

The recent evolution of first languages in Catalonia: between minoritization and language maintenance

Abstract

The case of Catalonia is often presented as a successful one in the field of language policy, based on the improvement in its legal situation, the increase in the number of people who know it, and the extension of its use in certain fields. To contribute to a complete evaluation of the current language policy model in Catalonia, this article assesses the evolution of the first languages of the population over the last fifteen years. The study shows that during this period, despite some oscillations, Catalan has remained in stable numbers of L1 speakers in absolute terms, thanks essentially to very strong patterns of intergenerational transmission in both linguistically homogeneous and mixed couples. However, significant immigration during this period has substantially increased the weight of other languages and, to a lesser degree, Castilian, so that in relative terms Catalan has been reduced as a first language between 2003 and 2018.

Resum

Sovint s'ha assenyalat el cas de Catalunya com un cas d'èxit en el terreny de la política lingüística sobre la base de la millora en la seva situació legal, l'increment del nombre de les persones que el saben i l'extensió del seu ús en determinats àmbits. Amb la finalitat de contribuir a una avaluació completa del model de política lingüística vigent a Catalunya, aquest article es fixa en l'evolució durant els darrers quinze anys de les principals llengües inicials que s'hi parlen. L'estudi mostra que durant aquest període, i tot algunes oscil·lacions, el català

s'ha mantingut en xifres força estables de parlants inicials en termes absoluts, gràcies essencialment a unes pautes de transmissió intergeneracional molt sòlida tant en parelles lingüísticament homogènies com en parelles mixtes. Tanmateix, l'arribada significativa d'immigració en el mateix període ha incrementat substancialment el pes del castellà i, sobretot, de les llengües altres, per la qual cosa el pes percentual del català com a llengua primera s'ha reduït significativament entre 2003 i 2018.

Introduction: the crisis of the native speaker concept and its role in demolinguistics

During the last decades, as a consequence of the *multilingual turn* (May 2014), applied linguistics and sociolinguistics have increasingly questioned the concept of *native speaker* and associated concepts such as first language. The questioning has arrived from a variety of perspectives, including the problems to define and operationalize it, its possible bias towards monolingualism, and its potential application to exclusionary purposes (Dewaele 2018). The traditional conceptions of what first language means is today at stake because of the evidence of innumerable forms of initial bilingualism (Grosjean 2010) and by the awareness that speakers themselves modify it (Seals 2019). *Native-speakerism* has even been defined as: «(...) a neo-racist ideology that has wide-ranging impact on how teachers are perceived by each other and by their students. By labeling teachers as separate “native speakers” and “non-native speakers,” it falsely positions them as culturally superior and inferior with separate roles and attributes» (Holliday 2018: 1). Research on new speakers and *mudes* has further problematized the distinction between L1 and L2 speakers (Hornsby 2015; O'Rourke & Walsh 2020, Pujolar & Puigdevall 2015), and the shift from *language* to *(trans)linguaging* has increased the pressure against the concept (García & Li Wei 2014; Li Wei 2018).

The echoes of these debates have reached macro approaches to sociolinguistics (Abtahian 2019). Nevertheless, the *native speaker* concept, under different labels, continues to

be widely used, especially in demolinguistics. Although its operationalization may vary, the fact is that a category grouping people who learned the same language(s) with their family of origin is routinely introduced in language censuses and surveys (Humbert et al. 2018). This persistence is probably explained because, in quantitative terms, the native speaker concept is productive. Study after study corroborate that, in multilingual societies, there exists a strong correlation between the condition of being a L1 speaker of a given language L_x and scoring higher than speakers of other languages L_y , L_z , etc., in terms of proficiency, use, and identification with L_x . Of course, this strong association does not mean that *native-speakerness* is always the best predictor of linguistic behavior, repertoire, or attitudes, nor does it allow for the ecological phallacy, because the characteristics of individuals are not determined by the group they belong to. But once assumed that it is not an unescapable fate, the privileged association of native speakers with their respective languages is so blatant that it would be anomalous not to take it into consideration.

Of course, the example of Modern Hebrew revernacularization and research on new speakers confirm that non-native language users may be significant agents of language revitalization (Hornsby 2015; O'Rourke & Ramallo 2015; Glinert 2017). But important as language *adopters* may be for language survival, nothing compares to a vibrant community of native speakers when it comes to secure the maintenance of a language (Ó Giollagáin 2014a, 2014b; Pháidín & Ó Cearnaigh 2008). Language revitalization acknowledges this fact. Giles et al. (1977) considered 'demography' —i.e., number of (native) speakers— one of the three pillars of ethnolinguistic vitality. The whole Reversing Language Shift model and the GIDS scale proposed by Fishman (1991) is based on the idea that maintenance depends on the (re-)construction of intergenerational language transmission (ILT) in a community of (native) speakers. So is the EGIDS model, which uses ILT as the criterion to distinguish between *threatened* and *shifting* languages (Lewis & Simons 2010). Two of the seven variables

employed by the Euromosaic survey on regional and minority languages in Europe were directly connected with the role of the family and the community in the (re)production of the language (Nelde et al. 1996, Williams 2005). Three criteria out of the nine used by UNESCO (2003) to evaluate language vitality are absolute number of speakers, proportion of speakers out of the total population, and ITL.

It is therefore hardly surprising that censuses in officially multilingual countries continue to include the category of native speaker among its questions (e.g., Canada,¹ India,² or the Ukraine³). In fact, the reduction in the proportion of native speakers of a given language is usually analyzed as a symptom of endangerment not only in small and severely threatened communities (Abtahian 2019), but also in societies where the local language seems to be solidly protected both by its institutional position and its demography as in Galicia (Monteagudo et al. 2016), or even in the officially monolingual Province of Quebec (Castonguay 2019). In few words, the state and evolution of first language transmission is a crucial factor of language sustainability.

Catalan: a language between minoritization and *normalization*

A language with a complex diagnosis and a difficult prognosis

The assessment of the situation and the sociolinguistic trends affecting Catalan, the biggest non-state language of Europe, is a contentious issue. On the one hand, the evolution of some important sociolinguistic indicators such as its official status, the sustained increase in the numbers of its speakers or its solid presence in many cultural industries have led many authors, especially —but not only— foreign observers, to consider Catalan in Catalonia a successful

¹ < https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/98-501/98-501-x2016005-eng.cfm#a2_1 > (Last visit: 18/02/2021)

² < https://censusindia.gov.in/2011census/HLO/Metadata_Census_2011.pdf > (Last visit: 18/02/2021)

³ < <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/> > (Last visit: 18/02/2021)

case of language revitalization⁴ (Fishman 1991; Strubell 2001; Woolard 2016). However, this diagnosis is far from unanimous, especially among local specialists, who often underline the secondary position and even exclusion of Catalan from many social domains, the legal restrictions to its use in some fields and the (allegedly) negative demolinguisic trends that affect the language (Boix-Fuster & Farràs 2013; Pradilla 2011).

The discrepancies regarding the evolution of Catalan are decades old and go back at least to the 1979 manifesto *A language without a state, a people without a language* appeared in the *Els Marges* journal (Argenter et al. 1979), appeared when the first measures to revitalize Catalan after Francoism were in discussion. In the view of its authors, official bilingualism with Castilian would not arrest the retreat of Catalan, so they called for exclusive official status in an independent Catalan state. The Manifesto arose a considerable public debate, including an explicit *Answer* (López del Castillo et al. 1980) where three reputed sociolinguists claimed that the cadre of official bilingualism offered enough tools to achieve a fair and equitable position of Catalan and Castilian within Spain, including the preeminence of Catalan in its own territory and a status of co-official language for Castilian in the Catalan-speaking territories.

The controversy triggered by the *Els Marges* manifesto about the capability of a bilingual regime to restore the position of Catalan and protect it from extinction lost intensity in the following years, but the debate about ‘the future of Catalan’ or even ‘the death of Catalan’, has never extinguished. On the contrary, it keeps coming to the surface every few years with renewed impetus, new voices, and new arguments such as the *deterioration* of Catalan or the alleged lack of will of Catalan authorities to take effective measures (Pujolar 2007; Querol 2011; Sendra & Vila 2016). To understand these controversies, it should be kept

⁴ The same cannot be said of other peripheral Catalan-speaking territories, where Catalan is severely endangered after long-standing processes of language shift, e.g., in Valencia (Montoya & Mas 2011), Northern Catalonia (Baylac-Ferrer 2009), Alghero (Chessa 2012) and east of Aragon (Sorolla 2016). This article focuses exclusively on Catalonia; for an overview of intergenerational transmission of languages in different Catalan-speaking territories, see Torres-Pla (2019).

in mind that it revolves basically around two factors. One is the (lack of) capacity of Catalan societies to decide on their language policies. The other one, sociodemographic reality.

Language policies

Like many other languages (Baggioni 1997; Heller et al. 2015), during the last three centuries Catalan underwent a process of *political minoritization*, i.e., an institutional process to convert it into a minority language in its own territory and eventually to eradicate it in the benefit of another language (Vila 2014). Little by little, both diglossic behaviors and proficiency in Castilian spread in Catalonia. Catalan, though, remained the first and everyday language of virtually all the population until the first decades of 20th, because Catalonia never experienced a large-scale interruption of its intergenerational transmission (Fishman 1991: 287–336; Vila 2020; Woolard 2016). Castilian only appeared as a first language in a significant percentage in Catalonia during the first decades of the 20th century, hand in hand with the first wave of Castilian-speaking immigration (Domingo 2014; Galindo et al. in press), which was to be followed by others (see below). As far as political power is concerned, though, the major change came in the late 1970s, after almost 4 decades of Castilian supremacist military dictatorship (1936/39-1975). The 1978 Spanish constitution introduced linguistic pluralism, and the 1979 Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia declared Catalan an official language, together with Castilian, and opened the door to language revitalization (‘language normalization’). In a few years, Catalan became the language used by default by the autonomous and local administrations (Marí 2011) and the main language of instruction at school and higher education (Arnau & Vila 2013; Pons 2015). Public and private mass media functioning in Catalan were created (Gifreu 2011) and promotion campaigns were launched. In this new environment, Catalan speakers progressively resumed the public use of their language, and young Castilian speakers progressively gained proficiency in Catalan. In general terms, the

value of the language grew in many spheres of life (Strubell & Boix-Fuster 2011, Caminal & Di Paolo 2018).

Nevertheless, these changes took place within a framework of political autonomy, not sovereignty or federalism (Cagiao 2015). The 1978 Spanish Constitution left untouched the super-ordinate position of Castilian as the only official language of the state and the only one that every Spanish citizen *must* know (art. 3.1). Catalan continued to be excluded from the central administration and, in Catalonia itself, the administrative bodies depending from the central authorities —e.g., the military forces, the national police, the bulk of the judiciary and the tax administration structures— continued to function basically in Castilian. This asymmetry has been reinforced during the last decades by new legislation and jurisprudence, especially by the Spanish Constitutional Court judgement 31/2010 on the 2006 Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia (Milian et al. 2010), in a process that has been described as the *devaluation* of Catalan's official status (Segura 2019). This asymmetry has a clear correlate in that all Catalan native speakers and a vast majority of immigrant alloglots is proficient in Castilian, but most non-Catalan L1 speakers who do not attend compulsory education in Catalonia only acquire some receptive abilities in it (Martínez Melo 2018).

The current language policy model in Catalonia has been defined as *integrationist* (Vila 2005), *de-territorialized* (Jiménez-Salcedo 2019) and *postnationalist* (Branchadell 2012), and its normative evaluation is controversial. Some authors have claimed that it *discriminates* Castilian speakers because they should be spared the effects of language revitalization policies (Fleming and Ansaldo 2020). Others, on the contrary, have praised these policies as the *fairest* model to organize plurilingual societies which are not territorially distributed (Branchadell 2012, Riera 2016). Finally, in the eyes of others, the model perpetuates the *unfair* supremacy of Castilian and condemns Catalan to extinction (Junyent & Zaballa 2020).

Demographic and demolinguistic dynamics

Next to political and legal issues, the other crucial factor is demography. Like many other Western countries, Catalonia has lived during more than one century under the parameters of the *complex demographic reproduction system* (Cabré 1999; Domingo 2014), which combines a low fertility with repeated episodes of massive immigration. Figure 1 shows clearly the impact of these different migratory waves, with migrants from the rest of Spain arrived during the 20th century and concentrated in the cohorts older than 44 years old, and foreign migrants arrived in the 21st distributed along the young and young adults cohorts.

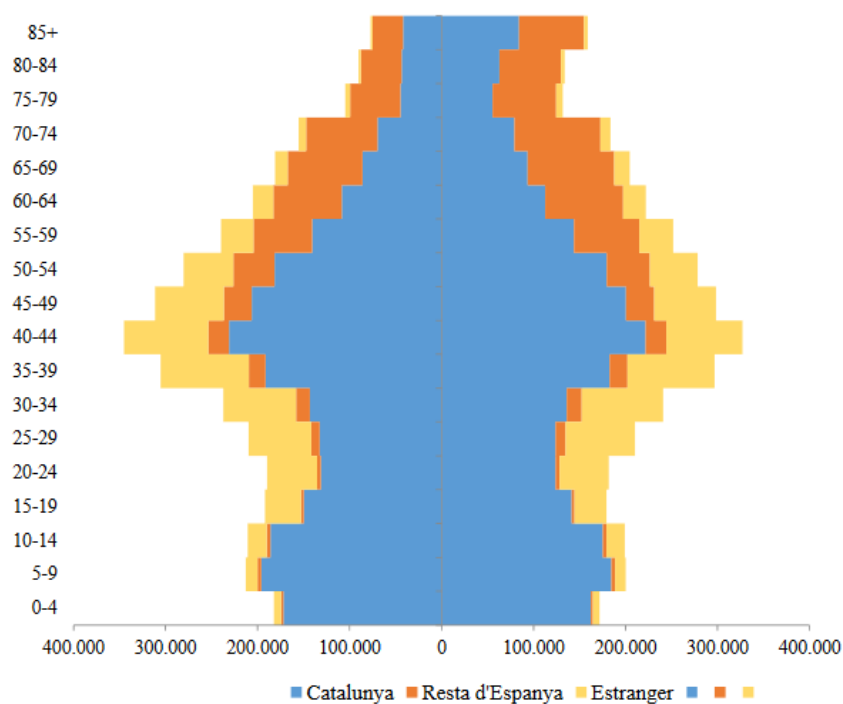


Figure 1. Population of Catalonia in 2018, according to sex, age and birthplace.

Absolute numbers. Source: Generalitat de Catalunya (2019)

The challenge of attraction

In a context of low fertility and significant immigration, to preserve its position, Catalan needs to ‘attract’ at least part of the newcomers. Before the mid-20th century, and despite official language policies, many newcomers learnt and adopted Catalan massively by informal learning in everyday interaction with the autochthonous population (Galindo et al. in press). But during

Franco's dictatorship (1936/39-1975), the combination of very strict official policies of Castilianization and the sheer numbers of immigration radically eroded the traditional patterns of linguistic integration. Thus, during the second half of the century, as more Catalans became proficient in the official language, newcomers stopped learning Catalan and introduced Castilian in more and more spheres of life. By the 1960-1970s, the first generations of locally born Castilian speakers became very numerous and Catalan became demographically minoritized in many urban areas (Reixach 1990). By mid-1970s, the number of Castilian-speakers had equaled that of Catalan speakers (Rodríguez Osuna 1979).

Language censuses were not introduced in Catalonia until the late 1970s, but we can obtain an indirect view of the demolinguistic transformation of Catalonia during the 20th century thanks to Figure 2, which shows the distribution of inhabitants living in Catalonia in 2003, segmented by their first language, birthplace, and birth date.⁵

⁵ This is just a rough approximation to the actual historical events. In first place, the graph does not take into account the moment of arrival of the population not born in Catalonia, which obviously took place at least two decades after their birth in many cases, i.e., the context of socialization for generations born in Catalonia before the 1940s was more Catalan because young and adult migrants had still not moved in. Besides, the graph does not take into account factors connected to vegetative movements such as differential life expectancy according to origin, nor does it consider the temporary migrants who eventually moved back to their places of origin, although emigration, including return migration, has been modest in Catalonia in the last decades (Cabré 1999; Domingo 2014; Recaño 2004). Nevertheless, the demolinguistic evolution shown in the graph is highly coherent with other sources, in particular with the account of the sociolinguistic transformation of Catalonia during the 20th century furnished by Galindo et al. (in press).

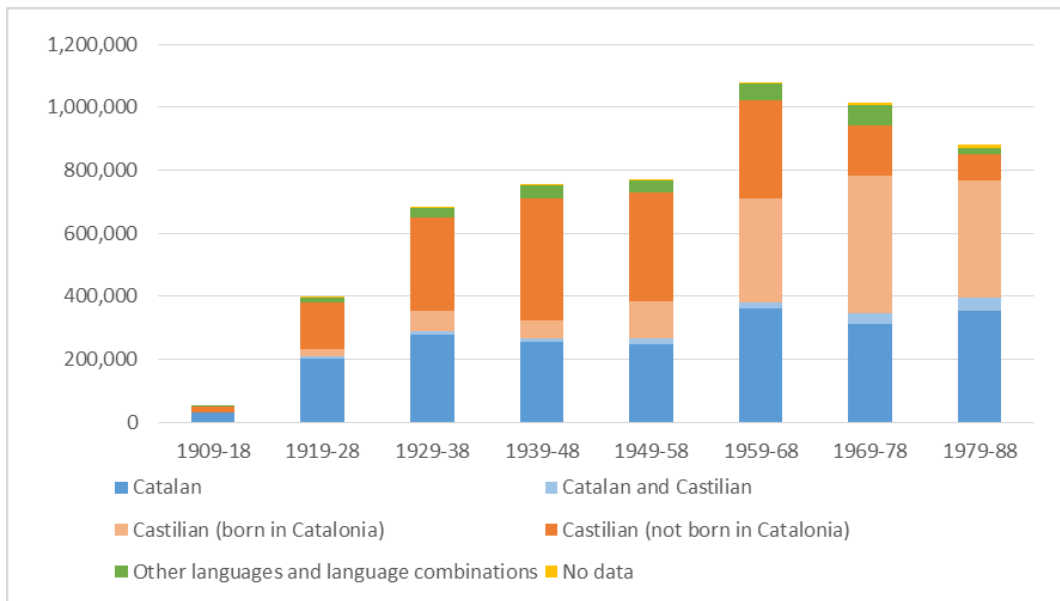


Figure 2. Evolution of Catalonia’s population according to first language, birthplace and decade of birth. Catalonia, 2003. Source: our elaboration on the basis of EULC 2003 (Vila 2007)

Immigration in the first decades of the 21st century was linguistically more heterogeneous. In 2018, foreign-born population was split almost in half among those declaring Castilian as their L1 (47.5%), coming from Hispanic American countries, and those declaring ‘other languages’—such as Arabic, Romanian or Tamazight—as their L1 (49.4%) (Flors-Mas in press).

The dynamics of language reproduction in Catalonia since the establishment of political autonomy in 1979 has been the object of sustained interest at least since the last 1970s. Research in this area has adopted both a quantitative approach and ethnographic perspectives, often focused on particular subgroups, and has been mostly published in Catalan (Centre de Documentació 2009, 2015a, 2015b, 2020). Some of the most relevant results are provided by analysis of 2013 official data comparing language spoken with parents and language spoken with children (Torres-Pla 2018). According to this analysis, Catalan and Castilian native speakers reproduced their L1 with their own children, although significantly higher for Catalan

(94.7%) than for Castilian (76.5%; the rest spoke either Catalan or both Catalan and Castilian). Catalan and Castilian bilinguals transmitted mostly Catalan (65.2%), whereas informants who declared other languages and language combinations with the parents declared this behavior with children in 70% of cases, but 22% of them stated they used Castilian with their offspring, a pattern already detected before the last immigration wave (Subirats 2010). In general terms, attraction towards Catalan (affecting 11.9% of the whole population) was slightly higher than attraction towards Castilian (9%). Torres-Pla (2018) also detected an erosion in the capacity of attraction of Catalan, which he attributed especially to a combination of factors, especially the demographic changes in the composition of Castilian-speaking couples.

The 2018 results and the new controversies

The publication of the results of the 2018 edition of the Survey on Language Uses of the Population (Generalitat de Catalunya 2019) triggered a new wave of public discussions regarding the state of Catalan and its prospects for the future, this time centered around demolinguisic issues. Whereas most of the data provided by the authorities suggested overall stability during the 2010s, other results, such as the steady decline in the use of Catalan in Barcelona, set all alarm bells ringing. The number of questions about the future of Catalan set on the table by the many analysts that took place in the debate —such as the 31 sociolinguists, language planners and activists invited by Vilaweb e-journal to publish a short article on the issue (Junyent 2020)—, was indeed very ample, but one of them was conspicuous: to what extent was Catalan losing ground as a first language, especially in intergenerational terms?

Goals

This article aims at making a balance of the evolution of first language in Catalonia during the last decades from two main points of view: on the one hand, the intergenerational evolution of first languages; on the other, the connection between first languages and informants' origin.

Methods

The basis for this article is provided by the four successive editions of the Survey on Language Uses of the Population, EULP in the Catalan acronym. This is a series of official statistics carried out by the Catalan authorities to obtain representative sociolinguistic data of the whole population (age >14 years; n >7,000) living in Catalonia. EULP started in 2003 and was repeated in 2008, 2013, and 2018. EULP provides sociodemographic data and detailed information about language abilities, language uses and language attitudes. Whereas most of the data are publicly available at IDESCAT's website, the results here presented are based on the data matrix provided by the Ministry of Culture.⁶

The four editions of EULP series allow to compare the evolution of the population of Catalonia during a 15 years period. The four populations are obviously not identical in at least three senses: first, the 2003 survey included the population born before 1988, i.e., born and socialized basically before the language policies of the autonomous authorities, whereas the 2018, on the contrary, included the population born before 2003, i.e., its younger cohort had been born during the autonomous period. Second, the 2003 survey still included a significant percentage of people socialized before most Castilian immigrants arrived in Catalonia which diminished in successive surveys due to biological reasons. Finally, the 2003 survey only included a minor percentage of foreign-born migrants and alloglots, but this population grew significantly in the following editions.

The dependent variable in the analysis was the first language(s) (L1) of the population,⁷ a declared variable gathered by means of the question «Do you remember what language you

⁶ Some small variation between publicly available data and the results presented in this article stem from the cleansing of the data matrix. In any case, this involves only minor changes that do not compromise the interpretation of the language dynamics here described.

⁷ In his analysis of language transmission based on the EULP series, Torres-Pla (2018) has used two variables constructed based on several questions that he denominates *language with parents* and *language with children*. Although the first one is quite similar to *first language*, research has shown discrepancies among them, especially in the younger cohorts (Tenorio 2013). In this article we will stick to first language as

spoke first, at home, when you were a child? ». Results were grouped in four different categories:

1. Catalan (only or predominant vs. Castilian)
2. Catalan & Castilian, i.e., both languages on an equal footing
3. Castilian (only or predominant vs. Catalan)
4. Other, including other languages and combinations of languages, i.e., also Catalan and/or Castilian combined with different languages.

Four basic sociodemographic variables were also included in the analysis as independent variables. The first one was age, aggregated for analysis purposes in the categories of youngsters (15-29), young adults (30-44), mature adults (45-64), and elderly (65 and more). The second one was geographical origin of the family, with six categories:

1. Respondent and both parents born in the Catalan Language Territories (CLT)⁸
2. Respondent and one parent born in the CLT
3. Respondent born in the CLT, both parents born outside
4. Respondent born in the rest of Spain
5. Respondent born in Hispanic America
6. Respondent born in the rest of the world

Besides, *first language of informants' parents* and *language spoken to own children by the informant* were also considered at some point in the analysis, grouped with the same categories as first language.

declared by the informants, since we consider this variable to be previous in time—language with parents may change as the informants grow up—and more prone to be analyzed in absolute terms rather than relative terms.

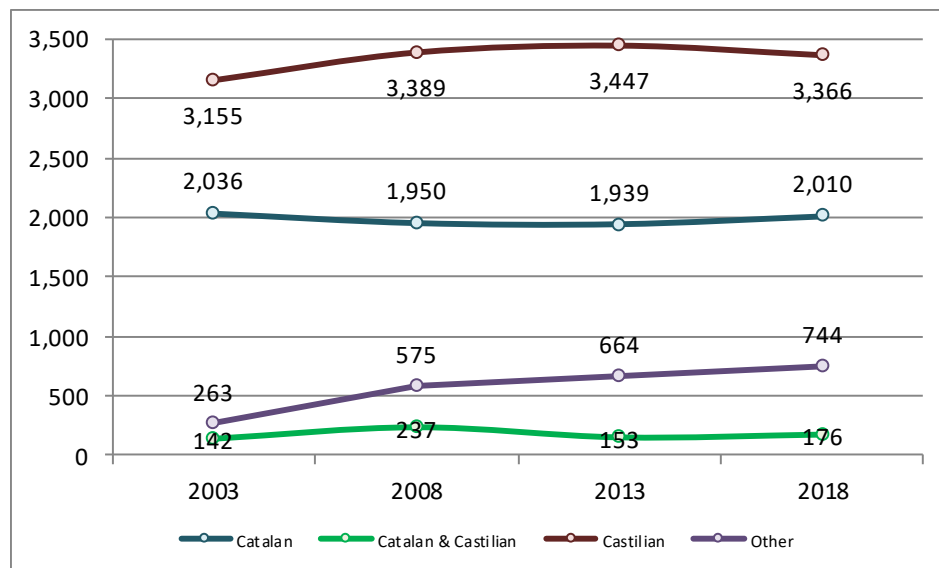
⁸ This category aggregates people born in Catalonia, Valencia, the Balearic Islands, and Andorra. The very scarce informants born in the rest of Catalan Language Territories may be grouped with Spain—if born in la Franja (Aragon) or el Carxe (Murcia)—, or with the rest of the world, if born in Northern Catalonia or Alghero.

The significance of the relationship between variables was tested through Cramer’s V test and adjusted standardized residuals. As for the comparison of data from different surveys (2003-2018), all the differences highlighted as significant were bigger than the estimated error of each sample.

Results

The global evolution of first languages from 2003 to 2018

Figure 3 shows the evolution of first language groups in Catalonia between 2003 and 2018. Two main groups stood up: Catalan and Castilian, followed by Other and Catalan & Castilian.



	2003	2008	2013	2018
Catalan	36.4%	31.7%	31.3%	31.9%
Catalan & Castilian	2.5%	3.8%	2.5%	2.8%
Castilian	56.4%	55.1%	55.6%	53.5%
Other	4.7%	9.3%	10.7%	11.8%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Figure 3. Evolution of population by first language. Catalonia, 2003-2018. Absolute (in thousands) and relative numbers⁹

⁹ All the figures in the rest of this article have been elaborated by the authors using the data provided by the four language use surveys, namely EULC 2003, EULP 2008, EULP 2013 and EULP 2018.

Between 2003 and 2018, the four groups¹⁰ kept the same position: Castilian > Catalan > Other > Catalan & Castilian. In absolute terms, three of them—Castilian, Catalan, and Catalan & Castilian—experienced minor transformations, whereas the Other group grew significantly:

- Castilian increased by 211,000 speakers. This increment was especially significant between 2003 and 2008, but then slowed down and even decreased between 2013 and 2018.
- Catalan remained rather stable around 2 million speakers, although its evolution followed the inverse path of Castilian: it decreased a little bit between 2003 and 2008, and between 2008 and 2013, but almost recovered completely in 2018.
- The Other group increased dramatically. By 2018, this group had added 481,000 speakers to the 263,000 it had in 2003 and summed up to 11.8% of the total population.
- The Catalan & Castilian group added 34,000 speakers to its ranks between 2003 and 2018, a 24.6% increase in relative terms.

Global evolution by age group

The longitudinal results become more complex as we introduce an analysis by age groups of 2018 data (figure 4).

¹⁰ It should be born in mind that these figures do not include children younger than 15 years.

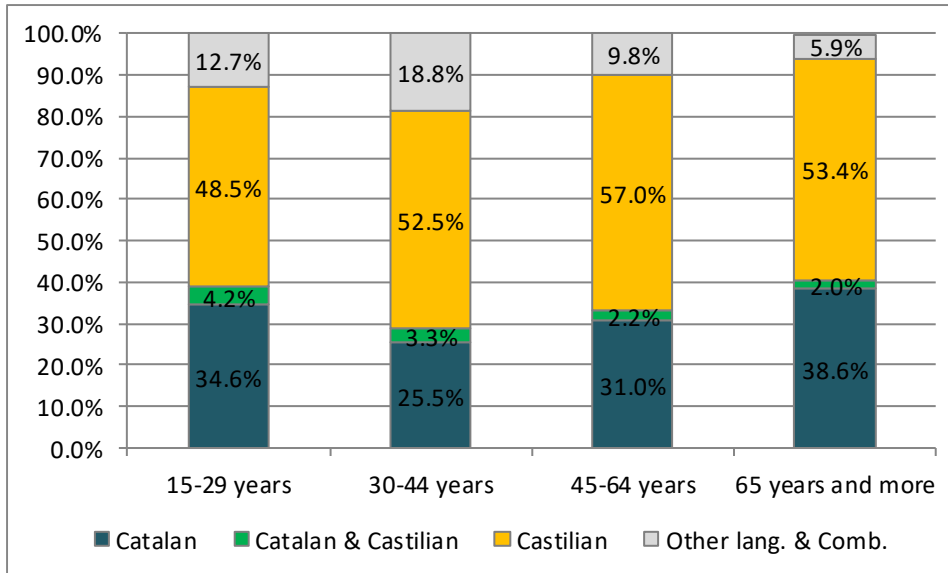


Figure 4. First language by age groups. Catalonia, 2018. Relative numbers.

In 2018, Castilian L1 speakers were especially predominant among mature adults, elderly people, and young adults, where they represented always more than 50% of the population, and reached their lowest (<50%) percentage among youngsters. Catalan-speakers were comparatively more numerous in the oldest and youngest cohorts and reached their lowest percentage among young adults and mature adults. Other speakers were especially numerous among young adults—the group more prone to migrate—followed by youngsters, and less frequent among older people. The percentage of Catalan & Castilian bilinguals grew steadily from older people to the younger cohort. A glimpse to absolute numbers in figure 5 shows that these changes in the percentages are due in first place to the dramatic changes in the figures of Castilian speakers, who in 2018 were especially numerous in the ages between 35 and 64, and in second place, to the group of Other, especially conspicuous in the 35-44 cohort. On the contrary, the absolute number of Catalan speakers remains quite stable across generations, although a significant reduction took place in the cohort 25-34 years, i.e., among those born between 1984 and 1993. The number of Catalan & Castilian bilinguals remains always

comparatively very low. Its increase in percentage in the youngest cohort is not due to a steady growth but rather to the diminishing number of Castilian speakers.

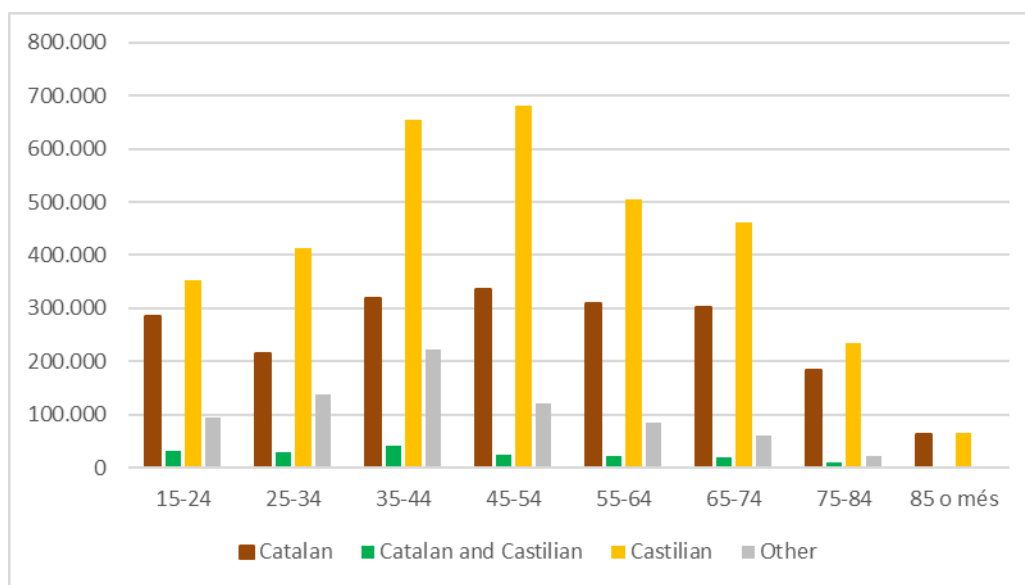


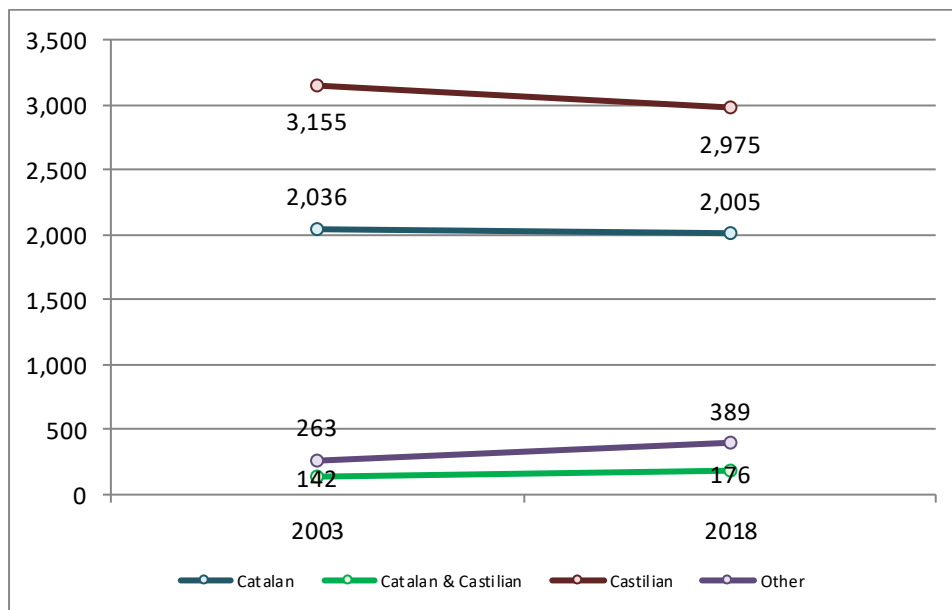
Figure 5. First language by age groups (decades). Catalonia, 2018. Absolute numbers.

The impact of immigration vs. endogenous demolinguistic trends

Immigration was the main factor of demolinguistic change between 2003 and 2018: the arrival of more than 1.1 million migrants in the first decade of 2000s significantly modified the sociolinguistic composition of Catalonia's society in absolute and in relative terms. These movements basically enlarged the Other group, which added circa 481,000 to the population, i.e., it multiplied itself by 2.83 between 2003 and 2018, and the Castilian group, which increased by circa 211.000, i.e., 7%.

But what happened to the population that was already established in Catalonia before this immigration wave? In fact, the volume of population older than 14 years born or arrived at Catalonia before 2004 and still living there in 2018 remained very similar, in absolute numbers (5,5M), to that of 2003 (5,6M). Each first language group followed a different pattern (figure 6): the Catalan group stayed at around 2 million, whereas the Castilian group decreased

significantly (180,000 individuals), from 3.2 million in 2013 to 3.0 million in 2018. The Catalan & Castilian group increased from 0.14 to 0.18 million, and Other increased from 0.26 to 0.39 million. In other words, during the 2003-2018 period, the endogenous dynamics led to a small reduction in the Castilian group, which lost around 3% of its members, whereas the Other and the Catalan & Castilian groups grew slightly (2.3% and 0.7% respectively), and the Catalan group hardly changed in absolute numbers.



	2003	2018
Catalan	36.4%	36.1%
Catalan & Castilian	2.5%	3.2%
Castilian	56.4%	53.6%
Other	4.7%	7.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Figure 6. Evolution of the first language of population born or established in Catalonia before 2003 by age groups. Catalonia, 2003-2018. Absolute (in thousands) and relative numbers.

In other words, the global increase in the number of Castilian-speakers during this period was entirely due to immigration. The sociolinguistic relevance of immigration in current

Catalonia is shown in figure 7, which shows the distribution of first languages according to the informants and their parents' birthplace:

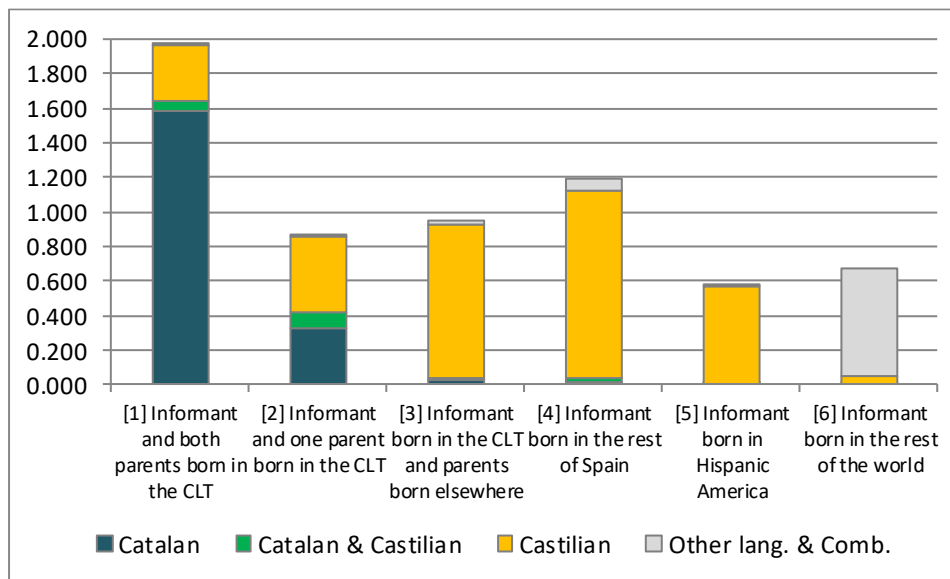


Figure 7. Residents in Catalonia by first language according to birthplace of the informants and their parents. Catalonia, 2018 (absolute numbers, in thousands).

1. People born in Catalan Language Territories (CLT) to parents born in the same area, amounting to 31.6% of the total population aged over 14 years, were very predominantly Catalan L1: 80.2%, and 3.0% had Catalan & Castilian as L1. Castilian was the L1 of 16.4%, and 0.4% had other languages as their L1.
2. People born in the CLT with one parent born outside the CLT, which gathered 14.1% of the total population, was the most heterogeneous group: Castilian was the majority L1 (50.6%), but Catalan came second with 38.5%, and Catalan-Castilian bilinguals represented 10.2%.
3. People born in the CLT whose parents were not born in the CLT, i.e. 15.1% of the total population, had Castilian as their first language in 92.9% of cases.

4. People born elsewhere in Spain, i.e., 19.0% of the total population, had Castilian as their L1 in 91.5% of the cases, with other languages and combinations—mostly Galician—amounting to 5.7%.
5. People born in Hispanic America, i.e., 9.4% of the population, were even more overwhelmingly Castilian-speaking (96.3%).
6. People born in the rest of the world, i.e., 10.9% of the population, spoke many languages and language combinations (92.1%), notably Arabic (19.6%) and Romanian (10.4%).

In other words, in Catalonia, first language correlates strongly with the geographical origin of families.¹¹ Leaving aside the Other category, which is intrinsically heterogeneous, most of the groups are quite homogenous as far as L1 is concerned. The three most homogeneous groups are those born in Hispanic America, followed by those born in Catalonia whose parents were born elsewhere, and those born in the rest of Spain, which share Castilian as its L1 in more than 90% of the cases.¹² Informants born in Catalonia to couples also born in Catalonia are also quite homogeneous (>80% Catalan L1), whereas the most heterogeneous group is that of descendants of mixed couples. The linguistic heterogeneity of the last two groups might reflect two different processes: language shift from Catalan to Castilian, or intergenerational retention of Castilian in second and even third generations of couples of non-Catalan origins. Of course, both phenomena may take place simultaneously, but in any case, they deserve further exploration.

¹¹ Cramer's $V = 0,667$ (significance 0.000).

¹² It should be noted that half of the Castilian-speakers living in Catalonia in 2018 (49.6%) were born outside of the Catalan language territories, and a further 26.3% were born in Catalonia to parents born outside the CLT—mainly in the rest of Spain.

Language reproduction within the family and transfers among groups

To assess that, we compare the first languages of respondents and their parents' first language (figure 8). The analysis shows that:

1. Respondents born to Catalan-speaking and to Castilian-speaking homogeneous couples almost always inherited the first language of their parents, both in the case of Catalan (96.4%) and Castilian (94.5%).
2. Couples formed by Catalan & Castilian L1 parents—in their different forms, e.g., one Catalan and one Castilian partner, two bilingual partners, etc.—produced Catalan L1 informants (59.9%) more than twice as much as Castilian ones (26.2%), and five times more than bilingual ones (13.2%).
3. Parents with other languages and language combinations produced 77.3% of Other informants. Whereas this is an inherently complex category due to its variegated composition, the most relevant fact is probably that in 18.4% of cases, informants coming from such couples declared just Castilian as first language, while only 3.7% declared Catalan as their L1.

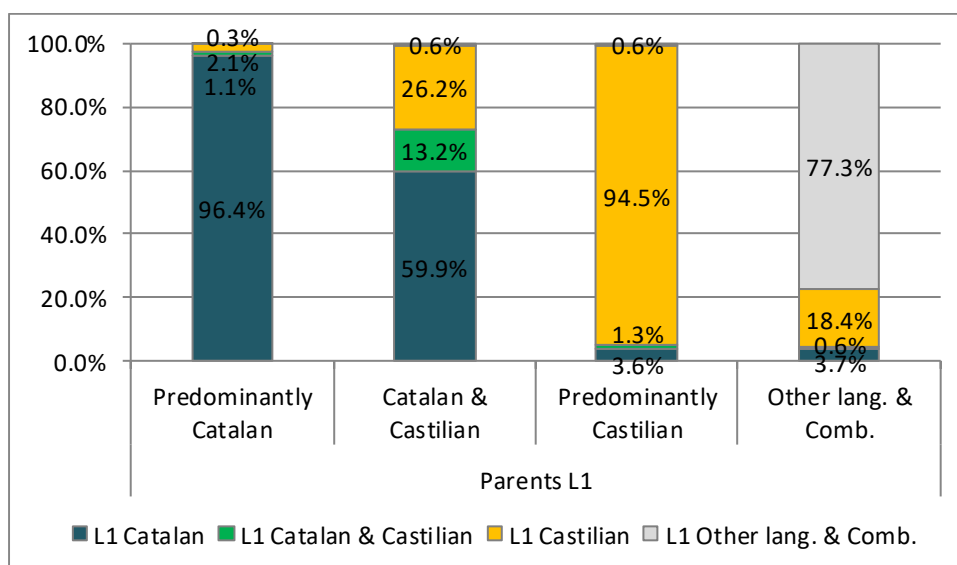
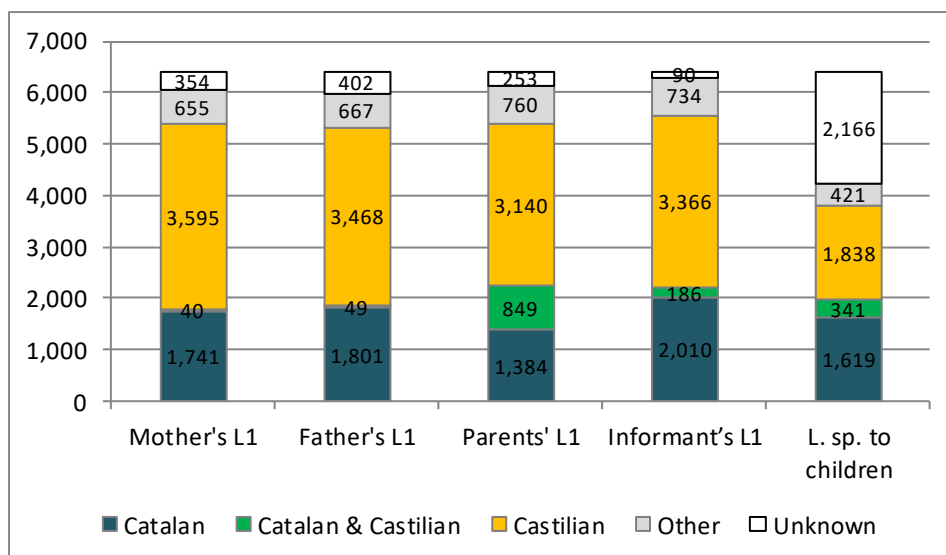


Figure 8. First language of respondents according to the first language of their parents. Catalonia, 2018 (relative numbers).

In other words, as pointed out in previous research, Catalan homogeneous couples and Castilian homogeneous couples reproduce their first language with their children, whereas Catalan-Castilian bilingual families tend to prefer Catalan, and Other families show different trends which include a significant transmission of Castilian (but not Catalan) alone.

Once projected onto the global population (figure 9), these trends produce the following results:

- The number of Catalan-speaking informants is higher than the number of their Catalan-speaking fathers and mothers,
- The number of Castilian-speaking informants is smaller than the number of their Castilian-speaking fathers and their Castilian-speaking mothers,
- The number of Catalan & Castilian bilingual informants is much higher than the number of their bilingual fathers and bilingual mothers, but much smaller than that of mixed couples.
- The number of Other informants is higher than that of their Other fathers and mothers.
- The absolute number of children in Catalan-speaking, Castilian-speaking and Other groups is smaller than those of the other columns, basically because the biggest group is that of Unkown/Not applicable, since many informants do not have children (yet). In percentages, though, the Catalan-speaking and bilingual groups grow substantially, whereas the Other group remains stable and the Castilian-speaking one diminishes. Of course, the variable language spoken to children is not exactly comparable to first language, but still data suggests a pattern.



	Mother's L1	Father's L1	Parents' L1	Informant's L1	Language spoken to children
Catalan	28,9%	30,1%	22,6%	31,9%	38,4%
Catalan & Castilian	0,7%	0,8%	13,8%	3,0%	8,1%
Castilian	59,6%	57,9%	51,2%	53,5%	43,6%
Other	10,9%	11,1%	12,4%	11,7%	10,0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Figure 9. First language of informants, informants' parents, and language spoken by informants to their children. Catalonia, 2018. Absolute (in thousands) and relative numbers.

The dynamics of language transfers: an age-graded perspective

To end with, Figure 10 synthesizes the main transfer patterns detected with an age-graded perspective to show evolution in apparent time. The graph is retrospective, i.e., it analyzes the language transmission between the informants' parents and the informants themselves, in other words, it describes what happened in language transmission until 2003.¹³ The difference between 'local' and 'external' Castilian correspond to their being born in the CLT or not.

¹³ Mothers' mean age for the first child in Catalonia was 31.2 years in 2019. Source: IDESCAT < <https://www-idescat-cat.sire.ub.edu/indicadors/?id=ue&n=10752> > (last visit: 17/02/2021).

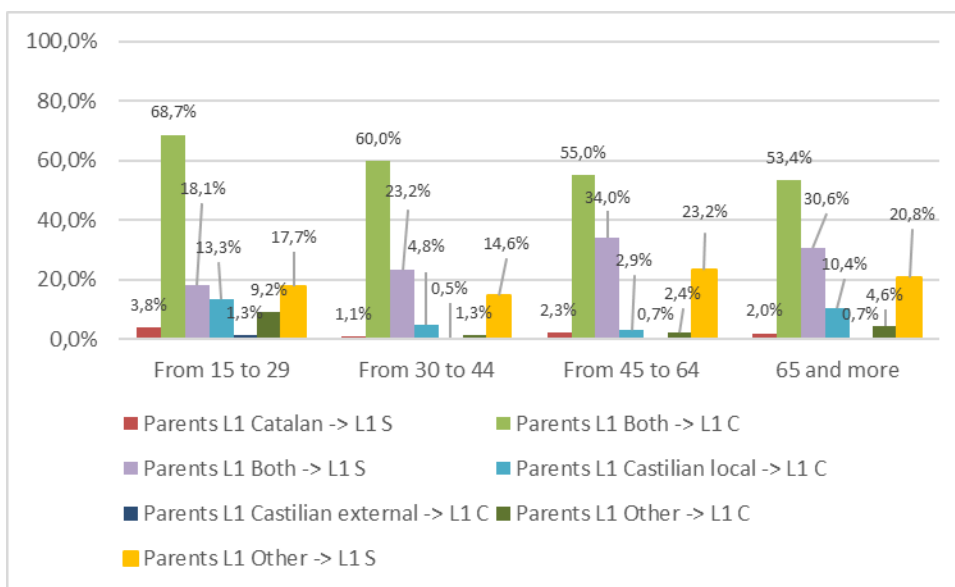


Figure 10. Transfers between different L1 groups. Catalonia, 2018. Percentages

The inclination of Catalan & Castilian bilingual couples to transmit Catalan grows from 53% in the oldest cohort to almost 69% in the youngest one, whereas their propensity to transmit Castilian decreases from almost 31% to 13%. For the other groups, trends are very weak, although the youngest cohort seems to record a slight increase in the transmission of Catalan among couples in the homogenous local Castilian and the Other groups—in the latter, probably due to the slight increase in mixed couples with a Catalan L1 partner.

Conclusions

Catalan has been politically minoritized during the last three centuries and became demographically minoritized in Catalonia during the second half of the 20th century. During the last four decades, revitalization language policies have managed that Catalan regains significant ground in many domains, whereas it remains in a minority position in other spheres of life and is virtually absent in other. In this paper we have focused on the evolution of first languages in Catalonia during the last decades.

The first conclusion is that, between 2003 and 2018, the amount of Catalan native speakers remained rather stable. Despite the low birthrates of the local population, the group managed to reproduce itself thanks to an extremely high level of retention among Catalan homogenous couples and to the fact that most of the offspring of Catalan & Castilian families declared themselves Catalan speakers. This *retention in intermarriage* strategy has proved crucial for the group's reproduction, since very few respondents from families without Catalan L1 parents claim to be Catalan L1.

Despite its capacity to reproduce itself, the demographic minoritization of Catalan during the second half of the 20th century has not been stopped, far less reversed, as far as first language is concerned. Between 2003 and 2018, the percentage of Catalan native speakers over the ≥ 15 population decreased, whereas that of Castilian remained rather stable, and that of Other multiplied. The basic explanation for that reduction was immigration.

The change derived from immigration has been the most conspicuous and has concealed other, less strident trends. These 'endogenous' trends are weak but look positive for Catalan. Synthetically, they show that the youngest generation of parents here analyzed, i.e., with children born between 1989 and 2003, experienced a slight but increased propensity to raise their children in Catalan. The trend was detectable especially among Catalan & Castilian bilingual couples, and, to a lesser extent, between locally born Castilian-speaking couples, and Other couples.

In synthesis, as far as first language is concerned, the endogenous trends that are positive for Catalan are significant but do not compensate for the demolinguistic effect of migratory waves and the powerful position of Castilian in demographic, legal and economic terms. Of course, the evolution of first language does not determine other fundamental variables, for second languages can be learnt, used and even adopted. But it is nevertheless a

fundamental parameter in demolinguistic dynamics that should be adequately assessed by language policy makers.

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