

Immigration and languages in Catalonia: from policies to results

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Immigration and languages in Catalonia: from policies to results

Transnational immigration is quite a new phenomenon in Catalonia and the rest of Spain. Its sudden increase from 2000 on helps explaining why immigration policies have unfolded during the last 20 years, a long-enough period to start evaluating its impact. This article reviews the framework for policies for the linguistic integration of foreign-born population in Catalonia, and explores their results through the lens of census data on their language abilities and practices. It shows that, in Spain, the asymmetrical distribution of competences and power between the state and sub-state levels “prevents the minority nations from developing comprehensive public policy on immigration”.¹ Together with the unbalanced legal and economic status of Castilian and Catalan, and the demographic minorization of Catalan-speakers, this poses a challenge to the full linguistic integration of immigrants and to the sustainability of Catalan in the long run.

Keywords: immigration; nationalism; language policies; Catalonia; Catalan language

A common trope in public discourse in Catalonia has it that the country has been historically a *terra de pas i d'acollida*—literally, a land of passage and welcoming. On empirical grounds, demographer Anna Cabré claims that, at least since 1860, immigration is indeed a structural feature of what she calls the Catalan system of reproduction.² This means that, from then on, the constitution of every new generation of Catalans has been the result of the reproduction of autochthonous population but also, crucially, of the incorporation of foreign-born people. Thus, during the twentieth century the country owes its huge demographic growth to successive waves of working-class, Castilian-speaking immigration from other parts of Spain.³ In spite of this, transnational immigration is quite a new phenomenon in Catalonia and Spain as a whole, starting basically in the 2000s. That is why immigration policies, both at state

and sub-state level, have mostly unfolded during the last 20 years. A long-enough period to start evaluating its results.

The aim of this article is twofold. First, it summarizes the policies aimed at the linguistic integration of foreign-born newcomers to Catalonia against the backdrop of theories about the competition between majority and minority nationalisms in multilingual settings. To frame the discussion, it presents first a review of sociolinguistic research dealing with the linguistic incorporation of immigrants to Catalan society, in order to help the reader get a better grasp on the complex dynamics of language choice in a context of dominance of Castilian and fourfold minorization of Catalan in legal, demographic, economic, and ideological terms.

The second goal is to evaluate the results of these policies in view of its impact on the language repertoires and practices of newcomers to Catalonia. It has been claimed that the Catalan model of linguistic integration,⁴ based largely on schooling through the medium of Catalan for all pupils, successfully bilingualizes—in Catalan and Castilian—both people born in Catalonia and second and 1.5 generation immigrants.⁵ However, this does not seem to be the case with first generation, adult immigrants, coming beyond school age and usually assimilating into Castilian.⁶ To assess these claims, the language skills and uses of foreign-born population will be analyzed through census data from the Survey on Language Uses of the Population carried out by the Catalan Government.

The article closes with a discussion of the implications of these results with regard to the full linguistic integration of immigrants and to the prospects for the sustainability of Catalan—a medium-sized language, with some 10 million fluent speakers, albeit a minoritized one.

1. Framing immigration and languages in twenty-first century Catalonia

As already said, immigration is a structural feature of the Catalan system of reproduction. It has taken place in the form of different waves, linked to episodes of rapid economic growth of one of the most prosperous territories in Spain—a feature that singles out the Catalan case from the typical position in economic peripheries of most minority language communities.⁷ During the twentieth century, the primary source of immigrants has been the peasantry from different territories of Spain, typically Castilian-speaking, and arriving to Barcelona and other industrial areas mostly in two periods: in the 1920s, and from 1950 to 1970 in the context of the Franco Dictatorship's developmentalist policies (*desarrollismo*). These episodes had a huge impact on Catalonia's social and linguistic landscape: as early as 1986, Spanish immigrants and their descendants accounted for 60.3% of the population—that is, 3.6 out of 6 million.⁸ Castilian, traditionally restricted to a section of local and state elites, enjoyed for the first time in history a wide social presence among the popular classes in Catalonia.⁹

Nevertheless, the main focus of this article are the so-called new immigrations, made up of people with the typically heterogeneous geographical origins, social statuses and linguistic backgrounds of the globalization era.¹⁰ As such, their origins range from high-skilled workers in multinational companies, coming mainly from Western countries and integrating the global middle classes in Catalonia,¹¹ to low-skilled workers from Africa, Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe. The mainstream movement is related to the second group and to the need for a cheap labor force in low income jobs in services, tourism and the construction industry before the global economic recession of 2008.¹² To illustrate this trend, Figure 1 reflects the evolution of population in Catalonia according to birth-place since 2000, when the pace of immigrant arrivals started to accelerate. Whereas in 2000 foreign-born population

accounted only for some 4% of Catalan population, in 2018 it has come to represent some 1.4 million people and 18.2% of the whole population, more than doubling the EU mean—7.2% in 2016.¹³ Following this, nearly 300 languages have been documented to be currently spoken in Catalonia.¹⁴

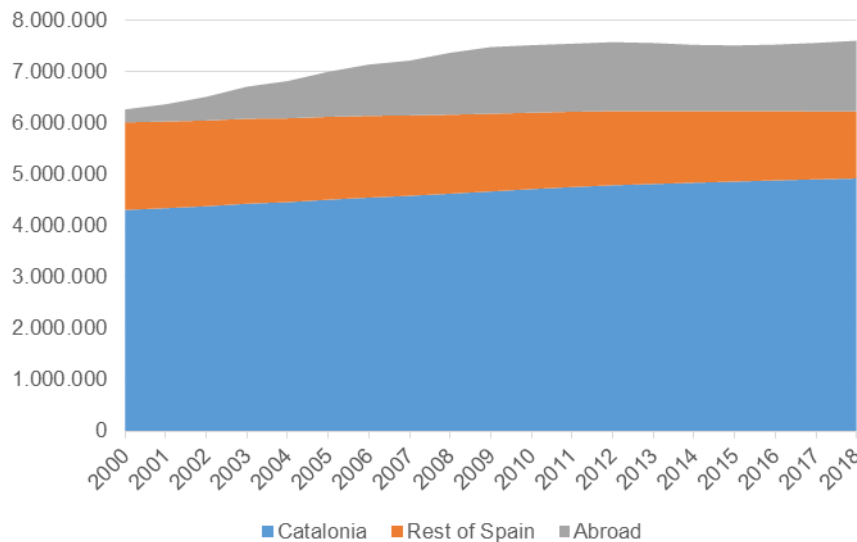


Figure 1. Evolution of population by birth-place. Catalonia, 2000-2018

As early as 2006, shortly after this phenomenon had started to gain momentum, Boix-Fuster and Vila observed that powerful conditioning sociolinguistic factors made Catalan a secondary linguistic option with regards to the integration of new immigrants, which were thought to be assimilating basically into Castilian—if it was not already their first language.¹⁵ This was the consequence of a fourfold minorization of Catalan in legal, demographic, economic, and sociolinguistic and ideological terms.

In legal terms, the Spanish Constitution (1978) defines an asymmetric model in which Castilian is the only official language of the state, and lays down that every Spanish citizen has the right to use it, but also a duty to know it. As ruled in 2010 by the Spanish Constitutional Court, no such duty can be extended to languages other than Castilian.¹⁶ These other languages can enjoy official status, but limited to the territory of

the Autonomous Community recognizing them as such.¹⁷ This asymmetry between Castilian and the rest of languages also affects lower rank regulations regarding the linguistic integration of immigrants.

In demographic terms, the Catalan-speaking population is in the minority within Catalonia, with Castilian in a stronger position. In 2018, only 31.9% of people living in Catalonia aged over 15 claimed Catalan to be their first language, and 3.0% declared both Catalan and another language to be their first languages on an equal footing. 53.5% declared Castilian as their first language, and 11.7% identified themselves as native speakers of other languages. The demographic minorization of Catalan-speakers is to be understood as a consequence of the different waves of Castilian-speaking first and then linguistically heterogeneous immigration to arrive in Catalonia, taking into account that Catalan society was mostly monolingual only a century ago, and that the transmission of Catalan within the family domain was never broken in spite of the homogenizing policies of the Spanish state.¹⁸

Third, in economic terms, Catalan has been usually identified with middle-classes—although not with economic elites—and, as such, it has been depicted as a tool for social positioning and upward mobility for working-class Castilian-speakers, beyond its integrative value.¹⁹ Despite this circumstance, which helps to explain the vitality of the language, Pujolar observes that “Spanish has retained an important position [...] in the private sector, as privatized state services [...] banks, transnational companies, the cultural industry and the press [...] still treat the Catalan market as just a section of a wider, culturally and linguistically unified, Spanish market”.²⁰ Moreover, although knowledge of Catalan may be a requirement to access a job in the public sector, no legal provisions affect the use of languages in the private sector.²¹ There, Castilian retains a dominant position, even more so in the sectors typically providing a first occupation to

immigrants.²² Thus, Castilian may be viewed by newcomers as an important economic resource, one that guarantees employability and provides more opportunities for future mobility.

This subsidiary position of Catalan gets reinforced by sociolinguistic and ideological pressures that limit its use in daily life, both for Catalan-speaking and for allophone (i.e. speakers of other languages) populations. To begin with, the historically established social etiquette of language choice privileges the use of Castilian for intergroup interaction—that is, for interaction among people with different first languages, which for most of the twentieth century meant Catalan- and Castilian-speakers.²³ In these settings, Castilian-speakers are generally allowed to keep their first language whereas Catalan-speakers are expected to switch to Castilian to ease communication. This general pattern, namely Catalan-speakers routinely—and usually unconsciously—switching to Castilian to accommodate the (alleged) linguistic preferences of their non-Catalan-speaking interlocutors, seems to be strongly applied by most Catalan-speakers when they interact with people they perceive more generally as “foreigners”. This attribution of origin can be based upon a racialized appearance or upon other semiotic elements potentially “revealing” his or her foreigner status—be it some piece of clothing, such as a hijab, a foreign first or family name, even a slight accent in his or her Catalan—and usually triggers this switch to Castilian.

Joan Pujolar has convincingly explained this trend through the lens of interposition, a concept coined by sociolinguist Lluís V. Aracil.²⁴ According to Pujolar, the dominant ideologies among Catalan-speakers position Castilian as a mediator of all their relationships with the “outside world”, and this includes the interaction with foreigners or with people perceived as such. Interposition also induces Catalan-speakers to expect that newly arrived allophones will learn Castilian first, and will not

necessarily learn Catalan, so that every Catalan-speaker knows Castilian, but not necessarily the other way round. This is why they would switch to Castilian to “ease the communication” with an allophone even when he or she might not know Castilian. Thus, interposition restricts the opportunities of newcomers to practice Catalan, and explains partly their tendency to assimilate into Castilian.

Pujolar argues that interposition of Castilian creates a contradiction between newly emerging public discourses on the linguistic integration of immigrants, which try to represent Catalan as the common language in Catalonia,²⁵ and the habitualized practices of Catalan-speakers—sometimes, key actors like language teachers—that limit immigrants’ opportunities to effectively use it. For instance, in the classrooms observed by Caglitutuncgil the communicative habitus of teachers of Catalan positioned immigrant women willing to learn it as “passive receivers of Catalan and active speakers of Spanish by encouraging [*them*] to interposition Spanish in bilingual interaction”.²⁶ Workers at the NGO studied by Garrido considered a basic command of Catalan and mere symbolic displays of the language—e.g. in greetings—as enough an indication of immigrants’ “willingness to integrate”, while they extensively used Castilian to interact with them and cater for their material needs.²⁷

Thus, results of previous research suggest that changes in discourses about Catalan are not being followed by a congruent change in the linguistic practices of the population. This article aims to further assess this claim through the analysis of census data, aiming to answer two research questions: how is the knowledge of Catalan and Castilian distributed among adult immigrants? And what role do Catalan, Castilian and other languages play in their current language practices and affiliations?

2. Minority nationalisms and the linguistic integration of immigrants

The critical importance of language issues in wider policies aimed at the integration of immigrants to the host society—like employment, health, or housing policies—has been underscored by several key actors in the field, like the Council of Europe.²⁸ In line with this concern, provisions for language training and testing for adult migrants seem to be in the increase in most European countries.²⁹ The design of such policies may be pretty straightforward in linguistically homogeneous nation-states. In such cases, enhancing the opportunities of adult immigrants to learn the national language may seem the key to success. This is not necessarily the case in Catalonia and other contexts characterized by the presence of fragile majorities and competing majority and minority nationalisms, with different agendas that can lead to disputes around which language(s) should be prioritized for immigrants' linguistic integration.³⁰

Zapata-Barrero has carried out comparative research on language policies for the integration of immigrants in different such contexts.³¹ He has shown that, in contrast with Quebec or Flanders—which have devolved, almost exclusive powers to manage language issues, together with a highly territorialized distribution of majority and minority language communities—in Spain the asymmetrical distribution of competences and power between the state and sub-state levels “prevents the minority nations”, such as Catalonia, “from developing comprehensive public policy on immigration”.³² Philosopher Will Kymlicka has argued that this circumstance, together with the fear that immigrants may be tempted to assimilate to the dominant culture, might add extra difficulties for a minority nationalism to fully embrace a civic, post-ethnic frame. That is, one which represents national identity as something to be built around shared political principles rather than something inherited by bonds of blood and descent. Also one that adopts an intercultural approach, accepting and accommodating

the expression of immigrant ethnicity, while promoting a common language as a tool for intergroup communication and elective identification by citizens. As Kymlicka puts it:

[...] the likelihood that a national minority will adopt such a post-ethnic model of minority nationalism seems to depend on a number of factors. In particular, it may require a range of policies (e.g. regarding language, education, and employment) which give the minority some control over the process of immigrant integration, and which establish or protect the pre-eminence of the minority's language on its historic territory³³

3. Language policies for the linguistic integration of immigrants in Catalonia and Spain

To what extent can Catalan institutions actually manage the linguistic integration of immigrants, though? To assess it, this section summarizes the framework for language policies for the integration of immigrants in Catalonia and Spain. It shows how, despite having limited control over the issue, the dominant trend in public discourses in Catalonia fit the post-ethnic model sketched by Kymlicka, embracing an intercultural approach and putting forward Catalan as a common, public language.

Spanish policies for the linguistic integration of immigrants

Before dealing with sub-state level policies, Spanish policies need to be reviewed, as Spanish Constitution gives the State exclusive competences on immigration issues (Article 149.1.2). The basic legal framework for immigration issues is further defined by the Spanish Civil Code and Act 4/2000, known as Act on Foreigners (*ley de extranjería*). In his analysis of Spanish policies for immigration, Zapata-Barrero finds it surprising that no such thing as a “discourse policy on identity nor on multiculturality”

exists.³⁴ Instead, public debate on immigration has revolved around security and socio-economic issues. Nonetheless, socioculturally based selection biases can be detected in the preference for non-Muslim and Castilian-speaking groups. This may be linked to the long-lasting influence of Catholic religion and the legacy of Spanish colonialism, reflected in the Francoist notion of Hispanity (*Hispanidad*).

Act 4/2000 asserts that schooling, labor market access, and learning official languages are the key factors for integration. With the plural in languages, foreigners' act leaves some space for the inclusion of mastery of official languages other than Castilian as criteria facilitating the attainment of work and residence permits. With regard to education, the act establishes that foreigners under 18 have the right and duty to receive education under the same conditions as Spanish nationals, and promotes adult instruction as a means to foster and improve the social integration of adult immigrants.

Regarding lower-rank regulations at the State level, Royal Decree 557/2011 devolves some competences on immigration issues to Autonomous Communities, most importantly the elaboration of reports on "social integration" in procedures to obtain a residence permit. These reports include information about linguistic training in Castilian and other official languages. The required level is quite basic: depending on the procedure, it ranges from A1 to A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, corresponding to 45 and 90 hours of training, respectively. As such, they basically allow for basic comprehension and very limited production of the target language. Finally, Royal Decree 1004/2015 regulates nationalization process, establishing a minimum of 10 years of residence as a requisite to obtain the nationality. This minimum is dramatically shortened for nationals of Iberoamerican Countries, Andorra, Philippines, Equatorial Guinea and Sephardi Jews, for whom only 2 years of residence are necessary. This is the main manifestation of the aforementioned selection

bias towards Castilian-speaking groups. Another important consequence of this last Decree is that foreigners willing to obtain the Spanish nationality are required to pass two face-to-face tests: a Spanish as a foreign language diploma (*DELE*) test, attesting at least an A2 level, and a test on historical, constitutional and sociocultural values of Spain.

Catalan policies for the linguistic integration of immigrants

Within this general framework, Catalan institutions have based their limited intervention on immigration issues on Catalonia's Statute of Autonomy (2006) and on Act 10/2010, on reception for immigrants and returnees to Catalonia. Before entering the field of immigration policies, a few words are in order to frame the general approach to language policies in Catalonia, starting in 1979 with the adoption of the first Statute of Autonomy, followed by Act 7/1983, on linguistic normalization, and Act 1/1998, on language policy. Vila summarizes the resulting approach along the following lines:³⁵

- An integrationist approach: policies avoid legally recognizing the existence of different language communities, and according them separated institutions.
- Double official status of Catalan and Castilian—in fact, triple since 2006, after the official recognition of Aranese, a variety of Occitan.
- Different rights and duties with regard to official languages. As already said, the Spanish Constitution establishes both a right and a duty for Spanish nationals to know Castilian, but no such duty can be extended to non-Castilian languages.
- Consideration of Catalan as Catalonia's own language (*llengua pròpia*), serving as a legal basis for the promotion of its use in different fields—mainly education, public media, and public administration. As such, current language

policies expose the whole population to public usage of Catalan, but do not require citizens to actively use it except in certain professional fields.³⁶

As for immigration policies, before Act 10/2010 the first initiatives to cope with the issue were the so-called Interdepartmental Plans for Immigration (1993-2004), followed by the Citizenship and Migration Plans (2005-2020). More importantly, in 2008 the Catalan Government promoted a National Agreement on Immigration (*Pacte Nacional per a la Immigració*, PNI).³⁷ This was a crucial step: first, because it gathered the support of a nourished group of economic and civil society actors. As such, it can be assumed to represent a broad consensus on issues of immigrants' integration. Second, because it set an innovative discourse on citizenship and integration, highly influential for subsequent policies for the (linguistic) integration of immigrants—crucially Act 10/2010—and very much at the core of the discursive shift towards the conceptualization of Catalan as a common language.

Some of PNI's fundamental ideas clearly resemble Kymlicka's depiction of civic, post-ethnic nationalisms: the need to develop a common public culture and to construct a civic notion of Catalan citizenship based on common political values; an intercultural approach to integration as a two-way process, engaging both newcomers and people already settled; and, most importantly for our current purposes, the challenge to make Catalan the common public language in Catalonia.

This last provision has a clear impact on Act 10/2010. The general aims of the law are to promote the autonomy and equality of opportunities for all, and to remove the obstacles to these ends. Among them, legislator singles out the possible lack of linguistic abilities of newcomers. As crucial steps toward these ends, Article 9 puts forward Catalan as the “common language to manage reception and integration policies”, and attributes to Catalan institutions the duty to provide immigrants with

means to achieve minimal competence in Catalan, and afterwards, and provided the individual requests or requires it, also in Castilian. This last provision, privileging Catalan as the language of first incorporation to the host society, was deemed unconstitutional by Spanish Constitutional Court in 2017.³⁸ Beyond this basic law, Act 12/2009, on education, also deals with the linguistic integration of adult immigrants, stating that Catalan institutions have the duty to provide a sufficient offer of teaching of Catalan to adult population, which has no access to Catalan through the school system. This article does not address explicitly policies affecting the school system which, as already said, fully bilingualize school population regardless of their first language, although immigrant pupils are found to attain lower levels of proficiency in Catalan and Castilian than their autochthonous peers.³⁹

The implementation of legal provisions for the linguistic integration of adult newcomers, with the ambitious motto to make Catalan the common language in Catalonia, depends basically on the Consortium for Linguistic Normalization (*Consortici per a la Normalització Lingüística*), rooted in the public sector.⁴⁰ Created in 1988 as the result of cooperation between Catalan Government and local councils, it has a wide territorial network and devotes itself to language consultancy, linguistic promotion, and language courses for the adult population. From 2000 to 2010, more than half million students enrolled in Initial, Basic and Elemental courses—especially in the first, free of charge one, which provides 45 hours of training (A1).

The main challenge facing these courses is the high rate of dropout after level requirements for residence and other permits are met (A1-A2). Taking into account the sociolinguistic constraints previously described, it can be reasonably expected that allophone adult immigrants taking part in mixed social networks will develop at least conversational abilities in Castilian. This cannot be assumed for Catalan, though: in this

case, more formal and explicit training may be necessary, due to its social minorization. The next sections turn to the analysis of census data, to explore what they show about the pace of immigrants' incorporation to the knowledge and use of Catalan and Castilian, and about the impact of the language policies reviewed.

4. Methods

Data analysis is based on the Survey on Language Uses of the Population, an official statistics carried out by the Statistical Institute of Catalonia (IDESCAT) and the Catalan Ministry of Culture every five years since 2003. The latest year with available data is 2018. The survey provides detailed information on language skills, language uses and language attitudes and identifications. Most of the data is publicly available at IDESCAT's website,⁴¹ but the results presented here are based on descriptive and bivariate analysis of the data matrix provided by the Ministry of Culture to researchers at CUSC—Research Centre for Sociolinguistics and Communication, Universitat de Barcelona, to allow for in-depth and interpretive analysis of the data. IBM SPSS Statistics 25 has been used throughout.

Four sets of variables from EULP are considered in the analysis:

- Dichotomous measurements of language skills in Catalan and Castilian. Respondents are asked to provide a yes/no answer to the questions “Are you able to understand/speak/read/write Catalan/Castilian?”
- Self-assessment of language skills in Catalan and Castilian. Respondents are asked to self-evaluate their linguistic abilities using a scale wherein 0 means no knowledge at all and 10 means perfect knowledge.

- First language, language of identification and habitual language. These variables provide a broad insight into the linguistic origin, affiliations and practices of the population, respectively. The first one is based on answers to the question “Which language(s) did you speak first at home when you were born?” The second one comes from answers to the very first question of the survey: “Which is your language?” The third one is more straightforward and results from the question “Which is your habitual language?” Catalan sociolinguists interpret stability or changes between these variables as a proxy for the “attraction” towards the use of, or the affiliation with Catalan among native speakers of other languages—or for the assimilation to Castilian of the Catalan-speaking and allophone populations.⁴²
- Percentage of use of different languages. Respondents are asked to provide an estimate percentage of their use of Catalan, Castilian and other languages in the course of a normal day. As a reflection of language practices, this variable is akin to the habitual language while providing a more refined approach to them.

Although the analysis will be focused on foreign-born population, references to the results of people born in Catalonia will be provided now and then to allow for a comparative view.⁴³

5. Results

Before presenting the results, it is important to bear in mind that the majority of foreign-born respondents are adult immigrants with no schooling in Catalonia, due to the recent nature of transnational immigration to Catalonia and to the fact that only people over 15 are included in the survey’s sample. This clarification is key due to the efficacy of the

Catalan model of linguistic education in providing bilingual proficiency in Catalan and Castilian to all pupils, irrespective of their first language. Results presented here are representative of the trends affecting adult immigrants, and thus a more reliable approach to the efficacy of language policies being reviewed.

Different statistical tests—chi-square for categorical variables and ANOVA for scalar variables—were carried out to assess the significance of the birth-place as an explanatory variable of the aforementioned sociolinguistics variables (dependent variables). All the tests shown a strong and statistically significant relationship between the variables ($p < 0.01$).

Language skills

Starting with the results of the dichotomous measurement of language abilities in Catalan and Castilian, Figure 2 points out a clear unbalance in figures for each language. In the case of Catalan, the ability to understand is the most widespread: in 2018, 8 in every 10 foreign-born speakers declared they could understand it. In contrast, two thirds said they could read it, one half declared they could speak it, and only one third said they could write it. These figures are in stark contrast to those of Castilian: competence in the majority language is almost universal among foreign-born subjects, albeit figures are slightly higher for oral abilities than for literacy ones. In any case, the lowest figure for Castilian—92.4% for writing—is well above the highest one for Catalan—81.3% for understanding. In comparison with the results for subjects born in Catalonia, competence in Castilian is pretty similar, with the biggest difference affecting the ability to write—7.1 points below the 99.5% for people born in Catalonia. In contrast, the differences with respect to Catalan are immense, because knowledge of Catalan is universally widespread among people born in Catalonia, excepting the ability to write (87.2%).⁴⁴ The biggest differences in the case of Catalan affect the ability to

speak (-47.2) and to write (-49.7).

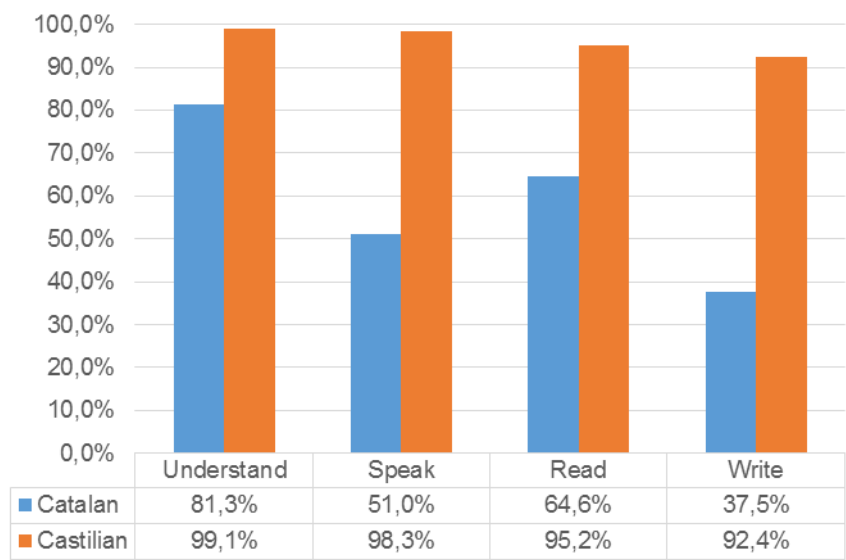


Figure 2. Knowledge of Catalan and Castilian in different abilities of foreign-born population. Catalonia, 2018 (percentages)

A very similar picture emerges when mastery of languages is measured through respondents’ self-assessment of their abilities on a scale ranging from 0—no knowledge at all—to 10—perfect knowledge. Data presented in Figure 3, representing the mean score for each ability in both languages, show that foreign-born speakers evaluate their abilities in Castilian in a very positive way: from 8.4 for writing to 9.1 for understanding. The means for Catalan are clearly below these in every ability, and range from 3.3 for writing to a maximum of 6.1 for understanding.

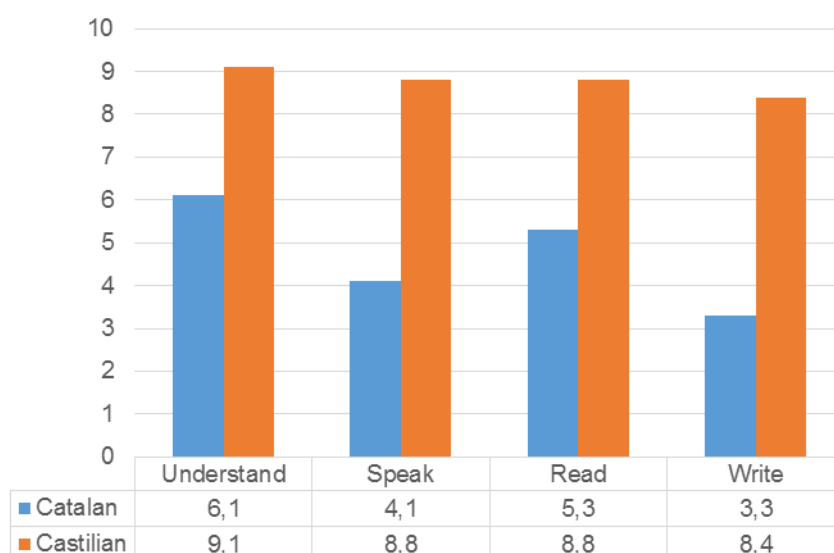


Figure 3. Self-assessment of knowledge of Catalan and Castilian in different abilities of foreign-born population. Catalonia, 2018 (means)

It is interesting to point out a final difference in skills between languages. In the case of Castilian, respondents evaluate better their oral abilities—understanding and speaking—than their written ones—reading and writing. This can be attributed to the fact that literacy requires conscious, explicit training, which may not be available (or necessary) for some of them, while daily practice of Castilian within mixed social networks allows most of them to develop a functional proficiency in oral abilities. In contrast, in the case of Catalan the main difference opposes productive skills to receptive ones: foreign-born respondents fare better at understanding the language than at producing it, be it in oral or written form. This result seems congruent with a language policy model that exposes the whole population to some public usage of Catalan, and thus may require a threshold of receptive proficiency, but does not call for the active use of the language by citizens. The aforementioned interposition of Castilian can reinforce this trend and prevent wider usage of Catalan by foreign-born population on a day to day basis.

First language, language of identification and habitual language

Figure 4 moves beyond language skills to issues of language use and identification. It synthesizes data on the percentages of foreign-born people who declare Catalan, Catalan and Castilian, Castilian, or other languages as their first language (blue bars), as the language to which they feel more affiliated (orange bars), and as the one they speak habitually (grey bars).

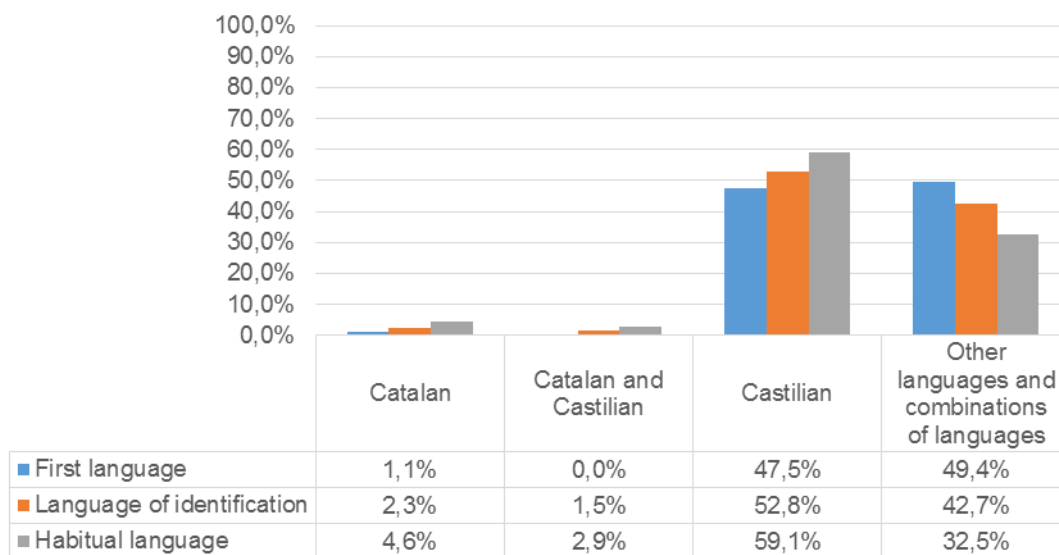


Figure 4. First language, language of identification and habitual language of foreign-born population. Catalonia, 2018 (percentages)

With regard to linguistic origins, foreign-born Catalans can be divided broadly in two groups with a similar weight: native speakers of Castilian, coming mainly from Latin-American countries (47.5%); and allophones, coming mainly from Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe (49.4%). Among the native languages most commonly cited by the second group are Arabic (10.3%), Romanian (5.4%), French (2.6%) and Amazigh (2.5%).

Changes between first language, on the one hand, and language of identification and habitual language, on the other, can be illustrative of wider sociolinguistic trends

affecting not only Catalan and Castilian, but also the heritage languages of allophones, which will be called immigrant languages for clarity.⁴⁵ The first finding is that in the foreign-born sample immigrant languages are cited more often as first language than as the language of identification or as the language used most often. 87,000 of the estimated 638,200 native speakers of an immigrant language do not identify mainly or exclusively with their first language anymore, and 218,600 of them have stopped using it mainly or exclusively in their day to day. In percentages, while 49.4% of the foreign-born sample claim to have an immigrant language as their first language, only 42.7% consider it to be the main source of their linguistic identity, and even fewer (32.5%) use it habitually.

The second finding is that assimilation to Castilian seems to be the main reason for the aforementioned weakening of immigrant languages in Catalonia. 68,500 foreign-born subjects join the group self-identifying as Castilian-speakers and 151,100 people the group that uses Castilian as its habitual language, while the aggregate of “Catalan” plus “Catalan and Castilian” only incorporates 34,100 subjects with regard to identification and 82,100 subjects with regard to habitual use. Identification and habitual use of Catalan, alone or together with Castilian, only represent 3.8% and 7.5% of the foreign-born sample, respectively. Meanwhile, Castilian alone reaches 52.8% for identification and 59.1% for habitual use.

Percentages of use of languages

A closer look at the language practices of foreign-born population will help to complete this sociolinguistic profile, through an analysis of the percentages of use of Catalan, Castilian, and another language declared by foreign-born subjects.

Table 1 shows that use of Castilian is clearly dominant: it accounts for two thirds of the self-reported language practices of the foreign-born sample. The mean

percentage of use of immigrant languages comes in second (20.3%), with Catalan in the last place (12.7%). Needless to say that these results are highly influenced by the first language of respondents. To account for this, Table 1 includes separated data for foreign-born native speakers of Castilian and for allophones. It shows that native speakers of Castilian use their first language far more often (82.4%) than allophones do (48.0%), and that the latter are responsible of most of the use of other languages, which reaches 36.5% in this group. It is worth highlighting that use of Castilian is the dominant trend even for native speakers of immigrant languages, who speak it more often than their first languages. And also that use of Catalan is clearly subsidiary for both groups.

L1	% of usage (mean)		
	Catalan	Castilian	Another language
Castilian	13.2%	82.4%	4.1%
Other languages and combinations of languages	10.7%	48.0%	36.5%
Total	12.7%	64.5%	20.3%

Table 1. Percentages of use of Catalan, Castilian and another language of foreign-born population by first language. Catalonia, 2018 (mean percentages)

To end with, Figure 5 provides a finer-grained image of the same measurement of language practices. Instead of representing the average results, it groups responses of foreign-born subjects in 25% ranges—grouping, for instance, people claiming to use Catalan “from 51% to 74%” of the time. Discrete responses corresponding to 0%, 50% and 100% are reflected separately, because they concentrate an exceptional number of answers and are considered especially symbolic for respondents.

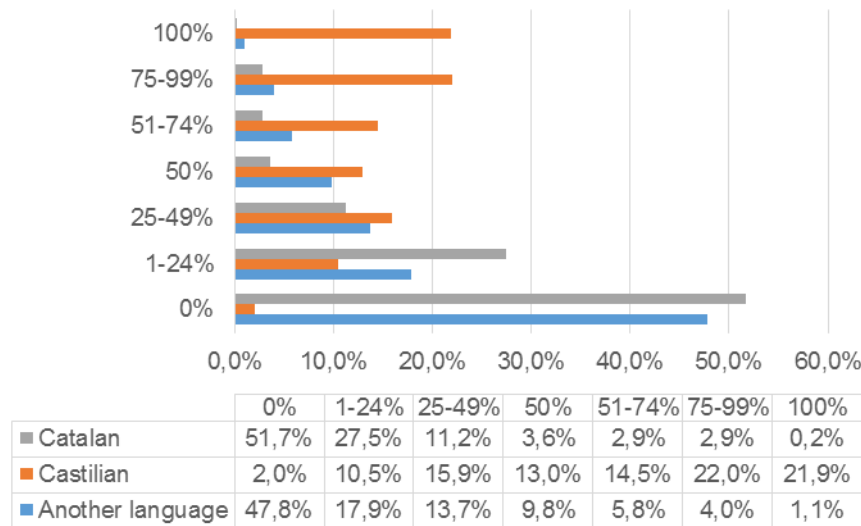


Figure 5. Foreign-born population according to self-reported percentage of use of Catalan (grey bars), Castilian (orange bars) and another language (blue bars). Responses grouped in 25% ranges. Catalonia, 2018 (percentages)

Different considerations emerge from the data. First and most striking is that, in the foreign-born sample, 0% is the commonest answer both for use of Catalan—51.7% of foreign-born subjects declare to use Catalan 0% of the time—and for use of another language (47.8%), albeit for different reasons. With regard to Catalan, high proportions of native speakers of both Castilian and immigrant languages report 0% of use of the language. As for other languages, 84.5% of foreign-born native speakers of Castilian report using them 0% of the time, but only 12.1% of foreign-born native speakers of immigrant languages declare using them 0% of the time. Figure 5 depicts again a position of clear dominance of Castilian in the language practices of foreign-born population in Catalonia. Majority uses of Castilian, corresponding to 50% of the time or more, concentrate 71.4% of the responses of foreign-born subjects, with 43.9% of them declaring to use Castilian more than 75% of the time. By way of a final contrast between both official languages, it would suffice to say that majority uses of Catalan—

50% or more—do not reach 10% of the answers of foreign-born subjects (9.6%), with only a slight difference between foreign-born native speakers of Castilian (10.3%) and foreign-born allophones (7.4%).

6. Conclusions

The picture emerging from data analysis is one of strong dominance of Castilian, especially in terms of abilities and practices; of progressive regression of immigrant languages, especially in terms of use but also with regard to affiliations, although to a lesser degree; and of a marked subsidiary position of Catalan in each dimension considered.

Having 50% of newcomers claiming to be able to speak the language and 80% to understand it may sound like a remarkable outcome for a minoritized language like Catalan. This result allows wider usage and further promotion of it without creating great exclusionary side-effects, all the more so if (at least passive) knowledge of the language gets universalized. Yet it reflects a situation that dramatically lags behind the purported position of Catalan as the common language for intergroup communication in Catalonia, as put forward by Act 10/2010 and other instances of public discourse.

The main explanation for these results lays in the fourfold minorization of Catalan described earlier. But language policies also have an impact. The asymmetric position of Catalan and Castilian in legal terms, together with the equally asymmetric distribution of competences between state and sub-state levels, leaves Catalan institutions with limited room to control immigration issues and to fully implement its agenda with regard to linguistic integration. Powerful mechanisms backing the position of Castilian range from the Constitutional duty of mastering Castilian for all Spanish nationals—including language tests for would-be Spaniards as part of their

nationalization process—to the faster nationalization of immigrants from purportedly “Hispanic” countries. As for Catalan, 45 to 90 hours of training may be required to facilitate access to different permits. This is probably insufficient to generalize a functional proficiency in Catalan in view of the legal, demographic and economic pressure of Castilian, which add to the interposition of Castilian and the hardships many foreign learners experience to be spoken to in Catalan. Further attempts to enhance its position by ensuring Catalan is the language of first reception, to be learned before Castilian, have been ruled unconstitutional, as already said.

This issue may be seen as secondary by many key actors in the field, though. Why not focus efforts on catering for the immediate needs and citizenship rights of immigrants, and let languages come in second? The problem with this argument is twofold. On the one hand, because languages mediate most aspects of integration into the host society, and choosing one language or another is unavoidable. Maybe the naturalization of the dominance of Castilian makes it appear as the “normal”, self-evident option to some.⁴⁶ It is still a choice, nonetheless. On the other, because language issues do matter in the lives of people: in contemporary societies, languages act as mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, and (not) mastering certain varieties directly affect speakers’ opportunities to access symbolic and material resources.⁴⁷

The policies and the sociolinguistic dynamics reviewed so far work against the opportunities for adult immigrants to actively master both official languages in Catalonia. And so, to attain a functional linguistic integration into Catalan society, which following the Council of Europe requires that “resources in the majority language and in the other languages of the repertoire are sufficient to allow adult migrants to manage relatively successfully the majority of social, work-related and personal communication situations”.⁴⁸ In the Catalan context, the long-existing social and

political—though not legal—consensus that, to fully participate in Catalan society, one needs to master both Catalan and Castilian, means that access to both languages should be facilitated to newcomers to grant them full symbolic recognition as members of the community, equal opportunities for social mobility and labor market inclusion, and a fair participation in the social and political life of the community. Given that universal access to Castilian can be taken for granted under the current sociolinguistic conditions, as the data show, it seems legitimate for authorities to put more effort into facilitating the acquisition of Catalan by foreigners.

Full linguistic integration of newcomers is also crucial to guarantee the sustainability of Catalan in the long run. Following Bastardas-Boada, linguistic sustainability is to be understood as a kind of linguistic contact “which does not produce [...] linguistic use in allochthonous language at a speed and/or pressure so high as to make impossible the stable continuity of the autochthonous languages of human groups”.⁴⁹ To allow for that, language policies must ensure that the incorporation of successive waves of immigration does not harm the continuity of Catalan in its historical area by deepening its demographic minorization. This is important not only for the sake of “preserving linguistic diversity”. It also matters as a way to prevent a hypothetical growth of anxieties and fears of assimilation among Catalan-speakers that, according to Kymlicka, could increase the risk of xenophobic reactions. This seems only a remote possibility in the current situation: a report recently published by the European Commission depicts Catalonia as one of the regions with the most favorable attitudes towards immigration, according to the electoral behavior of voters in elections to the European Parliament.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, a better distribution of competences and improving access to Catalan seem good paths to follow to make it even more improbable.

Tackling these issues may not be easy, though, especially in the current climate of recentralization of powers by the Spanish state and increased polarization in Catalan politics. The relative consensus over linguistic issues across the political spectrum following the end of dictatorship seems to belong to the now-distant past.⁵¹ Still, it seems worth to try to achieve a new consensus over the full linguistic integration for newcomers, for the sake of social cohesion and equality of opportunities for everyone.

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