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# **Language use in the context of double minority: The case of Japanese–Catalan/Spanish families in Catalonia**

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**Abstract:** This study explores language use in Japanese–Catalan/Spanish families in Catalonia with a special attention to Japanese. In a community such as Catalonia wherein two languages of different status are in conflict within its own territory, the ability of families to maintain a socially ‘weaker’ language and transmit yet another language that does not have an official status within the community raises an important question: how do these cross-linguistic families cope with a ‘double minority context’ in terms of organizing their language use within the family? Analysing the data collected through a questionnaire survey conducted with 29 Japanese–Catalan/Spanish-speaking families living in Catalonia revealed that the parents in said families adopted a mostly monolingual use of Spanish; however, this practice does not affect the families’ Catalan and Japanese use. Not establishing a single common language for the family may be one of the strategies to combat the threat to minority languages. In general, especially for the survey participants, Catalan and Japanese remain significantly utilised. Our study also found that sibling existence can influence language use patterns between parent and child (ren), with monolingual practices tending to be used in single-child families.

Keywords: Language use; cross-linguistic families; Catalan; Japanese; language transmission; heritage language

## **Introduction**

When a cross-linguistic couple has children, they often hope that their children also will be able to speak the language of each parent (Takeuchi, 2006). Theoretically, these cross-linguistic families—by which I mean a family unit with at least two different

languages, either in addition to or instead of the local language (De Houwer, 2003)—can provide their children with the opportunity to become bilingual in their parents' languages (Yamamoto, 2001, 2002).

Then, when a cross-linguistic couple attempts to transmit their heritage language in the home country of one partner, which is a society where two languages of different social status—i.e. one being socially weaker and less international in status—are in contact, how do they cope with this 'double-minority language' situation? Here, 'minority language' means a socially weaker language. Beginning with this question, the current study explores the language practices of Japanese–Catalan/Spanish-speaking families, by which I mean a family with one of the parents declaring to be a native speaker of Japanese and the other Catalan and/or Spanish, with a special attention to Japanese as a heritage language.

## **Background**

### ***Bilingual context of Catalonia***

After the fall of the dictatorship, Spain became a so-called 'state of autonomies'. This system permitted the creation of territorial organs of self-government, although it does not allow the same level of power distribution generated by real federal systems—the United States or Germany (Torres, 2007)—due to its political subordination (Boix-Fuster and Farràs, 2012; Strubell and Boix-Fuster, 2011; Vila, 2008). Today, an institutional use of Catalan (banned till the end of the dictatorship) has been remarkably recovered. Nonetheless, in terms of the ability of a language community to perform the basic functions of life within its territory in its own language (Boix-Fuster and Farràs, 2012), Catalan is still in a delicate situation due to this political subordination. Legally, all Catalan legislations are subjected to the Spanish Constitution, including the Statute

of Autonomy, which is therefore not exempted from the control of constitutionality (Bayona, 2010). The Spanish Constitution obliges speakers of ‘other Spanish languages’ to learn this language while saying nothing explicitly about the linguistic duties of Spanish speakers (Vila, 2008): there is no equal legal recognition of these languages (Boix-Fuster and Farràs, 2012).

Nonetheless, its resilience of periodically strengthening the ‘catalanizing’ language policy through new legislation despite repeated challenges by court (Woolard and Frekko, 2013) and its prestigious status associated with a relatively high-social class standing has helped this language survive. Thus, Catalan is, while rare and threatened, an upwardly mobile language (Woolard, 2003, p.87).

The social use of Catalan varies depending on the area. According to the Survey on Language Use of Population 2013, in the metropolitan Catalonia—Barcelona and nearby areas—Spanish has a dominant presence: Spanish is considered to be the usual language for 60% of the population while less than 30% considered Catalan as such. One of the key factors to understand this is the concentration of immigrants to this area formerly from other parts of Spain and recently from outside of Spain, particularly those from Spanish-speaking areas of Latin America, who represent 16.6% of the total number of foreign population living in Catalonia with residence permits in 2015<sup>1</sup>. The official data also showed that there has been a decline in Catalan’s percentage of knowledge and use due to the immigrants.

### ***Japanese in Catalonia***

In 2015, a total of 2262 Japanese lived in Catalonia<sup>2</sup>. Most are executives of Japanese companies established in Catalonia and their respective families, although Japanese who moved to Catalonia for the purpose of marriage also represent a significant percentage

of the total population of this nationality in Catalonia ([author], 2009).

Despite their relatively small number<sup>3</sup>, there exists both a full-time Japanese school and a Japanese language supplementary school in Barcelona since the 1980s, suggesting an on-going desire among Japanese residents to maintain their heritage language. Nevertheless, very little is known about this population in Catalonia, and no comprehensive study exist regarding its members' language use patterns<sup>4</sup>.

### ***Language use in bilingual families***

Bilingual families differ with respect to which family members speak which language(s) within the home, how frequently they do so, and which, if any, of those languages is spoken in the community (Lyon, 1996). Between bilingual couple, the language of communication is determined by factors such as proficiency of the language(s) spoken by each member of the couple; the relative status and/or prestige of each language; the language used when the couple first met each other; the relative distribution of power between the couple, and so forth (Baker and Sienkewicz, 2000; Burck, 2005; De Klerk, 2001; Yamamoto, 1995, 2002). The decision about the language chosen for parental communication is extremely important because it can either serve to support the use of minority languages in the home, or conversely, strengthen the use of the majority language by the child(ren) (Barron-Hauwaert, 2004, p.195). Studies about language use in Japanese–English families in Japan (Yamamoto, 1992, 2001) and in Great Britain (Okita, 2002) found that a monolingual use of English is most commonly chosen for parental communication. In the context of Japan, particularly, Japanese parents' high English proficiency may be an important factor in this choice. Conversely, findings from studies in bilingual families that do not include a native English-speaking parent suggest that the prestige or power relations between languages are significant criteria

when choosing a language for parental communication (Barron-Hauwaert, 2000, 2008; Doyle, 2013; Yamamoto, 2002). For example, Doyle's (2013) study on intermarried families in Tallinn found that most of the parents use a non-Estonian language or English for inter-parental communication, while in no family is Estonian used exclusively. However, if both of the parents have equally prestigious languages, the pattern of choice is not clear (Barron-Hauwaert, 2000).

Parental language use with the child was often highlighted and used by some researchers as a criterion to define different types of bilingual families, in addition to or instead of the parental language status, since the parental language use has considerable influence on that of the children and is fundamental to assuring it (Barron-Hauwaert, 2000; De Houwer, 1999, 2007; De Klerk, 2001). Romaine (1995, p.183–185) distinguished six different types of communication strategies to promote bilingual development in terms of the native language of parents, the language of the community and the parents' strategy in speaking to their children. Amongst these strategies, one person-one language (hereafter OPOL), the strategy whereby parents each speak their native language to a child, is one of the most referenced in literature and has often been recommended in guidebooks for bilingual families. Yamamoto (1995) explains two reasons for this behaviour: to facilitate emotional bonding between parent and child and the parent's conscious decision to provide exposure to the minority language. Nevertheless, this strategy is also criticized because it likely results in children becoming passively bilingual rather than actively bilingual (Döpke, 1992; King and Fogle, 2006; Takeuchi, 2006; Yamamoto, 1995). Likewise, trilingual families are also beginning to experiment with OPOL. However, if one or both of the parents is bilingual or trilingual, there is an inherent instability and weakness, as they have to drop one or both of the language for various reason (Braun and Cline, 2010). As Barron-Hauwaert

(2004, p.156) notes, ‘trilingualism is much more of a fluid and changeable phenomenon than bilingualism’; in trilingual families, the languages in question frequently overlap, which makes the parental strategy become ‘one parent, two or more languages’.

Regarding language use between siblings, children’s preferred language may change as they grow older. One of the most crucial points in the development of children’s language use patterns is when they start attending school. The language used in the school, particularly that used by their peers at the school, has considerable influence in determining the dominant language of the children (cf. Barron-Hauwaert, 2003, 2004; Grosjean, 1982; Tuominen 1999; Yamamoto, 1995, 2001, 2002). Likewise, previous research found that siblings in bilingual families prefer to use the language of the wider society and/or that of the school they attend to communicate with each other, in a monolingual or mixed way (Doyle, 2013; Okita, 2002; Tuominen, 1999; Yamamoto, 1992, 1995, 2002, 2008). Siblings’ choice of language is often arising subconsciously from simple need to communicate effectively (Barron-Hauwaert, 2011), or it is a direct consequence of language availability: if all the siblings have an equal command of two languages, they may establish a common language; if they attend the same school, they may choose the language of the school (Yamamoto, 1995).

In families where not all members share all of the languages spoken, challenges of maintaining multiple languages at home are encountered, and the pressure to use local language can be strong, particularly if it is the language that the parents use to communicate (Yates et al., 2012). The language of parental communication seems to be accepted as the ‘lingua franca’ in bilingual families (Barron-Hauwaert, 2000), which tends to be the language with the higher status (Baker and Sienkewicz, 2000). However, if a member of the family lacks proficiency in that language, the family is likely to

adopt a language that is comprehensible to everyone as its primary language (Yamamoto 2008, p.134).

### ***Language use in Japanese bilingual families***

Studies on Japanese–English bilingual families have commonly found that some Japanese parents use English to varying degrees when communicating with their children (Okita, 2002; Takeuchi, 2006; Yamamoto, 1995, 2001), either unwittingly or for a specific reason. Those who are living in English-speaking countries often shift to English as the children’s dominance of English increases even though they began exclusively or mainly using Japanese with their children (Okita, 2002; Takeuchi, 2006). Being the mainstream language, English gains ground in their family language use: Okita’s study (2002) in Great Britain and Takeuchi’s study (2006) in Australia found that more children communicate with their Japanese-speaking parents in both Japanese and English or exclusively in English than in Japanese alone, whereas more mothers exclusively or mainly use Japanese with their children. Yamamoto’s studies (1995, 2001) also found similar patterns though they were conducted in Japan, which suggests that an international prestige of English and the fact that it is not an unfamiliar language for most of the Japanese people (Yamamoto, 1995, 2001) help this language to be enhanced within family.

Hence, the wider society’s language has a significant influence over children’s language use and the use of the heritage language between parent and children might shift to the local language (Bialke-Toyama, 2011). Nonetheless, this ‘threat’ is a single ‘major language’ in aforementioned researches. Our question is whether it is also applicable to Japanese–Catalan/Spanish-speaking families in Catalonia, where Japanese has to compete with two local languages, with one being an international major language (Spanish) and other being a less international language (Catalan). Based on the

hypothesis that Spanish strongly influences our subject families' language use with Japanese being a language of retreat, this study addresses the following questions:

- (1) Which language is predominant within these families?
- (2) How do these families organize their language use, particularly that of Japanese?
- (3) Do such families have a common 'family' language (i.e. a single language predominantly used when all the members of the family are present)? If so, which language is it?
- (4) Does Japanese have some presence in language practice between siblings?

Despite an increasing number of studies on Japanese as a heritage language in cross-linguistic families, it is relatively a new field. Prior studies have mostly focused on Japanese–English bilingual families. Furthermore, few studies have conducted detailed investigation on the use of languages in cross-linguistic families (Yamamoto, 2002). Thus, this study is significant in exploring how the languages in question are used in families with a Japanese-speaking parent and a non-English-speaking parent in a context like that of Catalonia.

## **Methodology**

### ***Data collection***

The original data used in the present study was collected through a questionnaire consisting of three parts: personal, language-use and linguistic knowledge data. Attitude towards language can have an important influence on language use; however, this variable is not included here since the main focus of this study is on the presence of Japanese in the home domain. All participants in this study were Japanese native speakers living in Catalonia with a spouse who is a native speaker of Catalan and/or Spanish, and at least one child who was attending the Japanese Language

Supplementary School (hereafter, the supplementary school) or the full-time Japanese School (hereafter, the Japanese school) aged between three and fifteen. Japanese school is not a typical option for intermarried families settled in Catalonia because it follows national curriculum of Japan, though some parents choose this option because it would ensure an active use of the language (Barron-Hauwaert, 2004). Supplementary school is open every Saturday for children who attend a local school or international school, but wish to maintain their heritage language. In the case of Barcelona, most of the children are from intermarried families. Informants were recruited through these two Japanese educational institutions, which were the only two of their kind in Catalonia, for the following reasons. Firstly, enrolling children at these schools represents parents' active commitment to transmit their heritage language. Those who have no relation with any of these institutions generally have few relations with their compatriots either, which made it difficult to locate them. It also implies that their use of Japanese is less frequent than those families who enrol their children at one of these two institutions. Second, we are particularly interested in the use of Japanese in these families in a bilingual context, such as Catalonia. Although Japanese heritage children in Catalonia are much fewer in number compared with the studies conducted in other areas with a substantial number of such children, it is worth exploring such a peculiar case.

Twenty-three of forty questionnaires were completed and returned from the supplementary school, and six of ten from the Japanese school were returned<sup>5</sup>. Except for five fathers from supplementary school, all participants were mothers. There are 49 children across all the families of participants. Although these data are self-reported,<sup>6</sup> we consider it helpful to have an overall picture on the approximate rate of each language used.

Figure 1 Participants' years of residence in Catalonia

[Figure 1 near here]

Figure 2 Participants' language proficiency—Spanish and Catalan

[Figure 2 near here]

Additionally, a semi-structured interview on language use was also conducted after completing the questionnaire with a small subset of the participants (N = 7) from both schools who agreed to collaborate.

Table 1 Profile of interviewees

[Table 1 near here]

The primary objective of the study was to explore the languages employed in communications between possible pairs of speakers (e.g. between the father and son) in Japanese–Catalan/Spanish-speaking families, with special attention to Japanese, since one of the keys to transmit and maintain a heritage language is its use at home (De Houwer, 2007; Barron-Hauwaert, 2004). The participants were asked to complete *Table 2* proposed by Yamamoto (2001), identifying one or more languages that they use when communicating with other members of the family. All data appearing hereafter related to language use are based on the information provided in this table.

Table 2 Language use in home

[Table 2 near here]

Hereafter, the following abbreviations are used:

**J:** Japanese    **S:** Spanish    **C:** Catalan    **E:** English    **O:** Other languages

**JP:** Japanese parents            **JF:** Japanese father            **JM:** Japanese mother

**SP/CP:** Spanish/Catalan-speaking parents

**SF/CF:** Spanish/Catalan-speaking father

**SM/CM:** Spanish/Catalan-speaking mother

**Ch:** Children

**N:** Number of cases

### ***Terminology***

The terminology in the field of bilingualism and multilingualism is not always consistent between researchers (Braun and Cline, 2010, p.114). Thus, the following terms used throughout this paper should be understood as follows. *Language use* herein refers solely to whether children or parents speak a particular language (De Houwer, 2009, p.412). *Heritage language* is used to refer to Japanese in the sense that it is a language ‘other than the dominant language(s) in a given social context’ (Kelleher, 2010, p.1) and ‘with which individuals have a personal connection’ (Fishman, 2001), thereby clearly distinguishing it from Catalan, an indigenous ‘minority language’. Finally, parental *native language* seems important to defining types of bilingual/trilingual families, but defining the term *native speaker* is not a straightforward exercise, especially for those who are in bilingual/multilingual environments (Yamamoto, 2008). In Catalonia, three terms are used in demolinguistic census surveys: *llengua inicial* (‘first language’), *llengua d’identificació* (‘language of identification’) and *llengua habitual* (‘usual language’), some or all of which can be the

same because virtually all Catalan speakers are bilingual in Catalan and Spanish (Woolard, 1989). Therefore, it can be unclear whether both languages are their ‘native language’. *Native language* herein refers to ‘the language one learned first and serves as a base’ (Nakajima, 2008), although in the questionnaire, the term *mother tongue* was used instead since this is more familiar to many Japanese people than other terms. As for our participants’ partners’ native language, the researcher’s own experience suggests that Japanese spouses usually know their partners’ language background. Therefore, we asked our participants about the language(s) that they considered to be their *mother tongue* and that of their spouse.

## **Results and discussion**

### ***Predominant language within families***

Our participants can be classified into three types in terms of the number of languages available and used in home: (1) bilingual families (n = 13), (2) trilingual families (n = 13) and quadrilingual families (n = 3). In the bilingual families, the dominant language is mostly Spanish. This might be because of the fact that Japanese-speaking parents are competent in Spanish. If the local spouse’s native language is Catalan, Spanish is often chosen as their lingua franca, which turns the family into a trilingual unit. In Japanese–Catalan–Spanish speaking families (n=13), Catalan has more presence than Spanish compared with bilingual families, since the use of Spanish is mostly limited to parental mutual communication.

Figure 3. Types of families by number of languages

[Figure3 near hear]

### ***Language use between parents***

Amongst our participants, a monolingual use of Spanish is the most prevalent pattern (20 of 29 pairs, 69%). Japanese and Catalan have little presence because many parents have little knowledge of their spouse's language, and Spanish was used when they first met. All our participants declared themselves to be relatively proficient in Spanish, though very few of them had an equivalent proficiency in Catalan. In a couple consisted of a Catalan speaker and a foreign language speaker, Spanish is likely to be chosen as the language for communication between them because Spanish is often supposed to be an objective vehicle of expression equally available to all users (Woolard and Frekko, 2013, p.135). Furthermore, changing the language - especially from a majority to minority language- one uses to communicate with a certain person is often claimed to be difficult (Barron-Hauwaert, 2004). In fact, three of the interviewed parents reported that they maintained the language they used when they first met their spouses for this reason. Therefore, if a couple began its relationship speaking Spanish to one another, they are likely to remain in that pattern of language use. Hence, Spanish is likely to be chosen as the language of parental communication regardless of the local spouse's native language.

Figure 4 Language use between parents. Number of cases.

[Figure 4 near here]

### ***Language use between Catalan/Spanish-speaking parents and their children***

In this group of speakers, a monolingual use of parents' L1, mostly the societal language, is the most prevalent pattern (41 of 49 cases, 83.7%). Amongst them a monolingual use of Catalan is the most common, followed by a monolingual use of Spanish. Only three cases of bilingual use were observed within this group, each of which involves the use of Spanish.

De Houwer's (2003, 2007) studies on trilingual families in officially monolingual Dutch-speaking Flanders found that parental use of the socially dominant language (Dutch) becomes a strong competitor for other languages at home. Because parents speak Dutch at home, there may be no real communicative need for other languages. Unlike these findings, the results of the present study suggest that the use of Spanish between parents does not threaten the use of Catalan between Catalan-speaking parents and their child(ren).

Figure 5 Language use between Catalan/Spanish-speaking parent and child. Number of cases.

[Figure 5 near here]

### ***Language use between Japanese parent and child***

Between Japanese parent and child, bilingual use is the most prevalent pattern (19 of 49 cases, 38.8%). The bilingual use of Japanese and Spanish was slightly greater ( $n = 15$ ) than that of Japanese and Catalan ( $n = 11$ ). Accounting for the participants' self-reported language knowledge, the findings can be explained by the fact that all of the participants are competent in Spanish to varying degrees, but they did not necessarily possess competence in Catalan. The rate of concordance of language use between them and their children is lower (73.5%) than that between Catalan/Spanish-speaking parents and children (91.8%). Furthermore, over 57% of the children mix one or both local languages with the Japanese-speaking parent, which suggests an important influence of the local languages and Japanese parents' high competence in these languages.

Nevertheless, only 12% of the children were reported to use exclusively Catalan and/or Spanish in such communication. Unlike the findings of Yamamoto (2001, 2008), heritage-language-speaking parents' use of Spanish when communicating with the other parent did not seriously affect their children's use of Japanese, and Japanese was

generally the predominant language used by this pair of speakers.

However, it is not easy to adhere to an exclusive use of Japanese. One mother interviewed, EMR<sup>7</sup>, reported that she cannot avoid using Catalan at some times, such as when they are in the presence of a third person. Consequently, the children sometimes respond in Catalan even when the mother addresses them in Japanese. Sometimes she even allows them to mix the languages. Here is an example of conversation between EMR and her two sons (KMS, aged 10, and SMR, aged 6) held in the dining room about the school excursion:

EMR: KMS ちゃんだった？遠足に行くって言ったの。 [Translation: Was it you who said that you were going to go on excursion?]

KMS: La depuradora. [Water purification plant.]

EMR: うーん。 [Hmm...]

KMS: De Sabadell que ja no funciona. [The one in Sabadell that no longer works.]

EMR: そうなの？見に行ってもしょうがないじゃない、そしたら。 [Oh really? Then it's no use visiting there.]

KMS: No, per veure les màquines i tot això. [No, to see the machines or whatever.]

SMS: Abans anaven bé? [Was it used to work well before?]

EMR: 何が？ [What?]

SMS: Les màquines. [The machines.]

Since consistency in parent's use of their language in interactions with their child has a positive influence on the minority language development of the child (Döpke, 1992; Lanza, 1997; Takeuchi, 2006), allowing them a bilingual context hampers its development (Juan-Garau and Pérez Vidal, 2001; Mishima, 1999).

Another interviewee, SHK, the father of a five-year-old girl, explained that he cannot maintain conversations with his daughter in the same way as the mother does

with her. He mentioned the particular character of the relationship between a father and daughter, arguing that his presence is quite insipid in terms of his interactions with his daughter, because their conversation is often established only via some simple utterance such as ‘Ah’, ‘Oh really?’. SHK’s experience suggests that the gender both of the children and of the parents can be one of the influential factors on the use of the heritage language, since there are differences between the way fathers communicate with children and the way mothers do (McNaughton, 2000; Punyanunt-Carter, 2008). Father–daughter communication patterns are more closed than mother–daughter communication patterns (Youniss and Ketterlinus, 1987), which may affect the amount of interactions in heritage language between parent and child.

Figure 6 Language use between Japanese parent and child. Number of cases.

[Figure 6 near here]

### ***Language use between siblings***

Twenty of 36 children employed more than one language when communicating with their siblings; the remaining 16 children adopted a monolingual approach. Generally, school’s language Catalan had an important presence amongst the children, since 32 of 36 children with siblings attended Catalan-medium school. Yet, it seems that the language used at the children’s school does not necessarily overwhelm the use of the heritage language between siblings, i.e. there were more children who used Japanese together with other language(s) when communicating with their siblings than those who used only their school language. All of the children in the survey were reported to use the same language(s) when communicating with their siblings. Furthermore, it was found that in the families with the children not using Catalan with their siblings that

language is absent in their family.

In 9 of 13 single-child families, an OPOL strategy is strictly respected, whilst only 3 of the 16 families with more than two children reported to follow this pattern. Such a finding suggests that the number of children has some effect on this approach. If a family has only one child, controlling the language use of the child seems relatively easy, as the child forms a triad with his/her parents (Barron-Hauwaert, 2004, 2011). Instead, some previous studies have found that the existence of older sibling(s) increases the opportunities for younger sibling(s) to be exposed to the majority language at home (Barron-Hauwaert, 2011; Hoffman, 1985; Yamamoto, 2001) since the children often prefer the language used in school and/or in the wider society, with the older sibling becoming the linguistic model for the younger sibling (Barron-Hauwaert, 2011). Although few in number ( $n = 3$ ), our survey also indicated that the younger siblings used both local languages together with Japanese in communicating with the Japanese parent.

Figure 7 Language use between siblings. Number of cases.

[Figure 7 near here]

### ***Family's 'common' language***

In previous sections, how languages are used amongst different pairs of speakers have been described mainly on the basis of the data obtained through a questionnaire. The question of what language is used to communicate when all the members of the family are present was addressed in the follow-up interviews.

Half of the parents interviewed responded that they did not establish any 'common language' to be used when the entire family is present. One of those parents, YAR explained the pattern of language use in such situations:

「家族のみんなが揃っている時、子供は私とは日本語で、お父さんとはカタラン語で。私と彼はスペイン語なんで、同じことを二回繰り返していると思うんですよ。共通語はないですね。」

[‘When all members of the family are together, I and our children talk in Japanese. The children talk in Catalan with their father, and I and my husband in Spanish. So, we have to repeat the same twice. We have no common language.’]

YAR’s substantial support for the OPOL principle is evidenced by the fact that she and her family purposely maintain this complicated pattern of language use. She explained that Catalan could not be their common language because she did not have any intention to learn it. The reason for that position was clear: ‘If my children knew that their mother understood Catalan, they would address to me in this language’.

Not having a common family language may be a consequence of these parents’ persistency in OPOL. ‘Non-converging dialogue’, whereby each individual is in ‘monolingual mode’ for speaking and ‘bilingual mode’ for listening, is quite usual in many bilingual families (Pearson, 2008). Regarding our participants, many Japanese parents do not speak Catalan, though they may understand it to some extent. Therefore, if the Catalan-speaking parent speaks Catalan, the Japanese parent can pretend not to understand this language; however, if Spanish, which is understood by everyone, is established as the family language, the children may reserve the use of the minority language only to specific moments (Kasuya, 2004), which may diminish the use of this language and threaten its survival (Barron-Hauwaert, 2000).

Another mother, TKM, responded that she would like to introduce a ‘time boundaries’ (Baker and Sienkewicz, 2000), which is a strategy that involves both of the parents speaking both languages to their child(ren), but doing so at different times of the week. For example, the entire family speaks in Japanese on weekdays and in Catalan on

weekends. This strategy is used to avoid the use of the majority language at home (Baker and Sienkewicz, 2000). She said:

「10歳ぐらいになったら切り替えることはできるはずなので、彼女の頭の中で。だから共通語はスペイン語って決めないでね。」

[‘I think that my daughter will be able to switch three languages in her mind at the age of ten. That is why we do not establish Spanish as our common language.’]

When the entire family is present, lack of competence in a particular language may lead to a sense of exclusion (Piller, 2001) of one of the parents, because s/he has difficulty participating in or understanding the interactions between the other parent and the child(ren). This concern was also reported by some of the parents interviewed, though they assured that it does not present a huge problem for their family.

The rest of the parents interviewed reported that they had a family’s common language. However, unlike what is reported in other studies (Baker and Sienkewicz, 2000; Barron-Hauwaert, 2011; Lyon, 1996), only one family used the language of higher status –namely, Spanish- in such situations. This phenomenon might be explained by the fact that the Catalan-speaking parents in those families strongly promote the use of Catalan, and this attitude has a great influence on their Japanese spouses. In the only family that chose Spanish as its common language, the father’s strong support for the use of Spanish excluded Catalan from the home.

## **Conclusions**

This study focuses on a small group of Japanese-Catalan/Spanish speaking families who try to transmit Japanese to their children and have documented their family language use through quantitative data. As a case study with a small sample, the findings are not generalizable; nevertheless, it is worth exploring family language use in

this trilingual context of Japanese-Catalan-Spanish, which has rarely been studied. Furthermore, research is cumulative, and an increasing number of case studies provide a good base for comparing the findings of one study with those of other studies (Lanza, 1997:82).

The present study has observed a significant presence of Japanese amongst our subject families despite a complex sociolinguistic context of Catalonia where both Catalan and Japanese face a minority language situation due to the prevalence of Spanish. If a Catalan-speaking parent notably enhances the use of Catalan to compete with Spanish, it becomes a ‘double threat’ to Japanese, and the children are less likely to speak the minority language(s) (De Houwer, 2003, 2007).

The most striking finding of our research is that the presence/validity of such a ‘double threat’ was not confirmed as far as our subject families are concerned: despite the fact that Spanish is employed as the parental communication language in most Japanese–Catalan-speaking families, this practice does not affect the use of Japanese or Catalan at home. It may be due to their open attitude in accepting that it is the dominant language of the country in which they live and that there coexists three languages in their daily life. Likewise, Catalan is also well maintained but is not menacing to Japanese either: only 12% of the children were reported to exclusively use local language(s) when communicating with their Japanese parent. This rate is quite low compared with the results of Okita’s study (2002) and of Takeuchi’s study (2006). For some Japanese-Catalan-speaking families, not establishing a single common language seems to result in protecting the weaker languages from being overwhelmed by Spanish.

This study also suggested that some existing factors such as parents’ generous attitude towards children’s use of local language with heritage language parents, the

presence of siblings, or genders of the parent and the child, make it difficult to apply OPOL, the most commonly selected strategy amongst our participants.

Finally, our research found that local languages at our participants' home do not necessarily overwhelm Japanese: nearly half of the children use Japanese with their sibling(s) to different degrees.

Catalonia is a bilingual society whose own language is striving to compete with Spanish, thus it has an understanding of bi-/multilingualism. Furthermore, Japanese enjoys a positive social evaluation in Catalonia, associated with an image of economic power and the recent popularity of Japanese culture. Hence, as far as our subject families are concerned, the 'double minority' situation does not necessarily create an unfavourable condition for transmission/maintenance of Japanese, but it helps this language survive the complex reality of Catalonia, together with family's effort and school, the other key factors for transmission/maintenance of a heritage language (Landry and Allard, 1991).

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<sup>1</sup> *Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya*. This number excludes those who obtained Spanish nationality.

<sup>2</sup> *Instituto Nacional de Estadística* ([www.ine.es/jaxi/tabla.do](http://www.ine.es/jaxi/tabla.do)).

<sup>3</sup> For example, the number of Chinese in Catalonia was 51,646 in 2011 (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística*).

<sup>4</sup> See [author] (2009).

<sup>5</sup> There were forty inter-married families in total in the Supplementary School and ten in Japanese school when the research was conducted.

<sup>6</sup> Children's language use can be biased, though most parents probably know which language they use together when they are playing together (Barron-Hauwaert 2011).

<sup>7</sup> To guarantee the privacy of our participants, their names have been codified.

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Figure 1 Participants’ years of residence in Catalonia

Figure 2 Participants' language proficiency—Spanish and Catalan

Figure 3 Types of families by number of language

Figure 4 Language use between parents. Number of cases

Figure 5 Language use between Catalan/Spanish speaking parent and child. Number of cases

Figure 6 Language use between Japanese parent and child. Number of cases

Figure 7 Language use between siblings. Number of cases