

Heritage speakers in Germany and the Catalan countries: Catalan, Spanish and German as heritage languages.

Description and aim of the research project

This research project aims at investigating multilingualism in (early) childhood and young adulthood for the Romance languages Catalan and Spanish as well as German. Specifically, we want to analyze different quantitative and qualitative factors in children's input that may promote active bi- and trilingualism. Current studies on early multilingualism, as the work by Arnaus Gil et al. (2020), have observed that regular contact with the heritage or minority language(s) is decisive for active multilingualism (in this project, the minority or heritage languages are Catalan and Spanish in Germany as well as German in the Catalan-speaking countries in Spain).

Research project roadmap

In 2019, we could start with the first phase of the research project in the German city of Hamburg with 16 bi- and trilingual children (age range 2;6-13;0, mean age 5 years and 7 months). In the last years (2009-2019), the city of Hamburg has experienced a rise of registered Catalans in the electoral register (210.8%, *Federació Internacional d'Entitats Catalanes FIEC* 2019). In this sense, this city has been the best starting point for this ground-breaking research project. With the aid of the Catalan association *El Pont Blau*, we were able to contact and recruit many families in which at least one parent is a native speaker of Catalan.

The second phase of this project had to pause in 2020 due to the pandemic and we hope to restart in 2022. We would like to expand the Hamburg project in another big German city with a high number of Catalan speakers. Following FIEC (2019), the electoral register in the embassy of Düsseldorf (and, therefore, those Catalans living in North Rhine-Westphalia) is composed by 4,440 Catalans. In this sense, the number of registered Catalans in this *Land* has increased enormously in the last years (147.60%) and is situated in the third place after the regions of Hamburg and Berlin. Moreover, the Catalan community North Rhine-Westphalia is well-connected and very active. Just as *El Pont Blau* in Hamburg, the *Centre Cultural de Colònia* supports our research project and connects this Catalan community with it. This association offers numerous Catalan courses for children (heritage language courses) and adults (L2 Catalan). It also organizes regular meetings with families with children under 3 years. We are currently in contact with the *Centre Cultural de Colònia* and hope to start with our study in the next months.

The third phase is planned. This time, the focus resides in German as a heritage language. The study will take place in the Catalan city of Barcelona and its surroundings. Catalan as well as Spanish can be considered majority languages in this environment. Following the Catalan Statistics Centre IDESCAT (2022), the number of Germans living in Catalonia is 18,921. From the European countries, Germany is the fifth country with the highest number of citizens in Catalonia, after Romania, Italy, France and the United Kingdom. According to age, children and young adults as well as German speakers between 30-39 make up almost 25% of the German population in Catalonia. We are currently in contact with different German preschools in order to recruit bilingual and trilingual children who are raised with German as well as Catalan and Spanish.

First results

The results from the first phase of the research project in Hamburg seem to indicate that family language policies, together with the presence/absence of a family language at home, directly influence children's language dominance and preference (Arnaus Gil & Jiménez-Gaspar 2022a). Catalan language competence of the non-native parent seems to have no impact in the children's language development of the heritage language Catalan. We are currently analyzing other quantitative and qualitative factors that would positively influence children's language competence, especially for the heritage language Catalan. Furthermore, we have analyzed the data according to children's language mixing during the recordings. In a nutshell, the results show that language mixing mostly appears in the Catalan recordings, even for those children who show a dominance towards Catalan. In this sense, we could affirm that language dominance cannot predict the direction of language mixing, since it seems the case that the heritage language is more vulnerable for this phenomenon. Interestingly, those children who

would be considered to have a similar proficiency in both of their L1s show similar rates of language mixing in the Catalan and German recordings (Arnaus Gil & Jiménez-Gaspar 2022b). Considering the language interaction between siblings, we have observed that the role of older siblings for language competence and preference of the younger siblings is highly relevant. Moreover, older siblings reinforce and amplify family language policies and they thus have an impact on language transmission (Jiménez-Gaspar & Arnaus Gil 2022).

Literature

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