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## ***Survey Research in Catalonia: Bilingualism and Bias*** **Paul E. O'Donnell**

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## SURVEY RESEARCH IN CATALONIA: BILINGUALISM AND BIAS

PAUL E. O'DONNELL

Linguistic fieldwork uses as one of its tools the standardized survey or questionnaire. Its forms and application are many and varied. Theories about what types of interviewer to use also abound. Some study directors instruct interviewers to follow closely the wording and the order of the questions in the questionnaire, others allow the fieldworker greater leeway in attempting to elicit «less formal» responses. Problems of possible bias (i.e., the eliciting of incorrect or unrepresentative information) due to the interview situation itself has been discussed by many linguists (Milroy 1980, Labov 1972, and Rickford 1987) as well as by researchers in other fields. However, the problems of interviewer effects, third-party effects, and other possible biases have not received sufficient attention from linguistic field researchers. Furthermore, these questions become especially relevant in an area like Catalonia, where a situation of linguistic conflict<sup>1</sup> exists. In the *Principat*, as in the Catalan-speaking areas outside Catalonia proper, even the answer to a question about which language the informant speaks best can have political, cultural and even class overtones. In the following paragraphs, I shall consider how problems of interviewer-induced bias and third-party effects are particularly serious for the fieldworker in Catalonia. Furthermore, I discuss how careful selection of interviewers and control of the interview situation can help provide accurate

<sup>1</sup> Vallverdú (1981:31) defines linguistic conflict (*conflicto lingüístico*) as when «there appears one language which is politically and socially dominant, and another which is dominated». Traditionally, Castilian has been the dominant language, and Catalan the dominated.

information about linguistic prestige and the linguistic normalization process.<sup>2</sup>

The linguistic and cultural particularities of Catalonia are related to several developments in recent Catalan history. Two of these changes are the existence of linguistic conflict (between Catalan and Castilian) and a normalization process. In a nation where intense linguistic competition takes place, interviewer effects (bias based on interviewer demographics, attitudes, accent, and/or inadvertent behavior) and third-party effects (bias based on the presence, or absence of other persons besides the designed informant during the interview) can have a devastating effect on data accuracy.

#### INTERVIEWERS AND INTERVIEWEES IN CATALONIA

Despite the published studies of many linguists, anthropologists, and public opinion researchers examining the problem of interviewer selection and training, many field studies have suffered from the «group-membership syndrome». Labov *et al.* (1968) were proud to have fieldworkers in a Black Vernacular English study who were «participants in the vernacular culture and cognisant of its values», in the words of Milroy (1980:27). Many linguistic and opinion studies were indeed based on the premise that the native speaker, or the individual who had membership status in the group being studied had the best interviewer characteristics. Thus, a Black would be best suited to carry out a study of Black English, and a Catalan-speaker would elicit better information from another Catalan than would a nati-

<sup>2</sup> Vallverdú (1985:90) identifies the normalization process (*procés de normalització*) as «where there is both an establishment of linguistic norms (the purely linguistic aspect of the problem) and an extension of the language to all social levels (the political or sociolinguistic aspect). A linguistic *normalizer* is someone who helps extend the language to all social situations, and avoids using Castilian terms in his or her Catalan speech.

ve speaker of another language. However, public opinion researchers dating back to Katz (1942) dispute the «group-membership theory» by demonstrating that, for example, working-class interviewers tended to inspire more radical or «progressive» political and social opinions than did their middle-class counterparts. Katz (1942:267) concludes that «it would be a mistake to assume... that the most desirable situation for all studies is one in which the interviewer has membership-character in the group he is interviewing». In the case of Catalan-speaking bilinguals, whose dual loyalties are well depicted in Woolard (1986:61-65), the possibilities for interviewer-induced inaccuracies are considerable. The bilingual whose allegiances pull him/her towards Castilian-speaking parents in some cases, and towards Catalan-speaking classmates or coworkers in others, is especially prone to interviewer-influenced opinions and linguistic performance which are «interviewer-influenced».

Woolard (1986:64) describes the bilingual, bicultural «Ana», who was «proud of her Castilian origins», but also «equally able to trade the linguistic symbols of both groups, (and) habitually adjusted her choice of code to the linguistic identity of her interlocutors». The innumerable «Anas» that the field researcher encounters in Catalonia, whether offspring of immigrants or of linguistically «mixed» marriages, present enormous possibilities for linguistic and social information and misinformation. Numerous informants in Catalonia proper told me (O'Donnell 1986) that they would use Castilianisms like *acera* 'sidewalk' (instead of the Catalan equivalent *vorera*) in informal situations, but not in front of their purist «Catalanist» friends. Linguistic opinions, as well as performance could also shift according to the audience. Katz (1942: 267) found that «for some types of information the subject will respond more completely and accurately to an outsider with the proper prestige». Robinson and Rohde (1946) helped complete the picture by showing how Semitic-looking interviewers would elicit much different attitudes towards Jews than would non-Semitic-looking fieldworkers.

The general principle that informants *tend* to avoid expressing opinions or using linguistic forms that might displease or offend the interviewer (or third parties present) supports the concept of an «outsider advantage». The foreign fieldworker, while he or she may engender other biases, likes and dislikes, does not enter directly into the Castilian-Catalan linguistic and ethnic conflict. Just like Katz's «outsider with the proper prestige», the survey researcher who speaks with a foreign accent in both Castilian and Catalan may elicit responses that native Castilian or Catalan ears might never hear. While a variety of interviewers of both sexes and from different social, economic, and linguistic backgrounds represents the best situation for minimizing interviewer effects, the outsider can take advantage of his or her lack of group membership and be one of the primary data collectors. Many Catalan informants used «incorrect» Catalan forms in unguarded moments of interviews with me, but «corrected» themselves to Standard Catalan forms later in the interview.<sup>3</sup> A Catalan interviewer may never have heard these forms.

Certain bilinguals in Catalonia possess demographic characteristics which make them more «neutral» as interviewers than others. The children of linguistically «mixed» marriages (one parent speaks Catalan, the other Castilian) often have an excellent command of both languages; furthermore, their dual cultural backgrounds allow them to interview both the Catalan speaker and the *castellanoparlante* without clearly identifying themselves with one language or the other. Just as the linguistic and cultural outsider (who is a native speaker of neither language) has certain advantages, so the bilingual insider

<sup>3</sup> In Fraga (Aragon), six informants initially used the Castilianism *mesa* 'table', but later chose the Catalan equivalent *taula*. Like a lawyer who gives most weight to the earliest testimony, and tends to discount later versions or recanted testimony, I chose the earliest lexeme that the interviewers used as the least conscious and the most spontaneous.

(who may be a native speaker of both languages) can also be a highly valued inter viewer. Since more than one third of the marriages in Catalonia are «mixed», and the number is increasing (according to Strubell 1981:151), the child from a «mixed» background is becoming increasingly important to the future of Catalan language.

The problem of interviewer effects is not limited to small-scale surveys. Even Catalan government offices, which design excellent questionnaires for linguistic surveys, sometimes contract the actual interviewing to private companies. Thus, the government agency does not have control over the demographics of the actual field interviewers. Another study, financed by an official body in Catalonia, had a fatal flaw: Its interviewers went into the field with only Catalan-language questionnaires. When the interviewer had a Castilian-speaking respondent, he or she needed to make simultaneous translations of the questions. These on-the-spot translations could cause many kinds of bias.

### THIRD-PARTY EFFECTS

Another influence upon the interview is the presence, or absence, of other persons besides the chosen informant. I use the term *third-party effects* to describe the ways in which these persons can affect the interview. Some linguistic studies, like Blom and Gumperz (1972) or Labov *et al.* (1968) involve recording peer groups and party interaction. The intention is to obtain a more casual, relaxed style than that found in one-on-one interviews. However, in attempting to escape the constraints of the formal interview, the researcher may discover new pressures in group interviews.

Milroy (1980:25) describes a group's «capacity to impose normative consensus» while enumerating the advantages of group interviews. Nevertheless, the group norms may actually

inhibit speech that is normal in other contexts. Informants I interviewed in Catalonia would use many non-standard lexes in individual conversations with me, but would add «If I said that in front of my children, they would correct me». In another interview in Aragon, María C. used some Castilian terms rather than the local Catalan ones, only to be interrupted by her son, who reprimanded her: «You know the right words, Mom!» Elsewhere, Joan M. told me his native tongue, Catalan, was «a burnt-out language». He may not have expressed such a critical opinion in the presence of more «nationalistic» Catalans.

My own experience supports the contention that having family members or other third parties present during the interview may actually bias, rather than help, linguistic interviewing. While Shuy (1967:12) suggested the possibility that parents interfered with their children's interviews, I actually observed the opposite in Catalonia. Children often corrected their parents' speech. In sidewalk cafe discussions in which I was the only non-Catalan participant, one Catalan would often correct another's nonstandard speech. Since many self-recruited groups in Catalonia contain at least one linguistic «purist», the respected outsider who is neither a native Catalan nor a Castilian speaker may elicit more natural, less guarded speech in a one-on-one interview than in a group setting.

### PRESTIGE

Measuring linguistic prestige in Catalonia remains a very delicate problem. Authors such as Woolard (1982, 1984) and Zang Mier (1984) have stressed the unusual status of Catalan: A minority language which enjoys high prestige. Woolard's approach to the linguistic prestige issue is to conduct tests on Catalan and Castilian speakers which elicit their opinions about the two languages. Since Woolard's matched-guise tests do not directly invol-

ve interviewing, her studies avoid some problems of third-party effects and interviewer-induced bias.<sup>4</sup>

My own surveys (O'Donnell 1986, 1988) demonstrate that unsolicited comments about linguistic prestige are not uncommon in the course of linguistic interviewing in Catalonia. Furthermore, even language choice for the purposes of the interview is often related to prestige. One Catalan speaker in Aragon chose to speak Castilian during the interview because it was «más conveniente» ('more appropriate'). Other young informants in Catalonia, who clearly spoke Catalan better than Castilian, asked to be interviewed in Catalan. Thus, questions of social desirability and appropriateness even affect the answer to the question «In which language do you express yourself more easily, in Catalan, or in Castilian, or equally well in both languages?»

In addition to unsolicited comments and language choice, an informant's lexical usage can also provide evidence about linguistic prestige. Catalan speakers often choose between common Castilianisms (like *recibo* 'receipt' or *sello* 'postage stamp') and their Catalan equivalents (*rebut* and *segell*). Almost all young Catalan speakers have heard both the Castilianism and the Catalan lexeme, and their choice of either the Spanish word or the native Catalan word represents a linguistic opinion. Avoiding a Castilian term like *buzón* 'mailbox' and using the Catalan equivalent *bústia* shows an awareness of the Catalan-Castilian linguistic conflict, as well as a desire to be a good «normalizer» of the Catalan language (see note 2). Lexical choice goes beyond opinions about linguistic prestige: It demonstrates whether or not informants treat their language with respect in everyday use.

<sup>4</sup> Woolard's (1982) study of Catalan's status was based on a «matched guise» test given to 240 high-school-aged students. These students, native speakers of both Catalan and Castilian, listened to a recorded text in both languages, and then reacted to that text. Positive responses to a speaker using a given language (particularly regarding such characteristics as intelligence, leadership, and self-confidence) were interpreted as indications that the language was a prestigious one for those individuals.

Furthermore, examining lexical choice across generations provides insights into the future of Catalan. Informants in Arenys de Mar (near Barcelona) often complained that their children and grandchildren corrected their Catalan. These corrections, which usually involved use of Castilians like *sello*, are positive signs of the younger generations desire to protect and defend Catalan.

#### THE LINGUISTICALLY «MIXED» FAMILY

The bilingual family in which one parent is a native speaker of Catalan, while the other's native tongue is Castilian, represents an increasingly important sector of the Catalan population. Strubell (1981) underscored the numerical importance of the mixed familiy, and pointed out the higher birthrate of the immigrant population, compared to the native-born Catalans. The linguistic choices of the «mixed» family are therefore vital to the survival of the Catalan language. At the same time, the «mixed» family's language use is an excellent gauge of the state of linguistic normalization in Catalonia.

However, the same characteristics which make the child of a «mixed» marriage an excellent potential linguistic interviewer, also make him or her difficult to interview. Since many of these children are both bilingual and bicultural, they can adapt easily to different interviewers. Studies dating back to Katz (1942) and Robinson and Rohde (1946) demonstrate that informants tend to avoid expressing opinions that offend the interviewer, or even ones that they believe might conflict with the interviewers opinions. Thus it becomes even more important to use interviewers with a variety of demographic characteristics when working with these informants. When attempting to elicit opinions about linguistic prestige, the interviewer must also be actually aware of the dual allegiances of the «mixed» family member.

## CONCLUSION

This study stresses the merits of the standardized, one-on-one interview for studies that involve many informants.<sup>5</sup> Scholars like Mishler (1986:65) criticize the traditional interview with clearly established text, and favor having «interviewers and respondents, through repeated reformulations of questions and responses, strive to arrive together at meanings that both can understand». Nevertheless, studies like Schuman and Presser (1981) have stressed how subtle changes in question order and question wording can change the meaning of a question, as well as the informants' responses.

In the same way, I maintain that the presence of third parties in the interview situation (especially when Catalan bilinguals are involved) usually biases the interview. This is especially true when respondents discuss delicate issues of linguistic prestige or their own code switching. Furthermore, members of linguistically «mixed» households will be especially subject to third-party effects, since their bilingual and bicultural backgrounds allow them to make major linguistic adjustments to all real or perceived social pressures. The linguistic performance of Catalan informants will also be considerably affected by third parties. Many Catalans use some Castilian words in their daily conversations; however, they can easily use the corresponding Catalan lexemes if they believe doing so is more socially desirable.

It is clear that respondents are swayed by third parties pre-

<sup>5</sup> Rickford (1987) encourages repeated recording of informants and greater use of elicited intuitions. Through spontaneous interviews and repeated recordings, the researcher can «create contexts in which speakers might *betray* the range of their linguistic competence (that is, reveal in spite of possible efforts to conceal)» (Rickford 1987:161). This works well if the study goal is to examine the full range of linguistic competence of a few speakers. However, for studies that involve large numbers of informants in different areas, or for study results that the researcher may wish to *replicate*, more formal, standardized interviewing techniques are required.

sent at the interview, and that the interviewer him or herself represents a potential source of bias. Conventional wisdom dictates using interviewers who possess a variety of demographic characteristics. In Catalonia, both the child of a linguistically «mixed» marriage (with his or her dual cultural background), and the outsider (neither a Catalan nor a Castilian speaker) can be excellent collectors of linguistic data. Since researchers like Robinson and Rohde (1946) and Katz (1942) have demonstrated that informants attempt to avoid expressing opinions that might offend the interviewer, then the use of some interviewers who do not participate directly in the Catalan-Castilian becomes even more important.

Possible bias due to interviewer effects, third-party effects, and question-wording variation affects surveys of all kinds; however, such problems become even more acute for a linguistic survey in an area like Catalonia, where linguistic conflict is raging. Catalonia represents an excellent source of linguistic information about bilingualism, minority language survival, and educational and linguistic planning. However, linguistic discussions in the Catalan countries are often more emotional and heated than elsewhere, so the field researcher must proceed with even greater caution.

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