

**“Because I’ve grown up with it, because I love it, because I support independence”:
Language Choice and Identity in the Catalan Countries**

Marguerite Morlan

University of California, Berkeley and Fulbright Fellow, Universitat Pompeu Fabra
marguerite_morlan@berkeley.edu

The present study analyzes the extent to which cultural pride influences language choice among bilingual residents living in the Catalan Countries. Of 55 Catalan-Castilian bilinguals who filled out a sociolinguistic survey, 44 were born in Catalonia, seven in the Valencian Community, two in the Balearic Islands, one in Andorra and one in Perú. Demographic data reveal a participant age range of 18-64 and notable variation in education levels and professions.

The second section showed that, in comparison to other topics, most participants (35%) feel comfortable writing about work in their less preferred language. Next, participants discussed linguistic behavior when conversing with strangers. While 91% of participants would respond to a stranger in Catalan if addressed in Catalan, only 78% would definitely respond in Castilian if addressed in Castilian. Participants were also asked whether they would change languages if they started a conversation and realized that their interlocutor had difficulty understanding them. Again, the data show greater support for accommodating speakers who prefer Catalan. Only 71% of participants would switch to Castilian if they realized their interlocutor struggled with Catalan, but 87% of participants would switch to Catalan if they gleaned it was their interlocutor’s preferred language.

Finally, participants ranked how heavily eight factors influence their language choice between Catalan and Castilian. L1 Catalan speakers rank cultural pride third, behind their own comfort level with a language (first) and that of their interlocutor (second). Their L1 Castilian counterparts rank cultural pride fifth, and prioritize the linguistic comfort of their interlocutor (first) above their own (second). Everyone ranks the desire to be perceived as wealthier as least important.

The fact that L1 Catalan speakers rank their own linguistic comfort first while L1 Castilian speakers prioritize their interlocutor’s preference indicates that, contrary to prior research (Webber & Strubell i Trueta, 1991; Boix, 1993; Miley, 2002; Frekko, 2011), L1 Catalan speakers adhere less to ethnolinguistic accommodation. However, these results are in line with the EULC (2003). This, in combination with the higher cultural pride ranking from L1 Catalan speakers, suggests that if speakers’ cultural identities have a strong linguistic component, they may value using their native language over gaining interlocutor approval.

While data suggest a sentimental linguistic charge among L1 Catalan speakers, the correlation between political support for Catalan independence and daily Catalan usage is relatively weak at 0.24, evincing that even those who support independence use Castilian out of necessity.

References

- Boix Fuster, E. (1993). *Triar no és trair: identitat i llengua en els joves de Barcelona*. Barcelona: Edicions 62.
- Frekko, S. (2011). Containing Castilian in Catalan Talk Radio: Heteroglossia and the Projection of Monoglot Identities. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 84(1), 65-86.
- Miley, T.J. (2002). The Discourse of Language and Nation in Catalonia. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 46, 46-78.
- Torrijos, A. (2008). Sociolinguistic Characterisation of Young People in Catalonia. *Noves SL Revista de Sociolingüística*, 9(1).
- Webber, J., & Strubell i Trueta, M. (1991). *The Catalan Language: Progress Towards Normalisation*. Sheffield: Anglo-Catalan Society.