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**Who Are the Catalans?
Language, Identity and Assimilation
in Contemporary Catalonia**

by

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Abstract

This paper analyzes patterns of linguistic adaptation, cultural assimilation, and hidden contestation in contemporary Catalonia. It makes use of public opinion data available for the general population there, compared and contrasted with the results of primary research from 355 interviews conducted by this author with a random sample of Catalan politicians and schoolteachers. In the process, it assesses the relative merits of the “competitive assimilation” thesis, the dominant framework for understanding the dynamics of language politics in Catalonia. It contends that this thesis is critically flawed, both as description and as explanation.

Introduction

Since the transition in Spain and the subsequent creation of a quasi-federal state, successive regional governments in Catalonia have mobilized and maintained a broad, cross-class coalition in favor of a host of “assimilationist” nation-building policies, while managing to avoid the activation of a potentially explosive ethno-linguistic cleavage in Catalan society – one that largely overlaps with and is reinforced by patterns of class stratification there (Miley 2004). How have successive regional governments succeeded in maintaining this cross-class consensus, channeling the society’s latent ethno-linguistic cleavage in the process, rather than exacerbating it and making it more salient?

This is the puzzle around which my paper is structured. I begin by mapping the contours of the ethno-linguistic cleavage in Catalonia, and by documenting the extent to which this cleavage overlaps with patterns of social and class stratification there. I then turn to assess the main theory that has been formulated to explain the above puzzle: namely, the thesis of “competitive assimilation.” This thesis contends that the latent ethno-linguistic cleavage in Catalan society is being progressively erased, and that this process is being driven by a set of micro-level rational choices made by Castilian speakers in Catalonia, who, like Russian speakers in Estonia, have decided to pursue their self-interest by learning Catalan and adapting to the “local culture,” therefore foregoing political contestation (Laitin and Solé 1986).

I will argue that the competitive assimilation thesis is critically-flawed, both as description and as explanation. On the descriptive level, the “competitive assimilation” thesis would lead us to expect a much higher level of assimilation than can actually be observed. On the explanatory level, the “competitive assimilation” thesis, which purports to be a micro-theory and relies upon a game-theoretic model, cannot actually provide a *causal* theory at all; at best, it can only *describe* an equilibrium that holds, given a specific constellation of social and power relations. In sum, I will contend that the “competitive assimilation” thesis is not a *causal theory*, but a *description* – and that it is a *bad* description at that.

Mapping the Contours of the Ethno-Linguistic Cleavage in Catalonia

Before we can assess the merits of the “competitive assimilation” thesis, we need to provide the reader with a basic awareness of Catalonia’s demographic context, so that s/he can understand why Catalonia provides comparativists a case particularly ripe for exploring dimensions of nationalist political dynamics that scholarly theorizing on the subject has yet to deal with in an adequate fashion. Let us briefly mention five characteristics, each of which adds to the theoretical significance of the “case” of Catalonia in Spain.

One thing that distinguishes Spain from other comparable cases of democratic contexts in Western Europe and North America where significant “nationalist movements” question the legitimacy of the state, such as Belgium and Canada, is the high level of linguistic heterogeneity in the peripheral regions with the most developed sense of a distinct national consciousness themselves, the Basque Country and Catalonia (Linz

1986). Not only is Spain as a whole “multi-lingual,” but so too is Catalonia (see table one).

Table 1: "Mother Tongue" in Catalonia

<i>Castilian</i>	<i>Both</i>	<i>Catalan</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>N</i>
51.9	5.9	39.9	2.2	99.9	(2778)

Source: CIS Survey #2410 (2001)

This first characteristic, the fact of ethno-linguistic heterogeneity, makes Catalonia in Spain very different from either Flanders or Wallonia in Belgium, both of which are overwhelmingly monolingual and homogenous, or the different cantons in Switzerland. Indeed, it even makes Spain significantly different from a place like Québec in Canada, where there is a considerable degree of linguistic homogeneity outside of the metropolitan region of Montréal.

A second distinguishing characteristic is that Catalonia itself is also a “bilingual” region in another sense. Catalonia is, of course, the home of the Catalan language, a language with a long and rich literary tradition, whose cultural revival during the latter half of the nineteenth century preceded and fueled the birth of the nationalist movement in the region. But another language is spoken there as well – namely, Castilian, also known as Spanish, one of the world’s dominant languages (Linz 1975). Not only do roughly half of Catalonia’s residents speak Castilian as their first language, but virtually all of them, “Castilian speakers” and “Catalan speakers” alike, know it.

A third striking characteristic of Catalonia is the overwhelming impact that immigration from other regions in Spain has had on Catalan society. This too distinguishes the Spanish case from the Belgian and Canadian ones – not to mention places like Scotland and Wales as well, both of which have traditionally experienced waves of *emigration* rather than of *immigration*.

In contrast to all of these other cases, one of the defining characteristics of Catalan society is the very high percentage of its population that hails from other regions in Spain. From the middle of the nineteenth century, when Castilian-speaking immigrants from the rest of the country first flocked to Barcelona to work in the textile factories there, the Catalan working class has always included numerous non-autochthonous individuals among its ranks. But between 1955 and 1973, when the Catalan economy underwent unprecedented expansion, the number of immigrant laborers who came to Catalonia would skyrocket. By the time of the transition, Castilian-speaking immigrants from the rest of Spain had come to constitute clear majorities in most of the municipalities in the industrial belt surrounding Barcelona, and significant minorities throughout most of Catalonia. The demographic legacy of this wave of immigration continues to be profound to this day (see table two).¹

¹For an overview of the history of the phenomenon of immigration in Catalonia, see Termes (1984). For two overviews of the debates provoked by this phenomenon in nationalist circles up through the time of the transition, see Jacqueline Hall (1979) and Colomer (1986). For a comparative analysis that emphasizes the importance of immigration, see Shafir (1985).

Table 2: Ascendancy Groups in Catalonia

<i>Immigrants</i>	<i>First Gen</i>	<i>Mixed</i>	<i>Natives</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>N</i>
30.8	15.4	19.8	34.0	100	(1141)

Source: Orizo and Roque (2001).

Furthermore, a fourth characteristic of Catalonia that must be highlighted has to do not with demography, but with patterns of “subjective identification.” A useful indicator for capturing this complex dimension of Catalan social reality comes from responses to a question frequently put to the Catalan public in opinion polls since the transition to democracy. The question is as follows: “Today there is much talk of ‘nationalities.’ Would you say that you feel Spanish, more Spanish than Catalan, as Spanish as Catalan, more Catalan than Spanish, or Catalan?”² As it turns out, most citizens in Catalonia do not identify themselves in exclusive or binary terms – i.e., they do not consider themselves either “only Catalan” or “only Spanish.” Instead, the vast majority register multiple and complementary identities – i.e. they consider themselves “both Catalan and Spanish,” regardless of their ethnic or linguistic background (see table three).

Table 3: Subjective Identifications among Different Ascendancy Groups

	<i>Immigrants</i>	<i>1st Generation Born in Catalonia</i>	<i>One Parent Born in Catalonia</i>	<i>Both parents born in Catalonia</i>	<i>Total</i>
Spanish	30.2	6.1	1.6	1.3	12.4
More Spanish	12.4	11	7.3	0.3	7.7
As Spanish	43.8	57.1	30.1	23.9	37.3
More Catalan	5.7	17.2	44.7	39.3	24.3
Catalan	3.8	6.7	15.4	34.4	16.2
NS/NC	4.1	1.8	0.8	0.7	2.2
Total	100	99.9	99.9	99.9	100.1
N	(315)	(163)	(123)	(305)	(922)

Source: CIS Study #2455 (2002).

Finally, a fifth demographic feature, already alluded to above, needs to be highlighted as well – namely, the extent to which the ethno-linguistic cleavage in Catalan society overlaps with, and is thus reinforced by, patterns of social class stratification there (Martínez 1999) (see table four).

In sum, these five distinguishing characteristics – the fact of ethno-linguistic heterogeneity, the fact of societal “bilingualism,” the impact of immigration, the reality of multiple and complementary identities, and the significant overlap between the ethno-linguistic cleavage and patterns of social and class stratification – all need to be taken into account as the basic background for understanding the dynamics of linguistic and identity politics in Catalonia. Indeed, the policies of “linguistic normalization” and “na-

²Juan Linz and his collaborators at DATA first began to employ this question in public opinion surveys conducted in 1977 (1981). Linz later explored responses to the question in more depth in a series of articles and books published throughout the course of the 1980s (1985a, 1985b and 1986) More recently, Luis Moreno (1998, 2001) and Kenneth McRoberts (2001) have focused much attention on this five-point scale as well.

tional reconstruction” that have been pursued since the transition have as one of their principal objectives the “integration” and/or “assimilation” of Castilian-speaking, disproportionately working-class, immigrants and of their descendants into the linguistic and cultural habits of the autochthonous population there (Shabad and Gunther 1982).

Table 4: The Overlap of Class and "Ethnic" Cleavages in Catalonia

		<i>Capital-ists</i>	<i>Petty Bour-geoisie</i>	<i>Manag-ers</i>	<i>Ex-perts</i>	<i>High-skilled worker</i>	<i>Prole-tariat</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>N</i>
<i>Mother tongue</i>	Castil-ian	2.1	12.3	6.6	7.0	22.8	49.2	100	(575)
	Catalan	7.4	23.9	6.2	8.9	23.2	30.5	100.1	(406)
<i>Ascen-dancy groups</i>	Immi-grants	1.5	14.5	6.0	3.6	17.8	56.5	99.9	(331)
	First Gen	2.9	12.7	6.4	8.7	27.2	42.2	100.1	(173)
	Mixed	5.5	9.4	7.1	11.8	33.1	33.1	100	(127)
	Natives	7.0	24.2	5.9	9.9	21.8	31.2	100	(372)
	Total	4.3	17.1	6.3	7.9	22.8	41.6	100	(1004)

Source: CIS Study #2298 (1998). Class categories have been broken down in accordance with the criteria of Erik Olin Wright (1997). Calculated by Enric Martinez (1999).

Are Castilian-Speakers in Catalonia Assimilating? And if so, to what?

Having thus sketched the contours of the ethno-linguistic cleavage in Catalan society, we are ready to address the relative merits of the “competitive assimilation” thesis. As we mentioned at the outset, according to the “competitive assimilation” thesis, the absence of ethno-linguistic conflict in Catalan society can largely be explained the structure of micro-incentives, which has allegedly led Castilian speakers to “assimilate” into the linguistic and cultural practices of the Catalan-speaking community rather than to opt for a strategy of collective resistance. But what do those who espouse the thesis mean by the term “assimilation”? A good way to establish this is through reference to the formulations of the American political scientist David Laitin, the most prominent proponent of the thesis.³ Laitin (1995) has defined “assimilation” in the following fashion: “[It is] the process of adoption of the ever changing cultural practices of dominant society with the goal of crossing a fluid cultural boundary separating minorities from dominant society.” Elsewhere (1998), he has further specified: “[A]ssimilation can be thought of as a successful switch, in a variety of cultural realms, to the practices of dominant society.” What’s more, though the details of Laitin’s “microfoundational” account of the dynamics of “competitive assimilation” have evolved over time, one feature that has remained constant in his work is the assumption that “language” can serve as a proxy for “culture,” based in turn on the supposition that “language, religion, dress, cuisine, and family patterns are all interrelated,” and that consequently “linguistic shifts” (1998) can serve as a proxy for “assimilation.” In fact, he has defended this assumption

³Daniele Conversi (1997) and Michael Keating (2001) have advanced a similar claim about widespread assimilation. Unlike Laitin, however, they have not sought to identify its “instrumentally-rationalist micro-foundations.”

on both practical and substantive grounds. As a matter of practicality, he has defended the assumption on the grounds that “language, because it is relatively easy to monitor and measure, is particularly kind to social scientists seeking a window on identity shift” (1998). As a matter of substance, he has defended the assumption at least for contexts such as Catalonia and the post-Soviet world, where language has actually emerged as “the most salient issue.” Finally, Laitin has contended that one of the distinct advantages of his definition of “assimilation” is that it can be operationalized in a parsimonious manner, thus “allow[ing] us to cut through” complicated anthropological concepts such as “acculturation” and “integration,” and talk instead “simply about *rates* of assimilation in a variety of contexts” (1998).

The use of “language” as a proxy for “culture,” based on the supposition that “language, religion, dress, cuisine, and family patterns are all interrelated,” is at least partially problematic, insofar as it remains overly vague. Such vagueness is a problem because it conceals the multiple and complex ways in which cultural subsystems can be interrelated, not to mention the processes by which different categories can come to be more or less salient in the way that people divide the social world and therefore in the way that they imagine group belonging (Bourdieu 1991). In fact, dominant conceptions of the “sub-systemic cultural characteristics” required for belonging to a group can be fruitfully compared across contexts. Furthermore, even in one context, these conceptions can evolve over time in ways that call for systematic social scientific explanation. Finally, these conceptions are always subject to subject to internal contestation (Smith 2003).

Take, for example, primordial (or quasi-primordial) conceptions of group belonging in Catalonia. In 1979, according to a public opinion survey conducted by DATA, fully 82.4 percent of the population in Catalonia registered affirmative responses to the idea that either descent from a Catalan family or having been born in Catalonia were necessary conditions for considering oneself a Catalan. By contrast, only 60.7 percent of the population in Euskadi registered affirmative responses to the same idea (Linz 1985). Furthermore, by 1998, the proportion had dropped significantly in both places, while the gap between them had narrowed. Now, only 51.1 percent of the population in Catalonia, compared with 44.6 percent of the population in Euskadi, registered affirmative response to the idea (CIS #2298).

Table 5: Percentage registering affirmative responses to whether the criteria of either familial descent or birthplace should be applied for determining who is Catalan/Basque

	1979	(N)	1998	(N)
Catalonia	82.4	(1012)	51.1	(1006)
Euskadi	60.7	(779)	44.6	(614)

Sources: Linz (1985); CIS Studies #2296 (1998) and #2298 (1998)

As such, the evidence is indisputable that dominant conceptions of what it takes to belong to a group can and do evolve over time. Furthermore, even at any given point in time, such dominant conceptions are subject to internal contestation – or, to use the language of Gramsci (1971), they are vulnerable to counter-hegemonic projects. Take, for example, the disjunct between elite and public opinion about whether primordial (or quasi-primordial) prerequisites apply when it comes to distinguishing Catalans from non-Catalans. Whereas 51.1 percent of the Catalan population continues to consider ei-

ther familial descent or birthplace as prerequisites for belonging to the group, only 8.3 percent of teachers, 3.1 percent of local politicians, and 1.9 percent of Catalan parliamentarians whom we interviewed claimed this to be the case (Miley 2004).

Furthermore, even when we look only at the general population in Catalonia, we can still observe significant variations in opinion across different segments of the population – indeed, variations that are bound to surprise theorists who would equate nationalism with “primordialist” sentiment (Geertz 1973). Those who identify the least with Catalonia are most likely to register belief in the idea that primordial criteria can be applied for distinguishing Catalans from non-Catalans. To be precise, fully 60.8 percent of those who consider themselves only Spanish and 57.8 percent who consider themselves more Spanish register such a belief, compared with only 49.7 percent of those who consider themselves equally Catalan, 51.5 percent who consider themselves more Catalan, and 45.0 percent who consider themselves exclusively Catalan (CIS #2298).

What does this evidence have to do with the “competitive assimilation” thesis? To begin with, it reminds us that assimilation games are always *politically-mediated games*. In other words, it reminds us that both the *extent of* and the *kinds of* cultural shifts or “tips” demanded of outsiders are themselves determined by particular political junctures, as well as by particular constellations of material and social power relations. Furthermore, such a reminder alone amounts to a partial indictment of the assumptions built into the “competitive assimilation” thesis – simply because said thesis suggests the opposite: i.e., that it is the structure of micro-incentives for assimilation that explains political dynamics, when it is political dynamics that explain the structure of micro-incentives for assimilation.

The relationship between any given sub-systemic cultural characteristic or practice and the “cultural system” as a whole needs to be further specified before we can draw any conclusions about the significance of the “cultural shifts” we objectivate, measure, and map – because the *pressure to* and the *significance of* acquiring a given characteristic or of adopting a given practice, as well as its connection to group membership, varies by context in important ways.

A comparison between the Basque Country and Catalonia, this time with respect to the issue of “language,” again proves illustrative. In the Basque Country, only 21.8 percent of the population contends that “speaking Basque” is a cultural practice required for considering oneself a Basque (CIS #2296). By contrast, in Catalonia, fully 43.5 percent of the population contends that “speaking Catalan” is (CIS #2298). We can interpret such numbers as evidence that “language” is less salient in the Basque Country than it is in Catalonia, and that there exists less of a linguistic barrier to group membership in the former context than in the latter.⁴ What’s more, when we look closer still, we find that not only is there less of a “linguistic barrier” to group membership in the Basque Country than there is in Catalonia, but also that the criterion of “language” is less contested among different segments of the population in the former context than in the latter. For example, in the Basque Country, Basque speakers and non-Basque speak-

⁴This is not to say that language has not been salient in the Basque Country at all. See Mezo (1996).

ers alike register rather similar responses to the question of whether speaking the language constitutes a necessary condition for group membership. In Catalonia, by contrast, the discrepancies between the responses of different linguistic segments of the population are quite sharp. Specifically, those whose first language is Catalan are much more likely to consider speaking the language a necessary condition for group membership than is the rest of the population (see table six).

Table 6: Contested Conceptions of Basque and Catalan Identity: Affirmative Responses to the Question, "In Order to Consider Oneself Catalan/Basque, Should One Speak the Catalan/Basque Language?"

	Catalonia				The Basque Country			
	Yes	No	DK/DA	N	Yes	No	DK/DA	N
Cannot Speak Regional Language	25.6	69.7	4.7	(211)	20.1	66.4	17	(437)
Have Learned Regional Language	34.5	60.6	4.8	(330)	27.7	61.5	10.8	(65)
Bilingual Childhood Home	48.5	50.0	1.5	(68)	25.0	54.2	20.8	(24)
Regional Language is Mother Tongue	60.2	36.7	3.1	(387)	26.8	59.8	13.4	(82)
Total	43.5	52.6	3.9	(1004)	21.7	64.9	13.5	(609)

Sources: CIS #2298 (1998) and #2296 (1998)

Furthermore, just as conceptions of what is required for group membership can themselves shift over time, so too can the extent of contestation over these conceptions. In point of fact, in Catalonia the opinions of those who consider themselves predominately Spanish compared with the opinions of those who consider themselves predominately Catalan have become significantly more polarized over the past twenty years (see table seven).

Table 7: Shifts in Conceptions of Catalan Identity: Affirmative Responses to the Question, "In Order to Consider Oneself Catalan, Should One Speak Catalan?"

	Spanish	More Spanish	Equally Spanish	More Catalan	Catalan	Total
1979	30.3	32.7	34.5	45.5	27	33.3
1998	21.3	23.4	38.1	61.1	58	43.5

Source for 1979: Linz (1986)

From these tables mapping patterns of contestation, we can draw a provisional conclusion about why the language of "assimilation" is itself somewhat misleading. The figures reveal how processes of adapting to certain cultural characteristics or practices are always embedded within a context of complex interaction among different segments of the population. Consequently, we can infer that to understand the dynamics of identity transformation in any given context, we must never lose sight of the political processes by which barriers distinguishing "outsiders" from "insiders" are negotiated, or of the interactions between "outsiders" and "insiders." But the term "assimilation" partially covers over such processes and interactions. Regardless of any qualifications about the "fluidity" of cultural boundaries tacked on, the term "assimilation" connotes that the barriers distinguishing "insiders" from "outsiders" are stable, and that the content of the "culture" into which "outsiders" can assimilate is static.

Measuring Linguistic Shifts in Catalonia

Again, according to the “competitive assimilation” thesis, the absence of ethno-linguistic conflict in Catalonia can largely be explained by pointing to a structure of micro-incentives that has allegedly led Castilian speakers to “assimilate” into the linguistic and cultural practices of the Catalan-speaking community rather than to opt for a strategy of collective resistance. We have already made the theoretical point that, even if it can be shown that Castilian speakers are in fact “assimilating,” to point to a structure of micro-incentives for “assimilation” does not amount to an “explanation”; rather, it merely *describes* an equilibrium that itself needs to be explained. But to what extent is the account provided by the proponents of the “competitive assimilation” thesis even accurate as a *description*? Not surprisingly, much depends on the way the term “assimilation” is interpreted.

If the term “assimilation” is interpreted in a minimalist fashion to mean that, over time, Castilian speakers have progressively learned Catalan, then, as a matter of *description*, the claim is accurate. It cannot be denied that levels of knowledge of Catalan have increased significantly over the past two-and-a-half decades.

Table 8: Rates of "Linguistic Conversion" of People Whose Mother Tongue Is Castilian

	<i>Population</i>	<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Local Politicians</i>	<i>Parliamentarians</i>
“Loyal” Castilian-Speaking Identity	74.8	52.5	62.8	30.0
“Conversion” to Bilingual Identity	17.2	39.0	32.6	50.0
“Conversion” to a Catalan-Speaking Identity	7.8	8.5	4.7	20.0
N	(541)	(60)	(43)	(10)

Source for Population: CIS #2298, ,

Before we move on to examine the evidence at our disposal, let us tip the reader off to another basic feature of Catalan society: namely, that it is *diglossic*, i.e., that there are systematic differences in the linguistic codes that people employ in different spheres of activity within the society (Fishman 1963). Over time there has been much variance in Catalonia’s legal and institutional framework, and such variance has encouraged shifting patterns of diglossia there. Before the transition to democracy, for example, the Franco regime’s efforts to exclude the Catalan language from public life had provoked a diglossic situation in which people whose first language was Catalan were forced to employ Castilian in their dealings with the state authorities.⁵ Since the transition, however, much of this has been “corrected.” Nevertheless, some diglossic norms inherited from the Franquist past (and from before) remain; what’s more, the *Generalitat*’s efforts to

⁵The policies of linguistic and cultural repression of the Franco regime have been well documented. See, in particular, the work of Josep Benet, especially his classic, *Catalunya sota el règim franquista* (1978), but also, his more recent, and more polemical, *L'intent franquista de genocidi cultural contra Catalunya* (1995).

“normalize” the Catalan language have encouraged new forms of diglossia to emerge alongside the old ones.⁶

At the time of the transition to democracy, knowledge of Catalan was spread very unevenly throughout the Catalan territory. In rural and semi-industrial areas, where there was a lower concentration of immigrants from other regions in Spain, a higher proportion of the population could speak Catalan and, as a result, it was generally employed as the language of social relations in everyday life, despite the fact that it had been marginalized from official public life. By contrast, in industrial areas, where there was a higher concentration of immigration, a lower proportion of the population could speak the language; as a result, the Castilian language was much more prominent. In these areas, Castilian had come to be not only the language of official public life but, also, had for the most part come to be the *de facto* language of social relations in everyday life.

The census data available from the period immediately preceding the transition, though limited to the province of Barcelona, bear out such a generalization. For, in fact, they reveal the existence at the time of three different geographic zones, each of which was characterized by distinct levels of knowledge and use of Catalan: the first, situated in the mostly-rural hinterland of the province of Barcelona, composed of counties such as the Alt Penedès, Anoia, Bages, Berguedà and Osona, where knowledge of Catalan was widespread and its use in everyday social life and household relations was dominant; the second, situated in the city of Barcelona itself and on the coasts both to the north and to the south of it, in the counties of the Maresme, Garraf and the Vallès Oriental, where about half of the population knew the language and roughly the same proportion spoke it at home; and the third, situated in the industrial belt surrounding the city of Barcelona, including the counties of the Baix Llobregat and the Vallès Occidental, where only about a third of the population knew the language and even fewer spoke it at home (Vila 2000).

Two-and-a-half decades later, however, the situation has changed somewhat dramatically. For example, in the province of Barcelona as a whole, between 1975 and 1996, the percentage of the population that can speak the language increased from 53.1 percent to 72.4 percent; the percentage that can write it increased from a mere 14.5 percent to 44.3 percent; the percentage that can read it increased from 58.2 percent (in 1986) to 70.3 percent; and the percentage that can understand it increased from 74.3 percent to fully 94.3 percent. A similar trajectory is evident in the other three provinces as well – though the initial levels of knowledge in these were significantly greater than in the province of Barcelona. By 1996, in all of Catalonia, the percentage of the population that can speak the language had reached 75 percent; the percentage that can write it had reached 45.8 percent; the percentage that can read it had reached 72.3 percent; and the percentage that can understand it had reached 95 percent (Farràs, Torres and Vila 2000).

⁶For two bibliographic reviews of the vast sociolinguistic literature on patterns of *diglossia* in Catalonia, see Vallverdú (1998) and Boix i Fuster and Vila i Moreno (1998). On new patterns of *diglossia* that have emerged since the transition to democracy, see Flaquer (1996).

Due largely to the process of “linguistic normalization” in general and to linguistic policy in the educational system in particular, the level of knowledge of the Catalan language has increased throughout all of Catalonia. Indeed, the clear trend is towards a Catalan society in which all residents can speak the Catalan language.

Of course, the sheer number of people in Catalonia at the time of the transition who could not speak the Catalan language was itself testament to the profound impact that the phenomenon of immigration from other parts of Spain has had on the society. Nevertheless, such immigration came to a halt in 1973, when the onset of a global recession, combined with “escalating wage demands,” sent the Spanish economy in general, and the Catalan economy in particular, “into a tailspin” (Dubin 2002). Since then, inter-regional geographic mobility has been extremely low throughout Spain. Consequently, from the time of the transition, the percentage of the population born in Catalonia and thus technically “native” to the territory has consistently risen (though this is bound to change soon, due to the recent onset of another wave of immigration, this time from North Africa and, to a lesser extent, Latin America).

The increase in the percentage of the population that is technically “native” has undoubtedly facilitated the regional government’s efforts to “normalize” the Catalan language, but it has not translated into an increase in the proportion of the population that speaks Catalan as its *first* language. If, as a matter of *description*, it is accurate to claim that levels of knowledge of Catalan are on the rise, it is much less accurate to claim that Castilian speakers are “assimilating” in a more expansive sense of the term. To begin with, it is misleading to claim that Castilian speakers are “assimilating” to the patterns of linguistic and cultural *identifications* and *practices* of the “Catalan-speaking” community. What’s more, it is even more misleading to claim that the ethno-linguistic cleavage in Catalan society is being progressively erased. However, before we draw any categorical conclusions, let us take a closer look at patterns of linguistic shift in Catalan society.

The first question we must ask is: what proportion of those who spoke Castilian in their childhood home have since adopted a Catalan-speaking “identity,” at least as measured by responses to the question, “Do you consider yourself a Castilian speaker or a Catalan speaker”? The answer is: relatively few, at least among the general population. To be precise, only 7.8 percent of those whose childhood language was Castilian have come to consider themselves Catalan speakers, though another 17.2 percent have adopted a “bilingual” identity. Nevertheless, the levels of linguistic “identity-conversion” among the educators and politicians whom we interviewed who were born into Castilian-speaking families turn out to be much higher (see table eight).

These findings cast doubts on the extent to which the term “assimilation” accurately describes the kind of “cultural adaptation” Castilian speakers in Catalonia have undertaken. Indeed, the patterns detected seem to stand in contradiction to the alleged trend of “assimilation,” and to lend credence instead to the claim espoused by the sociolinguist Francesc Xavier Vila (1993), among others, that Catalonia’s two ethno-linguistic communities remain relatively consolidated – at least in the sense that both groups are managing to reproduce themselves across generations, and that consequently neither group is showing any signs of sudden linguistic substitution.

Even so, these findings should not be misconstrued as support for a claim that no differences whatsoever can be detected between, say, the linguistic habits of immigrant parents and those of their “native-born” children. For, unlike the former, the overwhelming majority of the latter do at least know how to speak the Catalan language. Of course, along with greater knowledge of the language comes greater use of it as well. Thus, on a scale of one to ten, where 1 stands for minimum use of Catalan and 10 stands for maximum use of it, immigrants ranked themselves on average at 1.92, whereas their children ranked themselves at 4.31. Still, the differences between the linguistic habits of immigrants and those of their children should not be exaggerated. For indeed, on this same scale of language use, the children of immigrants rank themselves much closer to their parents than they do to either children of native Catalans (who on average rank themselves at 6.78) or even to children of mixed parents (who on average rank themselves at 8.23) (see table nine).

Table 9: Scale of Use of the Catalan Language

	<i>Language use score</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>
Immigrants	1.92	2.56
1st-generation born in Catalonia	4.31	3.41
One parent born in Catalonia	6.78	3.09
Both parents born in Catalonia	8.23	2.75
Total	5.12	2.95

Source: CIS study #2298. Calculated by John Macinness (Unpublished manuscript).

Nor should our findings about the consolidation of two ethno-linguistic communities be misconstrued as support for a claim that members of one community never or only rarely employ the language of the other. For this is not the case – even though bilingual linguistic *identities* are not particularly common, it turns out that bilingual linguistic *habits* are, at least when it comes to the *habits* of social relations outside of the household. Thus, according to a 1998 survey sponsored by the *Generalitat*, despite the fact that only 11.7 percent of respondents claimed to use both languages inside their homes, fully 38.1 percent of them claimed to use both languages in “social relations” generally (see table ten).

Table 10: Linguistic habits in different spheres.

	<i>Household Language</i>	<i>Language of Social Relations</i>
Castilian	48.7	32.3
Bilingual	11.7	38.1
Catalan	39.5	29.5
	100	100

Source: *Enquesta lingüística* (1998)

Indeed, when we look closer still at reported linguistic habits, it becomes clear that there are systematic differences in the use of the two languages across different spheres of Catalan society. Thus, according to a 2001 CIS survey, the sphere in which Castilian was most often spoken was the household – fully 46.8 percent of the respondents claimed to do so in this context. By contrast, the sphere in which Catalan was most often spoken was in relations with the public administration – fully 47 percent of the respondents claimed to do so in this context. What’s more, bilingual linguistic habits appear to occur most often among friends, and then at the workplace. To be precise, de-

spite the fact that only 10.9 percent of the population reported using both languages at home, 15.3 percent claimed to do so when asking a stranger in the street something, 19.6 percent claimed to do so in stores, 24.1 percent claimed to do so at work, and 26.4 percent claimed to do so with friends. Yet again, however, the reported linguistic habits of the educators and politicians whom we interviewed differ quite dramatically from those of the population at large (see table eleven).

Table 11: Language employed in different situations.

		<i>Castilian</i>	<i>Both</i>	<i>Catalan</i>
<i>At home</i>	Population	46.8	10.9	42.3
	Teachers	22.2	13.3	64.5
	Local politicians	24.8	8.5	66.7
	Parliamentarians	16.1	8.9	75
<i>With friends</i>	Population	36.1	26.4	37.5
	Teachers	12	28.1	59.9
	Local politicians	13.1	30	56.9
	Parliamentarians	0	21.4	78.6
<i>At work</i>	Population	32.8	24.1	43
	Teachers	4.8	12	83.2
	Local politicians	13.1	15.4	71.5
	Parliamentarians	0	8.9	91.1
<i>In stores</i>	Population	36.1	19.6	44.4
	Teachers	7.2	11.4	81.4
	Local politicians	6.9	15.4	77.7
	Parliamentarians	0	10.7	89.3
<i>Answering the phone</i>	Population	45	9.9	45.1
	Teachers	10.8	15	74.3
	Local politicians	17.7	6.2	76.2
	Parliamentarians	3.6	8.9	87.5
<i>When asking a stranger something</i>	Population	41	15.3	43.5
	Teachers	10.2	18.1	71.7
	Local politicians	11.5	13.1	75.4
	Parliamentarians	3.6	12.5	83.9

Such qualifications notwithstanding, we can conclude that, with respect to the evolution of linguistic identities and linguistic practices, on the whole, the Castilian-speaking portion of Catalonia's general population constitutes a relatively consolidated linguistic community, in the sense that it is managing to reproduce itself across generations, and that it is not showing any signs of sudden linguistic substitution. Despite dramatically increased knowledge of – and some increased usage of – the Catalan language among the children of immigrants than among the immigrants themselves, the rates of intergenerational “defection” to the linguistic habits and/or linguistic identity of the Catalan-speaking portion of the population remain low (though the same description does not apply to the educators and politicians whom we interviewed).

Linguistic Practices and Subjective Identity in Catalonia

We have yet to specify sufficiently the relationship between linguistic characteristics and practices in Catalonia, on the one hand, and patterns of subjective, “cultural” identification there, on the other. Let us do so now.

When we compare patterns of subjective identification across linguistic groups (defined in a “primordial” sense so as to correspond with childhood language), we find a very strong correlation between identity and language in Catalonia. For example, in the general population, whereas only 16.7 percent of those who were raised in a Castilian-speaking household identify themselves as predominately Catalan, the proportion increases to 36.5 percent among those who were raised in bilingual households, and to fully 76.2 percent among those who were raised in Catalan-speaking households (see table twelve).

Table 12: Self Identification in Catalonia, Measured Across Linguistic Groups

	<i>Spanish</i>	<i>More Spanish</i>	<i>As Spanish</i>	<i>More Catalan</i>	<i>Catalan</i>	<i>DK/DA</i>	<i>N</i>
Castilian in childhood home	27.8	10.7	43.2	13.1	3.6	1.6	(1194)
Both languages in childhood home	7.1	9.0	44.9	22.4	14.1	2.6	(156)
Catalan in childhood home	1.3	1.3	20.2	41.8	34.4	1.0	(1346)

Source: CIS #2410 (2001)

This figure alone seems to vindicate the appropriateness of employing “language” as a proxy for “culture,” and therefore linguistic “shift” as a proxy for “assimilation,” in the Catalan context – though we must still stress the important qualification that an overwhelming majority of Catalan-speakers still identify themselves to some extent as “Spanish” in addition to “Catalan.” We must also stress that by “appropriate” we are speaking in purely relative terms. Important dynamics are inevitably covered over whenever a “proxy” is used to measure the transformation of a cultural subsystem, regardless of the relative appropriateness of the proxy. The use of linguistic “shifts” as a proxy for “assimilation” in the Catalan context proves to be no exception to the rule. For example, even though it is true that those who spoke Castilian in their childhood home but have since “shifted” to Catalan register much high levels of identification with Catalonia than do their linguistically “loyal” Castilian-speaking counterparts, the fact remains that, as a group, they still identify themselves as predominately-Catalan in significantly lower proportions than do their “primordially-defined, Catalan-speaking” counterparts (i.e., those raised in Catalan-speaking households). Such complexities can only come to light when we resist the demand of the proponents of the “competitive assimilation” thesis to “proxify” prematurely for the sake of “operationalization” (see table thirteen).

Table 13: Self Identification in Catalonia, Measured Across Linguistic Groups

	<i>Spanish</i>	<i>More Spanish</i>	<i>As Spanish</i>	<i>More Catalan</i>	<i>Catalan</i>	<i>DK/DA</i>	<i>N</i>
Castilian in childhood home and Castilian in today's home	32.5	12.1	42.4	9.4	2.0	1.5	(942)
Castilian in childhood home and both languages in today's home	16.1	8.0	51.1	19.0	4.4	1.5	(137)
Castilian in childhood home but Catalan in today's home	3.5	2.7	41.6	35.4	15.0	1.8	(113)
Catalan in childhood home	1.3	1.3	20.2	41.8	34.4	1.0	(1346)

Source: CIS #2410 (2001)

Measuring Subjective Identity Shifts

Because processes of identity formation are always embedded in complex and dynamic interactions between “insiders” and “outsiders,” focusing on the patterns of adaptation detectable among “outsiders” threatens to leave a misleading impression that the attitudes and practices of the “insiders” have remained static. This in turn threatens to leave a related, misleading impression that the dominant trend in Catalonia is toward the gradual erasure of the ethno-linguistic cleavage.

The extent to which these two impressions are misleading is immediately exposed when we compare different primordial segments of the population along an axis measuring patterns of subjective identification rather than along an axis measuring reported linguistic practices. When we do so, we find that, over time, there has been absolutely no trend toward convergence. Rather, all shifts towards “Catalanization” among immigrants and their children seem to have been cancelled out by parallel shifts towards “radicalization” among the native segments of the population. In other words, when we measure the cleavage between different ascendancy groups by comparing “average subjective identity scores,” we find that, though the terms in which the cleavage is articulated have shifted, the cleavage itself remains *every bit as sharp today as it was during the transition* (see table fourteen).

Table 14: Evolution of Average Identity Score for Different Ascendancy Groups in Catalonia (1979-2004)*

	1979	1982	1990	1991	1996	1998	2000	2001	2002
Immigrants	1.63	1.85	1.67	2.29	2.24	2.28	2.38	2.19	2.38
1st-gen	2.47	2.74	2.74	3.18	2.96	2.99	2.92	3.11	3.08
Mixed	3.02	3.21	3.37	3.63	3.55	3.48	3.35	3.63	3.66
Natives	3.29	3.39	3.90	4.02	3.91	3.99	3.76	4.04	4.06

Sources: Shabad (1979-1982); Orizo (1990), CIS 1978 (1991), CIS 2228 (1996), CIS 2298 (1998), Orizo (2000), CIS 2410 (2001), CIS 2455 (2002)

*Note that Average Identity Score has been calculated from a five-point scale, where 1=Only Spanish and 5=Only Catalan.

Sharper still is the discrepancy between patterns of subjective identification among the general population, on the one hand, and those among political and bureaucratic elites (including those whom we interviewed), on the other (see table fifteen).

Table 15: Self-Identification in Catalonia

	<i>General Population</i>	<i>Local politicians</i>	<i>Mayors</i>	<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Parliamentarians</i>	<i>High-level functionaries</i>
Spanish	12.7	1.6	6.6	6.1	0	0
More Spanish	7.9	0	8.1	3.1	0	0
As Spanish	38.1	40.9	25.4	28.7	32.1	7.8
More Catalan	24.8	28.3	37.1	25.6	30.4	29.9
Catalan	16.5	29.1	22.8	36.6	37.5	61.0
N	(2778)	(131)	(237)	(168)	(56)	(77)

Sources: CIS #2410 (2001); Matas (1996); Magre (1999); Miley (2004), ,

Finally, not only can we find a serious discrepancy between the patterns of identification of the general population as a whole compared that of elites as a whole; so too can we find further large discrepancies between masses and their elite counterparts across every ascendancy group (see table sixteen).

Table 16: Average Identity Scores of Different Ascendancy Groups in Catalonia

	<i>Immigrants</i>	<i>1st-gen</i>	<i>Mixed</i>	<i>Natives</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>N</i>
Population	2.38	3.08	3.66	4.06	3.25	(2778)
Teachers	2.66	3.57	3.96	4.52	3.83	(168)
Politicians	3.18	3.56	3.73	4.22	3.9	(187)

Source for population: CIS #2410 (2001)

Catalan Identity: A Regional or a National Identity?

Though the ethno-linguistic cleavage in Catalan society remains much sharper than proponents of the “competitive assimilation” thesis would like to admit, they might still take heart at the trends we have thus far mapped – since over time, all groups are feeling progressively *more* Catalan, *and* progressively *less* Spanish. Upon closer analysis, however, it turns out that even this “assimilationist” trend requires serious qualification. Why? Because though the population at large, as well as all ascendancy groups within it, have come to feel progressively more Catalan, they have yet to come to agree upon a host of basic questions about the nature of Catalan identity itself. For example, they have yet to come to agree upon whether Catalan identity is best understood in “regional” or “national” terms. Indeed, among the general population, only 13.8 percent of immigrants and 26.6 percent of children of immigrants consider Catalonia to be a nation, compared with 45.6 percent of children of mixed parents and 54.4 percent of “natives.” Once again, however, the pattern of responses among the educators and politicians whom we interviewed differs quite dramatically (see table seventeen).

Table 17: Proportion who consider Catalonia a nation, by self-identification

	<i>Spanish</i>	<i>More Spanish</i>	<i>As Spanish</i>	<i>More Catalan</i>	<i>Catalan</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>N</i>
Population	5.6	6.7	18.2	53.3	79.2	37.5	(2778)
Teachers	10.0	40.0	62.2	81.0	95.0	73.9	(168)
Local Politicians	-	-	48.1	88.9	92.1	72.7	(131)
Parliamentarians	-	-	50.0	94.1	100	82.1	(56)

Source for population: CIS #2410 (2001)

Furthermore, among the general population, only 18.2 percent of those who consider themselves equally Catalan as Spanish prefer the term “nation,” compared with 53.3 percent of those who consider themselves more Catalan and 79.2 percent who consider themselves exclusively Catalan. Not surprisingly, their counterparts among the educators and politicians whom we interviewed prefer the term “nation” in much higher proportions (see table eighteen).

Table 18: Proportion who consider Catalonia a nation, by ascendancy groups

	<i>Immigrants</i>	<i>1st-gen</i>	<i>Mixed</i>	<i>Natives</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>N</i>
Population	13.8	26.6	45.6	54.4	37.5	(2778)
Teachers	45.2	81.0	68.0	89.5	73.9	(168)
Local Politicians	59.1	68.4	54.5	85.9	72.7	(131)
Parliamentarians	66.7	83.3	83.3	84.2	82.1	(56)

Source for population: CIS #2410 (2001)

Finally, among the general population, even those who register “equally Catalan and Spanish” identities do not always imagine their *Catalanitat* in quite the same terms. Differences between ascendancy groups prove particularly revealing in this regard. Specifically, the proportion of immigrants and children of immigrants who imagine their *Catalanitat* in regional rather than national terms is significantly higher than is the case for their “native” counterparts (see table nineteen).

Table 19: Conceptions of Catalonia among those who identify as equally Spanish and Catalan, across different ascendancy groups

	<i>Region</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Nation</i>	<i>N</i>
Equally Spanish Immigrants	71.2	9.8	15.1	(285)
Equally Spanish First Generation	73.4	8.7	16.6	(229)
Equally Spanish Mixed	67.7	9.7	19.4	(93)
Equally Spanish Natives	64.4	9.1	22.3	(264)

Source: CIS #2410 (2001)

In sum, we can safely conclude that, though immigrants and children of immigrants are progressively coming to identify more with Catalonia, they continue to imagine this identity in terms that differ significantly from the imaginings of their native counterparts. Furthermore, the differences are sharper still between the general population, on the one hand, and the educators and politicians whom we interviewed, on the other. None of these continuing patterns of contestation could be detected if we were to limit our attention to linguistic “shifts,” as the proponents of the “competitive assimilation” thesis claim we can.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have assessed the relative merits of the main theory that has been formulated to explain the comparatively low degree of political polarization and conflict within Catalonia over ethno-linguistic issues: namely, the thesis of “competitive assimilation.” We have argued that this thesis is critically flawed, both as description and as explanation. We have contended that it cannot amount to an adequate causal theory, but only to a *description*; and we have insisted that, even as a *description*, it is misleading.

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