

Attitudes towards minority and non-official languages in Spain

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This paper presents a literature review that investigates the attitudes towards minority and non-official languages in Spain, such as Aranese, Asturian, Basque, Catalan, Valencian, and Galician, which play an important role in shaping regional identities and cultural expressions. The research methodology involved a comprehensive examination of previous studies, surveys, and academic papers, providing valuable insights into the perspectives of the inhabitants towards these languages in their respective regions. The findings of these studies reveal that language serves as a key element of identity and cultural belonging in the Aranese community of Valle de Arán. Moreover, factors such as educational linguistic models, regional spoken languages, and historical contexts influence attitudes towards Catalan and Valencian. The paper also explores the intricate relationship between the terms “Valencian” and “Catalan”, highlighting the complexities of linguistic identity. Overall, the research indicates a predominantly favourable outlook towards these minority languages. Despite certain challenges, the prevailing positive sentiment contributes to strengthening community cohesion, enhancing educational opportunities, and promoting cultural interactions.

Keywords: *language attitudes, minority languages, non-official languages*

1. Introduction

The paper aims to compile a theoretical review of existing research on language attitudes towards minority and non-official languages in Spain. Spain is a multicultural, multilingual, diverse country in which “41% of the population lives in officially bilingual regions” (Lasagabaster 2017, 65). In other words, it is home to a wide variety of languages, among which only Spanish (Castilian) is the official nation-wide language, while Aranese, Catalan/Valencian, Basque and Galician are co-official languages solely in the areas where they are spoken (Directorate General for Education and Culture 2006). However, there are other non-official regional languages, such as Aragonese or Asturian, and a great number of dialects and minority varieties. Consequently, since Spain is characterized by a diverse linguistic

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context, there is also a wide range of attitudes towards the aforementioned languages, that the present paper focuses on.

2. Theoretical overview

All people have certain beliefs about language, their own language, and other people's language. Some wholeheartedly support the official language, in this case, Castilian, is the best language to express their feelings or thoughts and represents the best opportunity to improve their offspring's' future. Others, on the contrary, believe that minority languages are as important and should be used, promoted and taught as much as possible. According to SIL (2022, 1):

Attitudinal studies aid in identifying how people of one language group view the personal character and social status of speakers of another language and how they form associations about other languages. Therefore, the assessment of language attitudes aids in grouping communities on the basis of their intergroup affinities and, in combination with other methods, in estimating potential extensibility of materials.

Hence, the theoretical part is divided into subsections that take into consideration some of the most important minority languages – either non-official or co-official in certain regions of Spain – and mention relevant studies carried out on said languages.

2.1. Aranese

Regarding the language attitudes of the Aranese community in Valle de Arán, which is an administrative entity in Catalonia, Lapresta and Hugué (2006, 110) discovered, in their study, that the Aranese collective identity is primarily emitted through the linguistic identity, according to the members of the community, since language is the means which transmits “the feeling of belonging, the emotional implication and the subjective identification of the individuals with the group”³.

Even for people that do not identify themselves with the status of Aranese membership, language is the most authentic cultural feature that brings the Aranese together. The strong relationship between language and subjective identity, that comes from the feeling of belonging to a linguistic community, highlights the already mentioned fact that, to them, the founding and most relevant aspect of the Aranese identity is the linguistic one. In other words, it acquires a participative function, and it expresses paternity, which is the most consistent patrimonial element (Lapresta and Hugué 2006).

³ Author's translation

2.2. Asturian

One of the first significant sociolinguistic researches in Asturias were carried out by Andrés (1997) and Llera Ramo and San Martín Antuña (2003). Andrés (1997) found that both men and women have the same positive attitudes and opinions towards Asturian; nonetheless, women have a higher level of linguistic awareness, while men show a higher level of declared knowledge and use of the language. Regarding the age variable, young generations show more appreciation towards the Asturian language than older ones, but the elders have a higher level of declared and detected knowledge; in Andrés's words (1997, 387), "old people have the language and young people appreciate it".

As for Llera Ramo and San Martín Antuña's study (2003), "II Encuesta sociolingüística de Asturias", the research series was continued with the third and latest sociolinguistic investigation coordinated by the same Llera Ramo. So far, the preliminary results were published by the Asturian Language Academy in 2017: they indicate that 65% of Asturians still agree with the fact that their vernacular language is Asturian, although this number is 13% lower than the figure shown in the previous study from 2003. Moreover, most Asturians believe that the Asturian language is the same as the other regionally official languages in Spain. Also, the level of language knowledge has grown considerably since 1983, when the percentage of people who knew Asturian was 40%, compared to 90% nowadays. Furthermore, although Castilian is still the language people prefer to socialize in, the last decade has brought a consistent rise in choosing Asturian for social interaction. However, according to Llera Ramo (2017), the preference for a bilingual context in Asturias, that includes Asturian and Castilian, has been maintained across the decade. And, overall, more than half of the Asturians continue to agree with Asturian's co-official status and with its instruction in schools as a foreign language.

Bleorțu (2018) also did research in Pola de Siero, which is a more traditional region in Asturias that represented the foundation of standard literary Asturian (Bleorțu 2015), and found out that some inhabitants – more exactly, those that feel proudness for being Asturian – identify themselves with the language variety they speak (Castilian with Asturian influences), manifesting a positive attitude towards it. On the other hand, those that wish for an improved economic status are more attracted to Castilian. Moreover, most of the participants consider the new standard Asturian to be "artificial" (Bleorțu 2018, 158).

2.3. Basque

Basque is spoken in both Spain and France and, within Spain, it can be found in the Basque Country and in Navarre; in the former autonomous community, Basque is a co-official language alongside Spanish (Madariaga 2019). The promotion of the use of Basque is positively perceived by 65% of the population of the Basque Country, a percentage that has increased during the last two decades (Madariaga 2019). In a previous study, Madariaga (2000 in Madariaga 2019) established a link between the attitudes of teenagers in the Basque Country and Navarre and their social background, that includes factors like the predominant language used at school or at home; in other words, a positive attitude is directly determined by the presence degree of the minority language.

Rojo et al. (2010) conducted a study on native and immigrant students, which showed overall positive attitudes towards Basque and Castilian; “however, it seems that their country of origin has a strong influence on their attitudes towards these languages”, along with the length of their stay, how old they were when they came to Spain and the predominant language spoken in the family. Lasagabaster (2007, 86) also carried out research on students living in the Basque Country and the results showed positive attitudes towards Basque, “even though students pointed out that it is a difficult language to learn and that there are more useful languages than Basque”. Moreover, the study observed no discrimination towards the minority language; on the contrary, it is equally integrated within the community although it is not as prominent as Castilian.

2.4. Catalan

Related to the language attitudes manifested towards Catalan, the first study conducted in this century in Catalonia and Aragon proved positive attitudes towards both Catalan and Spanish in secondary school students; nonetheless, “Catalan tended to take priority over Spanish”, regardless of the degree of presence of the language in the family (Huguet and Llurda 2001 in Huguet 2007, 25). However, findings of a previous research indicate that students’ attitudes were majorly determined by the language spoken at home; in other words, positive attitudes towards Catalan were enhanced in students who had Catalan as their native tongue compared to students who had Spanish as their L1 or were bilingual (Vicectorat de Relacions Institucionals i Política Lingüística 1998).

Later on, Huguet’s study (2007), that focused on university students, still found more positive attitudes towards Catalan than towards Spanish (or English) together with high levels of competence, but, on the other hand, it observed that the L1 variable had an impact on the participants’ attitudes, in the sense that closeness to a certain language also implied more positive opinions of that

language. Other factors that influenced students' attitudes were the linguistic model followed at school and the language spoken in the region they lived in. Moreover, an interesting finding was that "living in bigger cities (over 100.000 inhabitants) brings more positive attitudes towards Spanish", which, in the author's view, is related to the past migration of Castilian-speaking workers in the most important cities of Catalonia (Huguet 2007, 35).

2.5. Valencian (Catalan used in Valencia)

The term "Valencian" is surrounded by a shade of controversy due to its history and development within the Valencian Community. The official co-language of this region is Catalan, as agreed through the document "Les Normes de Castelló" in 1932 (Jordà 2007). Hence, because the Catalan used in the Valencian Community is a "dialectal variety of the Catalan language", many people refer to it as Valencian (Jordà 2007, 93). Nonetheless, employing this term has dispersed the idea that it is a separate language from Catalan, "although this is only an opinion not grounded in any philological criteria, and it is promoted by specific political parties" (Jordà 2007, 93). And, in fact, Catalan speakers are more concerned about the instruction language in schools and use of the language than they are about its label.

Regarding language attitudes towards the Catalan used in Valencia, research that tackles this issue are scarce. However, Blas Arroyo's research (1995) on Valencian students showed the existence of negative attitudes towards Catalan in the case of monolingual speakers of Spanish, which are in opposition with their positive attitudes towards Spanish; what is more, an intriguing finding was that bilingual speakers had even less favourable attitudes towards Catalan.

In Jordà's later paper (2007), almost half of the university students that participated in the study showed positive attitudes, 40% showed neutral ones and 11% showed negative attitudes. The last percentage, even though low, is the highest among the three languages involved in the research: Spanish, Catalan and English. As in other studies on language attitudes in the Spanish context, the results are linked to the participants' perceived competence of language, native language and the main language used in their hometown.

One of the most recent studies was González Martínez and Blas Arroyo's (2011) and it investigated language attitudes in Els Ports, a region in the Valencian Community. The research observed positive attitudes for Spanish in all domains of use, but, for Catalan, there were positive attitudes within the social and personal appeal spheres, and negative attitudes in terms of the socioeconomic status associated with it. The authors appreciate this to be largely determined by the age factor, as elders have a less favourable attitude towards Valencian, while younger generations value it more.

2.6. Galician

A study from 1995 by Sociolinguistics Seminar (Guitérrez et al. 2007) showed that Galicians' attitudes towards the Galician language are favourable, with a percentage of almost 70% of the population believing that Galician is as useful as (or even more useful than) Spanish and that it should be employed in schools. A more recent paper, Guitérrez et al.'s (2007), observed the attitudes of university students who were in the Teacher Training programme. The findings indicate that their perception of the knowledge they have in Spanish is superior to that in Galician and "confirm the intergenerational downward trend of the use of Galician" noticed in previous studies (Guitérrez et al. 2007, 61).

Moreover, the study confirmed the presence of negative attitudes towards the use of Galician, that devoid Galician of importance in contexts such as looking for a workplace, meeting new people or interacting with classmates. Also, only a very low percentage of the participants consider Galician to be important in the community integration process. Nonetheless, respondents' attitudes are more positive towards Galician, when compared to Spanish (and English) and enhanced attitudes are linked to their perceived competence of Galician.

The existence of negative attitudes towards Galician could be justified through "the low-prestige status associated with Galician", compared to Catalan or Basque (O'Rourke 2010, 149). In his view, there exist social and linguistic distances between the speakers of this minority language which lead to conflicts that negatively affect the language revival in the Galician community and may give rise to unfavourable attitudes; because of this, O'Rourke (2010) labels the Galician minority language as a weak one.

3. Conclusions

After having carefully reviewed some of the most relevant studies on Spanish minority and non-official languages, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Language is a key component of defining identity and a sense of belonging in the Aranese culture.
- Stance toward the Asturian language shows generational variances and a rise in admiration among younger generations.
- Social background and origin have an impact on attitudes toward the Basque language, with favourable impressions being connected to the existence of the minority language.
- Positive opinions about Catalan are seen in Catalonia and Aragon, where family language is important.

- History and politics have an impact on people's opinions toward the Valencian language, and certain unfavourable attitudes have been noted, especially among monolingual Spanish speakers.
- Attitudes toward the Galician language show a deterioration in its usage and perceived importance in a number of areas.

The review's overall conclusion emphasizes the generally favourable linguistic attitudes toward minority languages in Spain, which generate a sense of unity, advance cultural and educational opportunities, and strengthen community cohesiveness. However, unfavourable views in some settings highlight the significance of ongoing initiatives to maintain and encourage the development of these languages.

Consequently, this brief theoretical overview of the most relevant published studies on language attitudes towards various non-official and minority languages from Spain is meant to shed some light on the Spanish multilingual background as regards attitudes of inhabitants of the respective region towards Aranese, Asturian, Basque, Catalan, one variety of Catalan known as Valencian, and Galician. Except for Valencian and Galician, which were negatively valued by certain groups and in certain spheres of use, the papers showed overall favourable attitudes towards the aforementioned languages. This, in itself, proves that perspectives on multilingualism are still largely positive and languages that received the status of minority languages are not only accepted, but also majorly positively regarded by speakers of the areas where such languages exist. Socially and linguistically, positive attitudes help create a more unified community and enhance the educational and cultural prospects of the group of language entities, which, consequently, builds stronger human interaction and consolidates communion.

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