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Continuity and change: language ideologies of Catalan university students

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ABSTRACT

Catalonia is an interesting site for language ideology research for several reasons. It is a multilingual and multicultural territory, where both Catalan and Spanish enjoy the status of co-official language. Adding to this, over the course of the last two decades there has been a growing movement that has called for the independence of Catalonia from Spain, one which frequently places linguistic concerns at its centre. Against this backdrop, we report on a project that qualitatively examines the language ideologies of university students in the period after the 2017 Catalan independence referendum. Specifically, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 33 undergraduate students attending three universities from the wider Barcelona area. We examined the language ideologies of this cohort through the theoretical lens of linguistic authority, in particular, the concepts of anonymity and authenticity. Two central themes emerged from the data analysis: ‘Catalan: “lingered” authenticity?’ and ‘Spanish: glocal anonymity’. The findings reveal a complex array of language ideologies toward both Catalan and Spanish. Furthermore, in an ever-changing socio-political and sociolinguistic landscape in Catalonia, we maintain that qualitative methods can act as a powerful tool when examining cases of complex multilingualism.

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Introduction

Since the mid-2000s, the political situation in Spain has been marked by the issue of Catalan independence, which in turn has conditioned the electoral agenda of parties across the political spectrum both in Catalonia and Spain (Ianos et al. 2020; Holesch and Jordana 2021). In line with this, and despite fervent attempts by central state authorities, on 1 October 2017 a controversial referendum on the region’s independence from Spain was held (Anderson 2019). Following the subsequent declaration of independence made by the then President of the *Generalitat de Catalunya*,¹ Carles Puigdemont, on 27 October 2017, the Spanish government immediately suspended Catalan autonomy (Gillespie 2020). Scholars note that the Catalan independence referendum will most likely be remembered as one of the most significant turning points in Catalan and Spanish politics (Cetrà and Harvey 2019; Cossarini 2021). This struggle for self-government is often articulated in terms of linguistic rights and privileges (Cetrà 2019; Juarez Miro 2019). As such, the sociolinguistic situation in Catalonia is another vital ingredient that must be added to the mix. As a multilingual and multicultural community, two languages are used regularly in Catalonia (Catalan and Spanish),² albeit to varying degrees

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across the region (for more see Sabaté-Dalmau 2021). Importantly, within the wider socio-political context, Newman, Trenchs-Parera, and Corona (2019) highlight the positioning of Spanish as a counterpoint to Catalan in identity construction. Adding to this, the literature demonstrates fluid language ideologies concerning Catalan and Spanish in the territory (see e.g. Pujolar and González 2013; Woolard and Frekko 2013; Woolard 2016; Byrne 2019). Given the complexity of these issues, Catalonia represents a vital setting for politico-linguistic research, as the conflict in the region constitutes the most important national problem within Spain (Gillespie 2020).

The importance of language ideologies in sociolinguistic research is indisputable. As such, this study aims to examine the language ideologies of undergraduate students from three of the main public universities in the Barcelona metropolitan area. University students are particularly important because as a younger cohort they will presumably play a key role in the future of both Spanish and Catalan in Catalonia since they will likely become part of the professional, if not social, elite in the near future (Pujolar and Puigdevall 2015; Soler and Gallego-Balsà 2019). Thus, this paper reports on the results of semi-structured interviews conducted with what Hof (2019) labels a 'highly educated' demographic between September 2020 and May 2021. There are a variety of studies that have examined language ideologies across a range of domains in Catalonia (see e.g. Trenchs-Parera and Newman 2009; Casesnoves-Ferrer and Mas Castells 2017; Patiño-Santos 2018). However, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to qualitatively explore the language ideologies of university students in Catalonia in the period after the 2017 independence referendum. Given that language is becoming increasingly bound up in the political struggle in the region, we maintain that it is of vital importance to examine the language ideologies of the aforementioned cohort in the post-referendum era in Catalonia (Newman, Trenchs-Parera, and Corona 2019).

In this research, we understand language ideologies as individually held implicit and explicit subjective ideas and assumptions about languages and the social world (Boix-Fuster and Woolard 2020; Pérez-Izagirre and Cenoz 2021). Moreover, the literature demonstrates that language ideologies go beyond how people and collectives view language itself. Rather, they have been related to processes of identity construction and as such are invariably intertwined with complex socio-political and socio-cultural positions (Irvine and Gal 2000; Woolard 2016). Given this, we maintain that language ideologies can serve as a powerful concept in unpacking the complexities of the sociolinguistic situation in Catalonia. In the current study, we adopt Kroskrity's (2004, 2010) interpretation of language ideology, who views it as a ubiquitous set of beliefs, feelings and conceptions about language and use, which are often interrelated with the political-economic interests of individual speakers, ethnic and other interest groups. The present study is theoretically grounded in the concept of linguistic authority, a framework that posits two competing but frequently overlapping notions, namely, authenticity and anonymity (Gal and Woolard 2001; Urla et al. 2016; Boix-Fuster and Woolard 2020). These concepts are discussed further in the section labelled 'Language authority: the state-of-the-art'.

Today, Catalonia, and its capital city Barcelona, is a socially diverse and highly polarised territory (Solsona-Puig et al. 2021). Reflecting this, our findings reveal a complex and multifaceted configuration of language ideologies toward both Spanish and Catalan. As we will describe in the following sections, the informants' comments reflect the intricacies of the wider socio-political, socio-cultural and sociolinguistic debates within Catalan society. Before describing the study and the results, we begin by discussing the sociolinguistic situation in Catalonia. Then, we introduce the theoretical framework employed in this research, namely linguistic authority, as well as discussing the state-of-the-art in this field of research. The third section is dedicated to the methodology we employed. In the fourth section, we present our findings before discussing them in more depth in the fifth section. The article closes by summarising the results and pointing to implications for future research.

The context: Catalonia, Barcelona and language

Before discussing language ideologies further, there is first a need to contextualise Catalonia historically, culturally and politically. Located in the Northeast of the Iberian Peninsula, the autonomous

territory of Catalonia has a population of 7.6 million people. In addition, it is widely considered a key political and economic European region (Bremberg and Gillespie 2022). Historically, the Catalan language has gone through several cycles of oppression and revival (Ianos et al. 2020). Since the end of the Franco dictatorship in 1975, the Spanish Constitution recognises the existence of other co-official languages such as Catalan in Spain. However, this situation also creates an asymmetric distribution of language rights, since everyone has the duty to know Spanish, but minority languages are only recognised as co-official in certain territories (Ramallo 2018).

The number of Catalan native speakers has reduced from more than 95% of the population at the beginning of the twentieth century to 34.3% in 2020 (Plataforma per la Llengua 2020). However, authorities in Catalonia have implemented various language policy and planning initiatives that have seen a positive diachronic trajectory for the language (Woolard 2016). For instance, the Spanish Constitution of 1978 re-established Catalan institutions and conferred Catalonia a Statute of Autonomy in 1982. Furthermore, Catalan was promoted officially with the Linguistic Normalisation Law (1983), the Linguistic Policy Law (1998) and the Linguistic Immersion Programme in public schools. These successful revitalisation efforts have resulted in an increase in the number of speakers of Catalan across the region (Dowling 2018, 2019). However, as Atkinson (2018) argues, these language policy and planning initiatives have yet to successfully transform Catalan from an ethnic voice into a civic one. In terms of linguistic knowledge and use of Catalan, in 2018, 97% of Catalonia's population claimed to understand it, 81% claimed to speak it, 86% claimed to read it and 65% to write it. Among younger demographics (aged 15–29), 91% claimed to speak Catalan and 89% to write it (IDESCAT 2018). Despite the high level of knowledge of the Catalan language, overall, its use has decreased. More specifically, in Barcelona approximately 28.4% of people aged 15–34 claim to use it on a daily basis (IDESCAT 2018; Ajuntament de Barcelona 2021). However, the Catalan language cannot be labelled an endangered or threatened language. Rather, it suffers from 'demolinguistic stress' due to continuous regulatory pressures against its use (Casesnoves-Ferrer, Mas Castells, and Tudela-Isanta 2019). For example, the presence of Catalan in the regional education system is constantly questioned. In 2013, what became known as the 'Wert Law' (after the education minister of the time) was introduced in an attempt to reduce the prominent status conferred on the language in Catalan schools (Trenchs-Parera and Newman 2015). Adding to this, in 2020, the Spanish Supreme Court determined that 25% of the teaching in the region had to be in Spanish (Vergés-Gifra and Serra 2022).

Adding to the above, immigration is an important present-day dimension in Catalonia. Over the course of the twentieth century, the region experienced a substantial demographic growth with successive waves of working-class, Spanish speaking immigration from other parts of Spain (Cabré and Pujadas 1984; Flors-Mas 2021). The 2000s saw the newer phenomenon of transnational immigration in Catalonia. This inward migration to the territory has had a huge impact on its social and linguistic landscape, all of which has put the Catalan language under significant strain. Despite Catalan language campaigns and volunteering programmes, many newcomers to the region perceive Spanish as more 'useful', especially for its presence in administrative and legal areas (Boix-Fuster and Vila 2006). This perception is especially relevant considering that over 20.6% of the total population of Catalonia are international migrants and that the use and knowledge of Catalan among this group is especially low (IDESCAT 2020; Flors-Mas 2021). Adding to this, on 1 October 2017, Catalan authorities called a controversial referendum on the region's independence from Spain, where of the 2,286,217 votes cast, 2,044,038 (90%) were in favour of independence (Generalitat de Catalunya 2020). Considering this, Cetrà (2019) maintains that Catalonia's sociolinguistic situation often frames the broader ideological and political debate in the region, where ethnolinguistic identity plays a prominent role. From this perspective, the Catalan and Spanish languages are increasingly at the centre of the political and social debate between pro-independence and pro-unionist camps in Catalonia. With this has come the increasingly salient issue about what it means, personally and politically, to speak or not to speak Catalan or Spanish in contemporary Catalonia (Woolard 2016; Byrne 2020).

The majority of the population of Catalonia (5.5 million) is located in and around the Catalan capital, Barcelona. As a ‘global city’, the high levels of immigration (both internal and external) to Barcelona and its surrounding areas have brought a wide diversity in languages spoken to the city (Newman, Trenchs-Parera, and Corona 2019). The multilingual composition of the city includes non-Peninsular varieties of Spanish. In addition, non-Spanish speaking immigrants from highly diverse linguistic backgrounds are also present (e.g. Moroccan, Chinese and Romanian) and there are now in the region of 300 languages spoken in the wider Barcelona region (GELA 2022). All of this has important implications for language and identity in the city. As Newman, Trenchs-Parera, and Corona (2019) posit, ‘on a microsocial level, language negotiation has pervaded Barcelona life longer than many comparable diverse urban areas worldwide’ (Newman, Trenchs-Parera, and Corona 2019, 358). As such, Barcelona represents a rich site for sociolinguistic research. The current study focused on three universities located in the wider Barcelona metropolitan area, namely *Universitat Pompeu Fabra* (UPF), *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona* (UAB) and *Universitat de Barcelona* (UB). By focusing on university students, we aimed to shed light on the intricate connections between language ideologies and identity amongst a group that tends to be socio-politically active (Brooks 2016). Thus, this new information has the potential to provide an insight into the sociolinguistic future of Catalonia. Moreover, the radically changing political landscape since the 2017 referendum has generated deep divides in Catalan society, where language choice has often become a sensitive issue (Oller, Satorra, and Tobeña 2019; Cossarini 2021). This is important because ideological debates related to language are a constant feature of all language contact situations, particularly those of a conflictive nature (Soler and Erdocia 2020). As such, post-referendum Catalonia represents a fertile ground for research into language ideologies.

Linguistic authority: the state-of-the-art

Linguistic ideologies are ‘sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use’ (Silverstein 1979, 193). They affect the perception and behaviours related to linguistic aspects, and are not only about language, but are intertwined with wider processes of identity construction (Kroskrity 2010; Horner and Bradley 2019). Among the variety of ways to classify different ideological constructions of languages, this article employs linguistic authority as the theoretical framework to guide the analysis. In particular, we focus on the competing but frequently co-constituted notions of authenticity and anonymity (Gal and Woolard 2001; Woolard 2008, 2016). Boix-Fuster and Woolard (2020) maintain that the modern Western world is dominated by ideologies of authenticity and anonymity, where the former relates to the particularism of Romanticism and the latter to the universalism of the Enlightenment. Importantly, these concepts have previously been employed to the sociolinguistic situation in Catalonia (Woolard 2016; Byrne 2019; Tudela-Isanta 2021) and other Catalan-speaking regions (Ballerman and Melià 2010; Aguiló-Mora and Lynch 2017; Hawkey 2018). These ideological positions constitute a powerful theoretical lens to further our understanding of complex multilingualism, as is the case of twenty-first-century Catalonia. We utilise the aforementioned concepts in the current study as they are frequently prominent in debates about languages’ role in society.

Authenticity refers to the genuine or ‘essential self’ of a particular community (Atkinson 2018). Here, value can accrue to a language when it is seen as the genuine voice of a particular group of people and place, whereby a language is often geographically ‘rooted’ or ‘anchored’ to a local culture (Urla et al. 2016; Boix-Fuster and Woolard 2020). Adding to this, the ideology of authenticity attributes authority to the linguistic variety considered authentic to a community, where origins and beginnings define essence. From this perspective, in order to consider a language variety authentic, it ‘must be very much “from somewhere” in speakers’ consciousness, and thus its meaning is profoundly local’ (Woolard 2008, 304). Furthermore, Woolard (2016) notes that minority languages tend to be limited to claiming attributes of authenticity, where the ‘restricted’ nature of a ‘local’ language can result in it being seen as not suitable for widespread public use. With specific reference

to the sociolinguistic situation in Catalonia, Woolard (2016) claims that linguistic authenticity is indexical, as it signals ‘who one is, rather than *what* one has to say’ (Woolard 2016, 22).

On the flip side of the authenticity coin is ‘anonymity’. The ideological position of anonymity ‘holds that a given language is a neutral vehicle of communication, belonging to no one in particular and thus equally available to all’ (Woolard 2016, 7), and, by extension, is not reflective of a particular social position or geographical location. Furthermore, due to their perceived ‘banal invisibility’, languages attributed an anonymous value tend to be regarded as suitable for official use in the public sphere. Ergo, an anonymous language is considered neutral and objective, can represent anyone and everyone can use it. For example, Mar-Molinero (2006) notes that as a more globalised and commodified language, Spanish is rooted in an ideology of anonymity. Moreover, anonymity refers to what Urla et al. (2016) label an ‘ideological constellation’ of values that construct a language as being purely indexically neutral, referential and transcendent of any particular social identity. It is due to this ‘indexical neutrality’ that an anonymous language oftentimes acts as a bridge that allows communication between diverse people (Horner and Bradley 2019).

As mentioned, we focus on exploring the language ideologies of university students against the backdrop of significant political turmoil in Catalonia. Although a relatively recent field of inquiry (see e.g. Silverstein 1979), language ideology research has developed a rich and diverse scholarly tradition. Moreover, with the co-existence of the Catalan and Spanish languages in the territory, there has been a great deal of research conducted in Catalonia by language ideology researchers. For instance, when dealing with identity issues and language choice in Catalonia, Catalan and Spanish have traditionally been pitted against each other (Woolard and Frekko 2013; Erdocia and Soler 2022). However, recent sociolinguistic research has revealed that many of the multilingual speakers living in Catalonia now invoke more universalistic and/or cosmopolitan frameworks for interpreting their own language choice rather than overtly identitarian, particularist and nationalist discourses. From this perspective, there is now an emphasis placed on social harmony and an inclusive linguistic cosmopolitan ideology, associated with hybridity and fluidity (Woolard 2016; Boix-Fuster and Woolard 2020). The literature demonstrates that this support for multilingualism and respect for other groups’ language preferences is particularly evident amongst younger people (see e.g. Newman, Trenchs-Parera, and Ng 2008; Pujolar and González 2013; Sorolla and Flors-Mas 2020). Adding to this, the research conducted specifically in Barcelona has also revealed the emergence of a linguistic cosmopolitanism (Trenchs-Parera and Newman 2009; Woolard and Frekko 2013). Thus, with what Casesnoves-Ferrer, Mas Castells, and Tudela-Isanta (2019) refer to as the ‘un-ideologisation’ of language use – at least among a younger demographic in Catalonia – there has been a shift toward an anti-essentialist (or constructivist) consideration that Catalan is nobody’s language in particular (ideology of anonymity). This is in comparison to viewing Catalan as the essential language of the Catalan people (ideology of authenticity) (Pujolar and González 2013; Codó and Patiño-Santos 2014; Woolard 2016). However, other scholarly work (see e.g. Miley 2007; Ianos, Huguet, and Lapresta-Rey 2017; Byrne 2020) indicates that ethnolinguistic divisions may persist for some in Catalonia, rooted in notions of *catalanitat*³ and a Catalan-Spanish ethnolinguistic dichotomy (Hawkey 2018). This echoes the argument that to varying degrees, both Catalan and Spanish are caught between the pulse of authenticity and anonymity in twenty-first-century Catalonia (Woolard 2008; Atkinson 2018; Byrne 2020). This contradictory situation perhaps paints a picture of both continuity and change in Catalonia. Importantly, however, much of the sociolinguistic research in this field predates the October 2017 independence referendum and subsequent events. In addition, socio-political change and/or disruption is one of the most important aspects that influences the creation of new sociolinguistic meanings (Spolsky and Amara 1997). As such, the current situation in Catalonia provides an excellent opportunity to study the constructions of Catalan and Spanish in the region through the lens of linguistic authority. In the following section, we outline the methodological approach adopted in the current study.

Methodology

Following similar research in this field (see e.g. Çavuşoğlu 2021), we chose to employ a qualitative methodology. The research upon which this article is based was conducted over a period of nine months (September 2020 to May 2021). Through adopting a qualitative approach, we aimed to collate a rich, deep and textured picture of the respondents' language ideologies (Bazeley 2020; Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey 2020). In line with this, the semi-structured interview was applied for data collection. As one of the most widely used instruments in qualitative research, semi-structured interviews permit for flexibility in the interview process (Leavy 2014). This, in turn, allows the aspects of the topic which are important to the participant to be explored without being overly controlled by a fixed schedule of questions (Smith 1995). Additionally, semi-structured interviews were utilised as they can provide insight into the underpinnings of the personal decisions which individuals make. Moreover, semi-structured interviews are particularly good at accessing language ideologies (Gal 1993; Laihonon 2008; DeJonckheere and Vaughn 2019). The interviews were open-ended with respondents being encouraged to talk freely while an interview guide ensured that central issues were covered. As such, semi-structured interviews enabled us to investigate the reflections and opinions of young highly educated people about their lived reality in a fluid sociolinguistic and socio-political situation.

This research is based on an analysis of empirical data collected from 33 individuals. Of those who contributed to the research, 12 came from *Universitat Pompeu Fabra* (UPF), 11 from the *Universitat de Barcelona* and 10 from the *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona* (UAB). All of the respondents were registered undergraduate students, mostly from Arts, Humanities or Social Science degrees. However, one informant was studying Medicine. Adding to this, most of them were studying one or more languages in addition to the medium of their education. It may of course be the case that there was an element of selection 'bias' in the semi-structured interviews. This was due to the fact that participation in the project was on the basis of a response to a widely circulated email invitation. As such, the sample was random, beyond the fact that they were undergraduate students studying in the Barcelona metropolitan area. Importantly, however, the email may have attracted the attention of those students who felt particularly strongly about the sociolinguistic situation in Catalonia. Informants were largely younger although one informant was in her early fifties having returned to education to obtain her teaching qualification. While many respondents stated that they employed Catalan as their habitual language, the interviews were conducted in English, Catalan and Spanish depending on the informant's preference. Importantly, the interviewers were proficient in all three of the languages. In particular, the research team consisted of one native English speaker and two native Catalan/Spanish speakers. Once all the semi-structured interviews were transcribed, they were translated into English where necessary.

The data collection coincided with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in Catalonia (an issue that was also raised by the informants). Similar to Sy et al.'s (2020) research, this necessitated a degree of innovation by the research team as in-person qualitative data collection was complicated by the constraints of social distancing and the prioritisation of the participants' and researchers' safety. Given this, all of the semi-structured interviews were moved to General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliant online tools. Drawing insights from Roberts et al.'s (2021) experience of conducting online interviews, we kept detailed analytical and self-reflection memos. These memos provided additional technical documentation of the virtual process. Adding to this, the self-reflection memos noted our own impressions of the interviews. These post-interview notes added to the strength of evidence that supported the conclusions (McBride 2016). The average duration of an interview was approximately 70 minutes.

Following other recent applications of thematic data analysis in this field of research (see e.g. Fitzsimmons-Doolan, Palmer, and Henderson 2017), we employed this method to identify the most salient categories to emerge from the data (Morse and Field 1995). Thematic analysis involves the search for and identification of repeated patterns of meaning that extend across an entire

interview or set of interviews (DeSantis and Ugarriza 2000). This approach to data analysis is a flexible technique for organising and summarising large and diverse bodies of data. Thematic analysis can also provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data (Vaismoradi, Turunen, and Bondas 2013). In this study, the six-stage guide to thematic analysis was adhered to, which provided a detailed description of the phenomena under investigation (Clarke and Braun 2013; Braun and Clarke 2021). Interviews were transcribed using intelligent verbatim transcription. In this respect, we modified obvious grammatical errors when they occurred as well as removing filler expressions such as ‘um’. We also removed occurrences when interviewees verbally struggled to express a thought, although this was rare. Moreover, transcriptions were double coded by the authors to generate themes and sub-themes. The research team also met at regular intervals to discuss the dataset and develop consensus around coding, interpretations, patterns, ideas and themes. These meetings were also used to discuss issues related to the translation of the multilingual data. The interviews as a whole provide both the context and the framework for our analysis to discern how the informants order experiences, events and actions in order to make sense of them. Two central themes emerged from our analysis. In the following section, we discuss each of these in turn, connecting our findings to the literature, with a focus on how ideologies of authenticity and anonymity were represented in the data.

Findings

Through employing the methodological approach described in the previous section, we discuss two conceptually distinct but overlapping themes that emerged from the data analysis. The constructions of both Spanish and Catalan as well as their underpinning language ideologies are explored under two motifs: ‘Catalan: “lingered” authenticity?’ and ‘Spanish: glocal anonymity’. In what follows, we provide examples from the interviews in an effort to provide a picture of the sociolinguistic situation as it was described by the informants. Importantly, pseudonyms are used throughout and any identifying material has also been removed.

Catalan: ‘lingered’ authenticity?

When discussing their view of the Catalan language the respondents displayed a heterogeneity of views, albeit views that constructed Catalan largely as an authentic language. In this respect, for many, the language represented a core element of their national identity. For example, the respondents below stated the following:

I would say you have to speak Catalan to be Catalan. Because speaking Catalan is part of Catalan culture. You can live in Catalonia without speaking Catalan, it’s very possible to do that, but it’s not the same as wanting to be Catalan, just living here. I don’t know if you understand me. (Anna)

For example, for me, being Catalan is, one of the characteristics is to speak Catalan. And this also links to the idea of being a different country, different identity. This connects me with the independence movement because I’ve got an identity. I am Spanish okay, but also, I am Catalan and maybe more Catalan than Spanish. And it’s something that some people don’t understand. ‘If you live in Spain, you’re Spanish’, ‘No, we are Catalan’, ‘No, you’re not. Catalan is like, if you are from Extremadura or Andalusia, or from another community.’ No, no, we have a history, we have an identity, we have a language. (Gerard)

For Gerard, as well as language playing a key role in his identity formation, the role of the language in the independence movement is also alluded to. Through linking – albeit briefly – the Catalan language to the independence movement, Gerard’s comments mirror Miley and Garvía’s (2019) claim that ethnolinguistic divisions within Catalan society continue to exist; divisions that may well limit the appeal of Catalan secession. Eloi’s comments below go somewhat further.

I consider that the Catalan nation is based on the [Catalan] language. Therefore, the Catalan independence process is a national liberation and defence movement for the Catalan nation. For me, the defence of our

language is essential. And for example, I would not like a process of independence at the expense of language, a process of independence in which the role of the language was diminished. In other words, it's no good having independence if you don't have the language as has happened in Ireland, for example. (Eloi)

The excerpt below provides another example of the role the Catalan language played in the construction of a modern identity for the interviewees, where language is equated with territory and national identity.

If we think of Spain as a whole, it really has lots of different traditions in every region, but we probably might think of Andalusian traditions as what is Spanish and obviously Catalonia is different from Andalusia, but Catalonia is also quite different from Aragon, which is just next door, and probably really different to Valencia and to Occitania also. So, I would say Catalonia is obviously different because its idiosyncratic traditions, its folklore, its own language, which is obviously very, very important as well in defining our identity. (Arnau)

As previously mentioned, language ideology research can also provide insights into the complex interrelationship between language and cultures (Kroskrity 2004, 2010; Woolard 2016). For instance, positive evaluations of a language variety are frequently associated with its role in constructing a unique and distinctive culture (Chin and Wigglesworth 2007). As one participant commented:

Yeah, I think it's [Catalan] really unique because it's a different language from Spanish. It has more to do with French or Italian maybe than Spanish, and I think that kind of sets us a little bit different from Spanish speakers as well as Basque or Galician [speakers], which have very, I mean they are also Romance languages, but Latin languages, but they have little to do with Spanish in a lot of senses. So yeah, it's kind of a distinctive trait. I mean it's the reflection of a different culture and a different way of doing things maybe and so that's why I think that it's [Catalan] really important. It's like, it sets us apart, you know, a little different from others, but at the same time, because it also has many similarities with Spanish. Yeah, I mean it's also a thing that unites us probably in so many ways because we can understand each other with no difficulty. So, I think that's really interesting too. But yeah, that's why I think it's important for culture because it's a distinctive trait and it's a reflection of a different literature, different gastronomy, different, I do not know, like moviemaking for example, just to give some examples. So yeah, that's why I think it's really important. (Jaume)

The comment below by Emma provides another example of how the Catalan language acts as a core component of Catalan culture, where language use continues to be rooted in notions of *catalanitat*.

So, we are different. And we are, and we consider ourselves different from Spanish culture. Like, we have our own traditions, our own, yeah, celebrations and our own language. So, we want all these to be recognized. (Emma)

The frequent use of the plural pronoun 'we' above appears to index an identity of a specific group, one that is different from that of Spain. In addition, Jenkins (1996) argues that '(...) similarities cannot be recognised without delineating differences' (Jenkins 1996, 80), and one of the elements that a particular group has in common is their difference from others. Considering this, according to the respondents above, the Catalan language played a key role in the formation of a distinctly unique identity. However, this is not to say that the views of the informants were homogenous in nature. For example, in Maria's comments below, there is an emphasis placed on social harmony and inclusive linguistic practices.

Well, the truth is, yes. With most of my friends, I speak Catalan. At home, for example, my father is Italian, and I don't know why instead of speaking Catalan I speak Spanish and he speaks Italian. Then there is an amazing linguistic exchange, but apart from friends and my family, I find that I change a lot, the language, when I go through the centre of Barcelona because they often go straight into Spanish if you go to a shop. For example, this weekend I went to a hotel and I spoke directly in Spanish. I usually speak directly in Spanish and, therefore, I have no problem speaking in Spanish. I have many friends who, they're not very much in favour of the independence movement and they're always speaking in Spanish, I'm also speaking in Spanish to adapt to them, and in this case, I have no problem. (Maria)

As we can see from Maria's comments above, language choice was more a matter of personal preference rather than ethnic affiliation, and identities were framed as hybrid and linguistically cosmopolitan (Boix-Fuster and Woolard 2020). In line with this, for some, there was an emphasis

placed on getting along across ethnolinguistic boundaries and a continued readiness to accommodate other groups' linguistic preferences in Catalonia (Newman and Trenchs-Parera 2015).

Spanish: glocal anonymity

When discussing the Spanish language, the research participants echoed Boix-Fuster and Woolard's (2020) argument that language ideologies are both morally and politically loaded representations of the structure and use of languages in the social world. For example, in the excerpts below, Spanish was appreciated for its pragmatic value factor:

I also teach Spanish because Spanish is also a very practical language, to go to South America or even to the United States. And the more languages you learn, the better it is. (Abril)

Knowledge of Spanish opens many doors, not only in Spain, but also opens doors to Latin America, the United States and other places in Europe where Spanish is the obligatory language for formal affairs. Therefore, I don't see Spanish so much as a sentimental language for me right now, but more as a tool. (Maria)

The comments above illustrate how the Spanish language is understood as a more international or universal language. Adding to this, Eva's comments below provide another example of how the Spanish language was valued for its use at the international level.

It [Spanish] is really one of the best languages to know because it's one of the most widely spoken in the world. If you speak Spanish, you really understand, wherever you go, someone will always understand you. So, it's lucky to be able to speak Spanish, it's like speaking English or speaking Chinese. (Eva)

In the remarks above, the instrumental value of the Spanish language is highlighted. The ideology underpinning this is associated with anonymity, whereby a language is rooted in its ability to fulfil the role of a socially unlocatable, public and universal language. Linked to the perceived universality of Spanish, respondents stated concerns for the future of the Catalan language. For instance, Helena stated that:

We are worried, like the people who speak Catalan and care about Catalan, we are a bit worried because as more and more people are getting used to speaking just Spanish, it [Catalan] could at some point even disappear or be like really, just speak in Catalan at home, or with your friends, but that's it, with friends that would be 60 years old, like me and my friends in 50 years maybe. (Helena)

As demonstrated by the comments above, there was a complex constellation of language ideologies present amongst the informants regarding the Spanish language. Reflecting the contention that neither Catalan nor Spanish can completely fulfil the role of an authentic or anonymous language in Catalonia, when speaking of Spanish, many interviewees indicated that at the local level in the region, the language was understood more so as an authentic language. For example, for the informants below, Spanish was marked and rooted in an ideology of authenticity.

You cannot really live using Catalan nowadays, it's barely possible, well, especially in Barcelona, but now like any kind of process you have to do with central government you have to do it in Spanish. So, it's, for example, a kind of oppression is not being able to speak your own language wherever you want. So, you have to learn the empire's language in order to be able to live. Well, it's actually like in the constitution, in the Spanish Constitution, you have the right, no, not the right, the obligation to learn Spanish, so by law you have to speak Spanish. That's, for example, a kind of oppression. (Arnau)

In the end Spanish is the language of Spain. Spain will not disappear overnight. It's true that there are other languages, this is part of a debate on whether or not they are derived from Catalan, such as Valencian. I'd like to think that the languages of the Spanish state will become stronger, but that will not at any time mean the disappearance of Spanish because it's the language of the state of Spain and will remain the official language for many, many years. (Emma)

Negative views toward Spanish were evident when the current linguistic situation in Catalonia was discussed, whereby informants stated that the Spanish language and culture was being imposed on

Catalan society by an intolerant Spanish state (Byrne and Marcet 2022). In the excerpt below, another participant outlines how, against the backdrop of the socio-political situation in the region, it is possible that speaking Spanish has certain connotations. For instance:

[Spanish] is one of the languages of Catalonia and there's really no preference between Catalan and Spanish here. I think they are more or less equal, but they do have a different meaning. For instance, when a Catalan first speaks in Spanish, he or she identifies [...] it gives the impression of not being a very radical person or a supporter of independence, for example. So, there are small things that people can say: 'Oh, it's a Catalan [person] who has spoken to me in Spanish, he or she isn't pro-Catalonia but pro-Spain', that is how a person is labelled. So, speaking Spanish in Catalonia is not just a language but also a political position. It's like taking a stance. (Eva)

For Eva, the use of Spanish in Catalonia indexed support for a certain political position ('but they do have a different meaning'). This echoes the argument that language ideologies are rarely focused on just the language in question (Silverstein 1979; Irvine and Gal 2000). In the following section, we provide a more exhaustive discussion of this study's results.

Discussion

As a study 'on the ground' (Soler and Gallego-Balsà 2019), the present article should be interpreted as a dynamic outlook on a specific segment of Catalonia's population. The undergraduate students that contributed to this research should be understood as part of a wider, multi-layered and heterogeneous socio-political and socio-cultural community in Catalonia. Within this context, boundaries at both the individual and group level are defined by a shared history, culture and sociolinguistic background. Thus, understanding the informant's language ideologies requires consideration of the diverse sociolinguistic and socio-political reality in an increasingly 'global' Barcelona. Considering this, the data analysis revealed a wide range of views in terms of the Spanish as well as the Catalan language and views of languages and identities were constructed as hybrid, multiple and fluid (Byrne 2019; Tudela-Isanta 2021).

Contemporary scholarship in the field of language ideology research in Catalonia has identified a partial shift from the construction of Catalan as the authentic language to that of Catalan as the unmarked variety (Woolard 2016; Atkinson 2018). However, our data demonstrate that the trend toward 'anonymising' the use of Catalan identified in the literature may not be as prevalent as previously thought. The aforementioned 'un-ideologisation' of language use in Catalonia may be more of an ongoing and fluid process. For example, many of the students who contributed to this study identified the Catalan language as a fundamental component of national identity (Cortès-Colomé, Barrieras, and Comellas 2016; Riera-Gil 2022). In this respect, constructing Catalan as belonging to Catalonia, a factor that is rooted in ethnolinguistic essentialism, was a recurring theme. As such, the data suggest that many of our informants were much less ready to assign 'anonymous' status to the Catalan language. Furthermore, for many of the respondents, the Catalan language played a key role in the formation of an oppositional identity, or a 'trench of resistance' (Castells 2010). In line with this, ideologies of linguistic authenticity seemingly underpinned the metalinguistic construction of the authority of Catalan, where Catalan acted as a marker of difference from Spain as well as the Spanish language and wider culture. This is in line with the literature (see e.g. Newman, Trenchs-Parera, and Corona 2019; Oller, Satorra, and Tobeña 2019), which has found that many of Catalonia's citizens identify with a Catalan identity which is distinctly different from that of a Spanish one. Related to this, the potential for Spanish use to increase to the detriment of the Catalan language was also feared by some informants. Such a shift could potentially further prevent Catalan from gaining what Woolard (2008) describes as the anonymous invisibility of 'just talk' that characterises a public language. Interestingly, while all the participants in this study were attending universities in the Barcelona metropolitan area, the vast majority of them were from outside of the city, oftentimes coming from more rural areas of Catalonia. As such, given their geographical origins, this perhaps adds weight to the argument that the 'de-traditionalisation' of the

Catalan language may be less prominent in more rural areas of Catalonia than in Barcelona and its immediate surrounds (for more see Ianos, Huguet, and Lapresta-Rey 2017; Byrne 2019).

The findings also demonstrate that Spanish, at a more global level, was viewed as a common or unmarked 'standard public language' (Woolard 2008, 2016). Reflecting this, the interviewees constructed a hierarchisation of languages within an international linguistic market where Spanish was identified as the global language (Cameron 2012; Patiño-Santos 2018). This is in line with the wider scholarship, which has found that ideologies of linguistic anonymity tend to underpin the construction of Spanish. From this perspective, Spanish was viewed as more international or a language of the global market (Leeman and Martínez 2007; Codó and Patiño-Santos 2014). This is perhaps unsurprising in the context of an increasingly multilingual, multicultural and 'international' Catalonia. This also reflects elements of what has been labelled the 'commodification of language' (Ricento 2005; Cameron 2012), whereby Spanish is valued for its ability to compete effectively on international markets. Thus, the data indicated that Spanish had an economic value which further contributes to privileging it as the 'unmarked' or 'common' language. As such, on a more global or international scale, Spanish was constructed as an anonymous language.

Hornsby (2019) notes that, '[language] ideologies take flesh and become voices in discursive narratives on the language itself, and can serve as a springboard to index wider issues of tension and conflict in society' (Hornsby 2019, 76). In this respect, informants were often focused on what the Spanish language was associated with or what it represented in their minds. Considering this, at the local level in Catalonia, Spanish was far from being an anonymous language. Rather, it was constructed as being very much from somewhere specific, that was, a prejudiced Spanish state that the informants did not identify with. In line with this, use of the Spanish language was also connected to certain political positions. The fact of linking the use of Spanish with a specific political orientation aligns with what Jaffe (1999), in her discussion of Corsican, describes as an 'overdramatization and overpoliticization of communicative expressive activity' (Jaffe 1999, 246). Thus, some interviewees outlined how speakers can find themselves being labelled as pro-Spanish or pro-Catalan depending on the language that they communicate in.

To summarise, many of the findings were inevitably interwoven and a degree of overlap was unavoidable when the informants discussed both Spanish and Catalan. Nonetheless, the data presented in the previous sections echoed the wider literature in this field of research. Considering this, there tends to be a strong association between historically minoritised autochthonous languages and 'authenticity' in many contexts (O'Rourke and Ramallo 2018). This was seemingly the case in our study, as Catalan was frequently considered 'authentic' or as being 'from somewhere' in the respondents' consciousness, thus making it profoundly local. In comparison, the data indicated that when discussing the Spanish language in Catalonia, language ideologies aligned with a global vs. local status; whereby anonymity and authenticity tentatively run parallel with global and local uses respectively. As such, we maintain that neither Catalan nor Spanish can unambiguously fulfil the functions of a 'voice from somewhere' or a 'voice from nowhere' in contemporary Catalonia (Woolard 2016; Atkinson 2018; Byrne 2020).

Conclusion

On 1 October 2017 Catalonia organised a unilateral referendum on its independence from Spain. Scholars claim that there is a social fracture between unionists and the secessionists in Catalonia (Oller, Satorra, and Tobeña 2019), which tends to be configured by identity and language politics (Juarez Miro 2019). Considering that Catalonia's push for independence shows little sign of abating (Agustín 2021), the views of the informants on the use and value of languages offers a unique insight into the current as well as the future sociolinguistic situation in the region. Given this, studying what speakers think about languages in Catalonia is of central importance. In this paper, we have attempted to unpack undergraduate students' own perspectives about their social world and languages. The findings provide a nuanced understanding of Catalonia's cultural and social

diversity at the local level in a context of unprecedented transformation. We contend that the findings are of relevance to policymakers and stakeholders who are interested in solving some of the challenges posed in present-day multilingual and multicultural Catalonia.

It is clear from the data that the ideological debate over language is alive and well in the everyday lives of speakers in Catalonia (Boix-Fuster and Woolard 2020). Catalan and Spanish seem to exist in what Atkinson and Kelly-Holmes (2016) have labelled an 'ideological limbo', in which neither language can completely enjoy the 'authentic' nor 'anonymous' status. Adding to this, the data also reflect the argument that debates about language are never about language alone (Horner and Bradley 2019). In this respect, the data presented in the preceding sections indicates a heterogeneity of views, with the interviewees constructing and negotiating a diverse range of ethnolinguistic identities. As a qualitative study, we do not claim generalisability in our findings. However, the data have validity in terms of how they relate to the theoretical framework of linguistic authority (anonymity and authenticity) (Urla et al. 2016; Woolard 2016). This framework of analysis provided a lens to interpret the views of those who contributed to this research.

The analysis uncovered a strong but not entirely ubiquitous narrative of a Catalan ethnolinguistic identity by the informants. Moreover, as a marker of difference from Spain and Spanish culture, interviewees stressed that the language was inseparable from Catalan culture and their core national identity, framing their concerns around structural issues such as linguistic officiality. When discussing Spanish, the interviewees noted that as a 'global' language, it is much better placed than Catalan to occupy the role of an anonymous language. However, on a more local level in Catalonia, Spanish did seem to be underpinned by an ideology of authenticity. From this perspective, our findings add weight to the argument that outside of the independence discourse (for more see Byrne 2020), it seems that the 'ethnonational paradigm' or 'ethnic veneer' may indeed remain for some in Catalonia, with neither Catalan nor Spanish being completely an authentic or anonymous language (see e.g. Atkinson 2018; Boix-Fuster and Woolard 2020).

To conclude, the current study only offers a snapshot of what remains a fluid situation. Other research indicates that the construction of both Catalan and Spanish vary across the regions where they are spoken (for more see Tudela-Isanta 2021). Thus, we contend that how both languages are viewed potentially differs within regions also, in this instance Catalonia. Given this, future research should focus on undergraduate students attending university in more 'rural' areas of Catalonia, namely Lleida, Tarragona, Vic and Girona. In addition, it would also be worthwhile researching the language ideologies of Catalan students living and studying in other regions of Spain such as Madrid, for example. Such lines of research could potentially allow for a more comprehensive view of young people's language ideologies not only from across Catalonia but also from outside of it.

Notes


1. Government of Catalonia.
2. A third official language, Aranese, in the Aran Valley, is also present.
3. The quality of being Catalan or identifying with Catalan values (Lladonosa 2013).

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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