

## **Language and Education Issues in Global Catalonia. Questions and Debates across Scales of Time and Space**

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Historically, Catalonia has been considered a key site where issues of language and society can be fruitfully explored in order to illuminate central sociolinguistic debates, with an emphasis on power struggles between majority and minority/minoritized languages. A powerful reason behind this is the fact that Catalan continues to thrive in Catalonia, which is why Catalonia's language policy has been traditionally considered a success story in the process of reversing language shift (e.g. Fishman, 1991). In the early 1980s, after four decades of explicit institutional repression during the Franco era (1939-1975), Catalonia recovered some important self-rule powers that helped to secure the continuity of Catalan language, particularly in the areas of public education and mass media broadcasting. These two areas produced a positive impact in terms of making the language more publicly available and spreading the knowledge of it amongst those groups in the population who did not speak it as a home language and for whom Catalan was at the time absent from their immediate sociolinguistic environment. These were groups of newly arrived migrants of Spanish-speaking origin coming from other parts of Spain and their descendants, who settled in the growing industrial areas of Catalonia during the sixties and early seventies. The adoption of a Catalan immersion programme in schools also made an impact in the population whose L1 was Catalan, as from the mid-eighties this part of the population was able to learn the language in a formal environment, a possibility that did not exist during the Franco era.

In the period shortly after the transition towards democracy, Catalan and Castilian-speakers formed two fairly distinguishable ethnolinguistic groups, with the language being a clear marker of who belonged to which group (Woolard, 1989). However, as the knowledge of the language began to spread among the general population, language choice started to lose its marker as a symbolic identity trait (Boix, 1993), and more playful uses of Catalan and Castilian were observed by language ethnographers in the mid-nineties (e.g. Pujolar, 1997). After the turn of the century and with Barcelona progressively consolidating itself as an internationally or city, Catalonia has received another important wave of migrants. In comparison to the migration waves of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this time the impact on the local language ecologies seems to have been stronger, since in about a decade one million people have arrived and settled in Catalonia (currently, about 1,1 million people without Spanish citizenship live in Catalonia, source: Idescat, n.d.).

At present, the more recently arrived population to Catalonia come from radically diverse linguistic and cultural origins, mostly from Africa (28% of the foreign population), in particular Morocco, Gambia and Senegal, the rest of the EU (26%), Latin America (20%), and Asia (13%); the remaining 14% of foreign nationals come from other non-EU countries, and from North America (Idescat, n.d.). These new sources of diversity place more pressure on an already complex sociolinguistic environment, but paradoxically enough, it is precisely these heightened mobility flows which seemingly have enabled Catalan to outgrow its 'native-speaker' niche and to be adopted by speakers of different linguistic, ethnic and social backgrounds, who use it for different purposes and in different situations in their daily lives (Woolard & Frekko, 2013). The fact that Catalan has continued to be the main language of instruction at schools in Catalonia has also been an important element.

Nevertheless, tensions about language in Catalonia, especially in the context of education, persist and in recent years have been heightened at the same time that the political struggle between the Catalan and the Spanish central governments has also increased. As Woolard and Frekko (2013) point out, the present debates resemble those of past decades, and thus one could have the impression that nothing has changed in the sociolinguistic makeup of Catalonia. However, at the moment, language-in-education issues have become more legally entrenched, particularly since the passing and drafting of the new Spanish education law LOMCE (Ley Orgánica para la Mejora de la Calidad Educativa) (Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports, 2013). In the debates that led to the approval of this law, the then Minister of Education called for the need to ‘hispanicize’ [sic] Catalan pupils and for them to feel as proud of being Catalans as of being Spanish (El País, 2012). This was seen as necessary by the Minister in order to prevent the growing pro-independence support in Catalonia. One of the most polemic items of the law is the provision that it contains in relation to the possibility for families to choose the school for their children on linguistic grounds, something that goes clearly against the established model of linguistic immersion in Catalonia, which avoids segregation of students for linguistic reasons. Such a model is indeed highly complex and applied differently and with different degrees of success, as Bretxa *et al.*, Aliagas *et al.*, and Corona illustrate in their papers in this special issue. However, it continues to be generally perceived as a necessary tool to provide the language skills in Catalan to those who do not speak the language at home and for whom it is clearly absent in their immediate surroundings, as noted above.

The Minister of Education epitomises one of the positions in the current debate: the right for those families who so wish to have their children study through the medium of Spanish, thus framing the struggle in legal and juridical terms. This is not an original argument in the discussion by any means, but it has increasingly gained impetus after several court resolutions forcing some schools in Catalonia to teach 25% of the curriculum in Spanish; this has been recently the case in Mataró and in Sant Cugat del Vallès (Barcelona) (El Punt Avui, 2015). These events have been unfolding against the background of an increased demand by the regional government and a number of political parties supported by the population in Catalonia to be able to hold a referendum in order to decide about the region’s relationship with the rest of Spain, much like in the Scottish case. However, the Spanish government’s response to this demand has up to now been always negative, judicializing an issue that is clearly of a political nature, and turning the Constitutional Court into the arbiter of this political struggle. This, we must note, is in line with Hirschl’s (2004) account of several recent constitutional revolutions around the world, which are more often than not driven by the strategic interplay of (threatened) political and economic elites to hold on to their powerful positions, rather than a commitment of these actors towards democracy and social justice (Hirschl, 2004).

At the time of writing (October 2015) and after the recent regional elections in Catalonia of 27 September 2015, the situation is politically very unstable. Although the pro-independence parties have won the elections with a clear majority, there is a plethora of different ideological strands within that block that make their position a very fragile one (a similar situation, it needs to be added, can be found within the block of parties opposing Catalonia’s independence). The Spanish elections of 20 December 2015 will necessarily have an impact on the situation in Catalonia, but the aim of holding a referendum in the region mirroring Scotland’s example of 2014 seems still very unfeasible. Interestingly, at the public level and as Woolard and Frekko (2013) note, the discussion tends to be pitched against the one-nation-one-language (monoglot nationalist) ideology, with actions from one part of the equation perceived as threats to the existence and survival of the other party at the other end of it. On the ground, however, speakers and institutions in Catalonia need to continue making

linguistic choices, and as in many post-national, cosmopolitan regions elsewhere (Heller & Duchêne, 2012), such choices are increasingly tied to a flexible mobilization of their linguistic repertoires, including translanguaging practices (Garcia & Li Wei, 2014). This is illustrated in the papers gathered in this issue.

For many years, language ethnographers have focused their attention on education sites in order to uncover issues related to institutional power and actual language practices by education agents in minority languages and migrant contexts (e.g. Heller, 2006; Martin Rojo, 2010; Rampton, 1995; Woolard 1989). Very often, the central research sites have been secondary schools, given their centrality in terms of (re)production, legitimisation, and transformation of power struggles. While this research has provided important insights on the interplay between language policies, language practices, and ideologies in language contact situations, education institutions other than secondary schools have become increasingly important players in the configuration of a particular sociolinguistic frame in such contexts. This is the main reason why in the current special issue, we have decided to explicitly devote our attention to universities as well. As the papers by Gallego-Balsà and Cots, Moore, and Soler-Carbonell and Gallego-Balsà illustrate, the language tensions, ambiguities, and paradoxes faced by universities as higher education institutions in minority language settings can be wide-ranging, with important pedagogical and political implications for the minority language. In the case of Catalonia, this tension is currently exacerbated by the additional pressure that English exerts in the higher education language ecology of the region, as illustrated by all three papers in this special issue.

As regards secondary schools, there is still much to be uncovered from this setting in Catalonia too, and the papers by Bretxa *et al.*, Aliagas *et al.*, and Corona in this special issue provide interesting insights into the current relevant issues in that context. In brief, attitudes towards Catalan by pupils coming from non-traditional native backgrounds seem key to understand the evolution of the language, whether it is in examining students' self-confidence in the language (Bretxa *et al.*), using Catalan in rapping, a context where it is usually absent from (Aliagas *et al.*), or analysing how a group of Latin American adolescents have modified their ideas about Catalan across time (Corona).

By way of concluding, Block's commentary summarizes and highlights the most salient issues that arise from the six papers gathered in this special issue, which he regards as highly relevant in three respects: (1) the impact of globalization in economic, political, social, and cultural terms; (2) internationalisation and its effects across nation-states; and (3) migration and the movement of people across borders.

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