

# **Language Attitudes, Linguistic Authority and Independence in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Catalonia.**

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## **Abstract**

In a context of increasing linguistic and cultural diversity and political uncertainty in Catalonia, this article reports on a research project which set out to explore the attitudes of members of independence organisations operating in the city of Girona toward the Catalan and Spanish languages. This study approaches language attitudes through the theoretical lens of linguistic authority, in particular, the concepts of anonymity and authenticity. The data, gathered from six focus groups, provide an insight on the nature of linguistic authority in contemporary Catalonia. Two themes emerge in the informants' discussion of Catalan and Spanish: '21st Century Catalanisme' and 'Embracing Linguistic Diversity'. The comments of the respondents indicate that, against the backdrop of the independence process in the region, bilingualism and multilingualism have become highly valued in the territory. In addition, this study suggests that a fuller understanding of the situation in Catalonia may be facilitated by qualitative approaches, which explore attitudes in-depth.

**Keywords:** Catalonia, independence, linguistic authority, language attitudes.

# Introduction

The socio-political situation in Catalonia came to the full attention of the international media at the beginning of October 2017 when the region attempted to stage a referendum on its independence from Spain. Considering this, the ongoing political conflict in Catalonia provides an excellent opportunity to study the constructions of, and attitudes toward, Catalan and Spanish in the region (Castelló and Capdevila 2015; Micó and Carbonell 2017). In addition, the sociolinguistic situation in Catalonia is of great interest because it has features that make it different from that of other societies, with the coexistence of what Soler-Carbonell (2013) calls a ‘medium-sized’ language, Catalan, and a much larger language, Spanish (Vila 2013; Ubalde et al. 2017). Additionally, some of the most recent scholarly work illustrates changing attitudes toward Catalan and Spanish in the territory (Pujolar and Gonzàlez 2013; Soler-Carbonell 2013; Vila 2013; Woolard 2016; Dowling 2018; Ianos et al. 2018; Puigdevall et al. 2018). Given these issues, Catalonia represents an auspicious place for research with language and identity in the region facing major new problems and possibilities in a globalised world.

The aim of this study was to examine the interface between the informants’ language attitudes and their views on the Catalan independence movement. This article reports on the results of focus groups that I conducted with members of independence organisations in Girona (Catalonia) in the months that preceded the controversial self-determination referendum that took place on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 2017.<sup>1</sup> I suggest that language attitudes in Catalonia are adhering to a trajectory, in that there continues to be a shift in ethnolinguistic identity to an antiessentialist approach to language(s) with greater equanimity to language choice in general (Woolard 2008, 2016).

Language attitudes act like ‘windows’ that reflect deeper social processes, such as feelings towards groups or speakers and group affiliations (Ubalde et al. 2017). As such, this study proposes that language attitudes can serve as an analytical tool to slice through complex issues and illuminate the paradoxes of the ethnolinguistic situation in present-day Catalonia. In this research, I adopted Garrett’s (2010) construction of attitude, who defines an attitude as an evaluative orientation to a social object of some sort, whether it is a language, or a new government policy, etc. The ‘object’ in question in Garrett’s (2010) definition is language. I argue that the findings of this research can be usefully theorised through the theoretical lens of linguistic authority, which highlight the contrasting and competing ideologies of authenticity and anonymity (Gal and Woolard 2001; Woolard 2008, 2016).

The data demonstrated that the ongoing refashioning of the ties between language and identity in Catalonia was interwoven into the sovereignty movement in the territory. The findings of this investigation appear to be heightened by the current situation in Catalonia, with the stratospheric rise of independentism in the region and the ongoing tensions between state and regional governments (Dowling 2018; Hawkey 2018). The data, as I shall describe, reveals a dynamic relationship between the research participants’ language attitudes and how these attitudes intersected with their views on the Catalan independence project. Before describing the study and the results, I begin with a brief overview of the research setting, namely Girona. This is followed by a discussion pertaining to the lacuna in the current body of research. Following this, a brief review of the literature is presented.

## **Catalonia, Girona and Language Attitudes**

There is a wealth of macro data available regarding the sociolinguistic situation in Catalonia, the majority of which consistently suggests a positive diachronic trajectory for Catalan

(Atkinson 2018). However, throughout the region, the concepts of ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ language are blurred, varying spatially in terms of group status, power and size, depending on the geographical context in question (Rico and Jennings 2012; Astor 2016; Woolard 2016; Ubalde et al. 2017). The current investigation was located in Girona, a city that has been labelled ‘the heartland of Catalan nationalism’ (Lepič 2017). Girona has a population of 100,266 inhabitants and is situated 99 km northeast of Barcelona and 60 km south of the French border. The city is the capital of the *comarca* (county) of *Gironès* and the larger Girona Province (Nuss-Girona et al. 2016). Girona was selected primarily because it is a setting in which little academic attention has been granted in this field, with the majority of research being conducted in Barcelona and its surrounding area (see e.g., Woolard 1989, 2011, 2016; Boix-Fuster 1993; Pujolar 2001; Bretxa et al. 2008; Corona et al. 2013; Gal 2013; Soler-Carbonell 2013). As such, Marshall (2005) has called for more sociolinguistic studies to be conducted in the city. In terms of language knowledge and use in Girona, 89,279 (90.16%) of the population of the city claim to understand Catalan and 74,991 (75.73%) claim to speak Catalan. 4,067 (4.1%) residents of the city claim not to understand the language (IDESCAT 2017). In relation to the self-determination referendum held on October 1<sup>st</sup> 2017, 30,686 votes were cast in the city. From this number, 28,965 (94.39%) individuals voted ‘yes’ and 1,106 (3.62%) individuals voted ‘no’ for an independent Catalonia (Generalitat de Catalunya 2017a).

Quiroga (2014) points out that it is at the local level where the nation crystallises for individuals via national channels. Quiroga (2014) goes on to argue that a focus on the local permits for the investigation of particular political, ethnic and socioeconomic features of a community that often determine the national conceptualisation of language(s) and society. Thus, focusing on members of independence organisations in a local setting in Girona allowed me to ‘bridge historical, political and social perspectives to show how national identities are produced and

reproduced through everyday experiences' (Brubaker et al. 2008, 687). In addition, political change is one of the most significant features of the social context that enables the creation of new sociolinguistic meanings (Woolard and Gahng 1990; Woolard 1998, 2016; Cole and Williams 2004; Jaffe 2013). As such, the changing political context in Catalonia merits an exploration of the relationship between language, identity and political autonomy in Girona. Adding to this, in recent years 'Catalanism' in Catalonia has intensified on an unprecedented scale with a dialectical escalation between those political actors supporting independence and those who do not. This has resulted in a scenario of polarisation and a deep crisis of political legitimisation, where language is often a point of contention (Muñoz and Tormos 2015; Clua-Fainé 2017; Gagnon and Sanjaume-Calvet 2017; Hawkey 2018).

One of the first studies to be carried out on language attitudes in Catalonia was the now classic paper by Woolard (1989) and its continuation by Woolard and Gahng (1990). The first of these works concluded that both the group with a Catalan background and the group with a Spanish background showed a clear preference for their own language. The later study, Woolard and Gahng (1990), showed that even though participants still clearly preferred their own language, the perception of the Catalan spoken by Spanish speakers had improved. More recent research, conducted in various settings among varying groups in Catalonia, has found that not only the linguistic practices of many residents of Catalonia but also the ideological and attitudinal grounding of these practices has shifted noticeably in the opening decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with a reduction both in-group solidarity and out-group rejection in the region (Newman et al. 2008; Pujolar and González 2013; Woolard and Frekko 2013; Vila et al. 2018; Wilson-Daily et al. 2018). As such, it is argued by scholars that the new waves of immigration to Catalonia since the turn of the century are generating new multilingual and multicultural discourses, a dynamic that affects the national identity and language situations in the region, promoting inter-

group relations to a much greater extent (Lapresta-Rey et al. 2010; Woolard 2016; Ubalde et al. 2017). In line with this, research points toward a relaxation of what are considered Catalans ‘authentic’ features with a shift toward ‘anonymity’ (see e.g., Trenchs-Parera and Newman 2009; Pujolar and González 2013; Codó and Patiño-Santos 2014; Pujolar and Puigdevall 2015; Ianos et al. 2017a, b). In this respect, native speakers of Catalan no longer perceived the language as an ‘authentic’ language (Woolard 2009; Bou 2016). These conceptualisations of language(s) are discussed further in the next section.

## **Ideological Complexes: Authenticity and Anonymity**

The interface between the language attitudes of the respondents and their views on the Catalan secessionist movement was analysed through the theoretical lens of linguistic authority (Gal and Woolard 2001; Woolard 2008, 2016). Linguistic authority in modern western societies is often underpinned by one of two distinct ideological complexes, specifically authenticity and anonymity. These conceptualisations have been extensively discussed in relation to Catalonia (see e.g., Gal and Woolard 2001; Woolard 2008, 2016; Atkinson 2018). The concepts of authenticity and anonymity are ‘to a great extent coconstituted, meaning that they are defined in relation to each other as poles on an axis of linguistic differentiation’ (Gal, cited in Woolard 2016, 21). This conceptualisation is particularly useful in understanding the paradoxes which can be seen in situations of complex bilingualism involving minoritised languages (Atkinson and Kelly-Holmes 2016).

Authenticity is a term frequently found in studies of languages and nationalist movements. Here, authenticity locates the value of a language in its relationship to a particular community and is viewed as the genuine expression of such a community. Within the logic of authenticity, for a speech variety to have value it needs to be rooted in a social and geographic territory

(Woolard 2008). Woolard (2008, 2) adds that ‘To be considered authentic, a speech variety must be very much ‘from somewhere’ in speakers’ consciousness, and thus its meaning is profoundly local’. Woolard and Frekko (2013, 135) add that:

The ideology of authenticity credits a language variety with value insofar as it expresses the essential, distinctive nature of a community or a speaker, a view associated with Romantic particularism.

A given language can accrue authority at the level of authenticity as a ‘genuine expression’ or the ‘essential self’ of a community (Woolard 2008; Atkinson 2018; O’Rourke and Brennan 2018). Scholars have also noted that the ideology of authenticity and the link to identity can potentially constrain the acquisition and use of a minority language as a second language by a larger population (Woolard 2008; O’Rourke and Ramallo 2013).

Conversely, Woolard (2008, 2016), drawing from Nagel (1986), defines anonymity as ‘a view from nowhere’, where a language is unmarked and a ‘neutral public variety’. In addition, an anonymous language acts as a bridge that allows communication between diverse people (Hambye 2015), where a language ‘can represent and be used equally by everyone precisely because [it belongs] to no-one-in-particular [and is] positioned as universally open and available to all in a society’ (Woolard 2008, 307). I employ the concepts of authenticity and anonymity in this investigation as they are frequently prominent in discourses about languages role in society (Woolard 2016).

In terms of the changing role of languages in present-day Catalonia, Woolard (2016, 8) notes that:

Under autonomy and particularly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century there has been a turn-unsteady and sometimes unconvincing, but still a turn-away from authenticity-based discourses of language at both the public and personal level in Catalonia. [A turn] toward anonymity and allied concepts such as cosmopolitanism.

In this respect, language affiliations in Catalonia no longer seem to be solely based on fixed place-of-origin social categorisations, but on pluralised, fluid and cosmopolitan identities (Makoni and Pennycook 2012; De Fina 2016). As stated above, I wanted to explore members of independence organisations attitudes towards Catalan and Spanish in the context of the controversial Catalan independence referendum (October 2017). The importance of public debates on the co-officiality of languages in cases of political uncertainty, such as the sovereignty process in Catalonia, means that the study of language attitudes is of considerable importance (Ubalde et al. 2017). In such a context, I was particularly interested in how Catalan and Spanish were perceived within the independence movement in the region in terms of authenticity and anonymity. To conclude, through adopting a qualitative approach, I aimed to explore the relationship between the respondents' language attitudes and their views on the Catalan independence movement.

## **Methodology**

I chose to employ a qualitative approach to data collection in this research. Through employing this qualitative approach, I aimed to go beyond simple description and access the nature of linguistic, social and political phenomena in Girona (Heller 2011; Kamberelis and Dimitriadis 2011). Focus groups were used to gather data. The focus group or group interview is a 'nondirective' method of data collection which has been described as an interview with a group that aims to gather rich qualitative data from small numbers of people (Frankfort-Nachmias et

al. 2014). Dörnyei (2007) points out that focus groups can potentially reveal how participants may brainstorm their ideas together, share experiences, inspire and challenge each other and react to the emerging issues. Focus groups were considered especially beneficial given my interest in attitudes, because they facilitate a much more in-depth exploration than quantitative methods and participating in a focus group may lead to informants thinking about or talking about things that they may not have considered alone (O'Reilly 2009; Yitzhaki 2010). Additionally, focus groups were employed as they can provide unique insights into social and political phenomena and they can act as a method to re-contextualise political discourse expressed by politicians and the media in everyday conversation (Wodak et al. 2009; Kamberelis and Dimitriadis 2011).

For this investigation, I conducted a single focus group with six independence organisations in Girona.<sup>2</sup> I adopted a purposive sampling strategy in this study as it permitted for me to choose participants with specific characteristics that could act as rich sources of data (Draper and Swift 2011; Denscombe 2014). Recruitment procedures involved contacting a number of independence organisations through email. The focus groups took place between March 2017 and July 2017. The groups consisted predominantly of older respondents who employed Catalan as their habitual language. The focus groups were conducted in several different locations, such as conference rooms, offices and community centres. The focus groups all took place in the late evening, once participants had finished work and had the time to discuss the issues at hand. In the focus groups, I adopted a passive nondirective approach, whereby only enough questions or enough probes were used to keep the discussion going and interjection by the moderator was kept to a minimum (Frey and Fontana 1993). The aim was to facilitate the conversation in an unobtrusive and subtle manner, allowing participants to shape the discussion. Each group was small enough for everyone to have the opportunity to share

insights, and yet large enough to provide diversity of perceptions and ongoing conversation. However, at stages, the discussion became heated as participants sometimes disagreed with others point of view or thoughts on a subject. Nevertheless, each focus group participant was respectful of each other's opinions and comments. The fact that participation in the focus groups was on the basis of a response to a widely circulated email invitation sent to independence organisations, means that the 'sample' of respondents was random (beyond the fact that they were independence organisations in Girona, etc.). It may, of course, be the case that there was an element of selection 'bias' in the focus groups, in that the recruitment procedures may have attracted the attention of potential participants who felt particularly strongly about the situation in Catalonia.

In particular, as already mentioned, I was interested in the ways in which attitudes toward Catalan and Spanish might relate to the concepts of authenticity and anonymity. Following other recent applications of thematic data analysis in the context of language attitudes in Catalonia, such as Newman et al. (2013), I employed this method to identify the most salient categories to emerge from the data. Thematic analysis is flexible enough to provide deep and detailed descriptive accounts of complex data, while at the same time providing room for interpretation (Nowell et al. 2017). I treated the data from the focus groups as a single collection of texts and the six-stage guide to thematic analysis was adhered to, which provided a detailed description of the phenomena under investigation (Braun and Clarke 2006; Clarke and Braun 2013). Throughout the data analysis, it became clear that the informants' attitudes toward Catalan and Spanish were complex and multifaceted and seemed to be influenced by events in the region at the time of the data collection. In the following sections, I present extracts that highlight some of these tensions, focusing specifically on how ideologies of authenticity and anonymity are represented in the data.

## Findings and Discussion

As previously mentioned, the recent developments in contemporary Catalonia, comprising of mass-protests and the creation of new socio-political contexts, offered an excellent opportunity to examine the changing roles of Catalan and Spanish in the region. In all of the focus groups with the informants, Catalan and Spanish provoked much passionate debate. This was unsurprising, given the sensitivities about the role of the languages in Catalan society and the contentious referendum that was due to take place close to the period of data collection. Indeed, calls for independence in the territory has raised questions about what it means, personally and politically, to speak or not to speak Catalan or Spanish in contemporary Catalonia (Woolard 2016; Aramburu 2018).

The data revealed globally positive attitudes toward Catalan and Spanish. Echoing mainstream Catalan media and political discourse, linguistic diversity in Catalonia was framed positively when informants discussed the role of the languages in the modern independence process. Views of languages and identities were constructed as hybrid, multiple and fluid (Williams and Morris 2000; Heller 2003; Pujolar 2007a, b; Woolard and Frekko 2013; Torbisco-Casals 2017; Gamper-Sachse 2018). In what follows, I will give examples of some of the opinions of the speakers I interviewed in an effort to provide a picture of the sociolinguistic situation in present-day Catalonia. The constructions of the co-official languages in the territory and their fluid role in the sovereignty process, are explored under two motifs: ‘21<sup>st</sup> Century Catalanisme’ and ‘Embracing Linguistic Diversity’, where the former pertains to the Catalan language and the latter to the Spanish language.

## *21<sup>st</sup> Century Catalanisme*

The discussion of Catalan in the focus groups mirrored the wider discourse of the nationalist movement in Catalonia, which has seen the removal of ethnolinguistic divisions over the last decade (Cramer 2014). As such, many of the respondents expressed the same sort of fundamentally positive attitudes toward Catalan as those reported in other qualitative studies (see e.g., Gore 2002; Woolard 2009; Lapresta-Rey et al. 2010; Pujolar and González 2013; Puigdevall et al. 2018). In line with recent research, my data indicated that Catalan was, in general, considered an increasingly anonymous language, a language that did not belong to anyone and could be used by everyone within society (Woolard and Gahng 1990; Woolard and Frekko 2013; Pujolar and Puigdevall 2015). In my data, the respondents aligned themselves with the wider Catalan government policy and political rhetoric which promotes the idea of a collective nation in an attempt to erase the apparent linguistic and cultural divisions in the region (Woolard 1989; Franco-Guillén and Zapata-Barrero 2014).

When discussing Catalan and the independence movement, respondents were keen to stress that there had been a change in recent years with a movement away from the Catalan language as a fundamental aspect of the independence discourse. This echoes Trenchs-Parera and Newman's (2009) recommendation that in order to make Catalan more appealing to newcomers, the language should be constructed as a symbol of inclusion and openness, and not as an authentic language or a tool for assimilation for those new to Catalonia. Reflecting this, the participants below stated the following:<sup>3</sup>

There is still a relationship between identity and the language in the process, although surely this relationship is not as strong as it was a couple of years ago. (Pol, ERC)

[Catalan] is not a key factor, in my opinion. The language is not a key factor in the [independence] process. (Sofia, ERC)

While historically there had been an association between the language and the independence movement, respondents claimed that language choice and views on Catalan independence were no longer mutually exclusive. Discussing this issue further one interviewee said:

Well, it [the Catalan language] is one of the cultural features of what Catalan identity, *Catalanità*, would be. However, I believe that it is not exclusive and it probably doesn't need to be so at a political level. Nonetheless, I think that, for many years, Catalan nationalism has defended the Catalan language as a symbol of Catalonia and as a symbol of Catalan nationalism. But when the time has come to sell the country or make speeches about Catalonia as a nation, there might have been an excessive focus on the language aspect, leaving out some other aspects and maybe not being aware of the changes that Catalan society has undergone. But I think that this has changed due to the independence process, this is clear with organisations such as *Símate*<sup>4</sup> and others. In my opinion, the pro-independence people who used to have a strong militant attitude toward the language could not have understood the project of a country without the Catalan language as a central element of it. In the end, a compromise has been reached amongst ourselves and we say, 'let's see how we do this?', and acknowledged that this society is more than just the language. (Oriol, CUP)

The data indicated that Catalan nationalism had adapted to the multilingual and multicultural environment or linguistic and cultural patchwork of modern Catalonia (Bernaus et al. 2007), an approach labelled 'demographic pragmatism' by Woolard (2016). As such, Catalan was particularly valued in terms of its anonymity (Woolard 2008, 2016), something that stands out

quite clearly in the following extract, where the informant discussed the changing role of the Catalan language in the independence process.

It is an important factor because many people identify the Catalan language with *Catalanism* [Catalan nationalism], and the next step is independence. But what we are saying is that they are not mutually exclusive, there is an important part of Catalan society that is not Catalan speaking but they are in favour of independence. In fact, there are groups, such as *Súmate*, who call themselves independentists, Spanish speaking independentists. So, then the Catalan language is not even the most important factor when it comes to identifying as a pro-independence organisation. (Tomàs, ERC)

Tomàs's comments reflect the argument that the role of Catalan in the independence process had shifted in recent years and now embodied a type of 'integrative' or 'civic' nationalism, one with a reduced focus on linguistic criteria (Clua-Fainé 2011; Woolard and Frekko 2013; Soler-Carbonell et al. 2016; Woolard 2016). Participants frequently expressed the belief that previously there had been an overemphasis on the role of the Catalan language in the independence project and this had resulted in elements of Catalan society being excluded from the independence debate, primarily those who did not speak the language. Providing further insight into the situation, the informant below stated the following:

[Catalan] is a key factor for Catalan identity, but for the independence process, as I said, it has lost importance. 15 or 20 years ago, when pro-independence people were a minority, the mentality was more Catalan nationalist and the movement was led by Catalan people, so the language was more of an important factor. One thing is whether you consider the language to be more or less important, but as we can see, it has lost importance. (Arnau, Ateneu 24 de Juny)

The data presented above mirrors the argument that the independence movement in Catalonia had historically made the mistake of associating ‘Catalanness’ with exclusively speaking Catalan. Informants were keen to stress that such an approach was a mistake, as it had only resulted in certain demographics being excluded from the community. In the current investigation, Catalan was increasingly constructed as a public, standard language or a language of civic participation. As such, more voices were able to incorporate it into their language repertoire (Heller 2006; Soler-Carbonell 2013; Mulcahy 2017).

With this change, della Porta et al. (2017) note that the independence movement in Catalonia has increasingly tried to incorporate people not exposed to Catalan-centric cultural frames of reference, principally second-generation immigrants who were traditionally outside the scope of Catalan nationalism. My findings reflect Illas’s (2014, 6) work, who asserts that:

Separatism is no longer explicitly tied to the central identity mark of the language. The movement is composed of Catalan speaking and Spanish speaking militants and has the support of multiple collectives of non-European immigrants with no historical links to the Catalan structures of feeling.

The data revealed that choosing to communicate in Spanish or Catalan had little impact on the research participants’ views on the Catalan independence movement. In this regard, the sovereignty process seemed to hinge less and less on the value of the Catalan language as an index of ‘authenticity’ and more on its value for articulating an open public sphere and a cosmopolitan community (Woolard 2008, 2016). The cosmopolitan orientations displayed throughout the data seemed to have permitted for the opening of the independence project to an ethnolinguistically heterogeneous Catalan society (Newman 2011). The relaxation of the link between language and independence is perhaps unsurprising given the sociolinguistic and

socio-political diversity of modern Catalan society. From this perspective, the informants attitudes perhaps converge with government policies that promote the idea of a collective nation and the removal of linguistic and cultural divisions, in contrast to familiar nationalist political rhetoric (Corona et al. 2013; Newman et al. 2013; Pujolar and Gonzàlez 2013; Woolard and Frekko 2013; Woolard 2016). Illas (2014) argues that this reformulation of Catalan in the independence movement serves to benefit the ruling elites of Catalonia who strive to obtain the state power that Barcelona needs to remain competitive in the global market. Illas (2014, 7) adds that separatism is seen as ‘the political expression of a new generation of entrepreneurs ready to compete on a global scale and without the costly and often hostile intermediation of Madrid’.

To sum up, the data suggests that there has been a removal of ethnolinguistic divisions in the sovereignty movement in Catalonia, whereby the right to decide on the region’s future was presented as an inclusive broad-based (transversal) civic rather than ethnic movement (May 2012; Urla 2012b; Woolard 2016). The loosening of the link between the Catalan language and Catalan independence was constructed as a resource that was being used to recruit more non-native speakers of Catalan into the movement and increase its overall support base. However, some scholars would question the motivation for this reformulation of Catalan as a pillar of the independence discourse, with Tortella (2017) noting that for the political elite in the region independence is the ‘Promised Land’, where an independent Catalonia would be like their own private ranch. This is in contrast to average Catalan, where independence would have no material benefit. Miley (2007) adds that there are hidden ethnolinguistic divisions in the population and that the nationalist movement in the region is overwhelmingly ‘ethnic’ and an elite-led ‘top-down’ project. Echoing the wider political discourse, for the respondents it was clear that if the Catalan language remained at the heart of the process (as it once did) this would

only serve to alienate a large section of Catalan society and undermine the opportunity for Catalonia to become an independent state. The remainder of the discussion will be devoted to an exploration of the responses regarding the Spanish language, speakers of Spanish and their role in the Catalan independence process.

### *Embracing Linguistic Diversity*

The previous section indicated that those calling for an independent Catalonia had adapted to the changing linguistic and cultural reality of the region. The findings demonstrate that the Catalan language did not seem to be as prominent or important in the discourse of those campaigning for an independent Catalonia and was a ‘common, unmarked standard public language’ (Woolard 2008, 4). The importance of promoting a civic, rather than an ethnic construction of Catalan identity was, as Strubell (1999, 9) notes, to ‘avert the threat of a social and even political division among ethnolinguistic (and probably urban class) lines’.

Pujolar (2007a, b) argues that, in migrant-receiving bilingual or multilingual nation-states, foreigners become the target of diverse nation-state or regional governmental language policies and campaigns compete to attract new speakers into their language projects. This approach was evident in the discourse of the informants in this study. In response to contemporary multilingual and multicultural Catalonia, informants stressed the importance of Spanish speakers and other linguistic groups to the success of the independence movement. Indicating that in the case of Catalonia appeals to nationhood have been meaningfully calibrated to include non-traditional communities too. For example, the respondents below stated the following:

We are dependent on those who are not Catalan speakers, who mostly speak Spanish and who are in favour of independence. (Pol, ERC)

In the last elections we [ERC] brought in more Spanish speakers, like we said, to continue expanding not only the party, to fulfil the vision of creating a more hegemonic party in the future Republic, but also to take advantage and expand our base and win the referendum. Because without Spanish speakers we will never gain independence from Spain because Catalans are not a majority in Catalonia. (Sergi, ERC)

The excerpt below provides another example of the changing role of the Spanish language in Catalan society and the independence movement in the region.

If you go to some metropolitan areas, there are many people who speak Spanish and who are also separatists, I am an example of this. I come from a Spanish family and most of my family believes in the independence process, and we are not Catalan speakers. We know about it, we talk about it, but we are not Catalan speakers. (Emili, Ateneu 24 de Juny)

Another participant discussed the changing role of Spanish speakers in Catalonia and the importance of Spanish speakers to the independence movement.

There are Catalan speakers who are not independentists, but perhaps they feel Catalan and Spanish, or only Spanish. And these types of messages, with the *Senyera*<sup>5</sup> and the Spanish flag, and in Spanish and in Catalan, is a type of message that both Catalans and Spaniards question. It's a type of message that serves political parties. Well, it's legitimate, because they also have to try to get as many votes as possible to achieve their goals. (Iker, ANC)

The conceptualisation of Spanish in the excerpts above suggest that there has been a change in the independence movement in Catalonia. This transformation has assisted Spanish speakers,

as well as new foreign immigrants, in joining the national representation of the territory. Adding to this another focus group participant stated the following:

I believe that this is one of the greatest assets that the Catalan independentist process has had: that no political identity or tendency is excluded or should be excluded.  
(Aleix, ADAC)

The comments above seem to confirm the assertion that sovereignty movement in Catalonia is a more open, assimilationist and inclusive nationalism with no ethnic, religious, or linguistic distinctions (Conversi 2000; Gore 2002; Rodon and Franco-Guillén 2014; Woolard 2016; Aramburu 2018). The comments below illustrate the change in Catalonia toward an inclusive *Catalanism*:

I also especially think that Catalan nationalism has done something very intelligent. In other words, a language can be used in two different ways when building a nation, either as an exclusive element or as an inclusive element [...] Catalan nationalism finds itself in a completely new situation, it has been challenged by immigration coming from other areas of the Spanish State (Sibil·la, ADAC)

The above excerpts illustrate the importance of embracing the linguistic reality of modern Catalonia and incorporating Spanish speakers into the sovereignty process and ensuring that they vote. Dowling (2018) points out that no monolingual project for independence can ever attain a social majority in Catalonia. Traditionally, Spanish speakers in Catalonia (usually descendants of families that arrived in the territory from different regions in Spain during the 50s and 60s) had been omitted from the debate surrounding an independent Catalonia (Conversi 2000; Marshall 2006; Kleiner-Liebau 2009). My data indicated that separatism was transforming into a hegemonic movement, one that has traversed linguistic divisions where

both Spanish and Catalan were constructed as anonymous languages within the confines of the independence discourse (Woolard 2016; Minder 2017; Aramburu 2018; Dowling 2018). In addition, the findings reflect the argument that the sovereigntist discourse has become hegemonic in present-day Catalonia in soft ways or ways that evade block thinking and strong polarisation along national identity lines (Kraus and Vergés-Gifra 2017). Although as noted in the previous section, the apparent removal of linguistic divisions in the sovereignty movement requires problematisation. Considering this, the role and motivation of political and cultural elites in modern Catalonia cannot be ignored. Cramer (2015) adds that their leaders come from educated middle-class backgrounds and many are media professionals who understand the power and reach of new media in serving their agenda (Castells 2012).

Nonetheless, my data suggest that many of the respondents are much less ready to assign ‘authentic’ status to Spanish when it came to its role in the independence movement. However, this was not to say that for some informants that the Spanish language was not marked or unproblematic. For example for the respondent below, Spanish could not function as a natural, unmarked, anonymous variety or as ‘just talk’ (Woolard 2008).

In terms of the referendum, to win over the Spanish speakers and obtain the votes we need, *ANC* now uses Spanish in order to get more people to participate in the vote, it’s like a stab in the back! Some say that Spanish must also be an official language in the new Republic of Catalonia, which could be very damaging. And those saying this are in favour of independence, so you must keep that in mind.  
(Alba, *ANC*)

Despite Alba’s comments above, the majority of the respondents who contributed to this investigation constructed Spanish as an accessible, valuable, and ultimately anonymous language within the sovereignty process in Catalonia. Aramburu (2018, 11) adds that until

relatively recently, ‘the traditional profile of independence supporters of immigrant origin was that of ‘boundary crossers’ who attempted to pass unnoticed among the natives, downplaying the possible marks of their different origins as much as possible’. However, as Siqués (2008) and Pujolar (2010) note, the new social composition of Catalonia has reframed the public discourse regarding Catalan and Spanish within the independence project. Aramburu (2018, 10) offers a summary, stating that:

In the 2012 election, the independence movement realised that to secure a majority it had to attract a larger percentage of Castilian speakers. Since then, appeals to Catalans ‘regardless of where they come from and of the language they speak’ have been a constant in the impassioned speeches of pro-independence leaders, and that very fact implies a greater degree of recognition of the diversity of Catalan society than what had been customary in the official narrative until then.

Reflecting the comments above, the data analysis showed largely positive attitudes toward speakers of Spanish and there was an emphasis placed on including Spanish speakers into the independence movement. Here, speakers of Spanish were now viewed as a resource by the research participants; a resource that could be employed to increase the support base and probability of success for the sovereignty movement. This reflects the wider argument that to gain international recognition, the independence project in Catalonia has attempted to erase any nationalistic motivations from its discourses of justification, presenting itself as a civic nationalism, neither xenophobic nor closed but pro-European and open (Vergés-Gifra, cited in Gamper-Sachse 2018).

## Conclusion

At a time when the Catalan and Spanish languages are at the centre of current political and social issues, studying what speakers think about languages is of central importance for our understanding of the situation in Catalonia (Newman and Trenchs-Parera 2015; Woolard 2016; Minder 2017; Dowling 2018). In this study, I sought to investigate how a complex sociopolitical and sociocultural situation was reflected in what speakers thought about the Catalan and Spanish languages and their respective role in the Catalan secessionist movement. To unravel the complexities of the situation in Catalonia I employed the framework of linguistic anonymity and authenticity. Unsurprisingly, given that the use of the concepts authenticity and anonymity are infrequent outside of academic discourse, none of the respondents used either term explicitly. However, the data do seem to reveal a pattern in the attitudes of the respondents.

The data indicated that the forces of globalisation and the sociolinguistic agencies of new migrants have accentuated the need for the sovereignty project in Catalonia to undergo a process of re-imagination to consolidate itself in its current form (May 2012; Crameri 2014, 2015; Bel 2015; Boylan 2015; Woolard 2016; Colomer 2017). Similar to the situation in Quebec, but perhaps at an accelerated rate, the independence movement in Catalonia has made an effort to reach immigrant and minority groups since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Duerr 2011). The re-imagination of Catalan has seen it become a gradually anonymous language (or ethnically unmarked) and increasingly detached from binary ‘Spaniard’ or ‘Catalan’ identities within the confines of the independence project in the region. Consequently, the data suggests that Catalan has fewer group belonging connotations than in the past and language choice is now becoming increasingly about personal preference rather than ethnic affiliation within the

independence project in Catalonia. This is in contrast to other work which suggests that the languages of speakers in Catalonia remain, to varying degrees, rooted in their identity (Lapresta-Rey et al. 2010; Ianos et al. 2017a, b; Hawkey 2018).

Dominant Spanish discourses hostile to Catalan nationalism depict it and wider Catalan linguistic policies as illiberal and oppressive to Spanish speakers (Woolard 2016). The data presented in this research reveals an alternative portrait of Spanish speakers in the independence project. With only around a third of the population in Catalonia using Catalan as an everyday means of communication (IDESCAT 2015; Vila et al. 2018), the data suggest that the secessionist movement is now more aware of the diverse nature of Catalonia and, as such, now has a reduced focus on linguistic criteria. To open-up the independence project and increase potential support beyond those who did not have Catalan as their first language, there was now an emphasis placed on incorporating Spanish speakers into the wider discussion. In brief, Spanish speakers were openly welcomed into the project and deemed critical if the push for an independent Catalonia was to be successful. The more recently arrived linguistic groups to Catalonia from Northern Africa, South America and Asia were also constructed as vital to the success of the independence project.

In short, in the present work, I have revealed how the social and political changes in Catalonia have reframed the ecolinguistic context in the region, seemingly opening new avenues and possibilities for languages in the secessionist movement. As such, the space that Catalan and Spanish occupied in the independence project was embedded in a form of ‘cosmopolitan nationalism’ or ‘rooted cosmopolitanism’ (Appiah 2005; Trenchs-Parera and Newman 2009; Woolard 2016). In this regard, both Catalan and Spanish have become ‘anonymous’ within the independence discourse, albeit to different degrees for each language. The attitudes revealed in my data seem to support other work from the Catalan context such as Woolard and Frekko

(2013), who posit that on the ground in the region there seems to be a trend away from authenticity toward anonymity for Catalan, and even beyond to a new inchoate legitimating ideology that challenges both of these discourses (Woolard 2008). Although other research indicates that the ‘ethnonational paradigm’ still lingers for some in Catalonia (see e.g., Lapresta-Rey et al. 2010; Newman and Trenchs-Parera 2015; Ianos et al. 2017a, b; Iveson 2018). This perhaps suggests that outside of the independence discourse in modern Catalonia neither Catalan nor Spanish may be able to act as an authentic or an anonymous language (Atkinson 2018). This construction indicates, that although the sovereignty movement is attempting to become much more inclusive, an ethnic veneer may remain.

The findings also mirror the wider literature insofar as language attitudes and their evolution are closely associated with social, political and cultural developments (Woolard 1989; Baker 1992; Garrett 2010; Tódor and Dégi 2016). In line with this, my research demonstrates that there seems to be much more of a post-modernist discourse, with cosmopolitan attitudes toward both Catalan and Spanish present. Nevertheless, this investigation only provides a snapshot of a fluid situation in Catalonia. It is difficult to predict how the situation in the region will play itself out in the future but what does seem sure is that the potential for an independent Catalan state looks much more remote in light of recent events (see e.g., Gamper-Sachse 2018; Rodon and Guinjoan 2018). Whatever happens, Catalonia will remain an important object for study in the field of nationalism, secession movements and minority language studies into the future.

## Notes

- 1 Data for this project was obtained from six organisations, namely:
  - Ateneu d'Accio Cultural (ADAC)
  - Candidatura d'Unitat Popular (CUP)
  - Ateneu 24 de Juny
  - Súmate
  - Assemblea Nacional Catalana (ANC)
  - Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC)
  
- 2 Thirty-six respondents contributed to the focus groups in total. A single focus group was conducted with each organisation.
  
- 3 Pseudonyms are used throughout, and details have been removed to anonymise informants.
  
- 4 *Súmate* is a non-political, pro-independence civic organisation for individuals who speak Spanish and/or claim Spanish heritage. *Súmate* seeks to increase support for Catalan independence among demographics that may not have traditionally supported the movement. As stated above, *Súmate* was one of the organisations that contributed to the current research.
  
- 5 The *Senyera* is the flag of Catalonia and is flown on public occasions in public venues.

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