# The situation of Valencian as reported in non-institutional sociolinguistic research (1998-2002)

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#### **Abstract**

This article presents one of the most important non-institutional pieces of research carried out in the last decade on aspects of the situation of Catalan in the Valencian Country (where the language is known as *Valencian*), looking especially at aspects relating to the sociolinguistic trends and characteristics of the large urban areas —the city of Valencia and Alacant (Alicante)— where intergenerational transmission has come to a halt or is currently precarious in the extreme. By way of contrast, we shall also be looking at two other pieces of work: one on the county of *Marina*, which has remained faithful to the language, and the other on the population of the Valencian Country as a whole. The overall view thus obtained enables us to form some brief observations concerning the process of accelerating linguistic *minoritisation* (shift to minority status) in which Valencian society is immersed, and from there going on to focus on the relative lack of non institutional sociolinguistic research, resulting fundamentally from the language's diminished prospects.

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# 1. Introduction

The careful, scholarly work of many Valencian sociolinguists contrasts with the flag-waving tone of the Valencian Country's Autonomous regional government, eager to show the population's increased ability to read and write their own language, as irrefutable proof of the success of the official language policy that has been implemented. What the Valencian sociolinguists have been doing —often with sparse resources— has been to carry out a series of empirical studies with suitable critical rigour and independent criteria. In the present article we shall be reviewing some of this research briefly, looking at work done over the half decade 1998-2002, as a basis for venturing a reliable diagnosis of the state of (Valencian) Catalan that seriously challenges the official view and once more brings to the fore the dilemma between language loyalty and castilianisation (shift to Spanish) so lucidly captured by Luís V. Aracil (1966) nearly four decades ago.

# 2. Description of the research reviewed here

# 2.1. Interruption of intergenerational transmission: the case of the city of Alacant

For some time now, Brauli Montoya has been the most active investigator of the process of language shift in the city of Alacant. The book *Alacant: la llengua interrompuda* (Alacant, the interrupted language, Montoya, 1996), constitutes his most significant contribution on the subject —complemented by a subsequent study (Montoya, 2000) which looks at linguistic aspects of the shift. This is fieldwork carried out between April 1993 and August 1994, with a sample of 88 informants, representing 0.42% of the total universe under study, the latter

consisting of 20,856 inhabitants of Alacant over 30 and considered to be "natural speakers" of Valencian —having acquired it at home, or from their neighbourhood. This sample was broken down by sex, age, language of the childhood home, area where socialised and social status. The data was collected using quantitative means (open and close questionnaires) as well as qualitative ones (interview), by the study carried out by Ernest Querol (1990) in Ports county.

The life histories reconstructed by the writer enable us to determine the onset of the interruption of intergenerational language transmission (transmission of Valencian from one generation to the next) among the well-off neighbourhoods in the centre of the modern city during the period 1865-1917. Subsequently, between 1910 and 1970, the process spread to the old quarter of the city and the non-central urban districts, and finally between 1955 and 1980, reached the rural periphery.

The results of the questionnaire indicate a virtual absence of Alacant-born subjects under the age of 50 who learned Catalan within the family. On the other hand, those who have Catalan as their first language constitute less than one half of their group, such that they form 3.6% of the total speech community of the city (9,263 of the inhabitants, in absolute numbers). Transmission, then, is solely in the hands of the schools, and this is totally inadequate.

## 2.2 Language shift at an advanced stage: the city of Valencia and its metropolitan area

No one would dispute the importance of the city of Valencia in relation to the overall Valencian territory, given the city's demographic weight, geographic situation, political importance, etc. This state of affairs is not unconnected with the interest and curiosity which its sociolinguistic dynamics have aroused among scholars. The best proof we have of this is the proliferation of monographs which focus on different facets of linguistic contact at Cap i Casal (city of Valencia), three of which we have selected as being of especial interest.

## 2.2.1 Attitudes towards the varieties in litigation

Attitudes of speakers towards varieties in praesentia have been the object of study by José R. Gómez Molina in his book Actitudes lingüísticas en una comunidad bilingüe y multilectal: área metropolitana de València (1998) (Language attitudes in a bilingual community: the metropolitan area of Valencia), based on empirical research carried out in 1996-1997 with a sample of 234 consultants aged over 18 (reliable to 95%), selected according to the variables sex, age, socio-cultural level, mother tongue and usual language, place of origin and place of residence. These were asked to classify four speech modes recorded from bilingual speakers: standard Spanish (SS), Standard Valencian (SV), non-standard Valencian, or Apitxat (NSV) and lastly non standard Spanish of the Horta district (NSP).

Data collection was carried out via two procedures: an indirect technique, being an adaptation of Lambert's *matched guise technique* with the application of scales using semantic differential, and a direct technique, consisting of a questionnaire with both open and closed questions, referring to the two languages in contact (Valencian/Spanish).

The result of the study show there is a favourable attitude toward linguistic normalisation among the speakers of the area, due to the social categorisation of SV and the corresponding reduction suffered by SS, which nonetheless retains a clearly predominant position, derived from its greater commonality.

The improved status of SV has to do both with instrumental and integrative (social) values. With regard to the latter, the considerable relational or social aspects accorded NSV should be mentioned. Correlations between the two varieties indicate that we do not have to do with a diglossic situation here, so much as contextual variation, which in fact arises out of the deficient sociolinguistic consciousness of the speakers and the low level of competence in SV (Gómez Molina, 2002). At the same time, the SS (Standard Spanish) variety surpasses both NSV and SV in instrumental value and, among a segment of young people, also in its integrative value —that is to say, as a symbol of Valencian identity, very much disassociated with the use of Valencian (64.1%).

The sociolinguistic variables which best capture social characterisation of use are, in descending order, socio-cultural level, sex, age, usual language and place of residence. The mother tongue variable, in contrast, does not emerge as significant. The most interesting inferences that can be made are:

1) High sociocultural score, with very homogenous evaluatory criteria, favours use of SV and the integrative value is stressed; a mid-level sociocultural score favours SS, NSV and SV, while considering NSS as stereotyped; a low sociocultural score, lastly, favours NSV, followed by SS.

- 2) Men favour NSV, followed by SS and VS, while women, with more heterogeneous criteria, value SS in first place, followed by SV and VNS. Significantly, a sector of the women rates SV as "Catalanist" (i.e. promoting Catalonia to the detriment of Valencia), in opposition to the "Valencianism" of NSV.
- 3) SV is higher rated amongst young people than amongst those over 55, who also refer to anti-Valencian associations .

To that we have to add greater active tolerance of Spanish (91.4%) than of Valencian (72.2%), little social pressure in favour of linguistic acculturalisation —only 4.7% of Spanish speakers in the sample have become bilingual— and the fact that young people, when they acquire Valencian and become bilingual, continue to be monocultural in Spanish. The overall picture we derive is that SS (Standard Spanish) continues to be the predominant language by a wide margin in intergroup communication.

## 2.2.2 The figures

As its title suggests, *El futur de la llengua entre els joves de València* (The future of the language among the young people of Valencia) (1998) by Ferran Colom, sets out to analyse the situation of Catalan<sup>1</sup> among students in the city, both in terms of knowledge of the language and of behaviour and attitudes, by means of a questionnaire —inspired by the model used by Erill *et al* (1992)— which he administered at the beginning of 1996 to a sample of 877 third-year BUP students and first-year FP students (second grade) drawn from 29 schools and educational centres chosen to be representative.

Among the main conclusions that the author arrives at, are:

- 1) The origin and the geographic and linguistic make-up of the family determine the linguistic level and competence of the students in the sample. The highest level of competence was found among the children of "autochthonous" families (families of Valencian extraction) with Catalan as mother tongue (11%). Some 14% of the students could not speak the language, and the school system is far and away the setting where the subjects in the sample (50%) most came into contact with the language, absent as it is from their daily lives.
- 2) The outlook is still bleaker when we look at spontaneous and habitual use, reported by 5%, which in itself confirms the thorough nativisation of Spanish among young people. If we restrict ourselves to use in the family, the figure increases to 10%, with a further 10% who use the two languages without distinction (!). Despite that, a certain stabilisation or botoming out of intergenerational transmission seems detectable, around a minimum figure, since of the 22% of the parents who use Catalan among themselves, 21% also do so with their children, but this use is not always habitual.
- 3) As in the case of Alacant, it was found that in Valencia too, place of residence was a determining factor. Attitudes favourable to Catalan and its use outside the familiar increases moving away from the centre of the city. Conversely, in the historic central districts of the city and the Pla del Real, inhabited mostly by couples of local extraction, and with a high socioeconomic and educational level, there is below average use of Valencian and clear attitudes of rejection.

# 2.2.3 Intergenerational transmission: a much debated question

In a recent article, entitled "La transmission intergénérationnelle du valencien et son usage comme langue seconde" (2002) in the journal *Langage et sociéte*, founded by Malagan Pierre Achard, Raquel Casesnoves Ferrer contrasts the sociolinguistic situation of Valencia with that of the rest of the Valencian Country.

If we take into account the figures from the 1986 and 1991 censuses —and in the case of the city of Valencia, the Municipal Census of Inhabitants of 1996— as well as a survey carried out by Casesnoves over the academic year 1997-1998 among 167 secondary pupils in three schools in Valencia, selected on the basis of social class, percentage of newcomers from other points of the Spanish state, whether public or private, linguistic competence of the neighbourhood and the existence (or otherwise) of Catalan on the timetable. To complete the survey there were a series of semi-directed interviews with representative subjects..

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Translator's note: here as elsewhere in the text, "Catalan" (as a spoken in the Valencian context) refers to Valencian Catalan or *Valencià*.

The results obtained allow us to sketch in certain observations of the situation of Catalan in the city:

1) Not detected at all are the positive tendencies evinced by the official studies on levels throughout the country. According to these studies, we have on the one hand an increase in the ability to read and write the language (especially in young people aged between 15 and 19), resulting from the introduction the teaching of Catalan (Valencian) in the schools; on the other, with regard to evolution and growth in the family setting, they revealed an increase in the number of people who always or generally used Catalan. Expressed in percentages, this was 40.9% in 1989, increasing to 44.3% in 1995, which suggests a change of 3.4% in favour of Catalan, confirmed by a decrease of 2.0% observed for Spanish over the same period.

In contrast, in the city of Valencia a decrease in use was observed —in no instance reaching more than 15%— in the family setting. The fact is especially serious, since being taught in Catalan in school seems to be a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for it to be used subsequently in other settings. Indeed, Catalan is not the predominant language of the young people in even 10% of cases..

- 2) Intergenerational language shift was found to be intimately connected with place of residence. The city thus becomes a powerful catalyst in the process of shift to Spanish, such that, even when both parents are Catalan speakers from outside the city, moving to Valencia sets in motion a major process of bilingualisation, which frequently results in Spanish rather than Catalan being transmitted to their offspring.
- 3) The most influential factors in use of Catalan by young people are: the presence in their speech networks of Catalan speakers, positive academic experience of doing the school subject Valencian, leftwing political orientation, the language attitudes of the parents and, above all, cultural militancy in favour of Catalan.
- 4) The teaching of Catalan was not seen to have any influence (except possibly a negative one) on the language habits of the students. In contrast, teaching *in* Valencian was seen to have positive effects and contributed to the student becoming bilingual.

All in all, according to Casesnoves, the existence of two divergent sociolinguistic patterns can be discerned: that of the city of Valencia, with Catalan in an advanced state of recession, and that of the rest of the Valencian Country, where there would seem to be a slight recovery which on occasions may be camouflaging what is happening in the city of Valencia.

## 2.3 Precarious maintenance: the county of Marina

The picture being outlined until now, taking the form of rapid and drastic language shift in the main urban areas, has to be moderated somewhat when we contrast this with figures from the rural areas of the País Valencià. A recent study by M. Àngels Diéguez and M. Isabel Guardiola entitled *Transmissió lingüística intergeneracional a la Marina* (2002) will prove paradigmatic here.

The study is based on a survey carried out in 1997 with almost a thousand students and teachers at the county secondary schools of Altea, where the authors interviewed individuals fom throughout the county, having previously divided it up into five zones according to socioeconomic, demographic and linguistic factors. This procedure enabled them to detect greater incidence of Catalan speakers in the most rural areas, with little migration into the area and predominantly agricultural activity.

Bearing in mind that intergenerational transmission is closely correlated with households where both parents are Catalan speakers or Catalan is the language of 50% of mothers and 60% of the fathers, one would expect that it would be spoken by 50% of the students, not more. This turned out to be an accurate prediction of the situation. Some 48% of those questioned claimed to use Catalan habitually, a further 19.7% used it only sporadically and 32.3% never used it, and in fact these percentages indicate a good level of maintenance — with no more than 1.1% incidence of language defection— of intergenerational transmission.

The results given above are confirmed by the data on transmission amongst such speakers of Valencian extraction, which emerges as 84.8% percent of the 91.3% of couples who use Catalan as the language used in the relationship. Regarding children of mixed marriages, intergenerational transmission has undergone considerable erosion (25% speak to their children in Valencian, 36% in Spanish and 29% each in their own language), a situation which will get worse when the second generation immigrants —virtually half of the students— reach adult age.

## 2.4 An overall X-ray picture of the state of the language in the Valencian Country

I have deliberately left until the end, the review of Ernest Querol's contribution, *Els valencians i el valencià* (2000), both because of its scope, referring to the whole of the Valencian Country, and because of its ambitious theoretical underpinning, based as it is on the formulation of a new and ambitious model for the study of processes of language shift, partially released by the author in earlier publications.

Space does not really allow us to provide much of a description and critique of the complex Querolian theoretical edifice, which in any case has begun to elicit exacting —if positive—appraisal (Calaforra, 2002). At the risk of oversimplifying, let us say that the source of his approach was his dissatisfaction with the unsatisfactory nature of the most usual sociolinguistic models when looking at the factors that determine language use. To overcome the limitations he detected, Querol combined the interlinguistic relations approach of Aracili's model of interposition with trifactorial explanations of language use on the one hand, and the sociological paradigm of social definition (Querol, 2000: 21-43) on the other. That led him to conceive language shift as an (exclusive or hierarchic) *choice*, the mechanisms of which he illustrates on the analogy of migratory processes and a list of basic antonyms.

Overall, it becomes an attempt to integrate the theory of ethnolinguistic vitality — especially in the version which compares lammergeier or bearded vulture of prey, put forward by Allard and Landry, who developed the questionnaire used (in abbreviated form) by Querol—within the framework of the theory of social representation put forward by Moscovici. The latter is furthermore rounded off by recourse to the juridical institution of legal representation and topological catastrophe theory, with which he establishes a formal analogy that attains isomorphism (Querol, 1997).

The basic hypothesis of the author is that in a process of language shift —defined as "progressive isolation and reduction of the use of a language in its demographic extension, in its geographic extension and in its domains of use and, therefore, in the representation of its possibilities of use" (Querol, 2002b: 73)— the different types of possible linguistic behaviour are the result of the interaction of the social representations that speakers make of the languages in place, of the interpersonal network of communication and of the social reference group.

The empirical part of the research comprises 452 questionnaires (67 more than the minimum necessary), administered in 1998 students of the fourth year of ESO (Compulsory Secondary Education, with students age 16). In order to guarantee greater representativeness of the sample with respect to the whole of the population, one also has to control a series of strategic variables such as, for example, the provincial division, the linguistic area (Valencian-speaking / Spanish-speaking), type of the settlement (lesser / greater than 50,000 habitants) and language of instruction of the school.

The large amount of information obtained for each student (478 items per individual), was submitted to a whole series of statistical treatments: analysis of frequencies and percentages of each variable, crossing of two variables and multivariable analysis (discriminating and multiple regression), as well as application of the new SIPINA technique using induction graphs.

The most interesting results for our purposes are, clearly, those relating to the percentages of speakers of each language. If we only consider the historical Valencian-speaking area, we find that Spanish is overwhelmingly the language most spoken by the younger generation: 72.7% of the students have it as their first language, while Catalan can only manage a desultory 25.2%. In the case of their parents' generation, figures are very similar: 68.3% of parents speak Spanish, while only 28.8% speak Catalan, and taking the mothers only the figure rises to 29.9% while Spanish decreases to 65.1%.

The situation gets no better when we consider intergenerational transmission. Valencian-speaking parents (18.9%) do not transmit Valencian in 11.25% of cases —in contrast, Spanish-speaking couples (63.02%) who do not transmit Spanish do not amount to more than 1.89%. When the couples are mixed, if the mother is Valencian-speaking and the father Spanish-speaking (9.9%) they speak to the child in Valencian in 36.8% of cases, while in the reverse situation (8.3%) the figure drops to 26.5%. In a generation, therefore, the percentage of Valencian speakers has diminished by 4.25%.

But Querol's work does not stop here, since it seeks to explain the determining factors behind the language choice made by speakers, to be able to understand better the processes of language shift / language maintenance. Regarding the three variables under consideration, his results indicate that the use of Valencian correlates above all with social network, that is, the group of Valencian speakers the speaker regularly interacts with, verbally. These results

contrast with those obtained by Querol in Catalonia (Querol, 1999, 2001), where the use of the language was linked above all to social representation. They contrast, too, with what he found in the Balearic Islands, where the most important variable, the one that best correlates with language use, is the social representation of Spanish (Querol, 2002a). This is a problematic finding, given that if the social network shrinks progressively in intergenerational transmission, use will be reducing as well.

The consequences are clear: to reverse a process of language shift we need to ensure that the variable that best correlates with language use is social representation and that intergenerational transmission is not negative for the recessive language (Querol, 2000: 196).

#### 3. Final observations

Over and above the diversity of approach, scope and methodology, the earlier studies enable us to sketch the outline of the linguistic situation in the Valencian Country, characterised by the precarious subsistence of the principle cities such as Valencia, Alacant (Alicante) and Castelló de la Plana (Ferrando *et al*, 1990) —where complete breakdown in the intergenerational transmission of the language has either already occurred or will do so over the next couple of generations. This parallels its generalised maintenance in more rural areas, especially in certain counties such as Safor or Alcoià, a fact which renders them increasingly important with respect to the linguistic community as a whole (Montoya, 2002: 36-43). This is what Vicent Pitarch (1988: 16-20) has called "the rusticity of linguistic domains".

The persistence of the current norms of use, characterised by convergence on Spanish as the common language, increases the danger of massive language shift. Two processes in progress could also contribute to this in a powerful way: the increasing urbanisation of the population and the current flow of newcomers into the area (Morelló, 2002). The latter join others who came earlier, around the middle of the last century, from various parts of the Spanish state, and who in large part did not assimilate linguistically. The sociolinguistic situation described here, therefore, does not in any way support, far from it, the optimism exuded by the official research. Rather we could see it as a clear instance of the failure of 'politica lingüística" (language policy) —if we could call it that (Pradilla, 2002)— set in motion, and restricted until now almost exclusively to education and the use of generic-type propaganda.

It would be fair to say that the result of these "policies" has been very modest. While they have contributed to improving attitudes and competence in Catalan among the school population they have not succeeded in halting language shift, or indeed in fostering linguistic integration of second generation immigrants. Worse still: we cannot rule out negative repercussions. This in fact is observable in the form above all of abdication of responsibility for intergenerational transmission of the language observable in some sectors of Catalanspeakers with linguistic habits of undervaluing (Castelló, 2002). The presence of Catalan on the school timetable opens the door to what economists call externalisation of costs, leaving the transmission of the recessive language to the schools —something we have seen for sometime in the case of religious education. Far from being a minor detail, this externalising strategy complementary, obviously enough, to the internalisation of Spanish— is entirely congruent with a more general social trend which threatens to transform the school system into a kind of drawer for odds and ends, a place in which to stow all that the modernisation of society doesn't have time for. In such a situation, bearing in mind, moreover, how ineffective the school is when it comes to transforming the social order, Boudon (1973), can anyone be surprised at the ineffectiveness of the "normalisation" measures dictated by the Valencian institutions?

As we see it, possible solutions to the challenges posed by the current sociolinguistic situation are neither easy nor can they wait. Perhaps the most pressing need at this time is to call for the design and implementation of specific linguistic policies, adapted to the specific circumstances of each area. It should be quite clear that different situations cannot be tackled in the same way. The main tasks at the present time, as I see it, are to reinforce and increase the existing fullness of use of Catalan in certain rural counties, halt linguistic defection in others, increase the competence of young Spanish speakers and preserve the Catalan-speaking minorities in urban areas. Securing of these objectives goes hand in hand with radical transformation of the current framework for the management of the linguistic diversity of Valencian society. In a paper that may or may not one day see the light I have put forward a self-management model of interlingual relations based on the formula of what I call *libertarian liberalism*; here, however, I will content myself with stating the need for changes in the current model of education, in terms of the creation of a public network of educational centres *in* Catalan, and parallel to that the taking of decided steps towards the construction of a new

type of *forum for communications*, shared with the rest of the language community (Gifreu & Corominas, 1991).

Obviously, we cannot hope that these demands will be satisfied by any gracious concession from the powers that be. On the contrary: the élite of Valencian power have always distinguished themselves by their frank hostility to Catalan, and will not respond to anything but decided pressure from people. We are faced, therefore, with the peremptory need to bring together the Catalan speaking population of the Valencian Country, providing them with instruments for the reclaiming of their civil rights in language matters. Rather than a political process, this is a *pre*political process, essential for the emergence of alternative élites to the existing ones and now firmly linked with the replacement of the present *political culture of the subject*. This culture, with its corollary in nationalism, is dominated by the subjective idea of the benefits that power could contribute to the cause, should (I would argue) be replaced by a *participational* one, where consciousness of such benefits goes with recognition of the participation habit teamed with indispensable new initiatives for the proper functioning of the political system (Almond & Verba, 1963: 34-36). In my view, the existence of the Federació Escola Valenciana (Valencian School Federation) constitutes a hopeful indication that cultural change is beginning to take place.

The role of non-institutional sociolinguistics in this situation should be decisive, not only as a supplier of information on the state of the language community —as it has done until now and seems to be poised to continue doing so with ever increasing accuracy. (Casesnoves, 2003) but, above all, as a source of orientation for normalisation. And this last objective cannot be achieved without a profound change of direction with respect to its current approaches. We cannot continue any longer to be content with the (admittedly indispensable) detailed knowledge of the situation past and present, using them merely to formulate *reactive* measures. It is important now to pay especial attention to emergent processes and trends that could shape the future and, above all, we have to dare to construct our own future (Bas, 1999: 50-56). This means giving sociolinguistic studies a prospective dimension— until now hardly explored, apart from one or two timid exceptions (Querol, 2001, 2002)— having recourse to the many instruments designed by sociology (Bas, 1999), such as regressive analysis, future scenarios of likelihood of occurrence, the Delph method, the matrix of crossed impacts, the theory of dynamic systems, etc. Furthermore, these demanding standards and requirements will need to go hand in hand with the abandoning of old routines, such as that of selecting individuals of school age as subjects of a survey, purely for reasons of convenience the latter of course have not yet completely internalised the evaluating norms of society (Gómez Molina, 1998: 45). Similarly we need to pay more attention to the impact of the mass media on the process of minoritisation, despite the difficulty of evaluating it quantitatively, by means of questionnaires.

When all is said and done, we are faced here with decisive challenges concerning the survival over the long term of the Catalan-speaking community of the Valencian Country. This is an issue which sociolinguistic research cannot and should not ignore, if it wishes not to become mere rhetoric or a sterile demonstration of number crunching. Will we be worthy of the magnitude of the task facing us or will we resign ourselves to being helpless onlookers witnessing our own disappearance? The answer belongs, logically enough, to the future. The question at this time is whether we forge this future ourselves or whether it will be forged for us.

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