



Immigration and language education in Catalonia: Between national and social agendas

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Abstract

Most analyses of the sociolinguistic aspects of immigration focus on contexts where a single language is official and widely used. In bilingual Catalonia, newly arriving immigrants find themselves in a situation where the administration seeks to treat Catalan as a fully functional public language while large sectors of the local population still treat it as a minority language not adequate to be spoken to strangers. Popular language practices and discourses often seem to suggest that Catalan serves to assert identity while Spanish serves for practical communicative purposes, thus contradicting the official narratives over language and integration. Thus, what we find is that immigrants are required to adjust to different, competing, often blatantly contradictory linguistic ideologies and practices. In this article, I will seek to describe these contradictions and historical changes together with their implications for the local political economy of intergroup relations. I begin with a brief theoretical grounding of the concepts used. To this follows a historical account of educational language policies addressed to immigrants since the mid-1980s. A change in official discourses from language as national symbol to language as a means for social cohesion is documented. Language policies are contrasted with ethnographic data on linguistic practices in everyday life in various settings. To conclude, I reflect on the significance of these phenomena for a general understanding of the role of languages in the construction of social difference in contemporary societies. © 2009 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

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Catalonia, because of its condition as an officially bilingual territory, is an interesting site where to explore the social aspects of language connected to immigration and cultural diversity. Most analyses of the sociolinguistic aspects of immigration focus on contexts where a single language is official and widely used. In these contexts, immigrants are generally required to learn and use the state language on the basis of a combination of arguments that present language as a symbolic means of cultural and political integration and as a practical means for access to welfare and employment. In contrast, Catalonia's bilingual status results in ambivalent messages as to what languages and what identities should be offered to immigrants to enable them to build a sense of belonging and to meet their ordinary communicative needs in everyday life. From this perspective, a study of the Catalan context brings to the surface ambivalences and contradictions that are less visible in other contexts. In this article, I shall basically show how these ambivalences and contradictions emerge in the various forms of educational provision that immigrants find and in the local patterns of everyday language use.

To understand how Catalan official bilingualism plays out in different social contexts, it is crucial to *historicize* both the language policies of the administration as well as the changing patterns of language choice of the population in

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everyday life. Newly arriving immigrants find themselves in a situation where the administration seeks to treat Catalan as a fully functional public language while large sectors of the local population still treat it as a minority language not adequate to be spoken to strangers. Popular language practices and discourses often seem to suggest that Catalan serves to assert identity while Spanish serves for practical communicative purposes, thus contradicting the official narratives over language and integration. Thus, what we find is that immigrants are required to adjust to different, competing, often blatantly contradictory linguistic ideologies and practices (Schieffelin, Kroskrity, & Woolard, 1998). Additionally, the discourses of the administration over language have changed along the years from an emphasis on the significance of Catalan for national identity to an emphasis on the role of this language in what has been termed as “social integration”.

In this article, I will seek to describe these contradictions and historical changes together with their implications for the local political economy of intergroup relations. I will begin by providing a brief theoretical grounding of the concepts I shall use. After this, I will provide a historical account of educational language policies addressed to immigrants since the mid-1980s. I will show how immigration created a condition for a change in official discourses from language as national symbol to language as a means for social cohesion. In the third section, I will complement this general description with an analysis of various language courses for adult immigrants I investigated during 2003, where the contradictions between differing linguistic ideologies and practices emerged. To conclude, I shall reflect on the significance of these phenomena for a general understanding of the role of languages in the construction of social difference and political consensus in contemporary societies.

1. Language ideologies and interposition

As I suggested above, one important aspect of the Catalan sociolinguistic scene is the contradiction between official discourses over language and identity and the linguistic practices of social actors in specific situations. As is common in many linguistic minority contexts, native Catalans tend to treat their language as only appropriate to be used with those known to be Catalan (hence, not to immigrants). To explore this contradiction, some theoretical reflections are needed. During the 1970s and 1980s, native Catalans’ use of Spanish was commonly described as one aspect of “diglossia” (Ninyoles, 1985) or “speech accommodation” à la Giles (Viladot, 1989, Giles, Taylor, & Bourhis, 1973; Woolard, 1989: p. 156). However, as has long been contended, these frameworks generally lacked the capacity to address the complex social and political struggles underlying language use in minority contexts (Martin-Jones, 1989). For one thing, these frameworks were applied to a situation involving speakers of Catalan and Spanish only. They should need to be developed to explain why native Catalans “accommodate” in Spanish even to people who do not speak a word of it (see below). Additionally, these theories assumed a degree of uniformity within communities that is not present in contexts characterized by social struggle and social change (ibid).

The notion of “linguistic ideologies” as developed by Schieffelin et al. (1998) is more adequate in that it recognizes “struggles upon multiple conceptualizations of talk within a community and even contradictions within individuals” (Schieffelin et al., 1998: p. 15) that are connected with social inequalities. Gal and Irvine (2000) propose various types of “semiotization processes” that are found in the discourses and social practices where linguistic ideologies are projected. For the purposes of this study, their notion of “fractal recursivity” is a relevant process, that is, the tendency to project one representation, opposition or scheme at different levels of social and discursive practice.

To explain and analyze some of the recursive aspects of Catalans’ language usages, I will adopt Aracil’s (1983) concept of “interposition”. Aracil coined this concept as he was trying to develop an understanding of the ideological components of processes of “language shift” and “language normalization”, which he characterized as “linguistic conflict”. The conflict emerged when different languages vied to accomplish the multiple communicative functions of society (Aracil, 1982). Although his was clearly a functional approach, I find it possible to recontextualize “interposition” as one particular ideological position set within the context of contemporary sociolinguistic change in Catalonia. Aracil (1983) defined “Interposition” as one way to characterize a typical structural asymmetry between territorial minority (x) and majority (y) languages. It is “the fact that (almost) all relationships between the linguistic community associated with language x and the rest of Humanity are conducted through language y ” (Aracil, 1983: p. 176) Fig. 1 is a graphic rendering of what interposition involves.

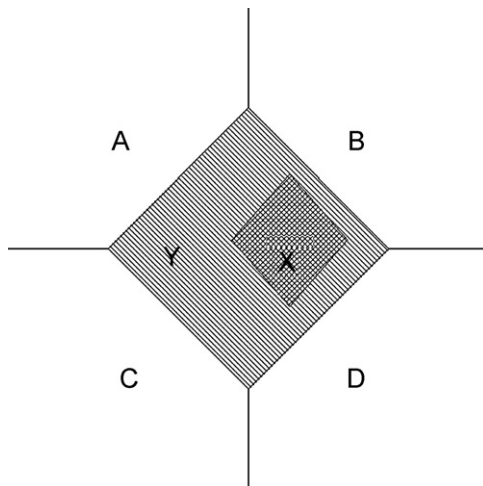


Fig. 1. Interposition of language y between language x and other languages.

In situations of interposition, we can generally encounter the following phenomena. (1) Lexical borrowings from other languages into *x* are mediated by *y* and normally involve the phonetic/phonological/morphological adaptations done by speakers of *y*.¹ (2) Conversely, words in *x* will be adopted by *a, b, c, d* in *y*'s version: this happens typically in toponymy.² (3) Translations are done via *y*. Speakers may voice a translation of a text from *a, b, c, d* in *y* rather than *x*. This was common in foreign language classrooms in Catalonia up to the late-1980s. (4) All strangers are addressed to in *y*, even if they do not speak *y* at all and even if they prefer to be spoken to in *x*. (5) *y* can be assumed to be universally valid for communication, not *x*. (6) Even foreigners who know *x*, are supposed to know *y* as well. (7) *x* and *x*'s community remain hidden from view in relation to foreigners. According to Aracil, “interposition is ambivalent because of its ambivalent mediating function, it transmits and intercepts, it shows and hides, it opens and closes—it is a bridge that links and a fence that separates” (Aracil, 1983: p. 190).

As can be seen, Aracil applied the concept to both “corpus” and “status” phenomena. The implications of interposition for the corpus can also be seen as the material traces (usages of language “*y*”) left by particular social practices in specific contexts where material conditions and ideological orientations asserted interposition. In any case, it is the phenomena referred to in (4), (5) and (6) that affects immigrants directly and provide the key to understand why Catalan speakers generally use Spanish to talk to (perceived) foreigners, including immigrants, in everyday life. “Interposition” bespeaks the ways in which speakers develop a sense of the position of a minority language as a restricted source of in-group local legitimacy. In Catalonia, “interposition” is opposed by nationalists and language planners who seek to turn Catalan into a public language devoid from its traditional ethnic connotations (see Woolard, 2003). Thus, although official language policies have managed to introduce Catalan in schools, in foreign language classrooms or in international topography, most Catalan speakers still maintain patterns of use that are typical of minority communities in everyday life. This means that they usually treat Catalan as an “insider” language to be used amongst native Catalans only, which is in contradiction with official policies to establish Catalan as a public language. Thus, foreigners generally find that Catalan speakers do not address them in Catalan, but Spanish, even when they may use Catalan for the rest of their daily activities. In Catalan-speaking areas, this positions immigrants in a space of sociolinguistic segregation. It is also the reason why immigrants generally learn Spanish first throughout the Catalan territory, and why Spanish becomes indeed the practical *lingua franca* amongst them.

¹ For example, the Catalan word for “condom”, *condó*, is a good example. Spanish speakers adapted it into *condón* because Spanish rejects final-word bilabial nasals. Catalan speakers reinterpreted it as a typical latin word with final [n], which in Catalan is dropped. *Condóm** would actually have been a more natural, direct rendering for the English word, had it not been borrowed through Spanish.

² Notice the recent fashionable international pronunciation of “Barcelona” with the Spanish voiceless dental sibilant (as in “thin”) instead of Catalan [s].

Table 1
Languages of instruction in Catalan schools.

	Primary school	Secondary school (obligatory and post-obligatory)
In Catalan (except foreign languages and Spanish language and literature)	92	49
Predominantly in Catalan	2	36
In both Catalan and Spanish	2	15
Not known	4	
TOTAL	100	100

Source: School census elaborated by the Department of Education and quoted in Pons and Vila (2005).

2. Education and sociolinguistic processes in Catalonia

The two official languages of Catalonia are Catalan and Spanish (which is locally more often called *castellà* or *castellano*, in English “Castilian”). Catalan is the language originally spoken in the territory and used in literature and official matters together with Latin up to the 18th Century, when the Spanish Borbón dynasty created a centralized Spanish state. Since then, Catalan has only exceptionally been used for formal and official purposes in short periods of decentralized liberal rule, the latest and longest one beginning in 1980 with the establishment of an autonomous government. During the 20th Century, immigrants from other Spanish regions made Castilian a language widely used in everyday life, particularly in urban and industrial areas. The two languages are very closely related, actually mutually comprehensible in simple written texts, as happens between Spanish and Portuguese. It has traditionally taken Spanish-speaking immigrants just a few weeks to learn how to follow a conversation in Catalan. Nowadays, all Catalan-born people are bilingual, although they may have a preference for one of the languages, usually their family language.

As one would expect, the new language policies had an important impact on educational policies. In 1983, the law of “Linguistic Normalization” was passed, which sought to establish Catalan as the predominant public language and, consequently, as the language of education even while the curriculum’s objective was that students must achieve a full and equal command of both languages at the end of obligatory education. One important option taken by the Catalan authorities (with the unanimous support of all political parties) was to create a single school system and thus avoid the creation of the different linguistic strands that are common in other contexts. Thus, a process of “catalanization” of the public school system gathered momentum during the 1980s. For predominantly Spanish-speaking areas, the government set up an immersion program that encountered wide popular support. A brief report written by the director of the Department of Education’s Office for the Learning of Language (SEDEC: *Servei d’Ensenyament de Català*), Arenas (1991) declared that, in the 1986–1987 course year, 24% of public primary schools were using Catalan only as medium of instruction, 39% had recently introduced it and were bringing up the new cohorts of students in Catalan too, 35% were using both languages to different degrees and 2% were using Spanish only. Ten years later, the entire public system became fully “catalanized”. Arenas’ report was published just before the phenomenon of foreign immigration became significant. Table 1 shows the data available for the 1999–2000 course year.

Thus, the obligatory school system was devised in order to cater for the need of a linguistically diverse population. The two language groups involved had a position of institutional legitimacy, one language being that of the state (Spanish), the other the territory’s “own language” (in Catalan, legally called *llengua pròpia*), which local authorities sought to foreground as an emblem of national identity. Of course, the linguistic issue was – as always is – an object of social and political struggle, as has been widely reported (see Woolard, 1989). Up to then, the term “immigrant” was actually used to refer to Spanish citizens coming from other areas of Spain or their children (see Pujolar, 1995). The arrival of migrant workers from Morocco and West Africa changed the scenario considerably as schools sought to adapt to the demands of students which had not been foreseen in the context of catalanization policies. In terms of numbers, the new immigrants started arriving slowly: in the 1991–1992 course year, they represented 0.81% of the total school population; but the process gathered considerable momentum at the end of the 1990s, as can be seen in Table 2.

The figures in this table reflect an important demographic change that was not foreseen in its scale by policy planners. Out of a population of 6 million, Catalonia attained 7 Million in 10 years, largely as a result of immigration (Table 3).

Table 2
 Foreign students at the three levels of obligatory education.

Course	Pre-school			Primary School			Obligatory Secondary		
	Foreign students	Total students	%	Foreign students	Total students	%	Foreign students	Total students	%
1999–2000	3,678	208,820	1.76	8,002	347,457	2.30	6,338	266,467	2.38
2000–2001	4,804	216,393	2.22	9,618	346,604	2.77	8,177	257,318	3.18
2001–2002	7,519	224,892	3.34	14,656	348,665	4.20	11,103	253,340	4.38
2002–2003	9,640	237,488	4.06	22,634	354,597	6.38	15,002	253,424	5.92
2003–2004	15,088	251,419	6.00	32,760	362,817	9.03	20,267	256,268	7.91
2004–2005	20,178	264,355	7.63	40,245	368,267	10.93	23,532	258,746	9.09
2005–2006	22,297	276,743	8.06	47,020	376,585	12.49	31,160	260,966	11.94

Source: Departament d’Educació. Estadística de l’Ensenyament.

The first reaction of educational authorities to immigration in the mid-1980s was channeled through the *Programa d’Educació Compensatòria*, inspired in the British Educational Priority Areas (and thus on notions such as “cultural” or “linguistic deprivation”). The program had been set up by the Spanish government in 1983 to foster special educational initiatives and the allocation of resources to schools serving disadvantaged social groups (Llevot, 2005). In Catalonia, the government addressed the first initiatives at Romany groups in Barcelona; but in 1990 “Arabs” were already identified as a target group (Llevot, 2005). Attention to language, i.e. “when they do not know the Catalan and/or Spanish language at all” (Departament d’Ensenyament, 1988) was present from the start. The main objective was to ensure proper access to education (i.e. prevent absenteeism, drop out, non-participation) and ensure the acquisition of basic linguistic and literacy skills. In any case, the implementation of the program encountered serious difficulties as it was not run by permanent staff but by teachers in temporary commissions and also because it could only attend a fraction of the demands of the many schools that were receiving immigrants (Llevot, 2005).

The turn of the century marked a discursive shift from the “compensatory” paradigm to what is locally called the “intercultural model”. According to Llevot (2005), the concepts of “equal opportunities”, “tolerance” and “compensation” were replaced by those of (social) “equity”, “cohesion” and “integration”. The “compensatory” paradigm had indeed been subject to criticism. Thus, a trade union report (Pozo & Martínez, 2001) criticized the fact that immigrants were often treated as equivalent to students with physical or cognitive disabilities or with social deprivation of a different kind. Palaudarias (2002) also observed that the “ethnic and national” model underlying education policies was obsolete in a new context characterized by wide cultural diversity. According to Siqués (2008), the shift also involved an important reframing of the language issue. Thus, while earlier political documents laid emphasis on the importance of the language for Catalan identity and culture, now the issue was framed in terms of the role of language for “social cohesion” through the new *Pla per a la llengua i la cohesió social*, ‘Plan for language and social cohesion’ (Departament d’Educació, 2004) renewed in 2007 (Departament d’Educació, 2007). Llevot (2005) and Siqués (2008) present the plan as embodying a radical paradigm change: (1) integration is given priority over language learning, as it is integration that facilitates language learning and not the other way around; (2) the teaching of the language does not primarily seek to protect Catalan identity but to promote social cohesion in a plurilingual society; (3) the learning

Table 3
 Foreign population in Catalonia 1996–2005.

Year	Foreign residents	Difference	Total population	Percentage of foreign residents
1996	97,783			
1998	121,347	23,564	6,147,610	1.97
1999	144,929	23,582	6,207,533	2.31
2000	181,596	36,667	6,261,999	2.85
2001	257,353	75,757	6,361,365	4.05
2002	379,668	122,315	6,506,440	5.84
2003	543,008	163,340	6,704,146	8.1
2004	689,349	146,341	6,813,319	10.12
2005	765,825	76,476	6,995,206	10.95

Source: Own elaboration of data from *Secretaria per a la Immigració* (2006) and the Institut d’Estadística de Catalunya (www.idescat.cat).

Table 4
Special provision for immigrant students in Catalonia.

Course year	TAEs				<i>Aules d'Acollida</i>			
	1998–1999	1999–2000	2000–2001	2001–2002	2002–2003	2003–2004	2004–2005	2005–2006
	13	23	30	39	–	649	938	1081

Sources: Siqués (2008) and Departament d'Educació (2007).

of the language cannot be promoted in isolation from the general social conditions and relationships in which students live, which means that it involves families, the teachers of all disciplines and other local actors;³ (4) the learning of the language (or the languages) is not a precondition for participation in the school system; but a process taking place throughout the students' academic life, and finally (5) intercultural education does not apply only to schools with significant numbers of foreign students, but becomes a constitutive feature of the system and a key element in the curriculum.

Now the layout of the principles must be set against the practical implementation of policies. The shift indeed expressed a significant political change in that a new left-wing coalition government succeeded in 2003 the conservative nationalists that had ruled since 1980. The discursive change was indeed accompanied by a significant increase in resources, which I detail below.

In terms of pedagogical practice, the key question was constructed around the so-called *alumnes d'incorporació tardana*, 'late-arriving students', by which it is meant students who came to school at an age when the basic literacy skills are supposed to be already acquired, when the learning of a new language does not occur as spontaneously as with very young children, and when ordinary learning activities require students to have these minimum skills. The first initiatives had actually been addressed to secondary school students (12–16-year-olds) and had consisted of special classes to learn Catalan and the basics of local cultural ways and history. The main issue of contention was the extent to which this earlier model involved the students in a special tract that separated them, however temporally, from mainstream classrooms. The first specific language program was piloted in the 1996–1997 course: the *Tallers de llengua*, the (Catalan) 'Language Workshops'. In 1998–1999, a more ambitious initiative was set up: the TAEs, *Tallers d'adaptació escolar i aprenentatges instrumentals bàsics*, 'workshops for school adaptation and basic instrumental skills'. These "workshops" closely resembled a parallel tract that laid special emphasis on language and drew ideas from Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). As concerns emerged about the issue of segregation, the government issued a directive in 2001 (SEDEC Servei d'Ensenyament de Català, 2001) urging schools to seek for practical ways to ensure that students spent as much time as possible in the mainstream classrooms. On this basis, the workshops physically located within their schools took to making students alternate between the TAE and the mainstream classroom.

It was in the 2004–2005 course year that the new government created the new model of *Aules d'Acollida*, 'Hospitality/Settlement Classrooms', where a maximum of 12 students could spend a maximum of 12 h a week (50% of the total) and two course years. Although the schools had a degree of autonomy to organize the classrooms, the insistence of authorities to prevent segregation was successful: in the first 2 years, half the students actually spent less than 5 h in these classrooms which were primarily aimed at "guaranteeing the emotional settlement and accelerating the acquisition of the medium of instruction" (Departament d'Educació, 2005: pp. 3–5). The commitment of the new government with the new policies, however, is much more visible through Table 4, where we appreciate the numerical scope of these initiatives along the years.

The new philosophy and commitment was also made visible through other means, such as ensuring an adequate fit of the *Aules d'Acollida* within the schools' organization, or through the creation of a special *Subdirecció General de Llengua i Cohesió Social* within the department of education with the specific mandate to implement and follow up the plan.

Evaluators of the plan show general satisfaction at the fact that students generally stay in the mainstream classrooms and use the *Aules d'acollida* exceptionally (mainly as a substitute for mainstream language classes); and also at the levels of linguistic proficiency achieved (Siqués, 2008).

³ The plan actually involved other interesting initiatives which are still too recent to be evaluated, such as the *Plans Educatius d'Entorn*, 'Community Education Plans' involving coordination between multiple departments (Health, Welfare, Education, Interior) and community groups to achieve particular objectives of a more wholistic nature in specific local contexts (Subirats, 2003).

However, whether the system effectively fosters *intercultural* values and plurilingualism, and whether it helps to ensure equal opportunities for all, remains to be examined. A number of studies show that, in Catalan schools (as is customary in most industrialized countries), immigrants suffer from the common problems of teacher prejudices (Alcalde, 2007; Ballestín, 2008; Unamuno, 2003), exclusion from peers (Serra, 2004) and higher levels of drop out and academic failure; except for most Latin American students (see Fullana, Besalú, & Vilà, 2003; Serra, 2008). The impact of the new policies on these phenomena can only be evaluated on the basis of a longer historical perspective.

One important issue not yet adequately addressed through the plurilingual, intercultural model is precisely the position of Spanish beyond the Spanish language classroom. Spanish is in many areas the everyday language of the majority of the pupils and is often the dominant language in the playground (Galindo Solé, 2000). The use of Spanish as a medium of instruction increases to nearly 50% in secondary education, though this is not necessarily the result of a planning effort, but the product of local – sometimes individual – preferences in a context where language policies have not been so forcefully deployed. Sabaté (2007), for instance, reports how the efforts of a primary school to promote an intercultural ethos met with the limits that the staff felt they had to impose on the use of Spanish in the classroom. Unamuno (2003) has also explored a common phenomenon encountered by immigrants: Catalan as the school language and Spanish as the peer and community language, whereby educational integration and participation is conducted in one language while a more informal social integration is conducted in the other. Another especial case has to do with Latin American students who respond to the stigmatization of their own varieties of Spanish (Corona & Unamuno, 2008), while their relationship with Catalan is seemingly less problematic.

3. Linguistic interposition in adult education: the case of non-governmental language courses

The position of Spanish in immigrant education is significantly strong in the sector of adult education, particularly in non-governmental language programs (henceforth NGLP). This is where the process of interposition is projected from everyday informal talk into institutional structures and practices.

The government's efforts to make Catalan accessible to adult immigrants may be framed both as "promotion of Catalan" and as "integration policies". In Catalonia, the Department of education runs various networks of "Official Language Schools", where immigrants are not specifically targeted, and "Adult schools", with an offer of courses of (Catalan) *Acolliment lingüístic*, 'linguistic *accueil*'. In the 2006–2007 course, 10,947 students took *Acolliment lingüístic* and 1,295 took a Catalan course at an Official Language School (Departament de la Vicepresidència, 2008). In addition to this, the Department of the Vicepresidency runs the *Consorti per a la Normalització Lingüística*, a big network of language services organized in collaboration with local authorities throughout the country. In the 2006–2007 course year, the *Consorti* delivered face-to-face, language courses to 81,344 students and distance courses to 8,510, more than half of which were of the basic level, and where about 80% of the students were non-Spaniards (CPNL, 2008). The trajectory of the *Consorti*'s language courses is interesting in itself. At the end of the 1980s, most students were Catalan born and concentrated at the proficiency level, which was required to apply for civil service jobs (Münch, 2006). At the time, foreign students were often bewildered by the fact that Catalan courses often assumed a knowledge of Spanish (as a source of references for comparison) that they did not have. The change of profile of these students took place during the 1990s, where teachers had to gradually redesign their courses and adapt to the new profiles of students. The same department also organizes the program *Voluntariat per la llengua*, where citizens freely offer their time to meet and chat with language learners (6304 "couples" in 2007) (DV, 2008). Thus, in a single year, around 100,000 adults were somehow actively involved in learning Catalan through some means provided by government agencies. Contrarily to much indigenous despondency and fears of a threat to identity, the figure does suggest that both locals and newcomers take the language issue seriously (see Pujolar, 2007a).

However, the non-governmental sector has traditionally taken a different view. It is not a unified sector; but its language options have historically been remarkably shared. They consider Spanish more useful and accessible to help immigrants to get around in their daily lives. Official language policies, from this perspective, are contested as essentially nationalist-driven and as not sensitive to the immediate needs of immigrants. I would argue, however, that the social processes involved in the setting up of language courses in this sector is largely driven by the linguistic

ideologies that constitute interposition and reassert the status of Catalan as an “insider” language only to be spoken to natives or near-natives.

The NGLP arose largely spontaneously in the early-1990s out of the initiatives of religious charities, NGOs and local social services. It has traditionally offered courses of Spanish and only exceptionally of Catalan (Rovira, Castellanos, Fernández, & Saurí, 2004). This was at least the situation of the sector when I conducted my fieldwork in 2003 in various towns of Northeast Catalonia. I contacted an Organization of Catholic Solidarity (henceforth OCS) which offered various social services to immigrants throughout the country, interviewed some of their staff, one social worker and several language teachers. I took part in a training session for teachers and I also undertook an intensive ethnographic observation (with audio and video recordings) of one course of Catalan they imparted to Moroccan and West-African women in a town I call *Vilagran*. I also visited five sessions of an experimental language teaching project organized by an adult education school in a neighboring town and interviewed two of the teachers.

An OCS social worker explained to me that the need to take language courses was firstly identified by the immigrants themselves. The Catholic Church, and Caritas Diocesana in particular, was one of the first welfare institutions that came into close contact with the groups of immigrants that were most at need. It provided not only training of various kinds, but also housing, food, clothing and legal advice. Normally, Spanish was the language used to communicate with immigrants and, as the story is told, the one they asked to be taught.

I have found no evidence that anyone made the effort of explaining carefully to immigrants the local sociolinguistic situation. When I asked social workers or educators whether the teaching of Catalan had been considered as an option, the answer was usually that the goal of the courses was that immigrants learned the basic linguistic skills that allowed them to *move around*:

Transcript 1: Interview to an OCS social worker.

Dolors: We consulted the pedagogists at the University of Barcelona and all that and they told us that it was very important that they started learning one [single] language · which they should master in a rudimentary fashion, and then the other one could be introduced. This year we had planned to organize a last module, for the students doing language, in Catalan; but we could not find any teacher of Catalan.⁴

These first basic linguistic skills were thus supposed to be in Spanish. This was also justified on the basis that many immigrants knew already some Spanish: “*lo poc que parlen · ho parlen en castellà*” ‘the little they speak, they do in Castilian’. In this context, the teaching of Catalan could be considered only for advanced students, as a “last module” for students who already mastered Spanish.

This conception of the language learning trajectory of immigrants thus reproduces the structure of interposition: outsiders cannot come into direct contact with Catalan, but through the mediation of Spanish. The acquisition of Catalan is therefore presented as the culmination of a process that one has to accomplish in stages, the first stage being the acquisition of Spanish. It is a gradual process of access to what the local community perceives as the core element of its identity: the use of Catalan. There are indications that this process is conceived in terms of popular conceptions of social integration:

Transcript 2. Interview to an OCS social worker.

Dolors: It is also particularly noticeable at the initial [language] levels. They are people who are – many of them in a quite unstable situation, that is, it is not people who are very established here. I mean, many people start [the course] and then they say “*well, I’m not coming – I’m not coming next week anymore because I am moving to Logroño to work. . . where I found a job.*” So you say “*Well, OK!*” Or “*I just came from Almería and then I am going to. . .*”. Everything is very much dependent on work. On the other hand, there are people who you see that they are more stabilized, that they’ve been here for longer and this people do come and say “*Well, I should like to learn Catalan*” for instance, isn’t it? [Logroño and Almería are Spanish-speaking provinces; stretches in italics are in Spanish]⁵

Significantly, in this extract, immigrants are represented as speaking Spanish. The main point is that interest to learn Catalan is connected to being “established” or “stabilized” in the local community, i.e. *aquí* “here”. Recent immigrants are not regarded as being fully “here”.

⁴ Catalan version:

Dolors: Nosaltres doncs vem anar doncs amb els pedagogs de la universitat de Barcelona i tal i ens van dir que era molt important el tema de que comencessin aprenent una llengua ● que és la que coneixessin la forma rudimentària i després pugui introduir l’altra ● aquest any ens havíem plantejat de fer un últim mòdul ● per la gent que feia idioma ● de català ● però no vam trobar cap professor de català

⁵ Catalan version:

The logic of interposition operates in other ways. A voluntary tutor of the village of *Riba* presented the history of language skills training in the following way:

Transcript 3. Interview to a voluntary language tutor.

Marta: they had studied it [Catalan] some years ago, but they dropped it. It was when they were doing grammar, pure and hard, (...) if we have a hard time ourselves at school when we are children, just imagine how it is with them, who do not actually speak the language and they start doing grammar, verbs and so on

Irene [Interviewer]: xxx) a more communicative approach?

Marta: think so, that, that is, if- maybe they are not- they aren't going to learn so much, are they? Maybe they won't ... master the bes and the ves and the accents and so forth. But when it comes to the street level, the conversation, which is what they are really interested in - they will master it, and they will understand when they children speak to each other in Catalan...⁶

Marta is memorizing here an earlier time when attempts were made to teach Catalan to immigrants; but where the teaching methodology was reportedly not adapted to the students' needs. However, I would challenge the view that the problem of Catalan teaching was in the learning methodology. Methodological problems must have been an issue for Spanish courses too; but they were never questioned in my fieldwork. Still in 2003 I visited a course of Spanish for West-African men in a town of the Costa Brava and found that the teaching method there was eminently conservative: focused on literacy and grammar. In the session I attended, they spent the whole class with a long dictation in the old primary-school style. Language teaching methods in the NGLP sector were characteristically conservative, as teaching was commonly done by volunteers who had no specific training and applied the methods they recalled from their school years. Marta's account is clearly a vague *ex post facto* explanation of a past situation in which Catalan courses for immigrants were problematized in ways that the Spanish courses were not. During my fieldwork, it was significant that the OCS had in fact invested significantly in introducing communicative methods and producing communicative course materials adapted to the specific needs of immigrants; but middle-aged or older volunteers often did not follow the recommendations of the OCS officials whether they taught Catalan or Spanish.

In any case, by 2001 the predominance of Spanish in the NGLP sector became subject to public debate. The first occasions in which the issue received public attention was when some groups of immigrants demanded to be spoken to in Spanish in meetings with local councilors and representatives of NGOs. Some participants in these meetings felt offended.⁷ Since then, groups and individuals connected with Catalan nationalism started to be publicly vocal about the issue and put forth the view that Catalan had to be the "language of integration". It was at this time when government programs started to address the language issue, while nationalist grassroots organizations, together with regional and

Dolors:també se nota al nivell inicial • són persones que estan • moltes d'elles bastant inestables o sigui no és gent que estigui molt ubicada en aquí • vull dir que molta gent te comença • i te diu bueno • no vendré • ja no vindré a partir de la setmana que ve perquè me'n vaig a treballar • a logroño que he trobat feina • tu dius pueh vale • o vinc d'almeria i me'n vaig a • està molt en funció de • de la feina • • en canvi la gent que tu veus que està més estabilitzada • que ja fa més temps que estan aquí aquesta sí que te diu • • bueno m'agradaria aprendre català per exemple no?

⁶ Catalan version:

Marta: havien fet classes anys enrera • que ho van deixar • • que era quan feien gramàtica pura i dura (...) que si a nosaltres quan anem a l'escola que som petits ja ens costa • imagina't ells que no coneixen la llengua els hi comencen a fer gramàtica i els verbs i no sé què (...)

Irene: (xxx) un altre enfocament més comunicatiu

Marta: jo crec que sí • que • o sigui que m- • sí que • potser • no apr- aprendran no aprendran tant no? Potser no • dominaran les be altes i les be baixes i els accents i no sé què • • però a nivell de • de carrer de conversa que és lo que realment • els interessa • sí que el dominaran • i entendran • doncs • com els seus fills es parlen entre ells en català

⁷ Part of the public debate can be followed through the regional daily *El Punt* from 10 to 15 October 2001. The headlines were: Immigrants de Salt es queixen perquè han d'anar a reunions en què es parla català (10/10/2001: 1), Fòrum d'Immigració de Salt: "Africans i centreamericans" reclamen... que es parli en castellà (10/10/2001: 5), Editorial: integració mal entesa a Salt (10/10/2001: 16), Polítics i entitats lamenten que molts immigrants desconeixin què és Catalunya (11/10/2001: 1), Polítics i entitats defensen l'ús del català... i reclamen plans d'acollida (11/10/2001: 6), Pujol recomana als immigrants que lloguin intèrprets (12/10/2001: 1), Salvador Sunyer (Excalcalde de Salt): "El problema és que els immigrants no tenen ni punyetera idea de què és Catalunya" (12/10/2001: 6), L'Imperi contraataca (12/10/2001: 27), "Si els demano en català, me'ls donaran, els papers?" (14/10/2001: 20), Moros i Cristians (15/10/2001: 22), Arronsar les espatlles (15/10/2001: 23).

municipal authorities, organized campaigns and initiatives to convince the general public to use Catalan to immigrants (with meager success) and to convince those responsible for language courses to switch to the teaching of Catalan (with a higher degree of success; in some places, only teaching of Catalan is currently available).

The context where I gathered most of my ethnographic data was a course of Catalan for Moroccan and West-African Women. At the time, most of the courses coordinated by the OCS were in Spanish; but the turn towards Catalan had begun with the encouragement of the charity's central office. However, the switch to Catalan encountered contradictions as well, basically due to the cultural barriers that local people possessed towards the use of the language with foreigners. Thus, one volunteer from another town basically taught Catalan vocabulary to immigrant women; but continued speaking Spanish exclusively to the students. So she used Spanish not only for socializing; but actually in all classroom talk except for the particular vocabulary items that the students were made to memorize through a picture card game. This was not exceptional in that many of the actors involved in Catalan courses actually interpreted that Catalan was only to be used as an object of study and not as a language of communication. The ideology of interposition was thereby preserved.

The course that I observed most intensely was specifically addressed to women (all courses offered within this framework were sex-specific), and the timing (from 10 to 12 in the morning) meant that only non-working women could attend. The course was attended by 12 women who came exclusively from Africa (mainly from Morocco, Senegal and Gambia). Most were basically housewives who were taking care of young children, which is why the OCS also provided a service of childcare during the sessions that was run by two retired voluntary women. There were two voluntary language tutors and one university student who was doing her final year project by assisting the tutors.

In the course, the volunteer teachers had made an effort to adopt communicative methods, which involved speaking Catalan as a language of socialization with students. However, any communication that was outside the teacher–student relationship continued to be conducted in Spanish. The two daycarers, for instance, spoke Spanish to the students. Interestingly enough, the same daycarers spoke Catalan to the children, as is also common in Catalonia due to the fact that kindergarten and early schooling is universally in Catalan. When outsiders came into the classroom to make an inquiry, they were also responded to in Spanish unless they themselves used Catalan. One interesting event took place when a student brought her grandmother to the class. The grandmother greeted some students in Arabic; but did not pronounce a word in Catalan or Spanish. The teachers, however, made their welcoming gestures and response cries in Spanish as a way to express politeness and proximity.⁸

Moreover, classes were often complemented with special sessions intended to teach or inform immigrants of practical issues: how to get residence permits, how to get help from the police, how to feed the family properly, basic health care advice, and so on. These sessions were conducted in Spanish. Interestingly enough, attendants were routinely (ritually I would say) consulted as to which language they preferred, to which they naturally responded in favor of Spanish. However, the organizers never seriously considered the possibility of using Catalan. Thus, in one of the sessions on feeding I attended, I inquired about each participants' repertoire and discovered that Catalan would have been perfectly viable and probably desirable at least for the students of the Catalan course. In another session on residence permits, a lawyer delivered the information in Spanish while two interpreters provided a translation in French and Arabic.

Spanish was also present in classroom activities as a heterofacilitating resource, i.e. as an accompanying aid, such as when it was offered as a translation of a Catalan term in the hope that it would be more familiar. Students also provided often vocabulary items in Spanish, which the teachers accepted while providing at the same time the Catalan equivalent. I would treat these practices not necessarily as a product of interposition; but as more ambivalent in that it was also justified methodologically as a resource to support learning. However, it is true that such uses can easily drift into a treatment of Spanish as a common resource in ways that can actually reinforce its status as a mediating language. I am grateful to Virginia Unamuno (personal communication) for this point, who observed that teachers in a primary school would treat Spanish as a common resource even when it was clearly not known by some of the students. Monica Heller (personal communication) has confirmed that this happens in Ontarian Francophone schools too in relation to the use of English.

Thus, the teachers generally assumed that the ability of students to use Spanish was higher than their ability to use Catalan and also that Catalan was more difficult to learn. In one occasion, when I tried to explain to one of the Senegalese students what my research was about, it became obvious that the student did not understand. One tutor then told me

⁸ For a more detailed examination of this event, see (Pujolar, 2009).

she would understand it better in Spanish. The student, however, very clearly contradicted her by signaling that she was not going to understand it in Spanish either. She was actually one of the most regular students, who participated in class more actively than the others. Her speech contained significant mixing between Catalan and Spanish and this is commonly interpreted as meaning that the person is somehow good at Spanish but is having difficulties with Catalan, that her Spanish somehow comes through, and not that she simply combines her resources in *both* languages. In another occasion, the same student got stuck in a question-and-answer drill and the first reaction of the teachers was to invite her to switch to Spanish, assuming it would be easier for her. Again, the student responded “*no sabe castellà*”, literally ‘doesn’t know Castilian’, the word “sabe” being in Spanish and “castellà” in Catalan.⁹ It is clear that the students’ strategy was to make the most of the resources she could muster in both languages. The assumption, explicitly contradicted by the student, is one of the tenets of interposition, which assumes that any foreigner speaking the language of the minority must forcibly have done it via that of the majority. This belief is certainly reinforced by the practical experience that many foreign people do display a higher knowledge of Spanish; but this experience is categorically applied to all foreigners generally in ways that are not consistent with their actual linguistic resources and, more importantly, in ways that effectively prevent them (or exclude them) from exposure and participation in communicative contexts where the learning of Catalan could take place.

There were other phenomena that suggest that the teachers felt uncomfortable about using Catalan in the classroom, though these were more ambivalent. For instance, teachers assumed very quickly that students did not understand their instructions and kept offering reformulations which were often more confusing for students. Teachers also discussed and evaluated the performance of students in the classroom openly as if the students could not follow what they said. In fact, one of the teachers recognized that she felt a certain tension because of her use of Catalan:

Transcript 4. Interview to a Vilagran voluntary teacher

Carme: when we speak Catalan, we have to gesticulate a lot, that is, make lots of gestures. Or with Josepa [the other teacher], not when we speak to each other but with them, when you talk about-, you always have in mind-, that is, you accompanied a lot what you told them with gestures, right? And you gesticulate a lot and you want them to understand and then you suffer a little, maybe I suffer a little at the beginning.¹⁰

Thus the sociolinguistic organization of the site, despite the option of teaching Catalan, still reproduced many features of interposition. Catalan was very much handled as a learning topic but its use as a practical means of communication (what actually contributes more effectively to language learning) was still problematic, as its use was restricted to those who attended the course or showed interest in the course *and* to the language tutors specifically.

To conclude this section, it is useful to compare the findings in the OCS courses with those of another site. During my fieldwork, I frequently visited a course where a very dynamic group of adult educators working for a public body were running a special program of Catalan language education for adult immigrants (henceforth LEAP). The organizers of this course had explicitly targeted interposition practices and had developed creative ways to avoid them. LEAP relied on young volunteers, mainly female university students, who were given basic special training on intercultural issues and language learning, and were backed by a teaching specialist throughout the course. Students’ participation in the classroom was one of the issues explicitly addressed. It was initially encouraged by making them talk about personal circumstances and concerns at the beginning of the course with the aid of “mediators” (typically young immigrants with a good command of Catalan) and by generally exploiting the entertainment value of learning activities experienced as games. The LEAP team was also more systematic in turning Catalan into the language of communication with immigrants. As far as I could gather, they spoke Catalan consistently (accompanied with frequent code switching into Spanish) both with students and non-students inside and outside the center. They also showed their critical approach to the dominant sociolinguistic order by taking the students to shops and markets and forcing local shopkeepers and attendants to speak in Catalan to them (and asking them to continue to do so when students came on their own). Advanced or especially extrovert students were also invited to join local cultural groups and to participate in local radio programs. The project seemed to achieve better results in terms of students’ participation in classroom activities and

⁹ For a more detailed examination of this event, see (Pujolar, 2007b:pp. 305–347).

¹⁰ Catalan version:

Carme: quan parlem català hem de gesticular molt o sigui té molt de gestos o amb la Josepa ho deiem quan parlem nosaltres no però amb elles quan parlaves d’una cosa sempre el cap o sigui marcaves molt lo que deies i molt amb gestos no? i gesticules molt i vols que t’entenguin i llavors pateixes una mica jo poder el començament pateixo.

in that many students seemed to acquire a working knowledge of Catalan. The fact that classes involved daily sessions of 1 h, instead of the OCS 2 h weekly sessions, may have also helped.

4. Conclusion

As has happened in many other areas of the world, international migration flows in Catalonia have radically changed the social landscape and thereby questioned the cultural and linguistic assumptions on which national identity was constructed. Language policies and institutional arrangements (particularly in education) were devised during the 1980s in order to manage the country's linguistic duality in the aftermath of a dictatorship in which Catalan had been violently repressed. The new autonomous government asserted the status of Catalan as a symbol of national identity while ensuring that the new generations acquired both languages through schooling. As the numbers of immigrants grew, this model encountered increasing contradictions, until a change of government led to a reformulation of the policy principles. The role of Catalan as a national symbol was reformulated in terms of its role as a facilitator of social cohesion in a multilingual society. As a consequence, more resources were specifically allocated to ensure that immigrants had access to Catalan.

However, the changes at the political level have not been mirrored by changes at the popular level consistent with official language policies. Many Catalan speakers, particularly in the older generations, have retained patterns of language use that are more typical of minority languages than of fully functional public ones. I have characterized these “popular” linguistic practices amongst speakers of Catalan as “interposition”, a typical ideological process of minority language usage. Interposition results from the established habits and conventions that treat the local language as an “insider” or an “in-group” language, one only appropriate to be used with members of one's own ethnocultural group. It has to do with how interactions, social spaces, administrative processes and resources connected to the local language are managed in contexts of contact with languages other than the dominant one. In these contexts, the dominant language is used and access to the minority language by outsiders is further restricted. The minority language is treated as more difficult and the majority one as more accessible, even as the community itself invests in making the latter even more accessible and the former less so. Therefore, in my data, informal conversations, daily transactions and procedural exchanges between locals and immigrants were held predominantly in Spanish. Most non-governmental educational programs offered Catalan only to those who already mastered Spanish. Even in the Catalan language classroom, the change from a pedagogical frame to classroom management or informal socialization was often expressed through a switch into Spanish. For all practical purposes, immigrants and foreigners were treated as speakers or potential speakers of the dominant language, not Catalan. Access to the Catalan language and to the forms of social recognition in entailed was mediated by a previous phase in which the language to be learned was Spanish.

The result of these ambivalences and contradictions can be seen in the data presented above and in many other situations. Catalan was accessible mainly through official educational institutions, beyond which Spanish was more accessible. It was typical that, in many immigrant homes, the children learnt Catalan at school while their parents learnt Spanish in the workplace and in their routine dealings with shopkeepers, employers, fellow workers and civil servants (that is, in oral interaction, as written documents are mostly in Catalan). It seemed as if, in linguistic terms, immigrants were expected to undergo a symbolic, cultural, integration through Catalan and a social, “practical”, integration in Spanish at the same time. A dichotomy between the cultural-identificatory and the practical communicative significance of the two languages was created. In fact, some interviewees explicitly argued that the teaching of Catalan made sense only in terms of nationalist sentiments while the teaching of Spanish was justified on simple practical grounds. Thus immigrants found that discourses and linguistic practices in different contexts diverged as to the ways in which they were expected to fit or adjust into the local linguistic market.

To conclude my analysis, I should like to put forward my own view of the implications of these ambivalences and struggles over language for the local linguistic market, that is, for the processes through which different social groups gain access to symbolic and economic capital. The public debate on language and immigration is certainly driven by nationalist interests as much as by actors who may have specific interests to present themselves as speaking “from the immigrants' perspective”, these being rarely immigrants themselves. To these I can add my own interest in providing an account that does justice to the complexity of the issues at hand. In my view, the tensions between Catalan and Spanish nationalist agendas clearly play a role in the processes of policy definition. This can clearly be seen through a negative fact: the absence of an explicit formulation of the role of Spanish in the design of the principles and policies of integration. Otherwise, the ideological motivations of political parties, their members or sympathizers are generally

very visible and open for contestation. There are, however, other processes and interests at work that are not so obvious. Given that Spanish is a language widely spoken locally and is a language of wider communication, it may seem in principle natural and even reasonable that it becomes a lingua franca. Many Catalan speakers, even nationalists, argue that speaking Spanish to immigrants is more practical and that learning Spanish first is to their advantage, as it increases their employability within and beyond the Catalan territory. However, this position takes for granted that immigrants cannot (should not?) access the types of employment where Catalan must effectively be mastered, which are predictably the better ones. From this perspective, one can see why many native Catalans may not be particularly interested in the fact that immigrants learn Catalan and thus become capable to compete for the resources and social position that the language gives access to.

As I see it, in Catalonia, the debate on the language of integration, with its tensions between Catalan and Spanish nationalisms, and with those who claim to speak from a “non-nationalist” position, partially reflects but also contributes to misrecognize the underlying socioeconomic processes that ensure for bilinguals (i.e. locally legitimated bilinguals) access to cultural capital and economic benefits not available to others). The question is therefore not which of the languages is more appropriate for integration; but to understand how locally legitimate bilingualism is effectively acquired and, more crucially, recognized.

To reduce the language debate in Catalonia to a confrontation between two nationalist agendas may also be misleading on other accounts. The situation described so far might lead readers to interpret that immigrants or foreigners more generally are caught between the demands of two distinct, contending, parties that require them to sign up for differing national projects. It is more complex than that. Catalan national ambivalences and contradictions are *embodied* in the linguistic and social practices of most Catalans, not neatly separated between fervent partisans of either position. Moreover, nationalist ideologies often transcend traditional ethnolinguistic boundaries, whether these are defined in terms of family languages, preferred languages or languages most used.

The dichotomy between a “symbolic” and a “practical” integration found in this study has resonances with ongoing debates over “ethnic” versus “civic” citizenship, or traditional nationalism versus “constitutional patriotism”. References to these seemingly contrasting paradigms of belonging can often be found in debates over language and immigration in Europe and North America. However, more often than not the two meanings of integration are ambivalently combined and treated as if they were the same in policy documents and educational programs. Often, this allows those who design educational provisions to skip the difficult question of what type of linguistic competence is pursued and what specific socioeconomic implications are involved. In Pujolar (2007b), I showed how many language programs for immigrants in industrialized societies are designed to steer students to cheap employment. The discourses of those who argue that language courses should aim at providing immigrants with a rudimentary competence in Spanish seem to follow the same logic.

Whatever the principles that policy documents and programs seek to honor, it is also important to examine in what ways their processes of implementation are really conducive to more equality. In the Catalan case, the *Pla per a la llengua i la cohesió social* clearly displays progressiveness and commitment to “civic” conceptions of identity. It successfully integrates nationalist agendas and left-wing principles in relation to language. Interposition, from this perspective, is clearly a problem from both a nationalist and an “intercultural” perspective, and it is consistent with the *Pla*’s objectives that educational and linguistic policies seek to reduce its spread and overcome its consequences. However, it remains to be seen whether the new “social” or “welfare” agenda attached to Catalan is actually deployed in ways that are actually conducive to equal opportunities socially and economically, and it remains to be seen the extent to which the unplanned practices of social classification, integration or exclusion on the ground help or hamper the social cohesion desired.

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Appendix A. Transcription conventions

Capital letters or punctuation are never used for the text in the original language.

Stretches in Catalan are always represented in normal type.

The English translation of a Catalan utterance is also in normal type.

Stretches in Spanish are always represented in italics.

The English translation of a Spanish utterance appears also in italics.

. . . Dots indicate pauses (one dot indicates any short pause that is of significance for the understanding of a particular utterance; the second dot and the following ones stand for each second of duration).

(xxx) Brackets indicate stretches that are either inaudible or difficult to interpret.

[xxx] Contextual information, including interrogative intonation in question tags, such as “no[?]”, is inserted between square brackets.

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