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## Evolution and determinants of language attitudes among Catalan adolescents



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### ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes language integration from an intergroup-relations' perspective, using the social identity approach and socio-contextual model of second language acquisition. It focuses on the evolution of language attitudes in adolescents as an indicator of cultural integration between the two major language groups in Catalonia. The distinctive features of the Catalan case – the similar ethnolinguistic vitality enjoyed by the two official languages and the widespread bilingualism that common schooling has fostered – make it of great sociolinguistic interest. The empirical study focuses on the development of language attitudes towards Catalan and Spanish by using a panel sample of Catalan students ( $N = 1050$ ) followed for a period of five years (three waves). Joint trajectory clustering was used to make a longitudinal analysis that shows the main patterns of coevolution. Logistic regression relates changes to other linguistic, identity and sociodemographic variables. Results show that there are three main types of change in attitudes: a majority one, which a profile of integration, and two others, which tend to separation. The direct effects of language confidence and ethnonational identity are found to explain the likelihood of individuals following one of these types of change.

### Introduction

The sociolinguistic situation in Catalonia is of particular interest because it has features that make it different from that of other societies. The bilingual context has determined language use because of the coexistence of a medium-sized language (Vila, 2013) – Catalan – and a much larger language – Spanish. In the context of Catalonia, however, both languages are official and have similar vitality (Ros, Huici & Cano, 1994). Various authors have pointed to the joint education model (the speakers of both languages are taught using Catalan as the language of instruction) prevailing in Catalonia as a guarantee of social cohesion (Bretxa & Vila, 2014; McAndrew, 2013). The language policy law states that the main aims of the joint model are: (i) to ensure that students have advanced competence in both languages and (ii) to prevent segregation along language lines. The literature on the first aim is extensive (Arnau & Vila, 2013; Strubell, Andreu & Sintes, 2011) and reports the success of the educational model as far as the level of language competence acquired by Catalan students is concerned. However, the research carried out on the second aim – that is to say, on the integration of the speakers of the two languages – is by no means proportional.

This is the starting point of the present article, which focuses on an indicator of cultural integration: attitudes to the languages in contact. It analyses the evolution of the attitudes towards Catalan and Spanish of pupils from different contexts and geographical areas in Catalonia throughout the educational cycle. The process of constructing language attitudes in Catalonia has been subject to

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analysis but not from the longitudinal perspective.<sup>1</sup> Although attitudes are dynamic, particularly in contexts of group interaction (Crano & Prislín, 2008), few attempts have been made to study this phenomenon. The longitudinal approach adopted in this article makes it possible to analyse the types of attitude changes and the variables they are related to.

Social mobility and cohesion are associated with the acquisition of a particular society's language/s. Likewise, language attitudes play a fundamental role from the moment they transcend the cognitive, affective and behavioural processes they involve (Baker, 1992). They act like 'windows' that reflect deeper social processes, such as feelings towards groups of speakers (Edwards, 1999) and group affiliations (Caldas & Caron, 2002). According to analyses of the role language plays in the construction of identity, attitudes are not only a marker of identity; rather they are the attribute *par excellence* of identity itself (Edwards, 2009; Fishman 1977; Lapresta & Huguet, 2008). And what is more, language attitudes are reciprocally associated with language ideologies or preferences, thus affecting processes of language integration (Alarcón & Parella, 2013; Trenchs & Newman, 2009; Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994).

The current political context in Catalonia and Spain is another ingredient that must be added to this portrayal. The current state of the language issue – namely, the doubts raised about the prevailing educational model, the reforms introduced by the *Organic Law for the Improvement of Educational Quality* (2013) in terms of the language of instruction, etc – highlights the need for studies to provide greater insight into the current state of language attitudes. Likewise, 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 and can contribute to the decision-making process. All this is essential for young people given the importance of language attitudes of adolescents as indicators of the extent of integration between the main linguistic groups.

This study intends to respond to a twofold question about what language attitudes are adopted over time and for what reasons, in a context that is eminently bilingual and in which the languages concerned have a similar status. The next section of the paper (section two) conceptualizes the notion of language attitude and the main theories that underlie an understanding of the relations between language groups. It goes on to present the studies on language attitudes that have been made in the Catalan context. Section three discusses the objectives and hypotheses while section four describes the methodology used. Section five presents the results, which are then discussed in section six, which also responds to the initial questions. Finally, we reflect on the possible implications of the study.

## Theoretical background

### *Language attitudes and integration*

Language attitudes have been studied by a wide variety of focuses in sociolinguistic research. However, there is a certain consensus to regard attitude as the readiness to react favourably or unfavourably to a social object (in this case language). It can be divided into three components (Baker, 1992, p. 12): a cognitive component (that is to say, beliefs and knowledge); an affective component (emotions, feelings and preferences); and a behavioural component, which is associated with action (a predisposal to act in a particular way). Consequently, attitudes can have a considerable influence on the state and evolution of languages, particularly in those cases of contact between language groups. What is more, on the assumption that attitudes are not innate and can be changed, understanding how they are constructed and how they evolve means that the perception and behaviour of individuals can be influenced more effectively. In this regard, Baker (1992) suggests that “attitude surveys provide social indicators of changing beliefs and the chances of success in policy implementation” (p. 9).

The starting point for gaining greater insight into the relation between language and social groups can be found in Tajfel's theory of social identity (1981). For this author, people's social identity is based on processes of social categorization, comparison and favouritism. People situate themselves and classify others into social categories. Positive or negative attitudes about the various categories come about by social comparison between the groups of individuals that make them up. But of more direct relevance to the issue that we are dealing with is the concept of ethnolinguistic identity (Giles & Johnson, 1987), which is defined as the process of social identification that arises out of the relations that are established in situations of contact between language groups. To understand how individuals value their belonging to a particular language group, reference must be made to the theory of ethnolinguistic vitality (Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, 1977). The vitality of a language is determined by a range of sociostructural factors: the demographic weight of a language group; its socioeconomic status and institutional representation.

There is a close relationship between membership to different social groups (ethnolinguistics), identification and representations or attitudes to the respective cultures. This evidence emerges from the socio-contextual model of second language acquisition (Clément & Kruidenier, 1985; Clément, Noels & Denault, 2001). This model states that in situations in which contact is possible between speakers of the first and second language groups, second language confidence mediates the effects of contact on motivation (Clément & Kruidenier, 1985), communicative competence and identity (Clément, 1986; Noels & Clément, 1996). Second language confidence is defined as the self-assessment of language competencies in particular social situations. It is associated with the lack of anxiety that an individual feels when using a language. Regardless of the vitality each group enjoys, L2 confidence leads to greater identification with the other group. According to the study by Rubinfeld, Clément, Lussier, Lebrun, and Auger (2006), which is based on the socio-contextual model, identification with the outgroup produces, in turn, more positive representations, attitudes and feelings towards this group. On the contrary, no significant effects were found in previous studies on the link between L1 ingroup

<sup>1</sup> One exception is the study by Ianos, Huguet, Janés & Lapresta (2015), which focuses on immigrants at school in Catalonia. It compares, however, only two moments in time and its focus and conceptualization are different from those of the present study.

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