

“Volunteers for language”, Linguistic Integration Programme in Catalan: facts for evaluation

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Abstract

This article reviews and evaluates the programme “Voluntaris per la llengua” (“Volunteers for language” <http://www.gencat.cat/llengua/voluntariat>), and it does so triangulating the quantitative statistical analysis and the qualitative statistical analysis from personal interviews. To begin with, the programme is placed within a general context, so that a typology of volunteers and programme learners may then be created, proposing an explanatory model of the elements enhancing the linguistic benefits of this experience –understood as the integration of the ability to speak Catalan and its subjective use. Secondly, the influence of the programme upon the social integration of the learner is analysed. Lastly, the article points to some measures which, according to these analyses, would improve the programme.

Summary

1. Phenomena involved in migratory movement
2. “Volunteers for language”: the Programme
3. “Volunteers for language”: participant description
4. Learners of Catalan taking part in the Programme: description
5. Learners’ motivation and observations
6. Factors determining the Programme’s success
7. Conclusions and orientations
8. Bibliography

1. Phenomena involved in migratory movement

In our present society, we may distinguish two different types of dynamics related to migratory movement¹ (Casey, 1977:16):

- Dynamics of individual immigrants.
- Movements dynamics of the host society.

On the other hand, the IOE (Colectivo IOE, 1987) differentiates between associations or councils created *by* immigrants and those created *for* immigrants. The contrast between them may also be applied to less institutionalised instances. Casey takes this differentiation further, distinguishing two different types of association within those created in the receiving society, or associations *for* immigrants. As he sees it, civil society offers services to immigrants through three different kinds of associations:

- *Ethnical associations*: created by immigrants themselves, they usually stand for the interests of one single ethnic group, although “they may include ethnical associations coordinating councils” (CASEY, 1997:16).
- *General associations within the receiving society*: their services are not solely addressed to immigrant population, even if a part of their resources are assigned to this immigrant population.
- *Specialised associations within receiving society*: solely concerned with immigrant integration, even if their members are not usually immigrants. They also include associations devoted to the study of the migratory phenomenon and its expansion.

Such classification within associations, which, again, may also be applied to the movements, does not point up the distinction between those associations concerned with social action according to an “assistance” model, and devoted to responding to their housing, work or legal needs, and those centred on claiming their rights according to a more transforming or *anti-systemic* model and on the fight to obtain “new” rights, or to improve the rights immigrants already enjoy. There is, moreover, another type of action: the cultural activity orientated towards the so-called “post-materialist” services, and as such they differ from the assistance model, which offers basically materialistic (logistic) services.²

¹ By *migratory movement* we mean both recently arrived immigrants and citizens born abroad but integrated in Catalan society.

² The difference between materialist and post-materialist is drawn according to the sense Inglehart (1991) gave them.

Having said all that, we can cross the *principal types of actions* with the *types of dynamics* concerning their origin, to obtain a typology of organizations, movements and public programmes related to migration, which can be further elaborated (see table 1).

According to this typology, the "Volunteers for language" Programme may be outlined, on the one hand, as a generalist cultural movement; that is to say, the services it offers are not solely addressed to immigrant population, and it has a linguistic and cultural character. On the other hand, it may also be considered a *public* cultural service, taking into account that it is a Programme pertaining to the Generalitat of Catalonia (public administration).

Table 1. Different types of organizations, movements and public programmes connected to the migratory phenomenon

	Assisting	Cultural³	Pressure group
Ethnical (and coordinating)	Ethnic-assisting	Ethnic-cultural	Ethnic pressure group
Specialists from the host society	Specialist and assisting	Cultural specialist	Specialist
Generalists from the host society	Generalist and assisting	Generalist and cultural	Pressure group generalist
Public Administration	Public and Assisting	Public and cultural	-----

2. Volunteers for language: the Programme

The Programme "Volunteers for language" was set up as a local initiative of several linguistic normalization centres and promoted by cultural entities –organizations such as Omnium Cultural <<http://www.omniumcultural.org/>> with the aim of attending and fostering the non-Catalan speakers who take the Catalan courses for adults. Later on, this initiative was taken up and promoted by the Secretariat for Language policy and by the Consorci per a la Normalització Lingüística (Consortium for Language Normalization <<http://www.cpnl.cat>>) itself, and was then spread throughout Catalonia. This experience also took in other previous experiences of linguistic volunteers, from University students, foreign students, Erasmus and others.⁴

Nowadays, "Volunteers for language" main goal is the learning of Catalan, the promotion of its use and the integration of recently arrived individuals. Thus, the Programme's function is to coordinate linguistic pairs, where a Catalan speaker and a non-Catalan speaker share a minimum of 10 hours conversation. This initiative, born, as we have said, from an agreement between the Consortium for Language Normalization and cultural entities such as Omnium Cultural, has spread and developed, and is now promoted by the Secretariat for Language Policy, the Catalan Institute for Volunteers, the Secretariat for Immigration de la Generalitat of Catalonia and the Consortim for Language Normalization. It articulates the initiatives from volunteers and cultural entities in the creation of linguistic pairs, and it embodies many voluntary organizations throughout Catalonia.

As regards the kind of relationship between the Programme "Volunteers for language" and other institutions and organizations, its link with public administration should be underlined. The Programme is in touch with cultural entities or assistance at ethnic community level, with specialist and general to mainstream organizations, and with pressure groups of a mainstream nature, such as the trades unions (see table 2).

Probably the fact that "Volunteers for language" has currently little or no contact with the minority group associations is a weak point in the programme. These associations represent a potentially important source of learners, difficult to reach via other means owing to fragmentation either because of external factors (social, religious, ethnic or geographical factors) in the country of origin, or because of internal factors such as the immigration laws and migration policies⁴. It would also be worthwhile to bear in mind the recent new lease of life of the federations of immigrants' associations. These second-order entities may well, in the near future, be a good way to reach immigrant learners from ethnic groups that to date have been severely underrepresented in Catalan courses and in the "Volunteers for language" programme.

³ Including folklore movements and associations

⁴ To see the effects of laws and migration policy on the fragmentation of newcomers, see Alegre 2000.

It is true that a minimum working knowledge of Catalan is needed to be able follow the programme as a student. Indeed, the fact that the majority of the latter come from adult Catalan classes may in effect be leaving aside a proportion of newly arrived immigrants who lack sufficient education or training.

In 2004, the Secretariat for Language Policy carried out a sociolinguistic survey of 1,300 participants on the programme, by means of telephone interviews –involving the interviewing of 650 teachers and 650 students out of the total population of 4,016 individuals. The aim here was simply to evaluate the programme. The fieldwork was carried out by the CIES consultancy firm, under the technical direction of the Sociolinguistics Institute of the Secretariat for Language Policy.

3. "Volunteers for language": participant description

Associationalism –the tendency to associate

In terms of volunteers' membership of association, what stands out is that it is much greater their student's level of membership, in the case of the four main types (linguistic or language specific, NGOs, cultural associations and others). Almost 11% of volunteers belong to an association dedicated to promoting the Catalan language. The most frequently mentioned were: Òmnium Cultural and the Coordinadora d'Associacions per la llengua (CAL, Coordination of Associations for the Language). Some 24.5% of the volunteers and 9% of the learners were members of an NGO, including Intermon, the Red Cross, Greenpeace, Médicos sin Fronteras (Médecins sans Frontières) and Amnesty International.

Furthermore, 28% of the volunteers and 10.8 of learners are affiliated to local or national organisations such as civic or popular culture centres or parish institutes, music clubs and organisations, choral societies, athenaeums, study centres and rambler's associations. Lastly, 28.3% of volunteers and 14% of learners are members of sports clubs, neighbours' associations, AMPA (parent mothers association), parties and unions and organisations providing support for the infirm.

In general, however, it can be observed that few volunteers belong to the immigrants' associations, and even fewer of the learners do so.

Personal interview with a volunteer

To complete the results of the survey a semi-structured interview was carried out with a volunteer, in order to obtain more qualitative information on the volunteers' viewpoint. Below we offer some of the main points that emerged.

With regard to speaking skills, the volunteer believes that her learner's ability has improved considerably: "I've seen how much he's improving in terms of language. I mean, at the beginning he wasn't at all fluent and now, now..., well you can see how good at speaking he is."

And in terms of use of the Catalan language, too, the volunteer states that after attending the programme, the student is making greater use of Catalan than before, in everyday situations:

Question: Well, so, in terms of speaking, speaking ability. Do you think your learner is better at speaking Catalan than before.

Answer: Oh definitely, yes, yes and what's more, that's really worth thinking about. I've thought about it a lot... the typical stuff you get, you know? "Those Catalans insist on speaking Catalan, and never ever change". They tell you that, and you have to take it..., and then he (the learner) tells you "I start speaking Catalan and when they see I'm struggling, they immediately switch to Spanish, so I can never speak Catalan with anyone. You're the only person I can speak Catalan to. *Now*, on the other hand, he says: "I can have more conversations, now, with the baker, the butcher, and I don't know who else... because I'm more fluent, and people notice, and so now they carry on [in Catalan]."

The volunteer expresses a humanist, life-affirming point of view from start to finish, and this is perhaps not out of place in a voluntary language worker of this type, and probably equally true of other volunteers. Expressing this point of view, however, does not preclude her thinking about the issue of language use, and more generally about the issue of immigration. On the first, she puts forward her own suggestion for a new language norm: "Not to change to Spanish when speaking to an immigrant person who's having a bit of difficulty with Catalan." I got to thinking a lot about this, about changing [switching]

to Spanish, and now for example I don't do it. Before when people answered me in Spanish, I changed to Spanish too, right? And now I've said no to that!"

On the overall issue of immigration, she concludes that more knowledge implies spurning stereotypes. "I think the immigrant problem is a problem of lack of information. And people, when you don't know, you're like "they're I don't know what". And when you get to know them, at least you'll know: "It isn't what's-his-name."

Lastly, it's worthwhile noting that this volunteer had not thought about what aspects of the programme could be improved, but she formulated her own views when asked for her observations. She proposed that the institutions behind the programme monitor proceedings: It's like once you get to know your language partner (the learner), you may find yourself very out of touch with your people (institutions promoting the programme), right? Not to be able, at the end of six months, a year, two months, or whatever, to have a bit of continuity, you know? I did have the sensation of being more committed to somebody, because otherwise you'd feel you'd just met them down the Ramblas [street in Barcelona] (laughs).

4. Learners of Catalan taking part in the Programme: description⁵

4.1 Types of learners

In the questionnaire administered to learners, they were asked to assess their ability to speak Catalan on completion of the programme, and also about frequency of use of the language after completion. To assess what we have labelled the individual sociolinguistic success or failure of the experience, the following two variables were considered:

- Increase in ability to speak Catalan after the experience;
- Increase in frequency of speaking Catalan after the experience.

The definition that was established on degree of success or failure in the case of each variable was:

- Success (S): responds more, or considerably more than before;
- No significant change; no significant increase in frequency of speaking Catalan after the experience;
- Failure (F): responds only as well as before, or less well.

Apart from growth of these two variables and their scores (speaking ability and use of Catalan) and the degree of success or otherwise (S, N, F) a technical typology was devised, as shown in the next table:

Table 2. Technical typology of learners with regard to ability and frequency of use of Catalan⁶

Increase in use of Catalan	Ability to speak Catalan		
	Success (S)	No significant (NS)	Failure (F)
Success (S)	SS	NS	FS
No significant change	SN	NN	FN
Failure (F)	SF	NF	FF

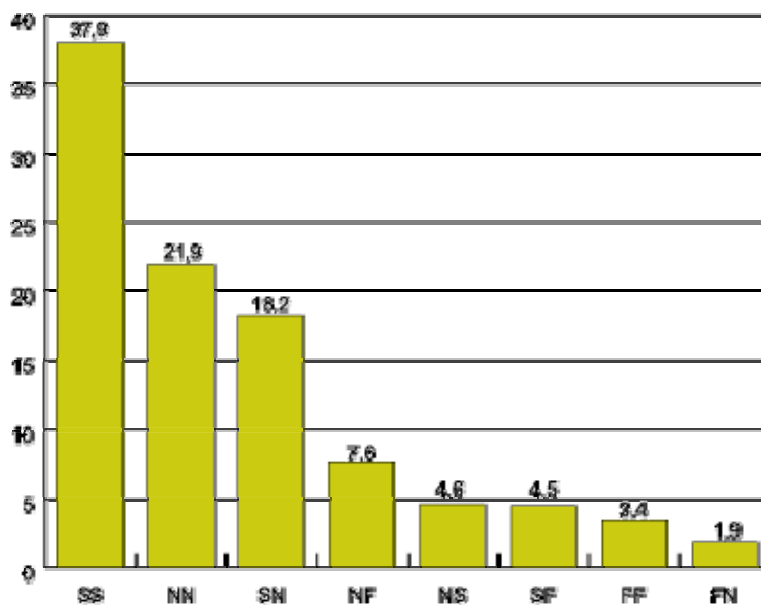
From this theoretical combination of 9 types of learners are derived the 8 types that we find in practice, given that no learner who answered the questionnaire fell into the category FS, that is, they failed to increase ability to speak Catalan, but increased use of Catalan compared with use before beginning programme. According to the results of the questionnaire, the distribution of learners expressed in percentages was as follows:

⁵ On the subject of the sociodemographic profile of the learners, readers can consult section 2 of the summary of the evaluation for the 2004 programme.

<<http://www6.gencatnet/llengcat/voluntaris/docs/aval/2004.pdf>>

⁶ The letter on the left refers to the "ability to speak Catalan" and the second letter, the letter on the right, refers to frequency of Catalan use on conclusion of the experience. For example, SN means that a learner has increased his / her ability to speak Catalan greatly or considerably, and there have not been significant changes in the use of the language.

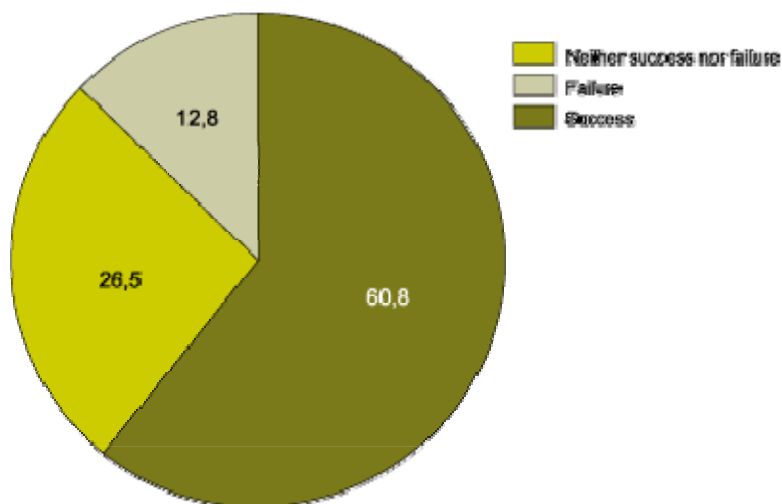
Graph 1. Groups of learners. Percentage of types of learners



As is shown on graph 1 there are three groups of learners classified as "successful" (SS, SN and NS), two groups we classify as "neither successful nor failures" (NN, SF), and three groups classified as "failures" (NF, FF and FN).

Lastly, if we group the groups by success and failure gradients, we get the following: 60.8% of the learners had increased greatly or considerably their speaking ability and / or effective use ("successful learners"); 26.5% had increased ability and actual use of Catalan slightly; that is, we could class them as "neither successes nor failures", and 12.8% had not increased ability in or use of Catalan ("failures").

Graph 2. Type of learners in terms of success or failure



4.2 investigation of the variables that affect success

To ascertain the factors that have a bearing on success a technique known as C&RT was used.⁷ This consists in finding the main variables that will explain success or failure. This method selects hierarchically those variables that can best explain the main variable. In this case two segmentation trees were drawn up, serving to isolate, and defined the variables in an exploratory way.

In segmentation *tree 1* (annex 1) the following variables have been taken into account:⁸

- Sex;
- Employment;
- Percentage of the time spent speaking Catalan;
- Knowing how to speak Catalan at the outset;
- Number of languages spoken;
- Attendance at adult Catalan classes;
- Number of meetings in the "Volunteers for language" programme.

In segmentation *tree 2* (annex 2) the same variables are there, except that the most influential variable of them all from tree 1 (knowing how to speak Catalan) has been excluded, in order to be able to tell which variables have the most influence on successful and unsuccessful outcomes.

If we analyse the two trees from a collective or conjoined viewpoint we will observe the fact that having some minimal notions of Catalan is the variable having most influence on success or failure, followed by the number of sessions or hours devoted to a programme.

In the second place we see that a specific employment situation and the fact of having attended or not attended a course on Catalan for adults also has an influence of results. These two variables and the number of hours put in, all point to the concept of time available for the programme, and the language habitually spoken, as the cluster of variables that best explain (or predict) success.

4.3 Characteristics of the groups of learners

Below we will look at the characteristics of these three groups in terms of the set variables or factors having a bearing on success or failure: the three socio-demographic variables (place of birth, age and state of employment) and the two sociolinguistic variables (able or not able to speak Catalan at the outset, and the language habitually spoken) and two variables having to do with the programme (number of hours and level of attendance of the courses).

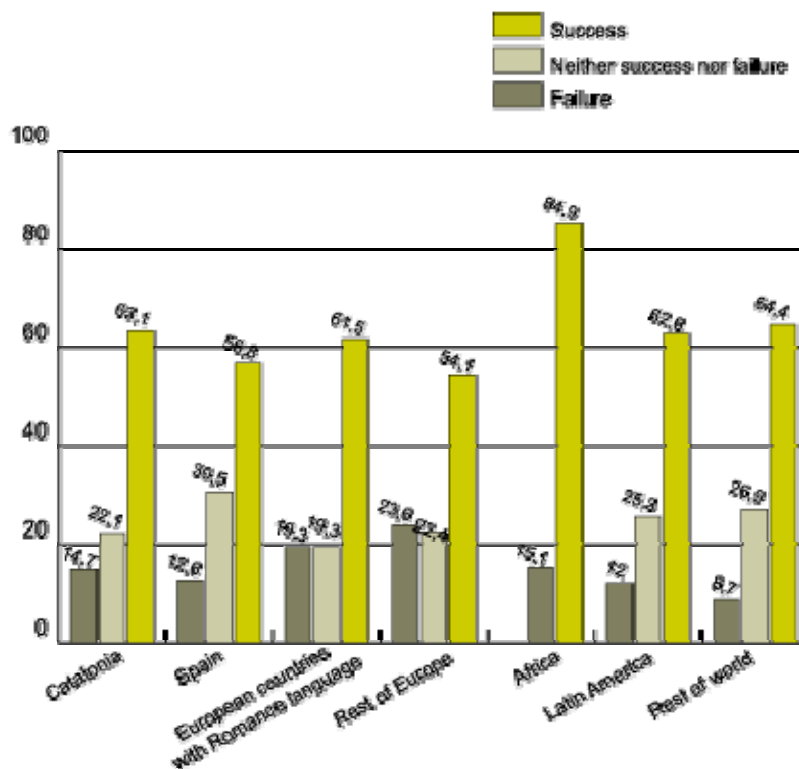
Place of birth

Here, what is most noticeable is that those born in Africa are the group with the highest level of success (85%), those born in Spain outside Catalonia present the highest percentage of "neither success nor failure" with 30.5%. The group born in Latin America are two tenths above average (62.8%) in terms of success, while those born in the rest of Europe are the group with the lowest percentage of success at 54%.

⁷ The C&RT method of classification, also known as CART (Classification And Regression Trees) is another technique for exploring relationships between dependent variables and a series of discriminatory variables or criteria. This method creates regression and classification trees, and the classification consists in the minimisation of the measures of the mode's impurity according to the discriminating variable chosen in an optimal way. C&RT generates binary trees (each division supplies exactly two secondary or daughter nodes) according to the following criteria: it considers the chi-square statistic for the categorical criteria variables and Fisher's statistic for continuous variables.

⁸ The variables used are those which substantial weight from the sociological point of view.

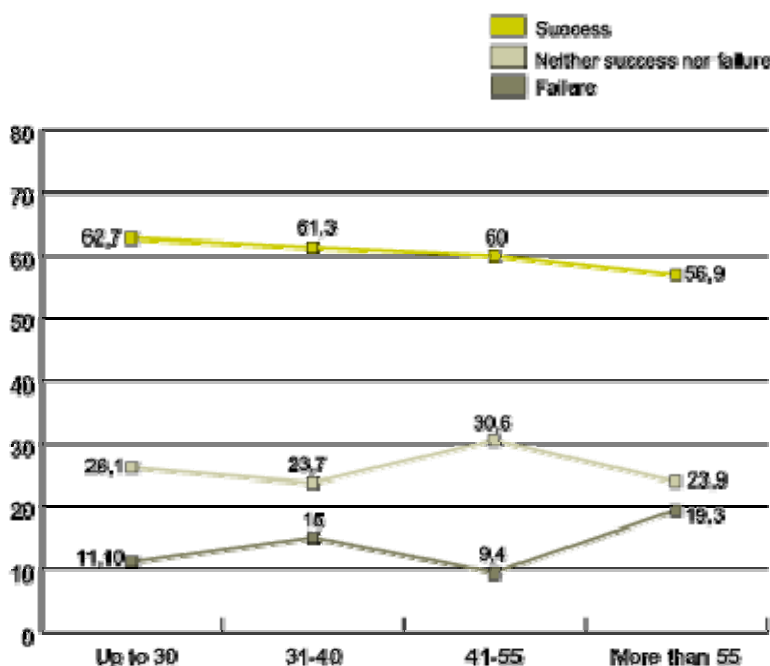
Graph 3. Place of birth and learner type



Age group

Turning to age group and type of learner (degree of success), we see a difference of 6 percentage points between the under 30s group and the over 55s group. In achieving success, so we can state that the younger group have a slight advantage with respect to the oldest age group. This tendency is not so clear with the "failure" category, nor with the "neither success nor failure" category. With the 41 to 55 age group, there is a lower percentage of failure, but with a higher percentage in the intermediate category.

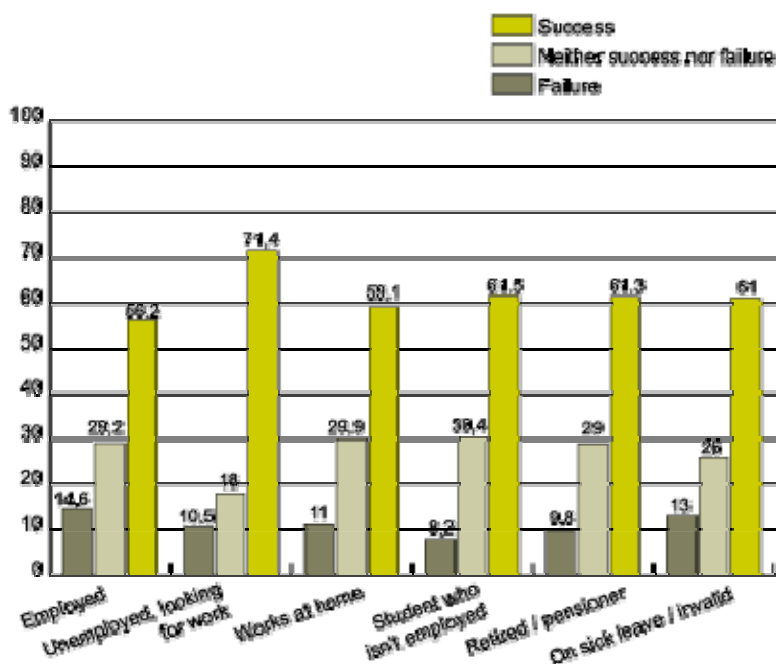
Graph 4. Type of learners by age group



Employment situation

With respect to learners' employment situation, the unemployed looking for work are those with the greatest success in the programme, while those in *employment* and *those who work at home* are the two groups with the lowest success level. There may be two reasons for this: on the one hand, we see that those with least free time have the least success; on the other hand, those who are out of work and looking for work and looking for work not only have more time, but are more successful as a result of instrumental motivation, since being able to speak Catalan will open more doors on the labour market.

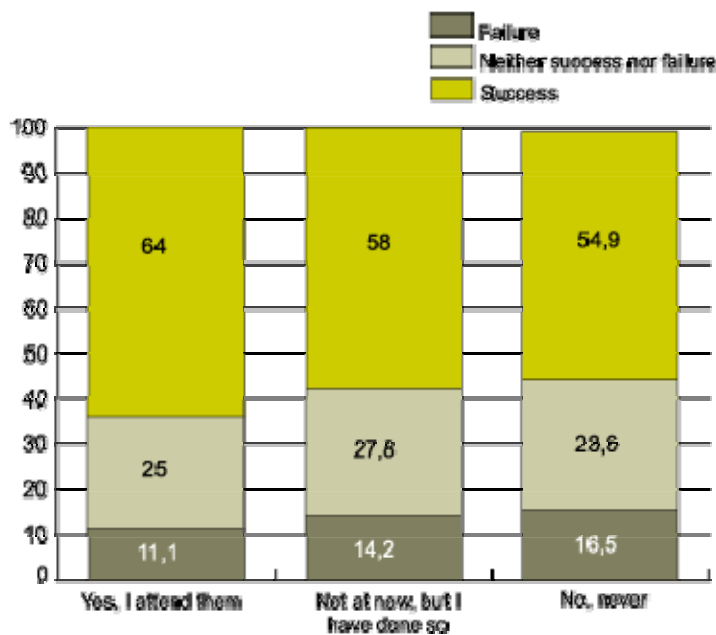
Graph 5. State of employment and success achieved



Attendance at courses

With regard to the relationship between learner type and attendance of Catalan courses, we see a direct relationship between success level and the fact of present attendance of such courses and there is a difference of 9 percentage points with those who have never attended such courses. Those who are ex-students of the courses are situated half way between the two.

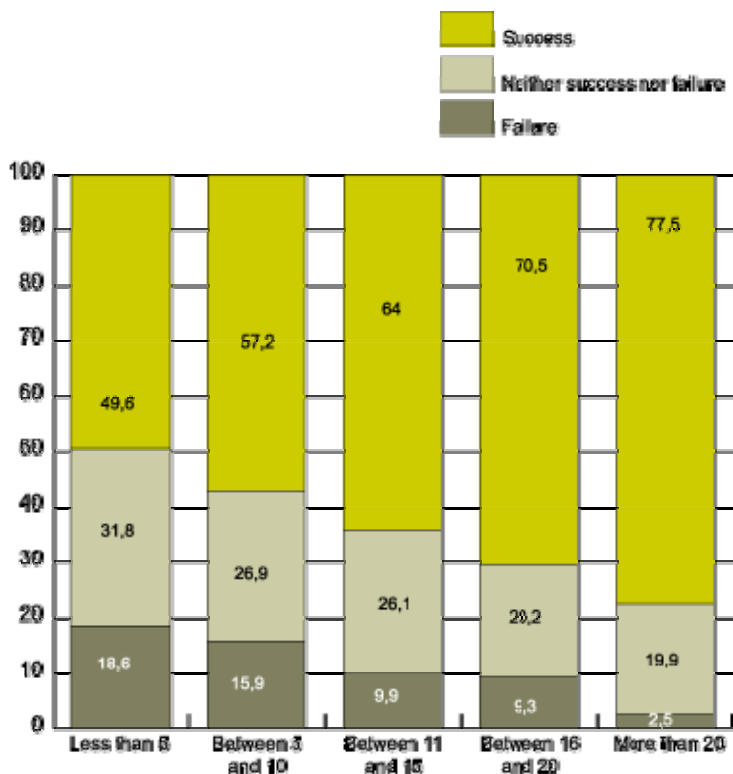
Graph 6. Type of learner and attendance at courses



Number of hours

Of all variables analysed, the number of hours of study devoted to the programme is the most significant. In the case of learners who have done more than 20 hours, 77.5% fall into the "successful" category. While the percentage goes down to 64% among those who have done between 11 and 15 hours. A high degree of correlation can be seen between the number of hours dedicated to the programme and the resulting success achieved.

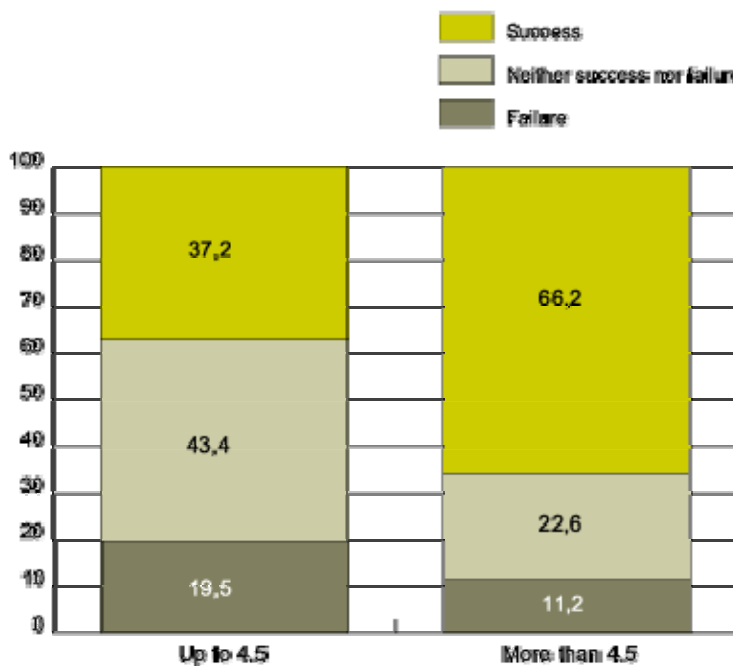
Graph 7. Total number of hours devoted to the programme and type of learners



Ability to speak Catalan at the outset.

Those who were able to speak some Catalan at the beginning of the programme were divided into two groups (against a scale of 0 to 10), taking 4.5 as the cut-off point established by segmentation *tree 1* (annex 1), which is the point that best discriminates between success and failure. It can be seen that those whose ability scores are in excess of 4.5 are more likely to achieve success, (66.2% do so) than those whose ability scores are less, (only 37.2% do so). This finding points up the need for a basic minimum ability to speak Catalan to be able to communicate with the volunteer teacher and thus follow the course properly.

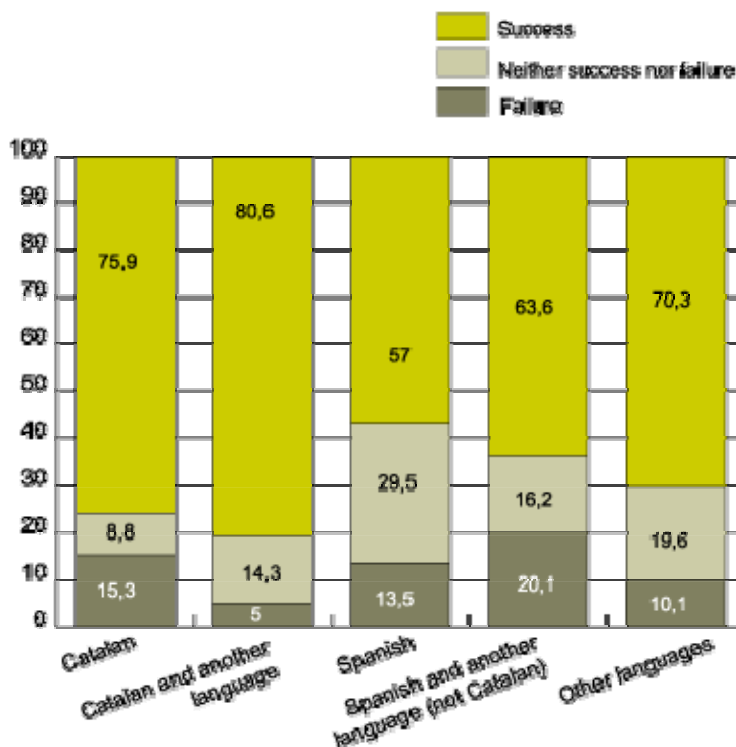
Graph 8. Ability to speak Catalan at the outset



Habitual language

Learners have a higher degree of success where they state their usual language(s) *to be Catalan and one other*, and in part this is due to the fact of having sufficient knowledge of Catalan to be able to follow the programme and sufficiently little Catalan to find it easy to increase their level. Those who least achieve success are those who only speak Spanish; a plausible explanation here is that while they may improve their Catalan, their speech networks typically continue to consist of Spanish speakers and so they do not increase frequency of use.

Graph 9. Language habitually spoken and learner type



5. Learners' motivation and observations

In this more qualitative part of the article, an analysis has been made of the contents of personal in-depth interviews with learners. Those interviewed were chosen according to degree of success or failure (according to learner typology, in the terms of this article) with cut-off point at 4.2. Thus an interview with a successful learner and an interview with who had failed were carried out and the content analysed to compare the two. The main findings of this content analysis are given below:

Topic	Success interview	Success followed by failure interview
Overall evaluation	The programme was a good experience.	Programme was a good idea, but certain requirements to be able to follow it properly were missing.
Knew about programme	Knew about programme through Catalan courses.	Knew about programme through family.
Relationship with teacher	Very good relationship with teacher, have even become friends.	The relationship with the first teacher was worse than with the second, although both were good. In general, admires the teachers.
General motivations	Learners enrol for the programme above all to improve chances on the job market.	Learners enrol for the programme to improve social relations and working conditions.
Individual motivations	Learned Catalan because resident in Catalonia and interest in the language is not so much functional, as stemming from interest in the country and its culture.	People who wish to settle in Catalonia learn more Catalan than those who are just "passing through" Catalonia.
Ability to speak Catalan at the outset	Spoke "a little" Catalan at the beginning of the programme.	With the first teacher, the learner did not speak Catalan (failure) but did do so with the second (success).
Time devoted to the programme	Has done many hours of the programme and continues to be in contact with the teacher, speaking on the phone as friends not as part of the programme (in Catalan).	The first time, didn't organise the time properly or put in enough hours. What is more, because of work commitments, the student could not start studying again until now (time of interview).

Speech network at the outset	This has proved a good opportunity to increase speaking of Catalan, since existing networks were of Spanish speakers. Often, people do not speak to her in Catalan because they perceive she is a foreigner. Helped her to get going on this.	From the beginning has had Catalan-speaking networks. Does not know Spanish, and that made difficult to communicate in the first programme (a failure) since at that point the student spoke neither Spanish nor Catalan.
Social network	Important in that provides the opportunity to meet people and widen one's circles. Helps her to integrate.	Important in that it helps in meeting people and widening speech networks. The student's motivation is instrumental.
Predisposition initially to learning languages	Good predisposition toward learning languages, from beginning.	Good predisposition toward learning languages in general.
Ease with which Catalan studied	It is easy to study Catalan but more expensive than the learner would have liked.	Finds there is much more in terms of facilities for learning Catalan than Spanish.
Recommendations	A certain minimum knowledge of Catalan is needed, but not more. No need to take a Catalan course before enrolling for the programme.	Increase the number of hours, and expect to reach a certain level, changing language pair more often.

6. Factors determining the Programme's success

Adopting a multimethod design for triangulation between techniques⁹ we have employed two different orientations (quantitative and qualitative) to obtain knowledge about the same aspect of social reality: the success or failure of the "Volunteers for Language" programme.

Below, we summarise in table form the factors that condition the success or failure of learners enrolled for the programme. The factors that emerge as common to the two methodological approaches (to evaluation) that we used are:

A minimum ability to speak Catalan at the outset
 Minimum number of hours
 Learner's work situation

The question of belonging to speech networks or widening existing social networks we have only been able to investigate qualitatively. This aspect has to do with favouring both sociolinguistic success (in terms of learning and use) and success in social integration.

Table 5. Factors and contexts that condition learner success and learner failure with the "Volunteers for language" programme

	Quantitative data	Qualitative data
Success factors	<p>Had some knowledge of Catalan at the outset.</p> <p>A minimum number of sessions (meetings) or hours devoted to the programme.</p> <p>Have had more than fifteen hours of conversation.</p> <p>The unemployed seeking work are more likely to succeed.</p>	<p>Spoke a little Catalan at the outset. "I've put in a lot of hours".</p> <p>Still sees the volunteer.</p> <p>Has a very good relationship with the linguistic partner: keeps up a friendly relationship.</p> <p>Has a network of Catalan-speaking friends which is in place and expanding and has Catalan-speaking friends and acquaintances. The majority of learners enrollee for instrumental reasons, to get in the work market.</p>
Failure factors	<p>Aren't able to speak Catalan.</p> <p>Have had less than 15 hours of conversation.</p> <p>Occupied people have less time to spare.</p>	<p>Have no knowledge or ability in Catalan. No knowledge of/ ability in either Catalan or Spanish.</p> <p>For lack of application, or other reasons, did not complete the programme.</p> <p>Discontinued programme, be-cause of demands of their work.</p>

⁹ For more about integration of qualitative and quantitative methods, see Bericat 1998.

7. Conclusions and orientations

1. The programme "Volunteers for language" has shown that more than 60% of learners have been able to learn to speak Catalan and have been able to greatly increase use of this language in their daily lives by means of the creation of new contexts of use and the emergence of new patterns of language use.
2. This programme has great potential in consolidating new patterns of language use, involving increased use of the Catalan language among originally non-speakers as well as between them and their volunteer teachers. Such patterns and underpinning norms include: "speak Catalan to non-Catalans" (that is, those whose mother-tongue is not Catalan) or "speak Catalan and don't feel ashamed", and in tune with one of the campaign slogans "Dóna corda al català" ("Give a boost to your Catalan"): <http://www.gencat.cat/llengua/queta>.
3. The programme has been well-received among recent immigrants, but it should be remembered that some groups or subdivisions are very poorly represented or absent from among those enrolled. There needs to be more advertising and promotion of the programme among the most representative members of each ethnic group or among federations that are coming to play an increasingly important and relevant role.
4. Every language pair (volunteer and learner) have a minimum of 10 of conversation together. This time is clearly not time enough to be able to acquire a basic working knowledge. The speakers who are most successful socio-linguistically did more than 20 hours of conversation. We recommend increasing the minimum number of hours or at least informing the learners and volunteers of the convenience and advantage of doing a minimum of 20 hours.
5. Since learners who are *looking for work* form the group that does best in increasing knowledge and use of Catalan, the programme should be advertised and promoted among the institutions and entities dedicated to the fostering employment (Servei d'Ocupació de Catalunya (Catalonia Occupational Service) and placement offices).
6. The fact of having some minimum knowledge of Catalan and having attended language courses are two factors that multiply the chances of success for this type of learner. Even then, the fact of having taken a course in Catalan should be made a condition for enrolling on the programme, and in sense the reverse is the case, at least for many newcomers for whom this might be the first contact made with the language situation, and they may then go on to be students on such courses.
7. The programme allows learners to forge links with the voluntary staff and helps them to create or to expand their own social networks which in many cases would otherwise be completely Spanish speaking. For the volunteers, the programme helps them to broaden still more or to renew their world view and to situate in a practical way the role of the Catalan language in relationship to immigration.
8. Turning to reasons for enrolling on the programme, in the first instance, are instrumental in nature, but reasons subsequently become more emotional or friendship motivated, between learners and volunteers, and by extension the total Catalan language situation. Some volunteers and learners propose organizing a real and virtual agenda of activities, cultural top-up, guided visits and other forms of participation.

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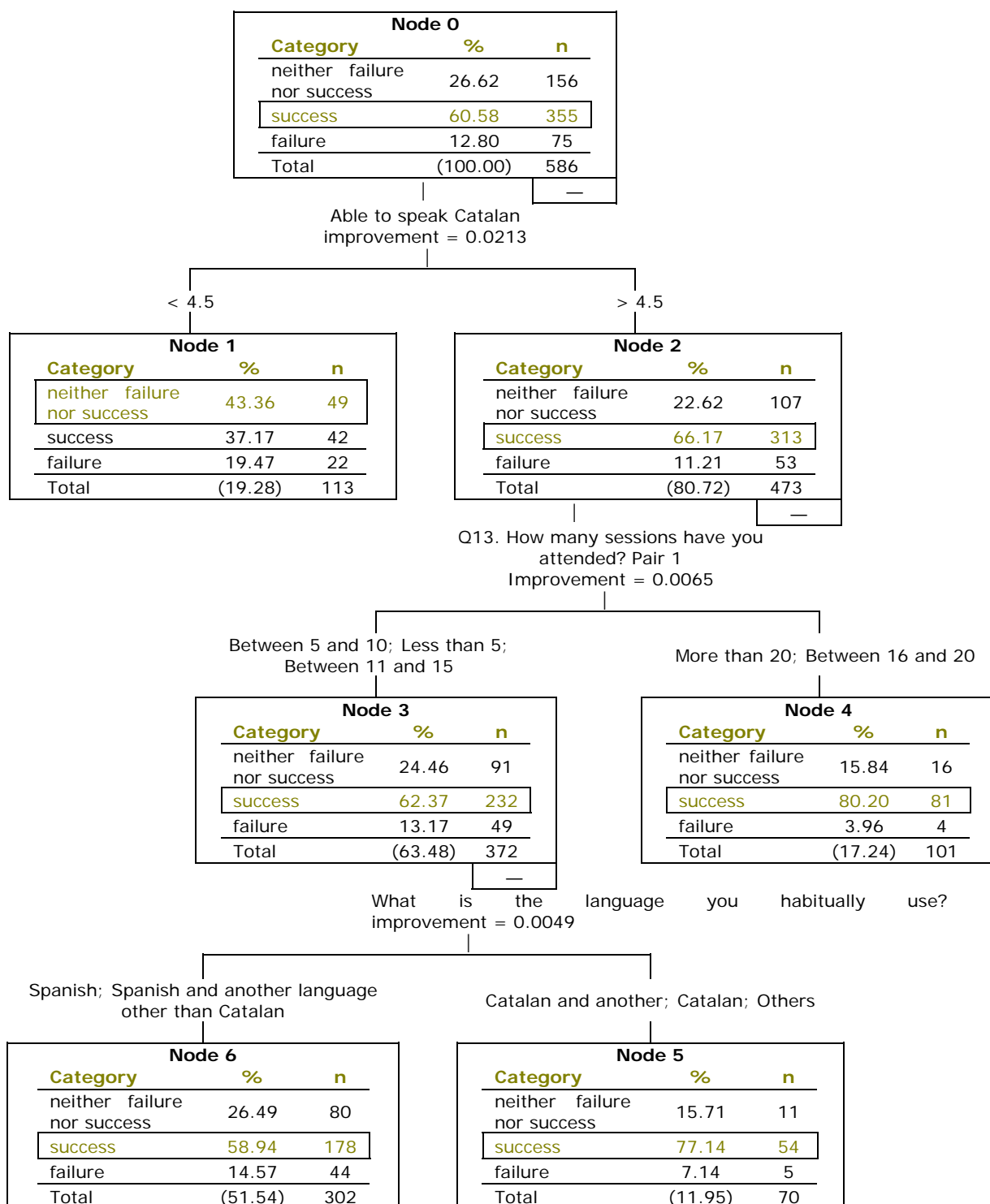
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Annex 1

Tree- 1

3 groups



Annex 2

Tree- 2

