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“It Depends Who I Marry”: Linguistic Recruitment and Defection in Barcelona
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"IT DEPENDS WHO I MARRY":
LINGUISTIC RECRUITMENT AND DEFECTION
IN BARCELONA¹

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Linguistic recruitment remains a "poor cousin" of Catalan language planning. While recruiting Spanish speakers into the Catalan-speaking camp is vital for Catalan's future, discovering why, when, and how *reclutats* became habitual Catalan speakers remains nebulous.² Recruitment techniques cannot be discovered through most large-scale linguistic or population surveys. Finding out the person, situation, or organization that recruited the *castellanoparlante* involves asking personal questions. Joining, or refusing to join, the other ethnolinguistic group, sometimes constitutes a difficult, even traumatic experience. The birth family, childhood friends, a Castilian-language primary and secondary education (to name a few factors), and a difficult transition to Catalan life makes some recruitments painful. For others, the switch was not difficult, just very personal: It involved boyfriends, girlfriends, or social groups one attempted to join.

In the interest of brevity, we do not attempt to define ethnolinguistic terms like *Castilian* and *Catalan*, nor to mention the large body of research that demonstrates the urgency of encouraging Spanish speakers to join the Catalan-dominant group. Indeed, much demographic data shows that birthrates among Spanish-speaking immigrants are at least twice as high as non-migrating birthrates (Sarribe 1987, Strubell 1990). Therefore, even 100% Catalan maintenance (with no *linguistic defection*) among current native speakers would lead to a steady decline of Catalan use in the *Principat*. While statistics showing Catalan to be strong and progressing abound

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² Among others, Boix (1993) and Vila (1993) have written about how Castilian speakers can be "linguistically integrated." Even Québec and Canada, which maintain excellent data on "mixed" marriages, language use at home, and on their peoples' demographics, don't give linguistic recruitment *per se* the attention it deserves. Immigration Department information (e.g. Veltman and Paré 1993, Gouvernement du Québec 1990) does emphasize integrating the foreigner into a society of which "French is the common language of public life" (Ministère 1990: 15). In O'Donnell (1990), I discuss three levels of recruitment (or integration) in Catalonia.

(number of "speakers" rising from 64.2% in 1986 to 68.3% in 1991, IDC 1992), the data on actual Catalan use remain less encouraging.³

Nevertheless, linguistic recruitment takes place in every locality where there is prolonged contact between the two groups. In the present study, I examine 1) the *four motivating factors* I found in almost all cases of recruitment, 2) *individual cases* of recruitment that show how delicate the personal and linguistic balance remains for many residents of Catalonia, and 3) *the most productive ages, situations, and organizations* for recruitment to take place. Our working definition of recruitment is as follows: Bringing a Castilian speaker into the Catalan-speaking world, partially or completely. "Total recruits" choose to use Catalan at home, at work, and in their social lives. "Partial recruits" use Catalan in a major sphere of their lives (for example, at work), but have other spheres in which Castilian dominates. These categories ("partial" and "total") do not represent airtight compartments. We can also speak of "failed recruitments" and "re-Castilianization" (Catalan recruits who "repent" and return to Castilian). Nevertheless, the lengthy interviews usually manage to ascertain the "degree of recruitment" of our informants.

The 1993 Barcelona Survey. The Barcelona-1993 survey included 25 "mixed" informants (children of linguistically "mixed" marriages), and 21 "recruited" informants. The "mixed" informants were often linguistic recruits, (many grew up speaking Castilian, and had to make a major language switch at one moment in their lives). The Barcelona-93 informants in these two groups were drawn from all but one of Barcelona's districts. Despite great differences in *reclutats'* personalities and temperaments, numerous common factors appeared in the recruitments studied.

Motivating Factors for Recruitment. Four important influences observed in this study (and in my previous studies) are 1) *preference/prejudice*, 2) *pressure*, 3) *prestige*, and 4) *sentimental/romantic factors*.

Preference remains a double-edged sword for linguistic recruitment. If Castilian speakers feel that their language, or variety, is less desirable than Catalan, they may switch languages as a "means of social advance" (Weinreich 1964: 78). Still, Fishman (1965: 68) demonstrated that what might be a low-prestige language (or variety) in one circumstance, becomes a symbol of "group membership" in another. Ana (all names of interviewees are pseudonyms) had friends who refused to speak to

³ Among others, Boix (1993: 126) shows Catalan to be, in practice, a minority language in the Barcelona area. 60.8% of the population has Spanish as its first language. Greater Barcelona represents 50.1% of Catalonia's population, as of the 1985 census (Boix 1993: 125).

her in her native Castilian. There were also professional advantages in her knowing Catalan. This helped convince her to convert to a Catalan-dominant social and college life. At the same time, Puri stopped using Catalan for 10 years, due to the discrimination she apparently experienced after graduation from a Spanish-language university. If Catalan is the preferred language in a social or professional group, potential recruits are more likely to learn it. Jordi claimed, for example, that he started learning Catalan because certain women would not go out with a Castilian monolingual. However, if "preference" is perceived as "prejudice," or "discrimination," Catalan recruitment suffers (see the "José Cruces case," below).

Social or employment *pressures* have been a major cause of language transition towards Catalan. In numerous businesses, conversing in Catalan is a basic job skill. Socially, "becoming Catalan" gave access to new social networks. Two male informants admitted that some women would not go out with them, or dance with them, if they only spoke Castilian. A combination of social factors—including his interest in Catalan-speaking women—and political factors (Franco's death in 1975), encouraged Jordi to learn Catalan at age 16. Between the ages of 14 and 15, Marc made his change from the "Spanish" social world to the Catalan-speaking side. These were, he explained, two social groups in school. He chose the Catalan group, and "my girlfriend taught me Catalan." While "friends" were the single most common reason for switching to Catalan (10 out of 27 recruits, or "mixed" informants reporting language shifts), the actual number may actually be higher. Behind a comment like "I switched when I changed schools" (six out of 27 gave "a new school" as the reason), many may have adopted Catalan out of social, not academic, pressure. Furthermore, a related subcategory might be "love interest." One young woman I interviewed in an airport claimed she switched to Catalan "because of (her) boyfriends." This sentimental factor is discussed at some length below.

Prestige and *loyalty* were other silent partners in the recruitment survey. Only four informants specifically referred to the high or low status of a given language. Still, Catalan's traditional high position⁴ in

⁴ Both Strubell (1990) and Boix (1995) describe Catalan's "middle position" in Catalonia's language triangle. As Boix (1995: 12-13) states, "On one hand you have the higher social position of *catalanoparlantes* ... on the other hand, for some sections of the upper and upper-middle class, Catalan is lower in prestige, useful ... but not necessary" (translation mine). I have some evidence that upper-class resistance to Catalan use has diminished. From concert halls to yacht clubs, Catalan has actually gained popularity (at least according to my informants). Further study is needed to prove, or disprove, this hypothesis.

the linguistic dichotomy help it gain adherents. José Cruces switched to Catalan in his teens, believing this language to be "a way of getting access to society." Jaime switched at age 21, in order to attain "self-esteem" and "social progress." Still, for 59-year old Albert, Castilian was once considered more "fine" and "elegant." Even now, he mentions, it is the official language of Barcelona's *Real Polo Club*, where "people with money" congregate. As the balance of prestige has shifted somewhat over the years (from Castilian to Catalan), learning Catalan has become increasingly socially desirable. Nevertheless, *loyalty* to one's own language remained strong.

Sentimental and romantic factors affect numerous recruitments. These emotional considerations may seem beyond the control of any language planning agency. How can a government office oversee the love interests of its citizens? Nevertheless, when we combine the demographic information regarding recruits with data about *where* recruitment took place, a clear picture of "fertile" ages and institutions emerges. Nine informants listed love interest (or its equivalent) as their main reason, or one of two main reasons, for switching. Martí, age 34, learned Catalan in secondary schools, and began to use Catalan regularly at that time. By the time he began seeing a Catalan-speaking woman at age 20, he had a new social network whose habitual language was Catalan. Married to a Catalan speaker, Martí now lives his life in his adopted language. María Elena, 49, made a double switch. At age 25, she met her future husband, and adopted Catalan as the language of their relationship. Furthermore, she managed to make the change with her younger sister. Many recruits find that they must continue to speak their native languages with close family members and friends, even if everyone involved knows Catalan. Joan, a 41-year old school teacher, frankly admitted that he did not start speaking Catalan until he "was going out with a Catalan girl." Pradi married Jaume, a Catalan-speaker, but didn't make the change at home until her son was born. Pradi, like many others, found that they could speak the adopted languages much more easily with the baby than with the Catalan-speaking spouse. Finally, while Marc, 24, seems as devoted to his Catalan identity as to his fiancée, one wonders if a break-up with the latter might not cause a crisis in the former. We shall examine failed recruitment and "re-Castilianization" in the next section.

Individual Cases: José Cruces and the Others. The present study tends to concentrate on those who managed, at least partially, to enter Catalan-speaking society. An interesting group of individuals are those who should have been recruited, but were not, and those recruits who later returned to the Castilian-speaking world. María Sánchez represents one extreme of the difficult continuum for language change.

María's positive attitude, intelligence, and pleasant appearance may all have contributed to the ease with which she joined the Catalan world. When she transferred to a different high school, she merely started using Catalan. The transition was smooth and easy. In both her work and her social life, Catalan dominates. Still, whether or not Catalan continues to serve as María's main means of communication "depends on who (she) marries."

Other cases give a less hopeful view of linguistic recruitment. Pradi, 31, came to a small Catalan town at age 14, but maintained her native Castilian until college. Though she knows Catalan, she couldn't switch with her home-town friends. Although exposed to an all-Catalan environment in Girl Scouts, she made no major move to Catalan until she went to college. Her intelligence, popularity, friendly nature, and strongly Catalan social networks made her a prime candidate for early recruitment. She now speaks with her young son in Catalan.

Jaime is married to a Catalan speaker and attempted to join Catalan society. His children converse in Catalan among themselves, but switch to Castilian with him. Jaime's switch at age 21 was motivated by a desire for social advancement and increased self-worth, he states. Learning the language did not constitute a great obstacle for Jaime. The problem was "getting over my shame." He did not, however, attain his social and personal goals: "I didn't feel like a real Catalan. I didn't move up." "Jaime's" attempted switch at age 21 did take: Spanish still dominates in all spheres of his life.

Jaime's problems in "becoming Catalan" may stem from his own temperament and attitudes. Pablo's functional Spanish unilingualism seems an aberration "that nobody can explain," as he himself admits. A child of a linguistically "mixed" marriage whose parents mostly speak Catalan between themselves, Pablo should be a proficient *catalanoparlant*. He can speak it, but rarely does. Perhaps attending English-speaking private schools in Barcelona (where Castilian was the second language) drew him into the Castilian-speaking world. As a child of a well-to-do family, Pablo perhaps demonstrates Catalan's role as a "sandwich language" (see Boix 1995 and Note 4). For certain sectors of Barcelona's upper- and upper-middle class, Castilian (and perhaps English or French) remain the languages of choice. Pablo's case remains unusual in that both his parents are habitual Catalan speakers.

Among all the "special linguistic cases," no one exemplifies the transitory nature of linguistic recruitment better than José Cruce's story does. His initial entry into Catalan-speaking society seems typical of thousands of recruits' experiences. As he ascended in society (monetarily and educationally), Catalan becomes his habitual

language. He also switched to Catalan (between the ages of 13 and 15) "to go against the current. At that time Catalan was repressed... I learned it and used it." He now regrets having adopted Catalan as his home language: "If I had children now, I would speak Castilian... it would be more authentic... Castilian is my language and I have a right to speak it." José Cruces, now in his 40s, swims against the new current, as he once fought the old one. José's story might seem an isolated incident, of one man's personal protest against certain language and educational policies, if comments similar to his had not been heard from numerous Barcelona informants. A pessimistic analysis of the José Cruces case holds that, if José, with a Catalan-speaking family and work environment, is moving away from Catalan, thousands of less committed *catalanoparlants* may be doing the same.

CONCLUSION

It is fortunate that an overview of all of our "recruited" informants gives us a much different perspective from what we have observed in the "José Cruces case." Catalonia, despite the linguistic and political battles of the mid-nineties, remains a fertile ground for recruitment. Our studies yielded four motivating factors for recruitment: *Preference/prejudice, pressure, prestige, and sentimental/romantic factors*. All four concepts remain closely related: *Peer pressure* may be felt to speak the more *prestigious* language. Perceived *prejudice* may cause speakers to favor the *lower-prestige* language. *Romantic interest* is presented here as a Catalanizing influence; however, we have also seen cases in which it has worked *against* recruitment.

A strong *preference* for Catalan emerges as an excellent recruitment tool. Learning Catalan to join a social group, or to make friends at school, is a common theme among the recruits. Catalans emerge as a generally excellent group of recruiters. No longer afraid to insist on speaking their language, Catalans increasingly accept poorly-spoken Catalan from Castilian speakers.⁵ While many recruits felt uncomfortable about their Catalan skills, none (in any of my four studies) stated that Catalans had mocked their attempts to speak. Still, one unpleasant episode with a Catalan university, or the autonomous

⁵ According to Woolard (1989), and my own experiences, Catalans are very accepting of poorly-spoken Catalan. As Woolard (1989: 127) writes, "... when I asked each informant if he or she had ever been laughed at by Catalans ... none could give a specific example." On the contrary, it was the "Castilians," she found, not the "Catalans," who laughed at mistakes in Catalan classes.

government, can convert a potential recruit into a militant Spanish speaker. If a preference for Catalan becomes a real (or perceived) prejudice, Catalanization suffers. Pro-Castilian backlash can stem from both an alleged injustice, or loyalty to one's Spanish-speaking roots.

Peer pressure often cannot be separated from *love interest* as motivational factors. Marc joined the Catalan social group at school, then met his Catalan-speaking fiancée. The single most common reason for learning Catalan (and a major source of Catalan teaching) was *friends*. Whether people learned Catalan to join a group, or joined, then learned, remains unclear.

The *prestige* factor continues to be the silent partner of linguistic recruitment. Despite Catalan's "sandwich status" as the middle layer of the language pyramid (see note 4), it remains, for most potential recruits, a high-prestige alternative. While only a few informants give their opinion about Catalan's "refined" nature, many admitted that its stature had increased during recent history. Still, as some informants accuse Catalan of becoming the "imposed" language, they may find greater informal prestige in Castilian as a "protest" language.

Some informants plainly state that *romantic interest* sparked, or accelerated their switch to Catalan. For others, the romance behind the recruitment came up almost accidentally during the interview. Nine informants (out of 27) listed sentimental factors in their conversion to Catalan. Without downplaying the importance of romantic relationships to recruitment, I must stress that numerous Castilian-speaking interviewees, spouses of Catalan speakers, were never recruited. The conclusion to be drawn from this section is: *Initial language use patterns are difficult to change*. The language chosen during courtship (to use an archaic term) usually becomes the language of the marriage. Decisions to "change languages after we marry" are more easily made than followed. Family members and friends who begin communicating in one code will have difficulty changing to another.

Our examination of these four motivating factors helps determine which *ages*, *situations*, and *organizations* most encourage recruitment. In previous studies (see O'Donnell 1991), I stressed that the 13 to 16 age group was the most "fertile" for recruitment. The current study suggests that *all* the teen years are a propitious time for language switching. My "total recruit" sub-sample averaged 17.7 years in age, its median age was 16.5. While I continue to find an increasing number of older "total" recruits, I find that *late* recruitment tends to mean *partial* recruitment.

Nevertheless, late recruitment did, in four cases (out of 27), lead to

total recruitment (when the informants married Catalan speakers). The "older" informants (who switched at age 20 or above) averaged 23.5 years when they made their biggest language shifts. No recruitment, partial or complete, took place after age 30 among my informants.

A single *linguistic domain* stands out as the scene of an enormous number of recruitments: *The Catalan educational system*. Although seven people claimed they made their switch "at work" (compared to six who switched "at school"), six of the seven "work" recruitments took place ... in schools. Thus, whether as school employees or as students, Castilian speakers are very likely to make a major language shift while affiliated with the institution of learning. This data underscores the importance of *Catalanization* and *immersion programs* in the schools. Still, certain other institutions have proven to be excellent linguistic normalizers: Boy and Girl Scouts, municipally sponsored activities (Summer Festival, sports, concerts), and local radio stations. Numerous informants, from this and previous studies, declared that they had to learn Catalan away from their habitual social networks. Due to the fixed nature of many linguistic *role relations*, Castilian speakers often could not make the switch with their close friends or family. The terms *transfer of venue* recruitment evolved from the numerous cases of informants who "couldn't speak it until I moved." Going to college (or changing to a new secondary school) provided two essential elements for recruitment: an educational institution and new role relations.

Finally, one individual appears as an unexpectedly good Catalan teacher: the newborn child. The child makes no judgments about the potential recruit's Catalan skills. No linguistic role relations exist initially. Thus, many "mixed" couples vow to raise the child in Catalan, and manage to do so.

The present study provides both hope and discouragement for linguistic recruitment. Some recruits have backed away from their support of Catalan during the 1990s, and claim that the laws supporting Catalan "have gone too far." Nevertheless, I prefer to view Catalonia as a nation in which people like María Lopez, (quoted in the title), abound. For these Castilian speakers, whether they become Catalan recruits merely depends on ... whom they marry, whom they date, who their friends are, which school they attend, and where they work. If the opportunity and the interest exist on the Catalan side, these *Spanish speakers* will make the switch.

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