

Authentic or Anonymous: Language Ideologies of Catalan University Students in a Changing Political Context

Steven Byrne¹, Aleida Bertran², Anna Tudela³

¹University of Limerick (Department of Psychology)

²Latvian Academy of Culture

³Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (Department of General Linguistics)

steven.byrne@ul.ie, aleida.bertran@gmail.com, anna.tudela@uam.es

Since the turn of the 21st century, Europe has been immersed in a situation of socio-political and social upheaval marked by processes such as Brexit, the growth of left- and right-wing populist parties and the strengthening of sub-state nationalisms. These developments have seen scenarios of polarisation and a deep crisis of political legitimisation across Europe, where language is frequently a point of contention in territorial disputes. This paper focuses on Catalonia, a key political and economic European region. In October 2017, the territory attempted to stage a referendum on its independence from Spain. This ongoing issue represents one of Spain's worst political crises in 40 years and the effects of the referendum still loom over the political and social milieu in both Catalonia and Spain today.

As a European territory where nationalism and the search for independence are most prevalent, this struggle for self-government is often articulated in terms of linguistic rights. Thus, investigating public debates on the co-officiality of languages in Catalonia is of considerable importance. The most recent scholarly work, conducted in various settings among varying groups in Catalonia, has found that not only the linguistic practices of many residents in the region but also the ideological grounding of these practices has shifted noticeably in the opening decades of the 21st century, with a reduction in both in-group solidarity and out-group rejection. However, as political change is one of the most significant features for the creation of new sociolinguistic meanings, the concern is that the ongoing political conflict in the region may have triggered changes in previous language ideologies found in Catalonia. As such, this paper aims to answer the calls for more research to assess the impact of the Catalan independence movement (*el Procés*) and the 2017 unilateral referendum on the language ideologies present in the territory. The metapragmatic comments of the respondents are viewed through the theoretical lens of linguistic authority, specifically the distinct ideological complexes of authenticity and anonymity.

This working paper reports on a research project that set out to explore the language ideologies of highly educated undergraduate students in the Barcelona region. Through adopting a purposive sampling strategy, will recruited students from the University of Barcelona (UB), the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB) and University Pompeu Fabra (UPF). Using the semi-structured interview method, this research provides a snapshot of the ideologies held by a group of thirty undergraduate students towards the languages which they come into contact with in their daily lives, in particular, Catalan and Spanish. Through giving a voice to these individuals this investigation illustrates the relationship between the respondents' level of support for the Catalan and Spanish languages and how this has been (re)framed by the ongoing political conflict in the territory.