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Integration trajectories of adult (im)migrants in minority and minoritized contexts: Ottawa and Barcelona

Abstract: To investigate the impact of policies on the integration trajectories of adult (im)migrants, we conducted a study in two urban bilingual contexts, Ottawa and Barcelona, where one of the languages is a minority or minoritized language (French and Catalan). Despite the differences between these two sociolinguistic realities, our study highlights the unpredictability of integration pathways as well as the need to revise, from a plurilingual perspective, the epistemological framework of the field.

Résumé : Afin d'étudier l'incidence des politiques sur les parcours d'intégration des (im)migrants adultes, nous avons conduit une enquête dans deux contextes urbains de sociétés bilingues, Ottawa et Barcelone, où l'une des langues est minoritaire ou minorisée (français et catalan). Malgré les différences entre ces deux réalités sociolinguistiques, notre étude a mis en exergue l'imprévisibilité des retombées des politiques d'intégration ainsi que la nécessité de réviser, depuis une perspective plurilingue, le cadre épistémologique du domaine de recherche invoqué.

1 Introduction

In government, civil society, and research circles there is an agreement that proficiency in the host-society language is an important factor in the integration and retention of (im)migrants. However, few have studied the specific impact of this factor and those that have done so, insist that it is difficult to grasp. The present paper reports on a study conducted concurrently in Barcelona and Ottawa that looks at a hundred adult newcomers who take, respectively, Catalan and French language classes aimed at their social and labour market integration. Once registered in these advanced language courses, they are beneficiaries of settlement policies within the two communities. They are also likely to become members of

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the Francophone community in Ottawa and the Catalan community in Barcelona. Our study aims to trace the linguistic profile and language practices of recent (im)migrants, their attitudes and motivations towards French and Catalan, as well as their contact with the two communities in order to bring to light the impact of language factors on the integration trajectories in a minority and minoritized context.

2 Ottawa

2.1 Demolinguistic context and rationale

In 2015, the Francophone population represented approximately seven million out of 35 million Canadians, with just over a million native French speakers residing outside of Québec. Moreover, a certain number among this population no longer use French in their daily lives. The integration of newcomers in minority Francophone contexts is therefore essential not only because it maintains the demographic weight of these communities but also in order for the Canadian Francophonie to benefit from immigration. Yet, presently, the vast majority of immigrants outside of Québec are settling in Anglophone communities (Fraser and Boileau 2014).

Ottawa's demolinguistic situation presents certain similarities with the rest of Canada but also some particularity. The Anglophone population constitutes the majority (almost 64%) while Francophones represent about 15% and – like in the rest of Canada – the progressive decline of the number of Anglophones and Francophones to the benefit of allophone speakers is apparent. In fact, the number of allophones climbed from 10.5% in 1981 to 21.3% in 2011 (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages 2015).

With respect to particularity, even though Ottawa has no official bilingual status, *de facto* bilingualism is very much present since the city is an emblem of Canada and hosts a bilingual federal government – the most important employer in the region. Situated at the boundary between Ontario and Québec, the Ottawa region contains all the Canadian linguistic groups: minority Francophones in Ontario and majority ones in Québec, majority Anglophones in Ontario and minority ones in Québec, as well as various allophone groups integrating either in English or French, in either a majority or a minority context. According to Gilbert and Veronis (2010: 35), “the region has a unique linguistic environment because the French presence is strongly rooted on both sides of the border. However, concomitantly, the region's bilingualism is highly valued because it provides the population with access to the rest of Canada and North America”.

In this context of linguistic to-and-fro, more than 37% of Ottawa's population is estimated to be bilingual and this proportion is rising steadily. Similarly, a quarter of immigrants declare being able to communicate with ease in English and French, on top of one or more languages that they already possessed before arriving in Canada (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages 2015).

2.2 Linguistic practices and integration trajectories of French speakers in Ottawa: principal results

Our sample consists of an almost equal number of men and women between the ages of 20 and 65, with strong representation in the 30–50 bracket, which is dependent on immigration policy. The sample is comprised of recent immigrants: 32 participants have resided in Canada less than a year. Moreover, they are an educated group, with the vast majority of participants having a post-secondary diploma.

At the linguistic level, it is a Francophone or Francophile population. Even if 23 different mother languages were declared, 11 participants have French as their mother language, 14 have Haitian Creole, and 36 originate from countries where French is one of the official languages. Furthermore, 43 participants finished their education in French in their country of origin (in Francophone Africa or the Maghreb).

2.2.1 Linguistic practices and attitudes towards the French language and community

Even if the tendency to live in two languages remains strong (for example, in French and English, in French and Creole, or in French and Arabic), the majority of our participants declared primarily using French in their daily social interactions and with their family (socializing, watching television, reading, surfing the web, etc.). Likewise, these immigrants mostly consider themselves as having a good or very good level of French, whereas 36 participants declared a “functional” or “weak” level of English. Finally, they seem keen on living in French in Ottawa. To that effect, the participants stated a preference for French in terms of integration aims (to live in French in a bilingual environment, to create a Francophone social network), economic goals (to find employment in a Francophone network, or even a bilingual job), and for personal reasons (an affinity with the language, to help their children with school, or to be introduced to a new Francophone culture).

2.2.2 Contact with Ottawa's Francophone community

However, notwithstanding a good command of French, a social and family life lived in French, positive attitudes towards the local Francophonie and its language, as well as a positive disposition to integrate into the French speaking community, the results suggest that other than social services (notably Francophone schools and hospitals), new immigrants are not familiar with institutions, organisms, and cultural events of the Francophone network established in Ottawa, and attend them even less. The same is true of numerous settlement services of which only three were recognized, and even then, only by ten participants.

3 Barcelona

3.1 Catalonia: a paradigm shift

From the beginning of the 21st century, Catalonia has experienced an unprecedented inflow of international migrants that poses a veritable challenge. In a single decade, the foreign-born population in the region has climbed from 2.9% in 2000 to 15.7% in 2011. In parallel with this demographic phenomenon, migrant settlement and integration legislation has progressively evolved within a double legislative framework: that of the Spanish state and that of the autonomous Catalan government. In 2011, the Generalitat of Catalunya agreed to take responsibility for, among other things, the *degree of integration* of migrants in relation to the granting of residency permits.

As Branchadell (2015) highlights, the local legislation envisions host-society language learning as an indispensable fact for migrants on the path to acquiring citizenship. Yet, if learning Catalan constitutes a measure of symbolic integration, it is perceived as a process for which only the migrant bears the responsibility. This unequal distribution of capital is rarely called into question, nor is the plurilingual repertoire of learners partially and impartially recognized (Garrido 2015).

The new Catalan sociolinguistic landscape impacts the acquisition and use of Catalan and, by extension, the linguistic integration of migrants. The territorial and official bilingualism encompasses two languages etymologically close as both are romance languages. This relationship increases translanguistic phenomena specific to contexts of language contact such as code-switching or hybridization. At the same time, there is a clear contradiction between, on one side, the official discourse that places the learning of Catalan as a central endeavour in the integration of newcomers and, on the other side, the practices that consist

of addressing the very same newcomers in Spanish. Authors like Pujolar (2010, in Caglitutuncgil 2014) qualify this phenomenon of “interposition” of Spanish in bilingual exchanges and note the use of this language as a *lingua franca* in many Catalan language courses (Caglitutuncgil 2014).

Finally, from the beginning of the 21st century, new waves of migration have also prompted a profound change in the orientation of Catalan sociolinguistic research which passed from subscribing to a paradigm of *distribution* and *conflict* – of North American origin – to one of *multilingualism*, where the new directions and perspectives would be, according to Vila (2015), the sociolinguistics of mobility and resources, the socio-economic integration of migrants in the era of globalization, and the impact of these new migration flows on a fragile linguistic ecosystem.

3.2 Linguistic practices and integration trajectories of Catalan migrants: principal results

The Barcelonan sample was composed of thirty participants representing 14 different countries and, virtually in equal parts, the European continent and Latin America. The age bracket of those surveyed fell between 23 and 66 years. Despite the high qualifications of almost half the sample who possessed a university diploma, the rate of unemployment was 16%.

3.2.1 Catalan language practices

Our sample’s language practices demonstrate a clear specialization by domain-of-use of three principal languages: Castilian, Catalan, and English. The first stands out as the most used in private, social, and professional domains. It is followed by Catalan in private and social domains, while English occupies the third place and is used mainly in professional contexts. In terms of Catalan in the workplace, the participants reported that they do indeed make use of it for interacting with clients and for reading.

3.2.2 Contact with Catalan and motivation for its learning

The distribution between Catalan and Spanish in the official settlement institutions remains relatively balanced. We found as many centers where our sample interacted more in Catalan, more in Spanish, or equally across both languages.

Nonetheless, Catalan asserted itself as being the most used language across municipal services and in the Consortium for Linguistic Normalisation.

With regard to the motivation to learn Catalan, the participants primarily pointed to their socio-professional integration and for many among them it was the primary and only reason stated. The second most cited reason was the desire (necessity?) to further the use of this language and to do so in the most correct and efficient manner possible.

4 Conclusion

Our data was collected in Ottawa and Barcelona, two cosmopolitan cities characterized by significant (im)migration rates, where the Catalan and the French-Canadian communities' identities are an important issue. In fact, these two communities (minoritized and minority respectively) remain preoccupied with the appeal that Spanish and English have for newcomers and with the power struggle facing their respective co-official languages, which affects the choice of language use and acquisition by (im)migrants. Hence our project tackles the integration process in a situation of relative fragility of the host society, where the newcomers are subjected to a double minority status.

In this context, in spite of the structural and environmental differences between the two sites, the project has highlighted, on either side of the Atlantic, a gap between the results expected by the various settlement and integration policies (that frame migrants in a homogenising vision) and the real directions finally taken by migrants, which prove to be multiple, varied, and often surpass the preconceived frame. Those results call as well for an epistemological shift in the field.

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