

The friulian linguistic area

The Friulian-speaking area includes the north-eastern part of the Italian peninsula. To the north the border of the Friulian-speaking area is the Alp watershed, to the east the border sometimes runs parallel to the state border of Slovenia, and then follows the lower course of the Isonzo River down to the sea; to the south the border is represented by the Adriatic Sea, whilst to the west the Friulian-speaking area borders the Veneto region, on the upper course of the Livenza River, and then runs down to the sea excluding the western part of the province of Pordenone and including the eastern part of the province of Venice. The Friulians that actively speak the language in the region are approximately half a million, according to the data of a recent sociolinguistic survey conducted by the University of Udine.

We start with geography and some figures, to specify the area we are dealing with, i.e. by demarcating the area we can consider as Friulian from a linguistic point of view and by providing an estimate of the people that actually speak the Friulian language. Geography has its weight, obviously, because Friuli is and was a gateway and a meeting point for different cultures and peoples, a place where the three main 'linguistic' souls of Europe come into contact: the neo-Latin one, which we belong to, and then the Germanic and Slavic ones.

To the north, the border of the Friulian-speaking language is the Alp watershed, from the state border of Austria; to the east the border runs parallel with the state border of Slovenia, then follows the lower course of the Isonzo River, that separates the Friulian-speaking part of the province of Gorizia, on the right side of the Isonzo River, from the non-Friulian-speaking part, on the left side of the river; to the south the border is represented by the Adriatic Sea; to the west the Friulian-speaking area borders the Veneto region, on the upper course of the Livenza River, and then runs down to the sea excluding the western part of the province of Pordenone – with villages such as Caneva, Sacile, Prata and the main town of the province, Pordenone - and including part of the old municipality of Portogruaro, in the province of Venice – with villages such as Gruaro, Teglio, Fossalta, San Michele al Tagliamento – separated from the Patria del Friuli in the first half of the 19th century.

It is worth noting here that a long time ago Friulian was also spoken in Trieste and Muggia, and more specifically the local dialects, but was subsequently abandoned for Venetian dialects and the like. Especially in Trieste, the language change occurred around the mid-19th century, and in Muggia towards the turn of the same century. Much evidence remains of these lost varieties of the Friulian language, such as literary and religious texts. The Friulian-speaking area shows some sort of setback, though not significant, on the western border of the region, due to the pressure by neighbouring Venetian dialects, a setback that was partly offset by the expansion of the Friulian towards the north and the east, to the detriment of Slovene and German varieties found on the regional territory.