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Lifestyle residents in Barcelona: A biographical perspective on linguistic repertoires, identity narrative and transnational mobility

Eva Codó

The popularization of lifestyle migration epitomizes the individualization of contemporary lives, and the centrality of travel and spatial relocation in people’s aspirational or real life projects. This paper examines the processes of sociolinguistic relocation of “lifestylers” in the polylingual city of Barcelona through the lens of their embracing or rejection of Catalan, the non-state, local co-official language. It aims to decipher to what extent these individuals see Catalan as relevant to their transnational life experiences, and how this relevance is embedded in their relational-emotional experiences and evolving sense of self. This paper, which examines two life stories gathered through ethnographic interviewing, is framed within biographical-experiential approaches to the multilingual repertoire (Busch 2012; 2015). The analysis shows that by assembling different narrative bits and by examining in detail the small stories informants tell to ground their accounts, a complex picture of language (dis)appropriation emerges. It argues that national identity rhetoric is a discursive strategy deployed by narrators to partly make sense and partly rationalize what is a complex bundle of identity (re)constitution reasons, emotional stances and interpersonal power dynamics. The paper concludes by arguing that presences or absences in people’s repertoire are embodied struggles for personal coherence.

Keywords: lifestyle mobility; sociolinguistic relocation; language and transnationalism; Catalan; identity in/and narrative

1 Mobility, identity and Catalan: Research rationale

Human lives have become mobilized. Whether corporeal, virtual or imagined, processes of mobility are transforming sociality patterns, family relationships and urban spaces, among others (Hannam, Sheller and Urry 2006). The consequences of such mobilization are not minor but reach into the very essence of the human condition. In Elliot and Urry's words, mobility is "reshaping the self" (2010:3).

The rise of the social phenomenon known as lifestyle migration or lifestyle mobility (Duncan, Cohen and Thulemark 2013) foregrounds the reflexive, "do-it-yourself" nature of late modern identity built around the idea of lifestyle (Giddens, 1991). Lifestyles, which connect the local and the global in a dialectic way, are "more or less integrated sets of practices which an individual embraces, not only because such practices fulfill utilitarian needs, but because they give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity" (Giddens 1991:81).

Lifestyle mobilities epitomize the individualization of contemporary lives, as well as the centrality of travel, tourism and spatial relocation in people's aspirational or real life projects. Unlike in previous decades/centuries, when choice of place of residence was articulated around possibilities of access to education and/or employment, within the last decades, geographical emplacement has become, for many, a matter of self-identity and lifestyle. Quite distinctively, it has reached beyond the confines of the nation-state, spurred by long-distance transportation opportunities and new political structures, like the European Union, which have eased mobility and relocation on a continental scale. Those who move now are no longer only the upper-classes, as in the 19th century Grand Tours, or the world's underprivileged sectors searching for better economic chances, that is, those we usually label as "migrants"; today's lifestyle re-locators are middle-class individuals trying to get a fresh start (O'Reilly and Benson 2009). These lifestyle re-locators construct stories of escape in which life prior to their mobility is frequently presented as dull or stagnant. Many of them also emphasize anti-materialist values to the expense of material or professional career considerations (Oliver and O'Reilly 2009). Relocation is construed as the possibility of a new beginning, of reinventing oneself, usually involving the reorganization of one's life in terms of a more satisfying work-leisure balance. Geographical relocation is, borrowing Giddens' words (1991:11), an opportunity for "reclaiming oneself", which typically takes place after a major personal crisis or at life transition stages.

The aim of this paper¹ is to scrutinize the processes of socio-linguistic relocation of lifestylers. The case of Barcelona, the capital of Catalonia, a territory situated in the north east of Spain, is pertinent to such analytic endeavors. Barcelona is officially a bilingual city (Catalan-Spanish) though actually fairly polylingual on the ground. Spanish, the state language and a global code, shares official status with Catalan, the regional, minoritized language. Over the last two decades, Barcelona has become a global node (Solé 2006) for the transnational circulation of capital, people, information and cultural practices. Its *ethnoscape* (Appadurai 1996) has diversified and globalized through the arrival of foreign population, not just so-called economic migrants but also a variety of educated, mobile individuals with multifarious and crisscrossing motivations for settling in the city. These foreign residents show different job-insertion and sociality patterns, and their decision to settle in the city is often temporary but may become permanent depending on personal reasons and professional chances. Thanks to their coveted linguistic capitals, a significant number of them find employment in language-intensive industries, such as transnationally-operating call centers, foreign language schools or the tourist sector. Though underpaid and precarious, this employment “buys” them a temporary stay in a cosmopolitan city with endless opportunities for self-realization in the experience economy (Urry 2010). This paper aspires to decipher to what extent lifestylers see Catalan, the sub-state language, as relevant to their transnational life experiences/imaginings/plans; what kinds of sociolinguistic interpretations are constructed about and around Catalan, its value and social meaning; and more importantly, how they are embedded in narrators’ situated relational experiences and their (evolving) sense of self and identity. The study contributes to current sociolinguistic research on multilingualism, mobility and lifestyle (Schneider 2014); narrative and emotion in processes of dislocation and relocation (Relaño-Pastor and De Fina 2005); and new speakerness, minority languages and social positioning (Pujolar and Puigdevall 2015).²

This paper is organized as follows. In section 2, I will briefly present the main issues with regard to the cohabitation of Catalan-Spanish in Barcelona and situate this study within broader sociolinguistic debates in Catalonia. In section 3, I will outline the

¹ I want to heartily thank the two editors of this special issue for their support in the formulation of the main arguments of this paper, and two anonymous reviewers for their perceptive feedback.

² Research leading to this article has benefitted from ongoing discussions on the “new speaker” theme as part of the EU COST Action IS1306 network entitled “New Speakers in a Multilingual Europe: Opportunities and Challenges”.

theoretical framing of the article, which utilizes the toolbox of narrative inquiry to empirically ground a biographical-experiential analysis of presences/absences in the constitution of the informants' linguistic repertoires. Section 4 will provide methodological details on the process of data generation. I shall then move on to the fine-grained examination of extracts from the two life stories selected from the corpus (section 5). Finally, I will summarize the main arguments put forward in the analysis of the data and discuss them in relation to issues of minority language new speakerness, mobility, identity and scale in the 21st century.

2 An overview of sociolinguistic dynamics in Barcelona

The lifestyle-driven individuals described above, sometimes also called *middling transnationals* (Conradson and Latham 2005), relocate to a very heterogeneous city which is officially bilingual. Some of these newcomers master Spanish upon arrival; others actually settle in the city to learn or improve it. In general, very few have any competence in Catalan. In this context, newcomers settle in Barcelona and (sometimes unexpectedly) encounter Catalan. They must comprehend a dynamic sociolinguistic landscape, and learn how to act in a linguistic market which is not unified (Pujolar 2001) and where the relative value of the two languages is often ambiguous and embedded in contingent life experiences.

In Barcelona Catalan is the declared habitual language of use of 27.8% of the population *vs* 60% who preferably employ Spanish, according to recent survey data (Direcció General de Política Lingüística 2015). A simple stroll down Barcelona major avenues reveals that Spanish functions as a fairly widespread lingua franca (Alarcón and Garzón 2011). Language choice in Barcelona (which increasingly includes English, Arabic or Chinese, and a great deal of other languages) is in general fairly unproblematic (for a succinct review of language ideologies, policies and practices in contemporary Catalonia, see Woolard and Frekko 2013). Yet, at the same time, the politics of language in Catalonia is a contested terrain where issues of nationhood, identity and belonging (Marshall 2012) are played out, but also where access to resources is critically at stake (Codó and Patiño-Santos 2014) given the middle-class indexicalities of the language and its importance in key social domains like the public administration or the educational field. To this complexity must be added the habitus of many Catalan speakers who tend to address perceived outgroup members in Spanish. This affects their chances of learn and use Catalan.

Alarcón and Garzón (2011) claim that different sociolinguistic regimes are imposed on different types of foreigners in Catalonia depending on their distinct geographical and imagined class origins. In their view, for educated and middle-class residents coming from the industrialized areas of the world, Catalan is not a pre-requisite for social acceptance or successful professional performance in skilled employment. They oppose this to the situation faced by economic migrants who can generally get by in Spanish, but whose possibilities for upward social mobility are restricted if they lack Catalan. According to these authors, the symbolic dimension of Catalan also plays out differently for both groups. Thus, unlike for the former for the latter Catalan eases relationships with locals and displays their willingness to “integrate”, as we attested in our own research with African migrants in the Barcelona metropolitan area (Garrido and Codó, 2014). The fact that for middling transnationals –the group to which most lifestyle in Barcelona belong– Catalan may be perceived as unnecessary leads some authors to claim that these residents tend to ignore the language (Alarcón et al. 2006). The goal of this paper is not just to elucidate whether foreigners may choose or not choose to speak Catalan and why; rather, it seeks to use the lens of a minority language and its uptake (or lack thereof) by transient populations to understand how speakers comprehend, navigate and play with (essentializing) regimes of language and identity to make sense of their personal and language trajectories.

3 Theoretical underpinnings

Individual and/or collective processes of dis- and re-location –the hallmark of our times– compel social actors to (re)compose their often shattered and discontinuous sense of self (Baynham and De Fina 2005). In those cases, biographical narratives constitute heuristic devices to comprehend not just individual situated experiences, but more broadly, life in globalized modernity, with its multiple self-contradictions, conflicts and fragmentations.

In this paper, I adopt a biographical and narrative perspective to language (dis)affiliation processes. I claim that it is in and through narrative practice that we (re)position ourselves and others; (re)construct our lives and social worlds; and contest or legitimize regimes of language and identity. This is most visibly –though not exclusively– done in elicited life story narratives, defined as “a fairly complete narrating of one’s entire experience of life as a whole, highlighting the most important aspects” (Atkinson 1998:8). Busch (2012, 2015) also argues for a biographical approach to polylingualism in sociolinguistic inquiry. She advocates an approach which departs from the lived experience of language (*Spracherleben*) as the means to understanding the

constitution of the structures of perception, action and interpretation that shape our language practices, ideologies, and linguistic affiliations and disaffiliations. For Busch, the speaking subjects and their language repertoires must be the analytical point of departure. Repertoires are not understood as cognitive or individual objects, but as interpersonally-, socially-, politically- and historically-anchored processes; repertoires bear the traces of the struggles, constraints and possibilities of the heterogeneous spaces that social actors have crossed, inhabited and creatively (re)constructed through their language practices.

In linguistically heterogeneous settings, language choice and attitude “are inseparable from political arrangements, relations of power, language ideologies, and interlocutors’ views of their own and others’ identities” (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004:1). The previous quote foregrounds the link between language and identity, a link which is central to the analysis presented here. I claim that identities are *sites of struggle* (Norton 2000), since adopting a new language is, fundamentally, a socio-interactive process in which speakers must learn (and often struggle) to participate in new discursive communities and inhabit, contest or reject the identities associated therein. Busch’s approach, outlined above, aims to understand precisely what that struggle means for individual speakers and how it surfaces in the constitution of their repertoires. She takes the experience of translocal relocation, and the feelings of uncertainty, discomfort and even shame, as the starting point from which to explore the emotional character of language (dis)affiliation, and language use or lack thereof. In that sense, absences in one’s repertoire are as significant as presences.

Our repertoire is not determined solely by the linguistic resources we *have*, but sometimes by those we do *not* have, and these can become noticeable in a given situation as a gap, a threat or a desire. (2015: 14)

In this paper I draw on Busch’s conceptualization of the situated, affective multilingual repertoire, and bring to it the detailed analytical tools of narrative research, in particular of the small story research tradition (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008; Georgakopoulou 2014). This paradigm has emphasized the need to look beyond coherent, linear and canonical narratives of the self and into fragmented, interactive and emergent stories which foreground the unstable, ambivalent and often contradictory nature of processes of identity (re)construction in post-structural contemporaneity.

The small story framework understands stories as sites of engagement, and therefore, it places special emphasis on the relational and interpersonal work that gets done by narrators. This work is said to provide revealing insights into how narrators

navigate different (and often contradictory) versions of selfhood which (dis)align them with hegemonic identity discourses or “grand narratives”. Georgakopoulou (2014) claims that “big”, i.e. coherent and linear, stories and “small” stories can co-exist in the same event and can be produced by the same teller for different purposes. This is exactly what we find in the corpus examined, where the “big” narratives of self (a term that I use here as equivalent to biographical narrative) that each interviewee produces are punctuated by multiple storied moments of personal experience which contradict or at least inflect those “big” narratives. Another key aspect in understanding the value of small narratives is moralization. Everyday stories always “instantiate” a moral point of view (Ochs and Capps 2001:46). Moralization is a fundamental strategy employed by narrators to underscore their agentivity, positively self-present and suggest an alternative socio-linguistic order (Ochs 2005). Moralization is tightly linked to emotion (Relaño-Pastor 2014), and as we have discussed earlier, the concepts of affect and emotion are fundamental for the experiential approach to language adopted in this paper. Finally, the small story paradigm emphasizes reflexivity as its analytical hallmark in line with ethnographic stances; in particular, it purports to integrate the reflexive understanding of the role of the researcher in the occasioning and constitution of stories into the investigation of their discursive purpose. This idea is also central to my analysis. But first, let’s focus on a few methodological aspects.

4 Data description and methods of data generation

This paper is based on two biographical stories from a small corpus of fourteen life stories that I gathered between 2012-2015 for a larger R+D project on mobility, language and identity.³ These life stories were elicited through unstructured interviews conducted with a variety of transnational speakers from the global North and the global South. The idea was to transcend the national focus of prior studies with similar goals (e.g. Block 2005). Interviewees came from distinct religious, cultural, educational and social class backgrounds, belonged to different age groups and spoke a variety of languages. I offered to conduct the interview in Catalan, Spanish, English or French; interestingly, they all chose either Spanish or English.

Given the nature of the research project and logical time limitations, the biographical interviews were oriented towards understanding the interviewee’s decision

³ Multilingualism and Mobility: Language Practices and the Construction of Identity (FFI2011-26964). PI: Dr. Melissa Moyer. Funding body: Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (2012-2015). My ideas on the experiential constitution of the polylingual repertoire have been shaped by my current participation in research project APINGLO-Cat (FFI2014-54179-C2-1-P) of which I am principal investigator.

to relocate to Barcelona and his/her process of settling in. These processes were framed within prior experiences of mobility and plans for future mobility. Details on the informant's family backgrounds and their educational and professional trajectories were also gathered. Narratives of language experience were not explicitly elicited, although they frequently emerged, scattered within stories of self-emplacement in the city.

My mode of interviewing was unguided and highly flexible, in keeping with the precepts of ethnographic interviewing. I had a number of themes that I wanted to cover in mind and made sure I covered all of them, which was relatively easy after a few interviews. Right from the beginning I mentioned that I viewed the event as a conversation rather than as a "typical" rigid question-answer event, which was facilitated by the informal nature of the spaces I chose, i.e. coffee places or bars (sometimes to the detriment of sound quality). I had some kind of personal contact with all my interviewees, as they belonged to the social networks of friends of mine, of current or former work colleagues, or were in some way or other connected to previous informants. This helped me establish a more personal/symmetrical relationship than is usually the case and be able to carry out follow-up ethnographic investigations of some of the key issues, people and spaces mentioned. As a local interviewer, I was also familiar with political debates, media campaigns and circulating discourses on language and related issues.

During the focal interviewing event, my engagement was complete; I reacted personally to themes, situations and stories, and sometimes even related them to my own experience. This had an effect on how informants constructed their stories and on their perceived interactional rights and obligations. As an illustration, one interviewee asked me to succinctly tell her my own life story. I happily accepted, congruent with the symmetrical give-and-take atmosphere that had been jointly created. I must acknowledge that my being a local interlocutor shaped the interview in particular ways. Interviewees were eager to bring "local" topics into the conversation, such as comments on the political independence movement in Catalonia and their position with regard to it, as we shall see in the extracts presented.

As I mentioned earlier, I have selected two biographical stories for analysis, more specifically those of Fabrizio and Patty (both pseudonyms). Both had arrived in Barcelona with no particular purpose in mind rather than enjoy a stay in the city and see the world. Their decision was not motivated by professional, study or economic considerations, though Patty mentioned a broad desire to continue improving her Spanish after having lived in southern Spain for a year. I chose these two informants because they

had no professional ambitions in Barcelona to which Catalan could be instrumental, because their stances toward Catalan were totally divergent and because they produced two of the most reflexive accounts of language and identity in the corpus.

A brief note is in place here about how the data chosen compares to the other narratives in the corpus. As I did not ask informants specifically about their experiences with or positioning toward the Catalan language, a variety of discursive framings can be found in the corpus. In 5 out of the 14 stories collected, the issue of whether or not to learn Catalan and why was explicitly addressed by the narrators; in the rest of stories, it was left untouched or backgrounded. When that was the case, I would bring the issue up. Respondents deployed a variety of stances in response to my questions. Mostly, they claimed to have learnt Spanish as a default language choice and to have acquired a working knowledge of Catalan through language classes and everyday experience. This allowed them to go by in the city but they were generally unable to have an extended conversation in Catalan.

Of the five informants who actively foregrounded local bilingualism as an issue, four of them took a favourable stance towards Catalan claiming to make real efforts not just to learn the language but to employ it on a daily basis. In that sense, only Patty took an overtly rejectful attitude.

Given the small nature of the corpus and the possible impact of my identity as a local interviewer and a Catalan speaker on respondents' attitudes, all these figures cannot be taken as indicative of significant trends among the population surveyed. My goal in this paper is different; I seek to use the analysis of these two narratives to reflect on how certain dimensions of sociolinguistic sense making (to do with very intimate and emotional experiences) are frequently left out of understandings of language and identity in favour of broader political, economic and ideological considerations, which despite their relevance, fail short of providing the whole picture. In that sense, it is because of their diametrically opposed ideological nature that the two accounts selected give me the opportunity to unveil strikingly similar biographical processes underway which challenge classic explanations of minority language affiliation as linked to a desire for community belonging. It is to these issues that I now turn.

5 Data analysis

Language use in minority communities has traditionally been framed within ideologies of authenticity (Woolard 2008); speaking the language is a pre-requisite for social belonging and a key marker of ethnic identity. Language revitalization movements have striven to decouple language from identity/belonging to make the speaking of the language anonymous, a less socially marked practice. In the case of Catalan, civic discourses grounded on ideologies of anonymity have been around for some time, but ideologies of linguistic authority do not change overnight. As a case in point, in the two life stories analysed, Fabrizzio and Patty still mobilize essentialising views of language and identity to embrace or reject the use of Catalan, as we shall see. Yet I argue that taking overt identity claims at face value to explain language (dis)affiliation obscures the intricate interplay of sociolinguistic scales, biographical sense making and emotional well-being triggered by geographical mobility and relocation.

5.1 Fabrizzio's story: *"I feel half Catalan already"*

Fabrizzio, in his late 40s, had first arrived in Barcelona twelve years prior to the interview. His is a typical story of relocation resulting from a major personal crisis after a breakup. A draughtsman by training, back in Italy he held an intermediate managerial position in a mould factory. In Barcelona, he had always worked for private security companies. I met him through another informant, a classmate of Fabrizzio's from his Catalan language class. When I first spoke to him on the phone to arrange the interview, I employed strategies of bilingual bivalency (Woolard 1998) not to overtly choose one language or the other, and followed Fabrizzio's lead to speak Spanish.

I provide for analysis here the first occasion in which Fabrizzio makes an overt identity claim, namely that he feels half Catalan. We could understand this form of self-presentation as derived from his alignment with the Catalan nation, the political discourse which frames his identity claim, but I want to argue that Fabrizzio's self-categorization as a Catalan has to be interpreted in the light of his personal processes of self-(re)definition, as a detailed analysis of his storytelling reveals.

(1)

F: Fabrizzio (informant); E: Eva (researcher)

- 01 F: y:: bueno he tenido que: ponerme las pilas [...] mi madre se ha quedado un
02 año paralizada entonces yo he tenido que luchar contra los hospitales la
03 sanidad italia :na (.) que es un desastre que comparada a la de aquí=
04 E: =ah sí

05 F: sí esto es un paraíso te digo yo (.) bueno ahora un po un po menos porque
06 con el tema de los recortes (.) de Madrid se están cargando:: (.) muchas
07 cosas de de de las buenas que había aquí
08 E: mmhu
09 F: no sé lo que opinas tú yo normal[mente de rollo
10 E: [no no es buenísima es buenísima
11 F: normalmente de rollo político [aunque
12 E: [ah!
13 F: aunque en el tiempo he ido madurando mis [ideas porque
14 E: [ah sí?
15 F: a mí la política nunca me ha interesado (.) pero:: tengo mi: mi: mis ideas
16 sabes (.) y: he ido madurando:: (2.0) o sea en principio yo no no distinguía
17 de entre de: España Cataluña (.) estaba encantado e: yo llamaba a esto
18 España luego poco a poco cuando me he documentado he visto como era
19 la situación he visto me he enterado que que no es España (.) por suerte (.)
20 eh ahora se están cargando: porque España es muy parecida a Italia
21 mientras que Cataluña e: tiene unas características que yo yo me siento no
22 lo digo por ganar puntos eh
23 E: ((laughs))
24 F: te digo lo que: yo me siento medio catalán a esta altura (.) y: y bueno
25 eh::hemos entrado en otro: en otro=
26 E: =en otro tema
27 F: bueno eh entonces allí empecé a luchar contra la sanidad italiana

English translation

01 F: a ::nd I had to pull myself together [...] my mum was paralised for a year I
02 then began a period o :f (.) that lasted eight or nine months fighting against
03 hospitals the Italian health system which is a disaster compared to here=
04 E: =oh okay
05 F: yes this is paradise I'm telling you (.) now a little l- less because of the
06 budget cuts (.) from Madrid they are destroying everythi ::ng (.) many of
07 the good things that there were here
08 E: uhuh
09 F: I don't know what you think about this I nor[mally about
10 E: [it's excellent excellent
11 F: normally about politics [even though
12 E: [oh !
13 F: even though over time my ideas have matured because
14 E: really ?
15 F: politics has never interested me (.) but I have my own ideas you know (.)
16 and I've matured (2.0) I mean at the beginning I did not distinguish Spain
17 from Catalonia (.) I was delighted erm I called this Spain then little by little I
18 started reading I realized that this is not Spain (.) luckily (.) erm now they
19 are destro :ying because Spain is very similar to Italy whereas Catalonia erm
20 has some characteristics that I I feel I'm not saying this to score points with
21 you
22
23 E: ((laughs))
24 F: I'm telling you I I feel half Catalan already (.) a :nd and okay now we've
25 began a different=
26 =a different topic
27 so then I started to fight the Italian health system

Twenty minutes into the interview and without it being thematically relevant (see my off-topic response in line 10), Fabrizzio brings up the theme of the political conflict between Catalonia and the Spanish state (lines 06-07). He seems eager to let me know about his political affiliations. He discursively sides with the Catalan pro-independence movement by mobilising one of their recurrent political arguments, i.e. the mistreatment of the Catalan population by the Spanish government, carried out, among others, by the “imposed” budget cuts on basic welfare services. He then launches a small story (lines 16-22) to explain the development of his recent political ideas. His story is presented as a narrative of personal awakening resulting from a process of personal and intellectual “maturation” (line 16). Similarly, Woolard (2013) attested metaphors of psychological maturation among Spanish speakers who had refused to speak Catalan in their adolescence but embraced the language in adulthood.

Fabrizzio constructs himself as agentively searching for information and discovering the truth, as encapsulated by his repeated use of verbs of knowledge and perception in lines 18-19: “I documented myself”, “I have seen” and “I have realized”. Finally, his evaluation of the story (line 19) contains a moralized “luckily”, which may ambiguously refer to this having “luckily” realized that Spain and Catalonia were distinct, or to the fact that Catalonia is “luckily” different from Spain. Anyhow, it is important to notice that in the story we only hear Fabrizzio’s voice; other voices (by politicians, academics, media figures, etc.) are erased⁴ despite the ubiquity of the topic in the public debate in Catalonia at the time. Fabrizzio’s narrative takes a further biographical turn when Fabrizzio equates Spain (and all its negative attributes) with Italy (line 20) and identifies himself with Catalonia (as metonymic for the Catalan people). This line of argument is further developed later in interview (not included here for reasons of space) when he depicts Italians as appearance-based, consumerist, and individualist, a lifestyle that he has allegedly always despised. In opposition, he establishes similarities between his own reserved personality and Catalans, stereotypically imagined as private people. So, Italy (and Spain) are construed as a past life that he strives to leave behind; Catalonia stands for his newly-embraced present and, I want to argue, the element that provides a sense of continuity (Linde 1983) to his displaced self.

As we have seen, Fabrizzio’s discourse is constructed on binary categories; it is also highly emotional (his lexical choices are revealing: “paradise”, “delighted” and the

⁴ Although they are implicitly present through e.g. Fabrizzio’s use of Madrid as metonymic for the Spanish government, a recurrent figure of speech employed in the Catalan public debate.

hyperbolic use of “*medio*” (half) in “*medio Catalan*”), and moralized (the Spanish are presented as destroying the welfare state, while the Catalans appear as helpless victims; but there are also those who happily live in the dark, and those, like himself, who are in the know). Fabrizzio’s new political stance serves to self-present in a morally positive light and interactionally align with me (line 22), but also to make sense of himself and of his inexplicable attachment to the city. In fact, the first thing Fabrizzio told me before we actually sat down to discuss his life was that he was in Barcelona for love reasons, love for the city, he clarified. The magical pull of the city was a recurrent theme throughout the interview. The essentialist identity narrative that Fabrizzio mobilizes seems but an attempt to comprehend this (irrational) attachment to Barcelona (despite his precarious job situation and unstable personal life). But what about language? In (2) we see how in the process of progressively affiliating with Catalonia, Fabrizzio feels the urge to learn Catalan, an urge that he had not felt for a few years. In the extract below, he narrates his linguistic transformation by means of, again, two small stories.

(2)

Plain text: Spanish; bold: Catalan

- 01 F : el català (.) digamos que son años que lo comprendo bastante bien=
 02 E : =ya=
 03 F : =a menos que no me habla uno de la Vall d’Aran eh uno=
 04 E : ((laughs))
 05 F : =e- entonces tampoco los catalanes de aquí lo entienden (.) y :: pero
 06 no lo parl- no [no ::=
- 07 E : **[no el parles**
 08 F : =no lo hablo
 09 E : huhuh
 10 F : o muy poco y llegaba un punto que a veces ha- había gente que me
 11 me hablaba en català y yo pidiend- pidiendo disculpas decía (.) que :
 12 (.) también en el trabajo que tenía que contestarle en castellano
 13 porque ()
 14 E : ya ya
 15 F : y : he aprovechado este período libre eh : [me he obligado
 16 E : [>para hablar<
 17 F : = me he apuntado a un curso y yo ahora puedo expresarme en catalán
 18 E : sí ?
 19 F : bastante bien
 20 E : **bastant bé?**
 21 F : BASTANTE BIEN o sea tendría que practicar porque si no eh
 22 E : pero lo utilizas ? o :?
 23 F : sí (.) a veces lo utilizo yo para para practicar también en el trabajo la
 24 gente flipa !
 25 E : ((laughs))
 26 F : sabes? sí porque me mira porque se entera que hablo mal el
 27 castellano y además me me:: me meto también a hablar en català
 28 entonces ya:: menudo! estoy encantado era mi asignatura pendiente=
 29 E : =aha

English translation

- 01 F: Catalan (.) it's been years that I can understand it=
02 E: =I see=
03 F: =unless it's someone from the Vall d'Aran uh someone=
04 E: ((laughs))
05 F: =in that case not even the Catalans from here will be able to
06 understand a:nd but I don't spe- I don't I [don't=
07 E: [you don't speak it
08 F: =I don't speak it
09 E: huhuh
10 F: or very little and I came to a point where sometimes there- there
11 were people who would talk to me in Catalan and I was apoli-
12 apologising I said (.) that (.) even at work I had to answer back in
13 Spanish because ()
14 E: I see
15 F: a:nd I've taken advantage of this free time to: [I've forced myself
16 E: [to speak<
17 F: = I signed up for a course and now I can express myself in Catalan
18 E: really?
19 F: fairly well
20 E: fairly well? ((Catalan))
21 F: FAIRLY WELL I mean I'd have to practice because otherwise uh
22 E: but do you use it? or?
23 F: yes (.) sometimes I use it to to practice also at work people are
24 amazed
25 E: ((laughs))
26 F: you know? Yes because they look at me they see I speak Spanish
27 badly and on top of it I get into speaking catalan so tha::t's!
28 imagine! I am delighted it was on my to-do list=
29 E: =uhu

In the first story (lines 10 to 13), Fabrizio's past self is embodied by a character who is ashamed of not being able to speak Catalan, and who is constantly apologizing (notice the use of the gerund to convey the idea of repetition) for having to answer back in Spanish. We see how in the story world, there are no interlocutors who make him feel bad about not speaking Catalan; his source of shame is internal, though overtly displayed in the narrative. It is this shame that forces him to sign up for a course and learn Catalan. The ashamed Catalan-less character of his past has given way to a character who likes playing with the language and astonishing his interlocutors (as we see in the second story, lines 23-28). Fabrizio's performance manages to transmit a playful atmosphere, both in the story world and in the interactional world. Whereas in the interactional world, Fabrizio's choice of the informal word *flipa* ('be amazed') in the abstract line makes me laugh, in the story telling world, he comes across as someone who speaks languages rather clumsily but unproblematically. As in the first story, there is a complete absence of appreciative reactions on the part of his local interlocutors. His evaluation conveys a sense of personal accomplishment ("on my to-do list"). So, speaking Catalan is presented by

Fabrizio as a personal goal, biographically rather than socially driven. Catalan is key in his identity reconstruction project, where knowing he is able to speak the language (though maybe not actually speaking it) brings him a sense of personal coherence with his new persona (as opposed to his past self). Interestingly, he does seem intent on becoming a regular speaker of Catalan. In fact, during the interview he does not take up my use of Catalan in lines 07 and 20 (not even symbolically) but continues to speak Spanish.

5.2 Patty's story: *"it's a point of contention that I don't want to (learn Catalan)"*

Patty, by contrast, constructs a highly disaffiliative narrative with regard to the Catalan language. She is a British woman in her late 20s. She relocated to Barcelona with some friends in 2008, after having lived in Granada, where she had moved to learn Spanish. A highly mobile individual, previous to living in Spain she lived in an array of different countries in Europe, Africa and Asia. In Barcelona, she worked in the ELT sector.

The first mention of Catalan in Patty's life story is when she introduces his new boyfriend, Jordi, whom in lines 02-03 she describes as "very Catalan". Two elements stand out: Patty's choice of "very" to qualify Jordi's identity and the fast thematisation of Jordi's Catalanness as their central difference, which I take as indexing her degree of personal distress. She goes on to explaining the way in which Jordi constructs his Catalan identity, and that is as downright rejection of anything Spanish (lines 07-08), a position she finds difficult to come to terms with (lines 07-10).

(3)

P: Patty (informant); E: Eva (researcher)

- 01 P: And as I partied less and less () like I'd want to really settle down
02 and then I met Jordi even though we we are very different like he's
03 very Catalan and I'm I respect and I respect that he does not consider
04 himself Spanish and I I love Catalunya and I've lived here longer than
05 I've lived in Spain than I lived in Granada but I like I like what Spain
06 represents the passion and the erm you know the joie the vivre the
07 the vivrancy and all of it I like that and I understand that he does not
08 feel Spanish but what I don't like is the is the the hatred ((softer)) that
09 it generates between people you know "I'm Spanish I hate erm
10 Catalunya, I'm Catalan I hate Espanya" you've got I think they've got
11 to realize they're very similar they can be different but they share a lot
12 of things. Are you Catalan or Spanish?
13 E: I mean I was born in Barcelona of a Catalan family

Patty's discourse is full of strategies of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. She "respects" Jordi's feelings and she "loves" Catalonia, which she backs up by foregrounding her having lived in Catalonia longer than in Spain. Her respectful and inclusive position is opposed to the radical, inflexible and exclusionary positions that she presumably hears in Jordi's social network and beyond (skillfully, she also includes the voices of radical Spanish nationalists who "hate Catalunya" as a token of her non-partisan stance). Patty's discourse is highly emotional, more so than Fabrizio's, as she discusses identity politics in Catalonia in terms of basic, primary feelings, such as hate (lines 08-10), and animates a dialogue between two caricaturized characters who come across as simplistic and even dumb. But it is also emotional because her disagreement over (identity) politics, as it is constructed at this historical moment in the social space she inhabits is basically what separates her from Jordi, her boyfriend ("I think it's probably the biggest problem we have yes", she tells me in another piece).

In extract (4) below, Patty continues to problematize Jordi. In lines 3-4, he is presented as parochial and narrow-minded as result of his geographical fixity and his nationalist feelings (notice the use of stance-conveying "very" again). Then Patty produces two small stories as exempla of the lack of understanding that exists between them. I want to concentrate on the second story (the first one is actually omitted for reasons of space), which she tells me to exemplify the negative reactions that her constructed liberal stance towards Others generates in Jordi. The story extends from line 15 to 35.

(4)

- 01 E: Has he travelled?
02 P: Yes yes he has travelled as well that's another thing erm you know he
03 can be quite small minded in a way because he's from [City] he's been
04 there all his life and he's very feels Catalan and all of this but you
05 know he's travelled he's erm (.) been to a few xxx places not as many
06 as me but he hasn't had the very life I've had and I think he found it
07 hard and continues to like the other day we had an argument ((story
08 omitted))
[...]
09 P: yes I know but a lot of people do that [not go to sleep] in Barcelona
10 that's a life that especially a lot of people who are into the electronic
11 music scene you know
12 E: right
13 P: goes hand in hand with drugs with partying with you know all the stuff
14 I'm not interested in that any more but (.) erm for example a guy in
15 the train I I met I was talking to him and I was on my way to Tarragona
16 to make some music
17 E: right

18 P: and we got talking and he was a really nice guy he was on his way to
 19 meet his girlfriend and he was gonna try and set up a chalet and
 20 because he was a snowboard fanatic
 21 E: uhu
 22 P: and we got talking and I said I'd do music he was very interested so I
 23 gave him my facebook (.) became his friend and then it turned out that
 24 he according to Jordi he was some nazzi because he was a espanyol and
 25 had all those tattoos and it was like all of the pictures of him on
 26 facebook were with the Catalan flag and him putting his finger up in the
 27 air and it did seem true but Jordi flipped out (.) and I said to him and he
 28 was like "how can you just give your facebook to a ()" and I said "a
 29 for the music and b because that's who I am that's what I do like I'm
 30 not scared I'm not a closed person like I've always been that and I'll
 31 always do that" and that's we're just fundamentally different on that
 32 and I think it's not necessarily because I'm British but yes like as you
 33 said I've travelled a lot I've lived in lots of different places I mean I
 34 haven't lived at home since I was nineteen so maybe we're just too
 35 different but we have to work it out.

The story is initially constructed around the opposing images that we get of the guy Patty met on the train, depending on whether it is Patty talking about him in lines 18-20, where he is presented as a "nice guy" in a stable love relationship with professional plans (to set up a chalet) and a life passion (snowboard) or Jordi (see lines 24 to 26), for whom he is a "nazzi" because he is a Spanish nationalist, has his body tattooed (invoking the classic imagery of the Spanish far-right) and is proud to publicly display his aggressive demeanor. In line 27, which contains Patty's evaluation of her story, she concedes that Jordi might be right about that person, and thus presents herself as a tolerant individual, which she immediately after opposes to Jordi's overreaction. Infuriated by Jordi's tell-off (line 28), Patty uses her own reported speech to launch an emotionally-charged justification of her decision to share her facebook page with her new acquaintance (lines 29 to 31). Her initial use of "to him" in line 28, as well as her audible change in pitch at the onset of her response to Jordi (line 29), denote the intensity of her emotions, as discussed by Relaño-Pastor and De Fina (2005). She presents herself as firmly and agentively standing up to Jordi (the list format of her arguments intensify her firmness). She is clearly contesting the power dynamics in their relationship, and interestingly, does so through a strong identity claim "that's who I am". Her response takes a specific incident and their different stance towards her sharing of personal details to illustrate different personalities but also different identities. Patty claims to be trusting and open-minded, which by implication Jordi and everything he stands for is not. In her final evaluation she reinstates her main point (i.e. that they are two different), which she interprets as derived from her more cosmopolitan outlook and independent lifestyle as opposed to Jordi's parochial thinking. In Patty's account, Jordi's personality gets

conflated with his “very” nationalist and exclusionary identity, and the language gets trapped in that. As a result, Patty explicitly refuses to speak Catalan, as we can see in extract 5 (line 8).

(5)

- 01 E: you watch them [films] in English or?
02 P: yes yes he always wants to watch things in original version
03 E: oh really? does he speak English?
04 P: he speaks it yes like not great but like definitely se defiende [he gets by]
05 E: you speak in Spanish between yourselves
06 P: we speak in Spanish between us and unless he reverts into Catalan but-
07 which he often does I should learn I think it's a point of contention that I
08 don't want to
09 E: you can understand it though
10 P: I understand it yes all of my friends have learnt it now all of my girlfriends
11 speak it
12 E: they speak it
13 P: I'm probably the only one

We notice that she presents her decision as individual and individualized (lines 10 and 13), because speaking Catalan for her symbolizes partaking in Jordi's either-or identity politics, which she utterly refuses. Catalan indexes a particular person type, which she does not want to inhabit, but her decision is also embedded in the context of trying to negotiate a love relationship with Jordi which is caring and tolerant, and above all, respects her individuality.

6 Discussion and conclusions

This paper has confronted two pieces of biographical discourse in which narrators position themselves differently with regard to the incorporation of Catalan into their repertoires. I have adopted a focused subject perspective which departs from the everyday experiences of language and the emotional scars they leave on the body to understand informants' structures of feeling and their willingness to invest or not in specific linguistic resources. The study has foregrounded the power of ethnographically-informed first-person data to illuminate the role of individual subjectivity, experience and relationality in shaping stances towards languages, but it has also questioned surface interpretations of identity narratives. As socio-interactive activities themselves, life stories are unfolding and jointly-constructed interpretations of self and social reality. In that process, interviewees may become ethnographers, and the local interviewer may be re-made into a valuable resource for ongoing meaning-making. Biographical storytelling can, thus,

become the discursive space for dialogical reflection, where researcher and informant roles switch over dynamically as the conversation develops. This has important ethical consequences for the practice of ethnography, because it helps to balance out a fairly unidirectional communicative event, where information flows from informant to researcher, but usually not in the opposite sense, and because it generates the sort of reflexive data which is the hallmark of any ethnographic endeavor.

I have shown that by assembling different narrative bits and by analyzing in detail the small stories informants tell to ground their accounts, a complex picture of language (dis)appropriation emerges. While the learning of Spanish seems to be a matter of fact consequence of spatial relocation to Barcelona, and thus, in need of no accounting, the case of Catalan is quite distinct, as tends to be the case with the adoption of non-state, minority languages (O'Rourke and Ramallo 2015). The stories of Fabrizzio and Patty are presented as flipped sides of the same coin. In both cases, Catalan is constructed as the most visible emblem of Catalan national identity imagined in romantic terms. Adopting Catalan (that is, actively speaking it, since basic understanding of Catalan is generalized after some period of residence in Barcelona), is narrated by Fabrizzio and Patty as willingly partaking in binary and essentialist politics of identity. Yet the more deeply the informants' biographical discourse is analyzed the more nuances to this "grand" identity narrative can be observed.

Fabrizzio's radical political positioning, aligned with the pro-independence movement, does not lead him to abandoning Spanish as his regular language of communication. The mere effort to have enrolled in a Catalan course and devoted some time to learning the language seems to suffice for him. He does not want to become an "authentic" speaker of Catalan aspiring to native-like competence, as would logically derive from traditional conceptions of linguistic legitimacy; his rudimentary competence is enough, because what he seeks in the language is the acquisition of the minimal bodily dispositions to ground his self-identification as half Catalan; that is, in Woolard and Frekko's words, "to cultivate coherence" (2013:6). His new linguistic availability is in line with his new political stance, but this, in turn, is not just political but also personal. Feeling Catalan is a way for Fabrizzio to embody a different persona. This new persona defines Fabrizzio's present, which he wants different from his past, but maybe not his future. Fabrizzio's Catalanness is thus contingent to his relocated contemporary subjectivity, and as such, unstable and in flux. Fabrizzio does not seek to belong to the Catalan nation. Alarcón and Garzón's hypothesis (2011) is, in that sense, confirmed. He

does not seek acceptance or integration despite his trying to “score points with me” (lines 22-23 in [1]). His language stories do not feature characters who may appreciate his competence, only characters who have fun with his fluid translanguaging practices and his unproblematically non-accurate Catalan. Fabrizzio seeks to make sense of his recent biographical history, of his emotional well-being in Barcelona and of his affective attachment to the city. His future may not be in Barcelona but in Brazil, as he tells me when the interview is over. If that happens, his identity jigsaw will have to be reconfigured, and his affiliations and self-identifications will be reconstituted. Rather than a way to fix himself in place, speaking Catalan may be, for Fabrizzio, a resource to construct a mobile and cosmopolitan self, as Woolard and Frekko (2013) discuss. Fabrizzio’s cosmopolitanism is not defined as accumulation of capitals which grant elite distinction, but as his on-the-ground embracing of different forms of linguistic diversity, his making fun of native ideals and his subversion of rules of linguistic purity. His valuing of playfulness and artifice may challenge old language ideological frameworks of authenticity and anonymity. However, all these meanings are not easily available from Fabrizzio’s “grand” identity discourse which pits two nationalist frameworks for understanding language and identity against each other, but have to be pieced together by looking beyond and below the dichotomic rhetoric that he mobilizes.

Patty’s discourse is similarly constructed, but, in that case, to legitimize her rejection of Catalan. Nevertheless, there is more experiential material than meets the eye. Catalan epitomizes difference in Patty and Jordi’s relationship, but also inequality. We see how Patty mobilizes notions of scale as a discursive resource (Woolard and Frekko 2013) to challenge Jordi’s power dynamics. Patty positions herself as the travelled cosmopolitan whose broader worldviews make her more acceptant of alternative lifestyles and ways of thinking, while construing Jordi as enclosed, ideologically (though not physically) immobile and rooted in place. It is the emotional charge of her moralized discourse that gives us a hint of what is at stake, i.e. the challenging of their domestic social order. Catalan is Patty’s resistance weapon, both toward Jordi and toward herself; it is the proof that she has not yet given in, that she has not yet been assimilated to Jordi’s world.

Both biographical stories demonstrate that a fine-grained analysis of small storied narrative is needed to unveil how a new language fits (or does not fit) into the logics of informants’ lives, and what it does or does not do for them. National identity rhetoric is a discursive strategy to partly make sense and partly rationalize what is a complex bundle

of identity (re)constitution reasons, emotional stances and interpersonal power dynamics. Understanding the logics of informants' lives entails comprehending their desire for personal coherence and positive self-presentation, as well as their affective and relational histories. Presences or absences in their repertoires are not simple choices with fixed meaning, but evolving processes of personal positioning; they are embodied struggles (hence their moral and emotional character). It is the emotional import of language stances that occasions the emergence of personal stories of individualization which transpire feelings of self-satisfaction and accomplishment or bitterness, frustration and even anger.

To sum up, the data analyzed here compels us to reflect on, challenge and complexify swift conceptualisations of “the local” and “the global”, and to understand the life contingent value of minority language resources for transient populations (among which the mobile lifestylers presented here). This data encourages us to continue analyzing small stories as the discursive sites animated by characters that embody ambivalence and contradiction. It also calls us to inquire further into notions of value and scale and their relationship to lifestyle options and identity in late modernity.

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