Chapter 5

Language education for adult migrants in Catalonia

Nation-state ambitions without nation-state resources

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Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to assess Catalan language education policy for foreign adult migrants in the autonomous region of Catalonia, with an eye on the language ideology that underpins it. Right at the outset, the uniqueness of the Catalan case must be stressed. Catalonia is not a sovereign state, but rather a 'minority nation' (Zapata 2006) or a 'substate minority' (Aubarell et al. 2004). As such, it regained political autonomy in the 1980s and is now a setting in which 'language is at stake in identity politics of an ethnolinguistic conflict' (Pujolar 2010; Mamadouh et al. 2011), to the extent that the status of Catalan is one of the main threads in the rationale behind the present secessionist challenge to Spain. But unlike other minority nations like Quebec, Catalonia does *not* have powers in migration matters and Catalan is not the dominant language of Catalonia. (See Bouffard, this volume, for a discussion of language policy in Quebec.) These two circumstances do not prevent Catalonia from having a *de facto* immigration policy propelled by a nation-state language ideology which endeavours to promote Catalan as *the* common language of Catalonia through a 'monolingual, consecutive, and literacy-based language provision' (Garrido and Oliva, this volume). This chapter tries to map the wide distance between this grandiose policy and the poor results it has yielded so far.

Linguistic background

In surveys about Catalan, a triple distinction is made between *initial language* (the language one acquired first at home), *language of identification* (the language one considers his or her own) and *language of habitual use*. Although Catalan statisticians have not explicitly relied on this stance, this three-way distinction is reminiscent of Rampton's (1990) alternatives for the concept of native speaker: 'language inheritance' nears 'initial language' and 'language affiliation' is close to 'language identification'.

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(Catalan surveys do measure 'language expertise' but we leave this dimension aside for now.) The latest available survey (Government of Catalonia 2013) shows that Catalan is not the majority language in any of these categories. In terms of language of identification, Catalan gets its highest score. Catalan was the language of identification of 36.4 per cent of the interviewees (47.6 per cent mentioned Spanish, 7 per cent mentioned both and 8.6 per cent other languages, starting with Arabic).

The renewed pre-eminence of Spanish and the percentage of people who identify themselves neither with Spanish nor with Catalan provide a glimpse of the sociolinguistic impact of foreign immigrants, who pose a new challenge for the linguistic equilibrium of Catalonia, as was the case with internal Spanish (and Spanish-speaking) immigration in the second half of the twentieth century. From 2000 to 2010 the foreign population in Catalonia multiplied by more than 6. The 181,590 foreign residents in 2000 (3 per cent of the population in round figures) became 1,198,538 in 2010 (almost 16 per cent).

As Mamadouh et al. (2011: 78) put it, 'from the point of view of the parties involved in a language conflict, immigrants can be seen as possible recruits for the language group. Will they choose the dominant or the minority language?' There is ample evidence that foreigners tend to choose the dominant (i.e. Spanish) language. In a 2006 survey focused on people of Moroccan, Ecuadorian, Romanian and Chinese origin, the following conclusion was reached:

> The predominant language in the family and with friends is that of the country of origin, although Spanish is also widely used with acquaintances. At work, the prevalence of Spanish is overwhelming, especially when compared to Catalan. The use of Catalan is very scant and few immigrants understand it.
>
> (Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya 2006)

A later survey in 2010 gave similar results:

> Spanish is the main language of respondents in all areas, although most keep their language of origin, especially at home. The presence of Catalan in daily life is minimal.
>
> (GESOP 2010)

This minimal presence of Catalan in daily life is not always due to the lack of Catalan-speakers in the networks of respondents, but also to a deep-seated social norm according to which Spanish, not Catalan, is the language to be used with foreigners (even if they happen not to know it). This is part of the *status quo* that Catalan immigration policy is intended to challenge.

Catalonia does not have real powers ...

Immigration is an arena of political tension between Catalonia and Spain. According to section 149 of the 1978 Spanish Constitution, the State shall have 'exclusive competence' over 'nationality, immigration, emigration, status of aliens, and right of asylum'. Accordingly, the 1979 Catalan Statute of Autonomy (the equivalent of a regional constitution) did not mention immigration among the powers of the Catalan autonomous government. In the first years of the twenty-first century, Catalan political parties, seeking greater regional self-government and national recognition, promoted a new Statute of Autonomy, which was finally passed by the Spanish Parliament and approved in a Catalan-wide referendum in 2006. Section 138 of this new Statute granted the Catalan government:

> *a)* exclusive power regarding the initial reception of immigrants, which includes health care, social services and guidance [i.e. educational] activities, *b)* development of the integration policy for immigrants in the framework of its powers, *c)* establishment and regulation of the measures necessary for social and economic integration of immigrants and for their social participation, *d)* establishment by law of a referential framework for the reception and integration of immigrants.

The conservative Partido Popular (People's Party) challenged the new Statute of Autonomy before the Spanish Constitutional Court. After a protracted discussion, key provisions of the new Statute were overturned in a controversial ruling issued in 2010 (STC 31/2010). The present upsurge of secessionism in opinion polls (44.5 per cent would vote for independence according to the latest poll released in December 2014 (Government of Catalonia 2014)) can be seen as a reaction. It stands in direct relationship to this ruling, which was contested by more than 1 million people who took to the streets of Barcelona on 10 July 2010. As for immigration, the ruling stated that section 138 has to be interpreted to mean that 'immigration' refers not to the corresponding state power but rather to other aspects of the management of immigration, over which the Catalan government does have powers, like health and social care.

Political tensions surrounding immigration matters did not end here. Following section 138.1.d) of the Statute, the Catalan Parliament passed Act 10/2010, on the reception of immigrants and returnees to Catalonia (see below). In an unprecedented move, the Spanish Ombudsman challenged this act before the Constitutional Court. Act 10/2010 runs a very high risk of being overturned given the leaning of the Court, which would only hinder Catalan plans on immigration and fuel political conflict between Catalonia and Spain.

... but it does have a *de facto* immigration policy

Despite these political shortcomings, Catalonia has had an immigration policy since the early 1990s. In 1993 there were 76,244 foreign residents who made up a scant 1 per cent of the population. Small as this figure might appear, it was big enough for the Catalan government (headed by Convergència i Unió, a right wing nationalist coalition) to launch its first Interdepartmental Plan for Immigration. This Plan aimed at promoting 'a global policy of integration of foreign immigrants who live in Catalonia', where 'integration' was implicitly understood to be a one-way, top-down process through which the administration moulds foreigners according to local norms. Among the stated goals of the Plan, no explicit mention of the Catalan language was made. In 2001, the Catalan government launched its second Interdepartmental Plan. Despite a reference to Catalan language and culture in the presentation of the Plan (immigrants were supposed to assume the importance of it), the Catalan language was not yet among its stated goals, the first of which was again 'to promote a global policy of integration of foreign immigrants who have settled in Catalonia'.

As far as language is concerned, the turning point came in 2005, with the first immigration plan of a new left-wing and nationalist party coalition in government. Among the challenges of this new plan was 'to turn Catalan into the vehicular language of immigrants'. This turning point coincided in time with a shift in the language ideologies underpinning the overall Catalan language policy. In terms of Woolard's celebrated distinction (2008), an ideology of *authenticity* gave way to an ideology of *anonymity*: the goal was to move from a conception that locates the value of a language in its relationship to an historically specific social group to the supposedly neutral hegemonic language associated with the public sphere of nineteenth and twentieth century nation-states. According to this framework, Catalan was supposed to become the common language of Catalonia, as French is the common public language of France and so on. Woolard (2008) incidentally welcomed a move away from both authenticity and anonymity to an approach better suited to a post-modern Catalonia with hybrid, fluid identities and languages. According to Branchadell (2010) a closer look at actual public discourses about language does not sustain the notion that this move has occurred.

This treatment of Catalan as a common language was inspired by Quebec sources (see Bastardas 2002 for an explicit effort to draw lessons from Quebec practices). For the first time, then, the Catalan language acquired a paramount role in an immigration plan. In the process of turning immigrants into citizens (the key idea of this plan), the mastery of Catalan was a necessary condition. The term *linguistic welcome* (*acollida lingüística*) was coined to devise a new approach to the teaching of the

Catalan language to foreigners, and linguistic welcome was included in a comprehensive welcome program. For 2005, seven pilot plans of linguistic welcome were implemented. The next year there were 22 such plans in place, one for each branch of the Consortium for Language Normalisation. (The Consortium is a joint venture between the Catalan government and a number of local authorities. Its major aim is to deliver Catalan language courses for non-Catalan speaking adults, now mostly migrants.)

One of the products of this Plan was the National Agreement for Immigration, which was formally signed on 19 December 2008. One of its three axes was 'integration into a common public culture that encourages participation in public life, the use of Catalan as a common language, coexistence in a context of multiple beliefs and religions, gender equality and the strengthening of social policies'. This principle of Catalan as Catalonia's common language was taken from the National Agreement and incorporated into the fourth immigration plan, the Citizen and Immigration Plan. This fourth immigration plan was launched in 2009 by the same left-wing and nationalist party coalition and was maintained by the right-wing nationalist coalition of Convergència i Unió after it won the 2010 Catalan regional election. In April 2014 the fifth plan (*Citizenship and Migration Plan: Horizon 2016*) was adopted by the Catalan government.

On the legislative side, the most important legacy of the National Agreement for Immigration was Act 10/2010 on the reception of immigrants and returnees to Catalonia, which was passed by the Catalan Parliament in 2010. According to section 7 (the official English translation is quoted here), 'the right of access to the first reception service begins in Catalonia from when the person is included on the population register'. Section 8 states that the first reception service includes 'training activities' whose minimum contents are 'basic language skills', 'labour knowledge' and 'knowledge about Catalan society and its legal framework'. As for basic language skills, section 9 states that 'over the course of the process of integration into Catalan society' both Catalan and Spanish are to be learned, with Catalan offered first and Spanish provided 'to those people who have attained basic skills in Catalan and request or require it'. Specifically regarding Catalan, section 9 read as follows:

2 The first reception service shall provide the training and resources needed to acquire basic skills in Catalan to people holding the right of access to first reception services and who do not speak the language, wherever possible through the Consortium for Language Normalisation.
3 The minimum baseline to be achieved in terms of the language skills referred to in the Common European Framework of

Reference for Languages established by the Council of Europe shall be set by regulation.

4 Catalan, as Catalonia's own language, is the common language for implementing reception and integration policies. It also is the language of training and information, a basic instrument for full integration in the country. To that end, the language learning offered by first reception services shall begin with the acquisition of basic skills in Catalan.

As I mentioned above, this Act awaits a ruling of the Spanish Constitutional Court. Beyond this new political clash between Spanish and Catalan authorities, section 9 does raise a number of questions: what are the 'training and resources needed'? When is language training 'completed'? Shall training begin *and* end with 'basic skills'? What about foreigners who are not at the 'first reception' stage anymore? In the next section I specifically address the controversial issue of what is the 'minimum baseline to be achieved in terms of language skills'.

Linguistic requirements for immigrants: the hope

In a survey carried out in 2010 by the Council of Europe (Extramiana and van Avermaet 2011), Spain came out as one of eight member states which make language knowledge a requirement neither for (a) admission to the country, (b) permanent residence, nor (c) acquisition of citizenship. Of the 31 states which replied, 23 'were concerned by at least one of the administrative situations identified' – among them all big EU member states, namely France, Germany, Italy and the UK.

In this context, it is no wonder that in the (Spanish or Catalan) juridical literature, little work has been done on the issue of linguistic requirements for migrants. In a pioneering work, Milian (2008) noticed that most works on immigration do not deal with its linguistic dimension. That is why he set out to design a proposal on language requirements for foreigners who settle in Catalonia. According to him, a linguistic demand that is both 'reasonable' and 'legally permissible' would be to establish a requirement to take Catalan language courses from the moment that a foreigner registers in the *padrón* (a municipal register) of the municipality where he or she dwells. It must be borne in mind that all foreign residents (whether they remain legally in Spain or not) are supposed to register in the *padrón*, which gives them right to certain benefits like schooling, medical assistance and social services.

Although not a linguist, Milian went as far as to suggest a number of hours (135) for these Catalan language courses. In the proposed scenario, Milian suggested a deadline of two years (from the inscription in the *padrón*) to complete the courses and be awarded a certificate. However,

non-compliance could not be a reason to refuse the renewal of the inscription; the right of every newcomer cannot be curtailed for linguistic reasons. This circumstance notwithstanding, Milian was of the opinion that non-compliance should lead to 'some punitive measure'. One possibility would be to have the offender pay the real cost of the unattended courses (otherwise there are no tuition fees). A major penalty would lie in the connection of the Catalan courses to a benefit like the issuing of a residence permit (see below).

To what extent did Milian's insights inform public policy? In an interview held shortly after the Act was passed, Oriol Amorós, Immigration Secretary at the time, spoke coincidentally of 135 hours for Catalan language courses, but the 'regulation' to implement it was not passed. Since 2011, his successor, Xavier Bosch (later Director-General for Immigration) has promised a number of times that the regulation is about to be passed. On 6 March 2012 he went so far as to give the number of hours necessary to get a certificate of 'first reception' (90 hours in the case of Catalan).

Why has no regulation been passed? There seem to be both financial and political reasons. At the time of writing Catalonia was amidst a wave of huge budgetary cuts that made the provision of any extra funding to implement the Act unlikely. On the political front, it must be recalled that the Act is overseen by the Constitutional Court and the language provisions that the unpassed regulation is supposed to implement could be declared unconstitutional overnight. But a certain lack of interest on the part of the Catalan government should not go unnoticed. Significantly enough, no mention was made of the Act 10/2010 in the 150-page long manifesto of the ruling party (Convergència i Unió) for the 2012 election. And again there was no mention of the regulation in the agreement of stability signed by CiU and Esquerra Republicana (Republican Left) for the 2012–2016 tenure.

Linguistic requirements for immigrants: the reality

Despite this procrastination on the normative side, things moved on the practical front. In April 2011 the *Spanish* government passed a royal decree (557/2011) that set a new regulation to implement Act 4/2000 relating to the rights and duties of newcomers. This decree gave new prerogatives to autonomous communities in the administrative procedures concerning foreigners. Thanks to this regulation, from July 2011 the Catalan government has been in charge of issuing *informes d'estrangeria* (reports for foreign citizens) to accredit, among other things, the degree of integration required to obtain a temporary residence permit (*informe d'arrelament social*, social settlement) and the integration effort necessary to renew the temporary residence permit

(*informe d'integració social*). Up to May 2013 the Catalan government issued 55,190 reports of various types. Of these 30,105 were of *arrelament* (settlement) and 1,015 of *integració* (to renew a temporary residence permit).

This new Spanish regulation opened a window for the verification of *Catalan* language skills within these administrative procedures. To demonstrate social settlement, the report is mandatory for applicants without family ties to other foreigners who are already permanent residents. In the renewal of a residence permit the integration effort of the applicant can be assessed by means of another kind of report. In both cases (reports of *arrelament social* and of *integració social*), there is a section in the form that applicants have to complete under the heading of 'language skills', in which they have to indicate the course(s) they have taken and the number of hours of each course.

The new Spanish regulation also forced the Catalan government to make decisions about 'the minimum amount of knowledge' to be certified. So the Catalan government established that 20 hours was the minimal length of a Catalan course for foreigners to get a positive report of *arrelament social* or of *integració social*. This 20 hour minimum was later raised to 45 when authorities realised that most migrants quit courses after the twentieth hour. No research has been done about this lack of persistence, which might be linked to the mismatch between the linguistic complexity of the situation on the ground for migrants and the anonymity ideology that underpins language provision and its monolingual slant.

The role of the Consortium for Language Normalisation

Be it 20 or 45 hours, somebody has to provide Catalan language courses for adult migrants. In Catalonia there are several public bodies that provide Catalan classes to adults – migrants or not. These are the official language schools, the Centres for Adult Training, and the Consortium for Language Normalisation (*Consorci per a la Normalització Lingüística*). Private actors are also involved in this, albeit to a much lesser extent. (For an example see Garrido and Oliva, this volume.) The main public provider of Catalan language courses for adult migrants in Catalonia is the Consortium for Language Normalisation: 130,000 students in 2009, compared to 10,000 in the Centres of Adult Training.

As for migrants, the Consortium made a very modest start (see Puig 2000; Branchadell 2004; Rovira 2004 and Van den Bogaert 2005 for early critiques focused on lack of means; and Miquel 2005 for a specific complaint about poor teacher training). Things improved over the years but, all in all, the Consortium is a perfect illustration of what Woehrling noticed already in his pioneering paper (2008: 52): 'there is often a lack of congruence between the linguistic obligations placed on immigrants

and the financial resources states are prepared to dedicate to the learning facilities available to immigrants'.

In the first years of the Consortium, adult migrants were not its main target at all. Between 1994 and 2000 just 36 specific courses for foreign migrants were organised. Non-EU citizens had scant representation in the general Catalan courses: in 1997–1998 only 1,637 students (or 3.3 per cent) were of that origin. But two years later the number had climbed to 3,046 (7.22 per cent). The arrival of large numbers of new immigrants refocused the Consortium's priorities. And the shift in language ideologies that I identified above meant the allocation of more resources (Pujolar 2010). In parallel to the linguistic welcome plans, a program of Language Volunteering was started. In this program every language pair (learner and volunteer) is supposed to share a minimum of 10 hours of conversation. In an initial assessment Solé et al. (2005) acknowledged that 10 hours 'is clearly not time enough to be able to acquire a basic working knowledge', and recommended increasing the minimum number of hours to 20. This recommendation was not taken up: at the time of writing 10 hours, 1 per week, was still the expected commitment for volunteers. The number of language pairs multiplied by 6 in the first years of the scheme, from 1,522 in 2003 to 9,437 in 2008.

In the case of language courses, no evaluation is yet available. The usual indicator of the Consortium's activities is the sheer number of courses offered and the number of enrolments. The golden years started in 2006, when the record of 3,000 courses was broken. The number skyrocketed to almost 5,000 in 2009. In 2006 the number of registered students neared 80,000 and the peak came also in 2009 with more than 130,000 registrations. If we count only initial and basic levels, where around 90 per cent of students are foreigners, between 2002 and 2006 the number of courses more than doubled, from 793 to 1,874, and the number of students almost multiplied by three, from 15,074 to 42,177. Even so the numbers are still modest. A contemporary survey (2006) showed the limited impact of courses: between 85 and 90 per cent of all interviewees had *not* received a single course. Moreover, this surge in enrolments was not accompanied by a corresponding growth in professional development activities. No specific courses for teachers of new immigrants have been systematically organised. A full master's degree to train teachers in the field of 'linguistic welcome' was not launched until 2010 by the Autonomous University of Barcelona and the Consortium – at a time when due to financial hardship the Consortium had virtually stopped recruiting new teachers.

In recent years, both the number of courses and the number of enrolled students have started to decline: from 4,725 courses in 2008 to 4,304 in 2011, and from 73,194 students to 64,389. According to the Consortium's report for 2011, 'there is not a problem of lack of supply, but decline in

demand', although it also acknowledged that in some municipalities supply did decline 'due to present financial hardship'. As a matter of fact, the Consortium experienced a budgetary cut of €6m between 2010 and 2011. Why numbers of enrolled students declined precisely after the passing of the Act that was supposed to create incentives for learning Catalan is an intriguing question that remains open for future research, not least because free tuition is not the problem.

But we should go beyond sheer numbers and try to assess the success of courses. As for attrition, the data are telling. In 2011 more than a third of all students in the initial and basic levels did not finish the course in which they had enrolled. The Consortium's report for 2011 admitted that 'one of the challenges for the Consortium is to reduce attrition at the basic levels', but no specific course of action has been taken so far. Consortium managers tend to put the blame on learners, but quality of teaching is also an issue here. As for attainment, the report for 2011 calls it 'very satisfactory': more than 80 per cent of students who took an exam passed it. But if we compare the number of enrolled students with the number of students who passed, this optimistic balance must be nuanced: fewer than half of the enrolled students (17,706) actually passed. This is a drop in the ocean. As Milian (2007) put it, the remarkable increase in the number of courses in the 2000s was not enough: 'in 2005 157,375 foreigners registered in Catalonia, far behind the 3,440 basic level certificates that […] were awarded. In short: a dismal failure'.

Conclusion

Catalonia is an autonomous region in Spain that has developed an immigration policy of its own despite the political impediments that derive from the division of powers between national authorities and regional ones. Within this policy, in which integration has always been the keyword, language made a poor start but acquired great prominence after Catalan political elites adhered to the ideology of anonymity and duplicated the Quebec principle that Catalan was to become the common language of Catalonia, the language in which all residents, regardless of origin, should communicate among themselves. This is a great ambition compared to the poor resources devoted to it and the poor results in terms of real language proficiency. If Catalonia has been depicted as a success story in reversing language shift, it is not also a success story in turning adult migrants into all-purpose Catalan users. The problem lies not only in the relatively small number of courses and the often discouraging quality of teaching, but also in the larger approach to language education for adult migrants. First, there is a deep-seated idea that 'basic skills are enough'. As García (2011: 10) remarked:

> if threshold [read B1] is the minimal level to be able to communicate in Catalan in any everyday situation and this is achieved through the elementary level, why do linguistic welcome plans always have the goal that immigrants only need to reach the basic level [read A2]?

Secondly, the belief is also held that Catalan language skills can be solely acquired in the classroom with a 'monolingual, consecutive and literacy-based language provision', which probably does not fulfil most of the migrants' actual needs (Garrido and Oliva, this volume). Independence would free Catalonia from Spanish law and give her full powers in immigration matters, but it is not clear whether it would also free her from such questionable beliefs. As Rovira (2004: 55) put it, 'not everything can be attributed to the lack of state powers'.

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