

Sicilian language: an overview

Contributed by Daniel Puglisi

The linguistic diversity of the European Union is as we recognise enormous; this however is not something, which should be looked at as a problem or an inconvenience. This diversity is one reflecting millennia of cultural and historical development, one of pride and celebration to any speaker of such a language. Therefore I'm sure that our friends in Wales, Catalunya, Galicia or elsewhere could understand what are respective languages mean to us. Fortunately in modern times overcoming past social and political prejudice has meant that their languages now have the opportunity and ability to adapt and progress in the modern age. The Sicilian language spoken by upwards of a significantly large 5,000,000 people on mainland Sicily and a further 2,000,000 estimated overseas speakers is like all our languages an extremely important and valuable cultural asset. Concerning its history every colonization or ruling of Sicily which exceeds at least 10 different nations or peoples have each left an evident linguistic mark on the islands language; 'Sicilianu' or 'lingua Siciliana'. The ancient Siculi and Sicanians from whom Sicily obtains its name date back more than 3000 years ago and the island itself had some of Europe's earliest civilizations. Sicilian would probably be classed as an Italic-Romance tongue. However although great influences on the Sicilian language itself come from Latin itself, in many ways Sicilian represents a unique blend of Greek, Arabic, French and Spanish lexis and grammar as well as many other linguistic features brought by others to come on the island. Together over time the Sicilian language evolved into an independent language, one that could not be given the stigma of dialect. However as many linguists recognise due to Europe's and especially Italy's historical, political past the label of dialect is no longer suitable for Sicilian. The Italian language itself was obtained almost completely from Tuscan dialect. Therefore if the label dialect were to be attributed to Sicilian then Catalan, Galician, Sardinian, Portuguese and many other European languages with aspects of Latin lineage would also have to be classed as dialects. Thus coming from such a rich history and culture the Sicilian language, one unique and independent like any other in the European Union ultimately deserves the same recognition, respect and equality as any other. With equality and human rights being a key philosophy of the European Union then all of our languages should play an integral role in the future of any Europe, super state or not. After all what makes this European Union special is its culture. Currently Sicilian in contrast to other so called 'lesser used languages' in Europe is not in danger of extinction by any means. It has many famous modern writers and poets in Italy such as Luigi Pirandello and Adrea Camilleri to name a few and is spoken fluently by young and old alike. However like all our 'lesser used languages' equal status, recognition and perhaps most importantly of all education is undeniably essential to their futures. Therefore Sicilian must be allowed the opportunity to be taught much more to new generations and given legal acknowledgement to allow its modern development and continuation. Like all of our languages if they are not given equality where some may be disregarded then in affect we are denying key rights of Europe's citizens. I hope this short text can confirm that we speakers of 'lesser used languages' together have shared common pasts where our languages were subject to oppression at some point. However, hopefully now we can work together to ensure the future and rights of the Sicilian language and our very own alike. danielpuglisi@gmail.com