active engagement with the region. On the other hand, the Italian translation, UN ALTO ADIGE PER TE (A South Tyrol for you), conveys a different tone, implying a more gift-like offering, as if the region is something granted to the Italian voters.

3.4.3. *Vita: Human dignity and moral imperatives*

Vita's electoral campaign presents a relatively balanced bilingual approach, with nine German-speaking candidates and seven Italian-speaking candidates. However, the party's communication strategy leans heavily toward German, as evidenced by the consistent use of German in a position of *Dominance* across the campaign materials which characterizes the LL. The bilingual presentation follows a *duplicating* approach, where the German and Italian texts appear side by side, with the German text always placed first.

The only paper-based poster identified features a prominent image of the party's lead candidate (*image*), placed at the top of the poster. Below the image is the text (*text*), the party's logo (*image + text*), and a graphic symbol of a pencil making a cross on a smaller version of the party's logo (*image*) [ID 91528]. The text beneath the image includes the candidate's name and title, *RA/AVV. DDR. RENATE HOLZEISEN, Spitzenkandidatin von VITA für die Wahl zum Südtiroler Landtag* in German and *Capolista di Vita per le elezioni al Consiglio Provinciale del Sudtirolo* in Italian (Attorney, Dr. Renate Holzeisen, Lead candidate of VITA for the election to the South Tyrolean Provincial Parliament). Despite the bilingual approach, there is a notable discrepancy between the German and Italian translations in Vita's slogans. In the German version, *FÜR EINE MENSCHENWÜRDIGE ZUKUNFT* translates to "For a future worthy of human dignity", whereas in the Italian version, *PER UN FUTURO A DIMENSIONE UMANA* translates to "For a future with a human dimension". The German expression, *menschenwürdig,* implies an ethical or moral judgment, emphasizing respect for human dignity and fundamental rights. In contrast, the Italian phrase, *a dimensione umana,* is more abstract and general, referring to a future that aligns with human experiences but without implying a moral imperative.

3.5. *Bilingual posters with Italian dominance*

Lega, Forza Italia, and Fratelli d'Italia, even though there is bilingualism in their electoral posters, all give dominance to Italian in their messaging. This is because, due to their national party character, which operates at a level that goes far beyond the Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano - South Tyrol, these parties aim to primarily address the Italian-speaking electorate. Probably, in their view, the German-speaking community, while significant, is considered a smaller group in comparison. In this context, using Italian as the dominant language might not only appeal to the majority of voters but also symbolize a shared identity, reinforcing the connection to Italian culture and values.

3.5.1. *Lega for Salvini Premier: Identity and priorities*

Among the Italophone-dominated parties, Lega for Salvini Premier (Lega) stands out for having the largest number of German-speaking candidates, including a Ladin representative. All manifestos examined for Lega displayed both Italian and German text,

but interestingly, despite its federalist nature, which positions its mission as giving a voice to peripheral realities, Ladin was not included in any of the campaign materials.

Lega's most common type of manifesto followed a classic electoral poster structure, featuring a half-length photo of the national party leader Matteo Salvini (*image*), surrounded by textual elements (*text*) and the party logo (*image + text*) [ID 90970]. The textual elements adhered to a *duplicating* structure, with the Italian and German versions appearing side by side. At the top of the manifesto, the electoral event is announced: *ELEZIONI PROVINCIALI / LANDTAGSWAHLEN; DOMENICA-SONNTAG 22/10/2023* (Provincial Elections; Sunday 22nd October 2023). This placement immediately reveals the *dominance* of Italian, also marked in the date, which uses the slash instead of a full stop, which correspond to the German standard. The contrast in slogan phrasing further emphasizes Italian dominance. The Italian slogan *L'IMPEGNO CONTINUA* (The commitment continues) is a direct call to action, suggesting an ongoing responsibility, while the German version, *UNSER AUFTRAG, UNSER VERSPRECHEN* (Our mission, our promise), adopts a more formal tone, stressing both a duty and a promise. This subtle discrepancy between the two languages highlights the differing levels of intensity and responsibility conveyed in each version.

In a second set of electoral posters [ID 91202], elements from the first manifesto were replicated, but with the addition of candidate photos and an electoral ballot facsimile. A noteworthy detail in this version was an error in translation: the term *Landestagwahlen* was incorrectly used instead of *Landtagswahlen*.

A third type of manifesto depicted individual candidates rather than Salvini and featured a mixed-language slogan, with the phrase *Metti una X sul simbolo della LEGA e scrivi-schreibe* (Put an X on the LEGA symbol and write) demonstrating an example of *overlapping*, where part of the slogan is in Italian and part is in German.

The final type of manifesto for Lega [ID 91491] shifted focus to policy points, presented with icons alongside bilingual text: *PRIMA GLI ALTOATESINI / DIE SÜDTIROLER ZUERST* (first the South Tyroleans), *CARO VITA / TEURES LEBEN* (cost of living), *SICUREZZA / SICHERHEIT* (security), and *GIOVANI E ANZIANI / JUNGENDLICHE UND SENIOREN* (youth and seniors). This type of posters showcased duplicating communication but with incorrect German translations, such as *teures Leben* (expensive life) rather than the more accurate *Hohe Lebenshaltungskosten* (high cost of living).

3.5.2. *Forza Italia: Reverence for the past and controversial slogans*

Forza Italia's 2023 campaign featured an overwhelmingly Italophone candidate list, with 80% of the candidates being Italian speakers. As such, their posters were almost exclusively in Italian, with just two German-language posters [ID 90967]. These were essentially mirrored versions of the Italian-language posters [ID 91136], with identical graphical elements and typographical features.

One key element in the Forza Italia campaign was the use of Silvio Berlusconi's quotations, prominently displayed in the posters. The German translations of Berlusconi's

phrases were accurate. Indeed, the translation preserved the meaning of the Italian slogan *CHI CI CREDE/ COMBATTE / CHI CI CREDE / SUPERA TUTTI GLI OSTACOLI / CHI CREDE / VINCE – WER DARAN GLAUBT, / KÄMPFT, / WER DARAN GLAUBT, / ÜBERWINDET ALLE HINDERNISSE / WER DARAN GLAUBT, / GEWINNT* (Those who believe fight, those who believe overcome all obstacles, those who believe win). The controversy arises from the fact that this formulation unmistakably evokes the well-known fascist precept "Credere, obbedire, combattere" (cf. Galli, 2021), sparking a heated debate about the appropriateness of this communicative choice (cf. Marcon, 2023; ANSA, 2023).

The visual elements of Forza Italia's posters reinforced the centrality of Berlusconi's leadership, even after his death. His words and signature displayed on the posters serve as powerful symbols, strategically used to craft a strong, personalized image for the party.

3.5.3. *Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S): Fairness and responsibility*

The party's campaign materials included bilingual text in Italian and German. The two types of electoral posters found in the electoral LL both feature bilingual Italian-German language with *dominance* of Italian over German for *positioning*. The font size and colors are identical for both languages. The first type of poster represents party communication, with a background featuring a group photo of all the candidates and includes textual elements, the party logo, and a QR code linking to the official website [ID 91145]. Although the graphic design might initially suggest a case of *duplicating*, some sections of the poster fall into the category of *overlapping*.

A clear example of *duplicating* is found at the bottom of the poster, where all textual elements provide exactly the same content in German and Italian. The situation is different in the central part of the poster, where the M5S programmatic points are listed. The Italian and German slogans show some direct correspondence, but also conceptual differences, leading us to refer to this as *overlapping*. We can analyze, as an example, one of the slogans: *STIPENDI E PENSIONI DIGNITOSI / GERECHTE GEHÄLTER UND WÜRDIGE RENTEN* (decent salaries and pensions). In Italian, the adjective *dignitosi* evokes the concept of respect and economic sufficiency, suggesting that salaries and pensions should ensure a decent standard of living. In German, however, *gerechte Gehälter* (fair salaries) emphasizes social justice and fairness, while *würdige Renten* (dignified pensions) maintains a connection to the notion of dignity, although it is less idiomatic than alternatives like *angemessene Renten*.

The second type of poster displays the classic electoral poster composition, with a half-length image of the politician, the logo beside them, and their name in the footer [ID 90960]. This poster also features hashtags and the election date. The slogans read: *TU HAI IL POTERE DI CAMBIARE / VOTACI!* / IN DEINER STIMME LIEGT /

DIE VERÄNDERUNG / GEH ZUR WAHL! (You have the power to change / Vote for us!). The slogans have a similar structure but differ in several significant aspects. In Italian, the phrase is personal, directly addressing the reader and attributing them with central responsibility. The use of the exhortative imperative *VOTACI!* (Vote for us!) reinforces this approach, explicitly inviting action. In German, however, the expression is less direct and focuses on the concept that change lies in "your vote", suggesting a symbolic connection between the individual's vote and their power to influence change. Rather than emphasizing individual power, the German slogan stresses the idea of collective responsibility. The imperative *GEH ZUR WAHL!* (Go to the polls!) reflects this same collective responsibility, urging not only action but the exercise of one's civic duty and right to vote. However, unlike the Italian version, there is no explicit reference to voting for the M5S, but instead, a general invitation to participate in the elections, maintaining neutrality in the message.

3.5.4. *Fratelli d'Italia: Strength and safety*

Despite the overwhelming presence of Italian candidates, Fratelli d'Italia (FdI) used five types of bilingual manifestos, with bilingual elements prominently featured alongside visual cues of the party's identity, such as the party logo and the image of Giorgia Meloni, the party president, who was not directly running in this election.

In all five types, the same structure can be recognized: image, text, logo, and Italian-German bilingualism (*linguality*). Here we will focus just on three of them. In the first type of poster [ID 91633], the image at the top of the poster features a half-length photo of the leading candidate Marco Galateo, with his name prominently displayed, accompanied by the bilingual slogan: *FORTE SICURO ALTO ADIGE / STARK. SICHER. SÜDTIROL.* (Strong, secure, South Tyrol). The second type of poster features all the candidates [ID 91272] and almost the same bilingual slogan *FORTE E SICURO IL NOSTRO ALTO ADIGE / STARK und SICHER unser Südtirol* (strong and secure our South Tyrol). The third type [ID 91144] features an image of the party president, Giorgia Meloni, in a half-length photo on the left, with a large logo displaying her name and the party symbol on the right. At the bottom of the poster is the slogan *TUTTO PER L'ALTO ADIGE / GEMEINSAM ZUKUNFT GESTALTEN* (everything for South Tyrol / designing together the future). The *Distribution* in the first two posters is a classic example of *duplicating*. The question that arises, especially in reference to the first poster, concerns the identification of the source language (SL) and the target language (TL) of the electoral message. The clear graphical dominance of Italian, in terms of size, font, and position, would lead one to think that Italian is the SL. However, it can be hypothesized that the SL might actually be German, as linguistically, with the initial alliteration in the three words *STARK. SICHER. SÜDTIROL.* and the punctuation, the slogan works better. Therefore, the graphical dominance might be used to conceal the conceptual dependence on German. In the third electoral poster, the *Distribution* is *complementary*: we have two independent slogans, with a clear graphical dominance of Italian in terms of size, font, and position. However, in order to fully understand the poster, knowledge of both languages is necessary.

3.6. *Trilingual posters in Italian, German and Ladin*

Verdi – Grüne – Vërc and *PD* are the only two parties that have adopted a trilingual communication strategy for their electoral posters. This decision stands out not only because it reflects the multilingual nature of the region, but also because it distinguishes these two parties from others in their approach to engaging with the diverse linguistic communities of the South Tyrol. This multilingual approach highlights their awareness of the region's complex LL and their attempt to reach all demographic groups.

3.6.1. *Verdi – Grüne – Vërc: Future and commitment to others*

Verdi – Grüne – Vërc presented a list of candidates whose distribution is not entirely polarized towards one language, although there is still a predominance of German-speaking candidates. In fact, alongside the 22 German-speaking candidates, there are 11 Italian-speaking and 2 Ladin-speaking candidates. This multilingualism is reflected in the only type of electoral poster identified [91148], which presents a trilingual *linguality*. The communication is carried out in German (in a dominant position), Italian, and Ladin: Deine Zukunft. / Per te. / Vërt fej. It is interesting to note that while Italian and Ladin present a case of *duplicating*, repeating the same slogan (for you), for German a different slogan has been chosen that uses *Zukunft* (your future), a catchword (cf. Schröter, 2011) fundamental to many of the party's programmatic aspects. The three languages do share the use of the second-person singular pronoun: deine/te/fej. As for the *composition*, the poster is made up of the classic components of an electoral tool: besides the slogan (*text*) and the logo (*image + text*), there are images of all the candidates (*image*) with their respective names.

3.6.2. *PD Partito Democratico: Community and time for responsibility*

The PD electoral list is characterized by a clear predominance of Italian-speaking candidates; nevertheless, the party has opted for trilingual communication, which, in this case, is complemented also by the more commonly used bilingual communication.

The first type of posters [ID 91572] is made up exclusively of textual elements, with the logo positioned at the center of the upper part. The trilingual text in Italian, German, and Ladin is of the *duplicating* type: *IL NOSTRO TEMPO / UNSERE ZEIT / NOSC TËMP* (our time). It is interesting to note that Ladin appears only in this text but is absent in all the surrounding elements of the poster:

from the phrase *Vota / Wähle* (vote) to the indications *Elezioni provinciali / Landtagswahlen* (provincial elections) and the date.

In the second type of poster [ID 91543] Ladin is absent, so it has only a bilingual *linguality* in German and Italian. It presents, at the upper left, the logo and, at the right, the date, written in the German format. It then features a large central image of the entire community with all the candidates and the following text: *LA FORZA DELLA COMUNITÀ / DIE KRAFT DER GEMEINSCHAFT* (the strength of the community), which is a perfect example of *duplicating*. At the bottom of the poster, there is, after a QR Code linking to the party's program and the social media symbols for Facebook and Instagram, the complete list of names and surnames of the 35 candidates.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This contribution analyzed the relationship between multilingualism and politics in the LL of the South Tyrol, assessing whether the multilingualism of the Autonomous Province of Bozen/Bolzano – South Tyrol emerged in the 2023 provincial election posters and to what extent the communication strategies of political parties reflected the linguistic composition of their electoral lists.

In a bilingual region (trilingual in two valleys), where electoral lists, as we have seen, included candidates from all three linguistic groups, one might have expected, from an institutional perspective, multilingualism or, at the very least, a balanced bilingualism in electoral communication.

The picture that emerges from the detailed description of the electoral posters presented by the lists is both complex and clearly defined. Excluding the JWA list, which, through its communication strategy *in absentia*, sent a message of rupture with the conventions and established codes of traditional parties, thus conveying the image of a radically alternative party, outside the norms and far from the conventional logic of traditional politics, the remaining fifteen lists made targeted communication choices.

Seven lists – *die Freiheitlichen, STF, Für Südtirol mit Widmann, SVP, La Civica, Centro Destra*, and *Forza Italia* – opted for monolingual communication; six lists – *Enzian, Team K, Vita, Lega, M5S*, and *FdI* – chose bilingual communication, and only two lists – *Verdi* and the *PD* – employed multilingual communication.

Among the monolingual communication lists, the first four chose German, in line with the majority of German-speaking candidates, although only die *Freiheitlichen* and *STF* exhibited complete alignment between their candidate list and the monolingual communication in German. *Für Südtirol mit Widmann*, in fact, presented two Italian and two Ladin candidates, while *SVP* featured two Ladin candidates. Neither party took this linguistic diversity into account when designing their election posters, which were strictly in German. However, it should be noted that the *SVP* also used flyers and pamphlets exclusively in Italian during the election campaign.

La Civica, Centro Destra, and *Forza Italia* are the other three parties that chose monolingual communication in Italian only. The first two made this choice despite having four German-speaking candidates in their lists. *Forza Italia*, with 80% of its candidates being Italian-speaking and Italian as the sole language of communication, also created a German-language poster (mirroring an Italian one) featuring a translated quote from Silvio Berlusconi, invoking the words after his death of a charismatic political leader.

Six parties – *Enzian, Team K, Vita, Lega, M5S*, and *FdI* – chose bilingual German-Italian communication. However, in no case can we speak of a balanced relationship between the two languages, because, as we have seen in detail, all available tools for multilingual,

multimodal, and semiotic analysis were skillfully used to create linguistic dominance, either of German (*Enzian*, *Team K, and Vita*) or Italian (*Lega*, *M5S*, and *Forza Italia*).

Despite this, monolingual communication choices slightly outweigh bilingual ones in the parties' strategies. The Greens and the PD, with their multilingual communication, ultimately represent a real minority.

The controversy surrounding certain posters (such as those from *Süd-Tiroler Freiheit* and *Forza Italia*) illustrates how political language can be laden with historical and symbolic meanings, often capable of evoking intense reactions and divisions. The use of evocative references, whether intentional or not, emphasizes that electoral communication does not merely convey a message but also contributes to shaping the collective imagination and public discourse. In a sensitive context like that of South Tyrol, where identity and historical memory play a crucial role, every linguistic choice can become a point of friction, transforming the electoral campaign into not only a political challenge but also a cultural one.

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