Minority languages and behaviour: Slovene and Friulian minorities in Italy

S A N D R O   S I L L A N I *,   E L I S A   K O S U T A

Abstract. A short review of current literature shows that: 1) people's behaviour is influenced both by the language they speak, and by the language or languages used by the media; 2) the status of a majority or minority language influences the impact it has on behaviour); 3) the effect of language on behaviour may vary depending on population; 4) different languages may have different effects; 5) there is a dearth of research on the influence of minority languages.
The aim of this study is to verify whether the languages spoken by two linguistic minorities in Italy (Slovene and Friulian) influence behaviour to differ from the behaviour of the Italian-speaking linguistic majority. We considered a sample of 1 080 Italian consumers, which we divided into four homogeneous subsamples by gender, age, qualification and per capita income. The only differences were in terms of linguistic minority and spoken language, more specifically: Slovenians who speak Slovene, Friulians who speak Friulian, Friulians who do not speak Friulian, and other Italian individuals who neither belong to a linguistic minority nor speak Slovene or Friulian.
We compared the averages for eight antecedents of behaviour: Advertising Involvement (Message Involvement, Media Involvement and Behaviours); Price Consciousness; Environmental Concern; Moral and other-oriented Reasoning; Time Management and Time Pressure.
In four of the cases there was an association with minority languages, with significant differences emerging in the following cases: 1) between people speaking a minority language and those belonging to the linguistic majority; 2) between people who belong to a minority and speak the minority language and people of the same minority but who do not not speak the minority language; and 3) between people of different minorities that speak or do not speak the respective languages.

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The results confirm that behaviour can be influenced by minority languages, even if there appears to be no direct link between behaviour and the language spoken, for example where the link may be environmental or ethical rather than linguistic.

Finally, this analysis proves that to define an effective language policy, it is necessary to study how a linguistic minority and a linguistic majority respectively behave towards a minority language, and also the cause-and-effect relations between attitude and behaviour.

Key words. Minority language, behaviour, consumer, attitude, Slovene, Slovenian, Friulian.

1. Introduction. Are minority languages an antecedent of human behaviour? History abounds with cases that confirm that minority languages can influence political behaviour. It is also often assumed that language influences consumers' behaviour (sometimes referred to as "ethnic consumption"). Despite this, the languages people speak are frequently not taken into proper consideration, or not recognised at all (with regard to energy consumption, time organisation, and so on).

Many studies have analysed the relationship between behaviour and language. The structural features of a language and its writing system (for example, ideograms that represent concepts, or alphabetic symbols representing sounds) influence mental representations, which, in turn, have an influence on memory and on behaviour (Schmit et al. 1994; Pan, Schmit 1996). Other authors have focused on how a language can be used to categorise its speakers. This categorisation does not concern only ethnic or cultural identities, but also social and psychological profiles (Piller 2003). Other works have examined prejudiced attitudes towards nations and speakers of a certain language. Bruning and Saqib (2013) have noted that in Canada prejudice towards countries and people speaking the languages spoken in Canada is less severe than prejudice directed at people and countries speaking other languages. Moreover, they found that linguistic minorities tend to be less prejudiced than linguistic majorities. Chen (2013) and Roberts et al. (2015) focused on the relationship between spoken language and intertemporal choices of speakers and found that spoken language has an influence on the perception of the time elapsed before a future event happens. Therefore, it influences intertemporal choices, which are the decisions that will have consequences in future, for example considerations about savings, retirement, smoking, overeating and so on.

In the era of economic globalisation, languages have become marketing levers and enterprises must

manage them, paying attention also to consumers' attitudes, preferences and reactions to the languages used in communication (Heller 2010; Holmqvist, Grönroos 2012). These considerations have produced a series of studies on consumer behaviour and on the use of language for marketing communication. The results prove the following: (1) that the language used for marketing communication influences the consumer's perception of a product (Chen et al. 2006; Krishna 2012); (2) that the mother tongue of consumers is associated with the sense of belonging and closeness to the group (Myers-Scotton 1999, 2002); and (3) that the visual and oral processing of the same language may have different effects in different cultures (Schmitt et al. 1994; Pan, Schmitt 1996; Tavassoli, Han 2001; Zhang, Schmitt 2004). In certain countries, such as Japan, Korea, Germany and India, the use of English in advertisements usually suggests a positive stereotype and acts as a social symbol of modernity, progress, elegance and a cosmopolitan identity (Takashi 1990a, 1990b; Battistella 2002; Piller 2003; Krishna, Ahluwalia 2008). On the other hand, the use of English in Mexico for a domestic product tends to reduce trust and create less positive attitudes (Alonso García et al. 2013).

Mai and Hoffmann (2011) found that in Germany the use of a local dialect in a professional way in commercial relationships produces the following effects on purchasers: (1) purchasers do not underestimate the salesperson who speaks a familiar dialect; (2) it improves the satisfaction in the relationship with the salesperson; (3) it increases the satisfaction with the company; and (4) it promotes the intention to purchase.

Other studies focused on the antecedents of linguistic preferences in consumers and found that they depend on the perceived control, on linguistic abilities, on political considerations, and on ethnocentrism (Liu et al. 2005; Holmqvist 2011; Holmqvist et al. 2014). Krishna and Ahluwalia (2008) stressed that advertising by multinationals cannot imitate the linguistic strategies used by national companies, and that the efficacy of an advertisement based on mixed languages depends on the promoted product. Luna and Peracchio (2001, 2005) showed that the association of an appropriate image with a message broadcast in a certain language enhances its conceptual processing and the recollection of the spot, and reduces the differences in interpretation and reaction between native-language and second-language speakers. Zhang and Schmitt (2004) pointed out that the linguistic abilities required of individuals exposed to a bilingual advertisement influence neither their comprehension and message processing, nor their behavioural response to the advertisement. The previously quoted works by Luna and Peracchio show that code switching has a persuasive effect, which depends on the prominence of the switched word. Moreover, they also found that, if the association with the minority language is positive, the switch from a majority to a minority language has

a more persuasive effect than code switching in the opposite direction.

We considered a study on the extension of commercial life in food products[1], from which we acquired some information about consumers. We used the information in a limited way for the present work, in order to find out if there were any behavioural differences between the Italian-speaking linguistic majority and the two linguistic minorities of Italy – the Friulians and the Slovenians. We examined the same behaviours investigated in the abovementioned study. When it was found to be impossible to observe human behaviour directly, or when it it was possible that the behaviour could be altered by observation, the researchers used indirect measures; variables which they assumed to be known antecedents of the behaviour in question. The researchers focused on behaviours connected with the advertising of consumer goods, such as product prices, environmental concerns, lifestyle ("hectic life"), time management, and ethical aspects of human behaviour.

2. Research methods and data collection. Each behaviour considered in this work was measured by means of a battery of items, each of which returned a value on a measurement scale. The attachment 1 includes the Italian versions of the items used on each scale; this was the version used to collect the data in the interviews. The original versions can be found in the Bibliography. Each scale is based on the interviewed person's degree of agreement with each item – ranging from complete disagreement (1) to total agreement (7). The attitude measurement was calculated as the average of the scaled ratings given each item.

As regards advertising, the involvement of consumers was measured using Spielmann and Richard's (2013) scale *Defining overall advertising involvement*. Consumers' attitudes to each product's price were measured using a scale of *Price Consciousness* (Alford, Biswas 2002). The inclination of those interviewed to opt for an environmentally friendly behaviour was measured by means of the scale of *Environmental Concern* (Balderjahn et al. 2013). The ethical consequences of behaviour were measured using a scale of *Moral and Other-Orientad Reasoning* (Balderjahn et al. 2013). The attitude to life-style ("hectic life") was measured using two scales, one for *Time Management* and one for *Time Pressure* (Black 2004).

To find out if there were any differences between the behaviour of a linguistic minority and a linguistic majority, we did some tests (p=0,05), and interviewed a non-probability sample of consumers in Northeast Italy from September 2015 to May 2016. Membership of a linguistic minority was detected using two lists of items with yes-no questions. The first list focused on identity and on the sense of belonging: *Are you Italian? Are you Slovenian? Are you Friulian?* And so on. The second list, instead, referred to languages: *Do you speak Italian? Do you speak*

Slovenian? Do you speak Friulian? And so on. Foreign people, Italian people of other linguistic minorities, people who asserted to be both Slovenian and Friulian, or to speak one or more minority languages not belonging to the respective minorities, were not taken into consideration, since they were not sufficiently numerous.

3. Results. From a first overview of the questionnaires, 1080 interviews resulted valid and the consumers were divided into 4 subsamples (Table 1): 170 Italian consumers not belonging to any linguistic minority and not speaking a minority language; 144 Italian consumers belonging to the Friulian linguistic minority but not speaking Friulian; 407 Italian consumers belonging to the Friulian linguistic minority and speaking Friulian; 359 Italian consumers belonging to the Slovene linguistic minority and speaking Slovenian.

Table 2 reports the sex, age, qualification and per capita income of the consumer sample. The majority were women, with an age between 30 and 60 years, with a high school degree and a monthly per capita income between 1000 and 2000 euro.

Table 3 describes the scales used for the 1080 consumers in the sample. Before analysing the results, it is necessary to state that a scaled value was measured for each consumer and that the data in the table represent an average of the minimum, maximum and so on. A minimum of 1, for example, means that at least one interviewed person gave a 1 to all the items on the scale and a maximum of 7 that at least one interviewed person gave a 7 to all items on the scale. In particular, the lack of symmetry and kurtosis of the distribution confirm the efficiency of all the scales to measure the behavioural differences between those interviewed. To better understand the data, the average values and standard errors of the average are also reported in Figure 1. From this chart, one can observe that the consumer sample is not overly involved in the advertisement (*Message involvement*, *Media Involvement* and *Behaviour*), is generally attentive to price (*Price consciousness*), quite concerned about the environment (*Environmental concern*), fairly moralistic and selfless in making decisions (*Moral and other-orientated reasoning*) and, finally, manages to organise their time (*Time management*) despite leading a hectic life (*Time pressure*).

The *Time pressure* data are unusual, in that this scale uses *reverse items*, such as "Every day I take time for my hobbies", "Every day I take care of myself" and so on. This means that the greater the degree of agreement with a statement, the smaller the scale value. Put another way, considering the geographic area of the survey, where there is a strong presence of volunteering, sports and self-care activities, the expectation is to find people with time to dedicate to these activities and not those who have a hectic life. Therefore, the *Time pressure* scale should see more values between 1 and 4 than between 4 and 7. As a consequence

Table 1. Consumers' sample.

Belonging to the linguistic minority*	Speaking the minority language		number	%
	Slovenian	Friulian		
No one	no	no	170	15.7
Friulian	no	no	144	13.3
	no	yes	407	37.7
Slovene	yes	no	359	33.2
Total			1080	100.0

* All the interviewed people stated to be Italian and to speak Italian, no Slovene stated not to speak Slovenian.

Table 2. Socio-demographic characteristics of the consumer sample (N=1080; interviewed people %).

		Majority	Friulians Who Speak Friulian		Slovenes Who Speak Slovene	Total
			No	Yes		
Sex	Male	52.4	33.3	35.4	41.2	39.7
	Female	47.6	66.7	64.6	58.8	60.3
Age	< 30	27.6	39.6	19.4	13.4	21.4
	30-60	60.0	53.5	62.4	63.0	61.0
	> 60	12.4	6.9	18.2	23.7	17.6
Qualification	Compulsory School	20.8	16.0	24.8	27.9	24.0
	High School	50.0	48.6	50.6	49.6	49.9
	University	29.2	35.4	24.6	22.6	26.1
Monthly household per capita income (euro/month)	< 1000	15.6	11.8	16.5	10.6	13.7
	1001-2000	42.5	45.8	52.3	59.9	52.5
	2001-3000	25.1	26.4	21.1	22.3	22.8
	3001-4000	8.4	9.7	6.1	4.2	6.3
	4001-5000	3.6	2.1	0.5	1.9	1.7
	> 5000	4.8	4.2	3.4	1.1	3.0

of consistency, if the sample is quite moralistic, selfless, concerned about environment and invests time in the above-mentioned activities, then the *Time pressure* values should be lower – rather than higher – than 4, except where these activities are considered a duty, as work, and not a way to spend one's free time as the scale supposes.

The subsamples were harmonised according to sex, age, qualification and per capita income, in order to compare the linguistic minority and linguistic majority independently of these items. The residual numerosity is reported in Table 4. To sum up, we compared 129 females and 61 males within the same age-group (30-60 years), qualification (high school degree) and per capita income (1001-2000 euros per month). The more critical numbers were for males not speaking either minority language: these bases were at the very limit of acceptability.

The results of the comparison are reported in Figures 2-9.

Focusing on the male sample, Figures 2, 3 and 5 show that there are no significant differences between the four subsamples in terms of advertising, price and time. Figure 4 shows a significant difference among Friulian-speaking Friulian people and Slovenes in terms of *Moral and other-oriented reasoning*, since Slovenian people are more careful about these aspects of behaviour. A noteworthy difference can also be seen between the Slovenian and Friulian minority, on one hand, and the Italian majority on the other hand, in terms of the

environment. In this case, however, we have to take note of the extremely small size of the subsample.

The results of the comparison among females are depicted in Figures 6 to 9. If we consider price (Figure 7) and time (Figure 9), no significant differences emerged between the behaviours of the four subsamples. Figure 6, in contrast, shows a significant difference between Friulian women not speaking the Friulian language and those speaking one of the two minority languages. Friulian women who speak Friulian are more involved in advertising while Slovene women are more involved both with the media and with advertising messages. On the other hand, figure 8 reveals that women who only speak the majority language are less concerned about the environment than women who speak Friulian or Slovenian and less moralistic than women who speak Friulian.

4. Discussion and conclusions. Current literature shows that: 1) people's behaviour is influenced both by the language they speak and by the language or languages used by the media; 2) the status of a majority or minority language influences its impact on behaviour; 3) the effect of a language on behaviour may vary depending on population; 4) different languages may have different effects; 5) there is insufficient research on minority languages.

The first consideration to make is that the sample and subsamples studied do not represent a population and, as such, the averages may be

Table 3. Scale rate relieved for the whole sample (N=1080).

	Minimum	Maximum	Average	SE	Axymetry		Kurtosis	
					Stat.	SE	Stat.	SE
Advertising involvement - Message Involvement	1.0	7.0	3.3	0.05	0.32	0.07	-0.69	0.15
- Media Involvement	1.0	7.0	4.2	0.05	-0.21	0.07	-0.91	0.15
- Behaviours	1.0	7.0	2.9	0.03	0.43	0.07	-0.27	0.15
Price Consciousness	1.2	7.0	4.3	0.03	-0.21	0.07	0.07	0.15
Environmental Concern	2.1	7.0	5.1	0.03	-0.32	0.07	-0.26	0.15
Moral and Other-Orientated Reasoning	1.2	7.0	4.9	0.03	-0.28	0.07	-0.07	0.15
Time Management	1.0	7.0	4.5	0.04	-0.12	0.07	-0.19	0.15
Time Pressure	1.4	7.0	4.4	0.02	-0.27	0.07	0.44	0.15

Theoretical values of scales and their meaning: minimum 1 (total disagreement), maximum 7 (complete agreement), median 4 (indifferent).
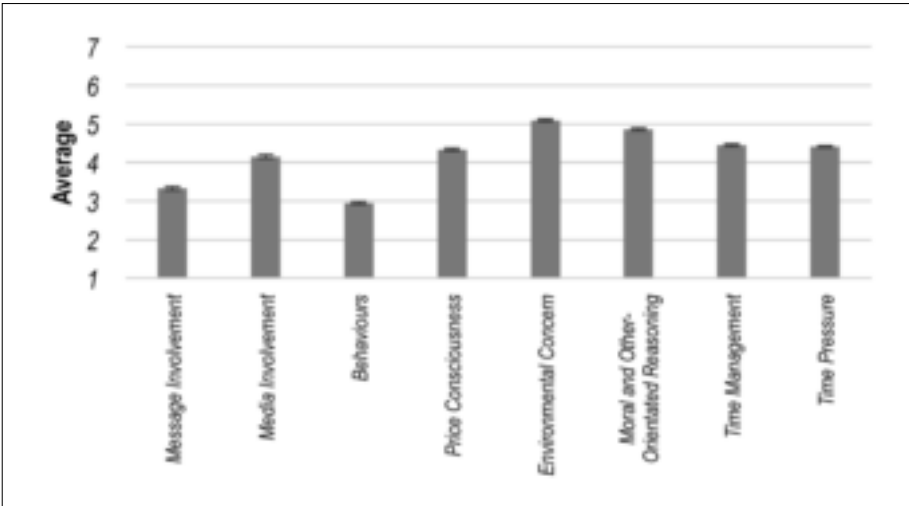
Figure 1. Attitudes of consumer sample (N=1080).

Table 4. Numerosity of subsamples following harmonisation according to sex, age, qualification and per capita income (Number of interviewed people).

	Majority	Friulians speaking Friulian language		Slovenes who speak Slovene	Total
		No	Yes		
Males	9	4	25	23	61
Females	17	15	55	42	129

Age 30-60; high school degree; monthly per capita income 1001-2000 euros.

considered valid for this analysis but cannot be used to express values for the whole related population.

We considered 8 behavioural antecedents: only four of them revealed some association with minority languages. The specific differences that emerged were between: 1) people speaking a minority language and those speaking a majority language; 2) people belonging to a minority and speaking a minority language and people of the same minority but not speaking the minority language; 3) people belonging to different minorities, irrespective of whether they speak the relative minority language or not. These results were not related to the four sociodemographic variables we applied, but it not clear whether they are perhaps related to other consumer traits. To sum up, the results of this work show that there are some behavioural antecedents that are not influenced by speaking a minority language and others, in contrast, that are. However, to understand whether the minority languages we analysed do indeed cause behavioural differences, it would be necessary to conduct further studies.

The conclusion from this work is that minority languages can be a determinant of human behaviour, especially behaviours with no apparent link to language, such as those related to the environment or to ethical consequences. This study confirms the fact that attitudes and measurement scales are an interesting research tool.

This work did not take into consideration linguistic behaviours; however, it does reveal a necessity to study attitudes towards majority and minority languages and analyse the cause-effect relationships between such attitudes and behaviour, in order to define an efficient linguistic policy.
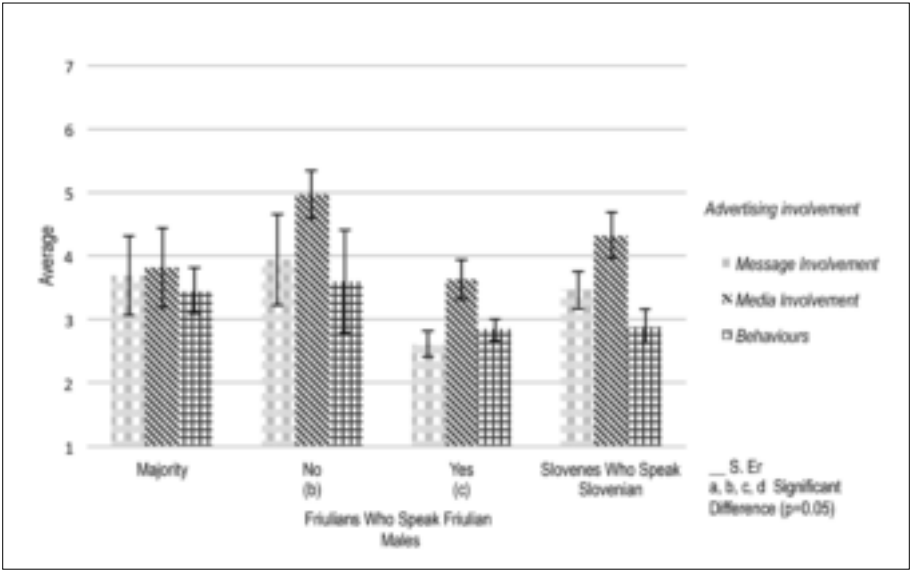
Figure 2. *Advertising involvement* of males belonging to a linguistic minority.
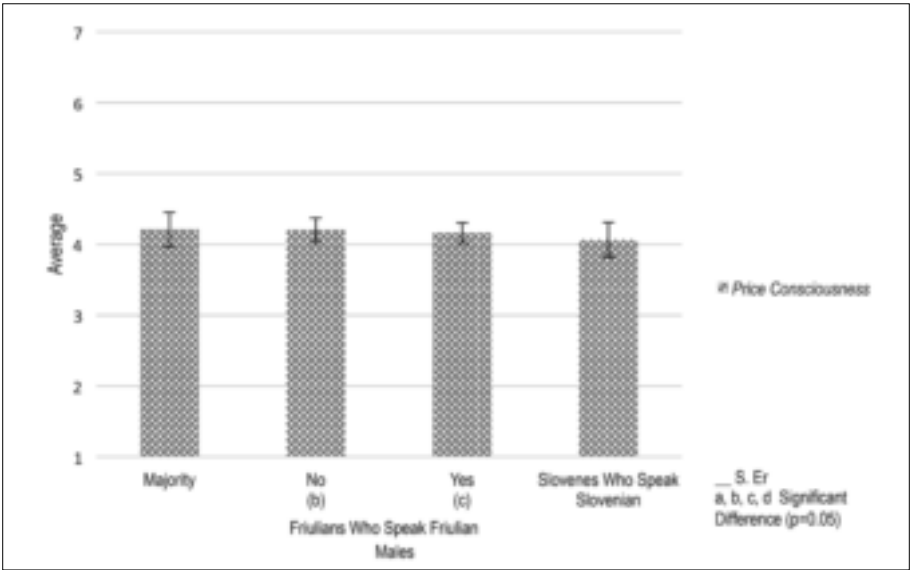

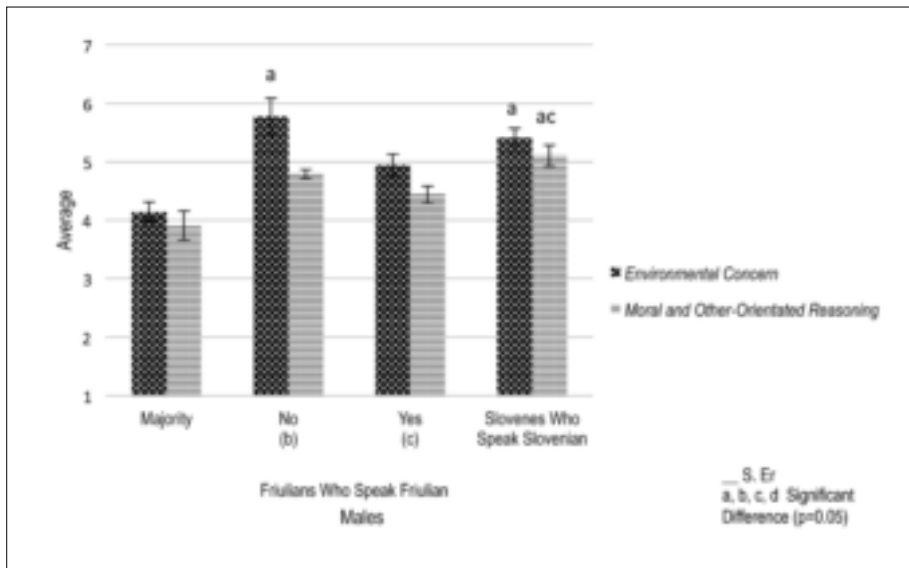Figure 3. *Price Consciousness* of males belonging to a linguistic minority.

Figure 4. *Environmental Concern* and *Moral and Other-Oriented Reasoning* of males belonging to a linguistic minority.
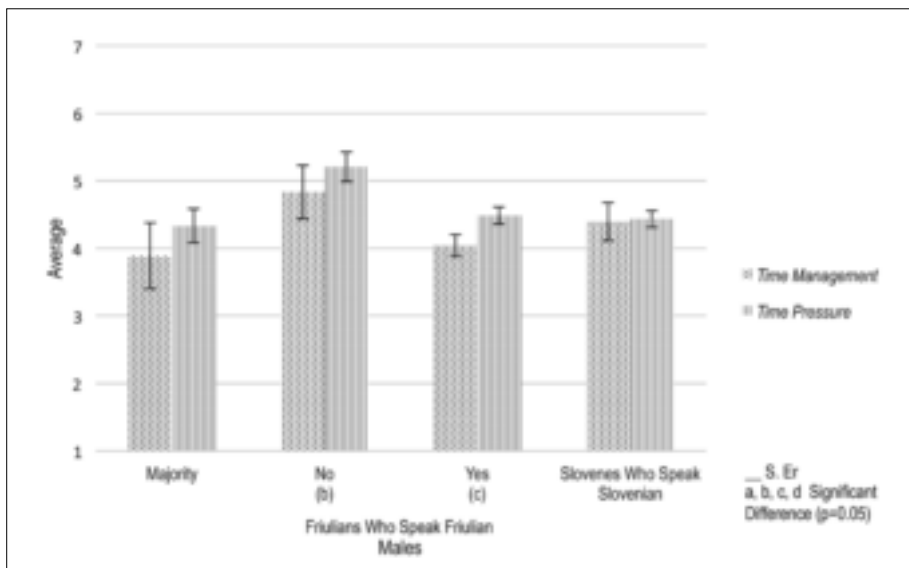

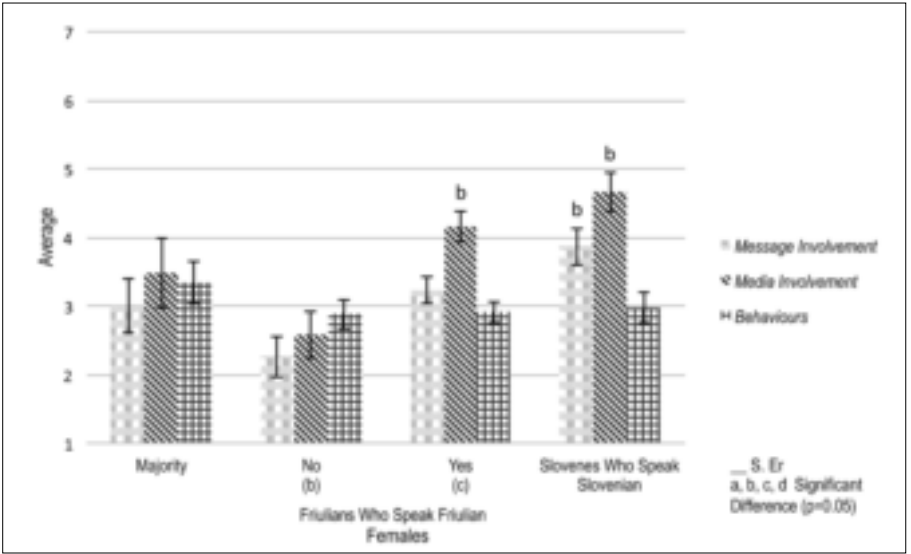Figure 5. *Time Management* and *Time Pressure* of males belonging to a linguistic minority.

Figure 6. *Advertising involvement* of females belonging to a linguistic minority.
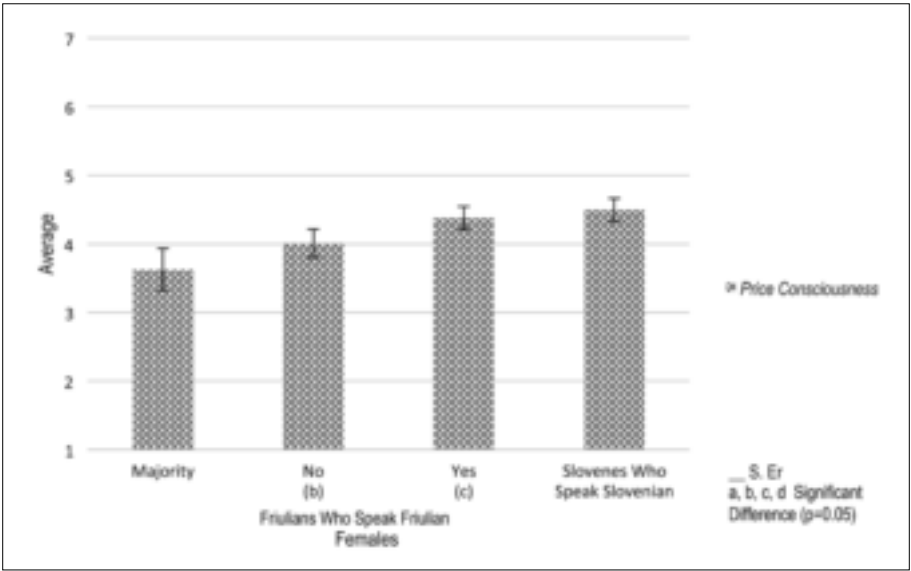

Figure 7. *Price Consciousness* of females belonging to a linguistic minority.
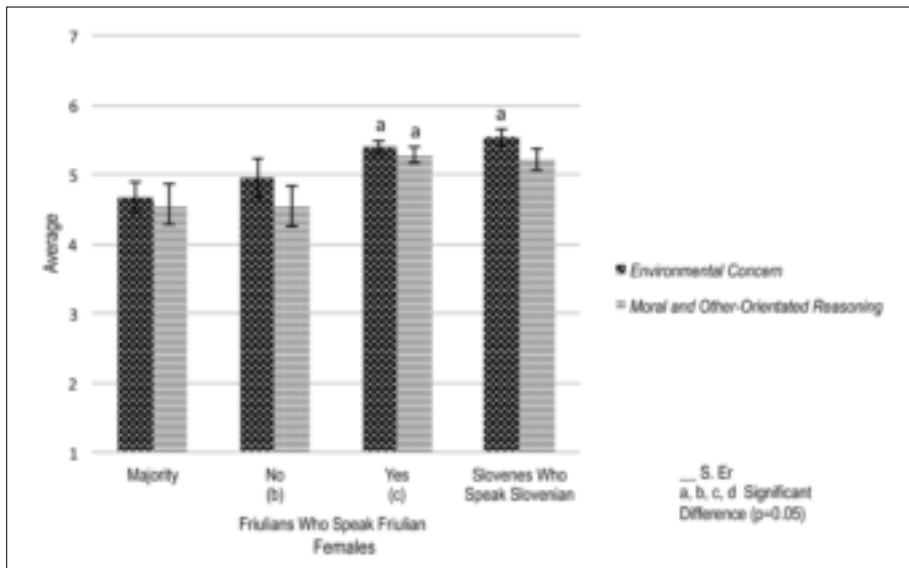
Figure 8. *Environmental Concern* and *Moral and Other-Oriented Reasoning* of females belonging to a linguistic minority.
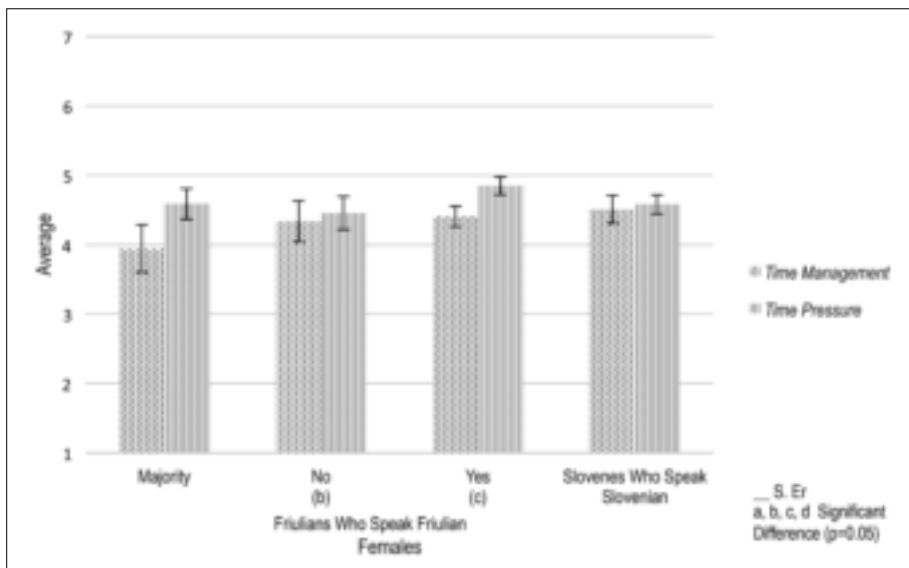

Figure 9. *Time Management* and *Time Pressure* of females belonging to a linguistic minority.

Attachment

Italian version of the items used for the attitude measurement scales. This version was used to elicit the data (measurement scale: total disagreement (1) or complete agreement (7).

1) *Advertising Involvement* (Spielmann e Richard, 2013)
   1.1 *Message Involvement*
   Mentre guardo la pubblicità di un prodotto alimentare:
   Trovo che sia importante.
   Trovo che sia di mio interesse.
   Trovo che sia rilevante.
   Trovo che sia significativa.
   Trovo che sia di valore.
   Trovo che faccia bene.
   Trovo che sia essenziale.
   Trovo che sia motivante.

   1.2 *Media Involvement*
   Presto attenzione al contenuto.
   Mi concentro sul contenuto.
   Penso al contenuto.
   Mi focalizzo sul contenuto.
   Faccio uno sforzo guardando il contenuto.
   Leggo con attenzione il contenuto.

   1.3 *Behaviors*
   Sono tentato di acquistare i prodotti alimentari pubblicizzati.
   Faccio uno sforzo per cercare ulteriori informazioni sui prodotti alimentari pubblicizzati.
   Segnalo ad un amico i prodotti alimentari pubblicizzati.
   Vado sui siti web dei prodotti alimentari pubblicizzati.
   Suggerisco a qualcuno di visitare i siti web dei prodotti alimentari pubblicizzati.

2) *Price Consciousness* (Alford, Biswas 2002)
   Sono disposto a fare un ulteriore sforzo per trovare prezzi più bassi.
   Comprerei in più di un negozio per approfittare dei prezzi bassi.
   Vorrei sempre fare acquisti in più di un negozio per trovare prezzi bassi.
   Il denaro risparmiato trovando prezzi più bassi di solito vale il tempo e lo sforzo.
   Di solito vale la pena "spendere" del tempo per cercare i prezzi più bassi.
. Se un prodotto è in sconto, può essere un buon motivo per comprarlo.
   Quando compro un marchio in sconto, sento che sto facendo un buon affare.

Ho le mie marche preferite, ma il più delle volte compro il marchio che è in sconto.

Sono più propenso ad acquistare i marchi che sono in sconto.

Rispetto alla maggior parte delle persone, sono più propenso ad acquistare marchi che sono speciali. (R)

3) *Environmental Concern* (Balderjahn et al. 2013)
Ho paura per le generazioni future quando penso alle condizioni ambientali.

Se continuiamo con lo stile di vita attuale ci avvicinando a una catastrofe ambientale.

Guardare la TV o leggere sui giornali dei problemi ambientali spesso mi imbarazza e mi fa arrabbiare.

Ci sono dei limiti della crescita economica che il mondo industrializzato ha già raggiunto o raggiungerà molto presto.

La grande maggioranza delle persone non agiscono in modo ecologicamente responsabile.

A mio parere, i problemi ambientali vengono molto ingranditi dai sostenitori del movimento ambientalista. (R)

È ancora vero che i politici fanno troppo poco per proteggere l'ambiente.

Per proteggere l'ambiente, noi tutti dovremmo essere disposti a ridurre il nostro tenore di vita attuale.

Devono essere adottate misure di protezione ambientale, anche se questo può ridurre il numero di posti di lavoro.

4) *Moral and other-orientated Reasoning* (Balderjahn et al. 2013)
Le mie decisioni sono solitamente basate sulla mia preoccupazione per le altre persone.

Le mie decisioni sono di solito basate su ciò che per me è il modo più equo e giusto di agire.

Scelgo alternative che sono destinate a soddisfare le esigenze di tutti.

Ho scelto una linea di condotta che massimizza l'aiuto che ricevono altre persone.

Ho scelto una linea d'azione che tiene conto dei diritti di tutte le persone coinvolte.

Le mie decisioni di solito sono basate sulla preoccupazione per il benessere degli altri.

5) *Time Management* (Black 2004)
Organizzo il mio tempo meglio di altre persone.

Mi piace organizzare le mie attività in base alle ore.

Poiché gestisco le mie attività in base alle ore, sono in grado di fare molte più cose.

6) *Time Pressure* (Black 2004)

Mi prendo del tempo per i miei hobby ogni giorno. (R)

Ogni giorno mi prendo cura di me. (R)

Ogni giorno metto da parte del tempo per me. (R)

Mi sembra di non avere mai abbastanza tempo per fare le cose che voglio.

Mi sembra sempre di essere di fretta.

Ho un sacco di tempo libero. (R)

(R) Variabile *reverse* (I valôrs da scjale di misurazion a son invertîts rispiet a chei rilevâts pal item).

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