

THE CONSTRUCTION OF CATALANIST IDENTITIES: GROUP HISTORY AND INDIVIDUAL PRACTICE

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1. Introduction

Boundaries of identifiable speech communities very often coincide with ethnic boundaries (Milroy, 1987; Milroy & Milroy, 1992), and the construction of identities in bilingual communities is often related to language choice (Woolard, 1989). Furthermore, work in language and political economy (cf. Gal, 1989; Geertz, 1994; Irvine, 1989; Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994) has highlighted the complex relationship between constructed identities and political-economic, linguistic, and ideological factors. When ethnicity and language use are closely related in a bilingual community, political ideology and linguistic nationalism can play an important role in the construction of identities. This process can be seen very clearly in the construction of identities in Catalonia, Spain.

For political, economic, and sociocultural reasons that are rooted in an idealized past, many present-day Catalans do not consider themselves Spaniards at all. This paper traces the construction of Catalanist identities in bilingual Catalonia from its origins to the present, framing discourse on language and identity politics in the established qualitative model of habitus theory (Bourdieu, 1991). This theory allows for the articulation of the multi-faceted relationship between constructed identities and language (including language choice, ways of speaking, and linguistic ideologies) through a model of symbolic profits of distinction in social and political-economic “markets”.

Habitus can be thought of as the visceral ways of feeling and reacting that are the product of inculcation and lived experience, orienting individuals in their actions. Catalan habitus, is, like all habitus, a model for identity construction in which shared group histories partially incline individuals in their actions and reactions. An understanding of shared history is thus crucial to any examination of habitus. Therefore, my deconstruction of Catalanist identities begins with a critical analysis of key events in Catalan history. I demonstrate how, historically, interactions between Catalan habitus and linguistic and political-economic

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markets have manifested themselves in the identity-constructing practice of language choice. In the second section of the paper, I discuss identity construction in modern-day Catalonia, based on data drawn from over 75 hours of conversation recorded in situ. I argue that particular “ways of speaking” Spanish (Bauman & Sherzer, 1991) actually represent practices of Catalan habitus as actively constructed “acts of identity” (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985) that create and maintain identities through objectification in discourse.

2. The history of the identity-constructing practice of language choice

Throughout the history of Catalonia, the importance of the Catalan language and of the political sovereignty of Catalonia has varied in different sectors of the Catalan society and the symbolic power of upper-bourgeois economic supremacy has been a constant tool in constructions of identity. Factors that have historically mitigated against Catalan identities include the reduction of Catalan monolinguals in Catalonia and the assimilationist, repressive nature of Spanish monarchies.

Catalonia was born of the Hispanic March, a Carolingian expansion in the late eighth century into the Pyrenees. This extra-peninsular origin foreshadowed a distinct Catalan habitus. In 1137, Ramón Berenguer IV, count of Barcelona, became king of Aragon by marriage and the Confederation of Catalonia and Aragon was born. For three centuries, the Catalan language flourished alongside financial and political independence. Catalonia’s mercantilism of the 13th and 14th centuries stretched to Syria, Persia, and Central Asia (Solé, 1992). When the last Catalan king died in 1410 with no heir, a Castilian king ascended to the throne. With the dynastic wedding in 1469 of Fernando and Isabel la Católica, Catalonia’s fortunes became definitively linked with those of Castile. Castilianization of the Catalan upper classes began for the first time. A good part of the Catalan nobility and aristocracy followed the king to his Castilian court in Madrid. Catalonia found itself in a marginal position at the dawn of the first world market (trade with America). This definitive link to Spain was an important turning point in the political-economic and linguistic histories of Catalonia and likely a formative aspect of the shared history that makes up Catalan habitus.

From the 16th to the 18th century, the Catalan aristocracy progressively abandoned Catalan for Castilian. After losing the war of the Spanish Succession (1702-1711), Catalonia was occupied by Spanish troops, who suspended all Catalan institutions, effectively marking the end of Catalonia as a discrete political entity. Catalonia’s monetary system was abolished, and all uses of Catalan were explicitly proscribed by order of the Nueva Planta (‘New Foundation’) decrees of 1716. This period was doubtlessly formative in the Catalan linguistic

and political habitus, and it remains both brutal and personal in the memory of shared history of many Catalans. It inaugurated a 250 year span in which no other European language would be prohibited by law so many times, nor persecuted so repeatedly (Ferrer i Gironés, 1987).

In the 19th century a newly industrialized and bourgeois Catalonia conflicted with an essentially agrarian Spain. The Catalan upper-bourgeoisie began to express its interests in Catalanist nationalistic terms, hoping to win advantages in competition for industrial growth. This effort to foment nationalism among the Catalan people included the exaltation of the Catalan language. The intent to convince the Catalan people that their language was an inherent and essential part of their identity was a clear expression of linguistic ideology. The *Renaixença* ('Rebirth') helped the Catalan language to recuperate its prestige after years of decadence and disuse among the bourgeoisie themselves. It also contributed to the nationalist project of the upper-bourgeoisie to create a story of a "vast and glorious shared history", which could then be inculcated in the habitus of younger generations of Catalans.

For nationalist purposes, bourgeois Catalans could imagine, or re-imagine, their history of achievement and persecution as homogeneous and naturalized. They could join together under the false impression that the region of Catalonia had always fought to preserve and express an independent Catalan identity. The bourgeoisie could generalize or idealize this "shared history" to represent all Catalans and the typical Catalan. In turn, with every retelling of this history, more and more Catalans could believe it and incorporate it into their habitus. This ideological tool of bourgeois nationalism remains potent and in use to this very day, having only been strengthened by the collective negative reactions of recent generations to Francoist repression.

3. Identity construction in present-day Catalonia

Today as much as in centuries past, one locus of intersection between the Catalan habitus and political-economic and linguistic markets is language choice. Yet, presumably, multiple competing models exist for both language and identity in Catalonia (Boix Fuster, 1993), and individuals can likely select ways of speaking from a large and complex repertoire of resources. Thus, Catalan habitus is also practiced in other ways. Bourdieu (1991: 38) has commented that the linguistic market "plays a part in shaping... the meaning of discourse" where individuals "make *distinctions* between different *ways of saying*, distinctive manners of speaking" to practice their habitus (*italics in original*). In this section of my paper I consider one such way of speaking as a current practice of Catalan habitus, through a qualitative examination of excerpts from interviews I conducted in Barcelona in 1995.

My interviews were conducted in Spanish, and so I was concerned with ways of speaking in the Spanish language that might relate to Catalan habitus. One way involves speaking Spanish with noticeable Catalan influences, as I have discussed elsewhere (Vann, 1995, 1996, 1997). Another way of speaking that I view as a practice of Catalan habitus involves the repeated invocation of a history of group repression. This practice represents a modern incarnation of the ethnolinguistic and nationalistic project begun centuries ago. Repression has been idealized and transformed into a building block of constructed Catalan identity (cf. the celebration of the definitive fall of Barcelona to Spain in 1711 as a day of Catalan national unity). A Spanish-speaking individual, regardless of Catalan ancestry, can indeed lay successful claim to Catalan identity through ways of speaking that recall a glorified shared history lost to Castilian domination. I discuss this further below.

Two social networks in Barcelona were examined for this analysis: one in which 26 individuals habitually speak Spanish and one in which 32 members habitually speak Catalan. Individuals in both networks were very comparable in age, SES, and gender; however, in comparison to individuals in the Spanish-speaking group (from Pedralbes and Gràcia), more members of the Catalan-speaking group (from Sant Andreu) considered themselves “Català heavy”, implying more of a Catalanist ideology. Members of this group also seem to practice Catalan habitus and perform Catalan identities through invoking a common past more often than the members of the Spanish-speaking group. Therefore, the excerpts that follow have been chosen from interviews with members of the Catalan-speaking group. I will profile two informants from this group to develop an understanding of the Catalan linguistic habitus in its relation to linguistic and social markets. The first profile illustrates an important aspect of the nature of a Catalan habitus. The second profile illustrates practicing this habitus through invocation of shared history.

This first informant, whom I’ll call Montse, is a 21-year-old woman born and raised in a traditional Catalan family in Barcelona. Montse’s father is a bank director, and her mother is a housewife. Though Catalan was the only language Montse spoke at home, her education was almost exclusively imparted in Spanish until university, where she now takes classes taught in Catalan as part of a program in Catalan philology. Since secondary school, Montse has spoken Catalan with her friends. Consider her illustration of a Catalan habitus:

M=Montse=S1-12, R=investigator; habitually Catalan speaking group, individual interview, page 12, lines 37-51, page 13, lines 1-6;

R: ¿Os creéis mejores los catalanes?

M: No sé. Es que ¿sabes que pasa? Que a mí, en todo el mundo, ¿eh? No me gusta hacer, decir,

“Ah, es que yo soy superior a ti porque yo soy catalana y tú eres castellana.” No, yo creo que no. Quizá sí, el conjunto de la gente catalana, ¿no? A lo mejor sí que, sí que hay, a vece- en, sobre todo cuando hay mucha gente catalana y, y hablan entre ellos ¿no? O hablamos entre nosotros, sí que nos lo parece, pero cuando, pero cuando hay una persona castellana o un grupo castellano, nos pasa al revés; siempre nos sentimos inferiores, porque siempre hemos estado muy machacados por los castellanos...

R: Sí sí, cuéntame más.

M: Eh pues, porque, no sé. Supongo que por la represión que hubo aquí cuando, cuando vivía Franco ¿no? Y entonces, eh, no sé. En casa siempre lo he oído.

R: ¿Por qué?

M: No, yo no lo entiendo pero es que...es verdad o sea, es como si, no sé, como si, como si nos recordara que, que han estado aquí mucho tiempo y que nos han querido imponer una lengua que no es la nuestra ¿no?

R: Do Catalan people think they're better?

M: I don't know. You know what happens? It happens to me, to the whole world. I don't like to say “Oh, well I'm superior to you because I'm Catalan and you're Castilian.” No, I don't think so. Maybe so, the Catalan people as a group, you know? Maybe so, I think there are times, above all when there are a lot of Catalan people speaking amongst themselves, you know? When we speak amongst ourselves, then it does seem that way to us, but when, but when a Castilian person or a group of Castilian people are around, the opposite happens; we always feel inferior, because we've always been so harassed by the Castilians.

R: Yes, yes, go on.

M: Uh, well, I don't know. I guess because of the repression there was around here while Franco was alive, you know? And then, uh, I don't know. At home I've always heard it.

R: Why?

M: No, I don't understand it but, well it's true, I mean, it's as if, I don't know, as if it reminded us that they've been here a long time and that they've tried to impose on us a language that's not ours, you know?

Montse mentioned how Catalan people feel in the presence of Spaniards, detailing an inferiority complex resulting from a shared history of linguistic oppression. This complex has been indoctrinated in Montse at home and experienced firsthand through socialization. It illustrates an important part of a Catalan habitus: the pervasive feeling of prolonged group oppression. When this aspect of Catalan habitus is further developed in discourse, Catalan identity can be constructed through the performance of an oral narrative that tells of a shared history lost to suffering and repression. We can see such a performance in the next profile.

The second informant, whom I will call Laura, is a 21-year-old woman born and raised in Catalonia, who has always spoken Catalan with her bilingual parents, an accountant and a housewife. She received her education in both Spanish and Catalan until university, where she now studies Catalan philology, taught exclusively in Catalan. Laura speaks to almost all of her friends in Catalan. Consider her performance of Catalan habitus:

L=Laura=S1-20, R=investigator; habitually Catalan speaking group, individual interview, page 6, lines 21-47;

L: Yo me considero catalanista, y creo que todo buen catalán tendría que ser catalanista. Es que está vinculado ¿no?, porque cuando di, dices catalanismo, hablas de ideología, hablas de sentimientos, (R asiente) ¿sabes? O sea, ser catalán es algo más que hablar una lengua ¿no?

R: Sí, ¿soi, sois una etnia aparte?

L: Sí sí sí, yo diría que sí, como la gente del País Vasco, o como los de Portugal; ves, la diferencia entre los de Portugal, eh, sí, los de Portugal vamos, y nosotros, es una y mínima, ¿no? que ellos tuvieron la suerte de conseguir la independencia, y nosotros tuvimos la mala suerte de no conseguirla... No quiero enrollarme con cuestiones de historia, pero sabes que los reyes Católicos, es decir los dos reinos, mantuvieron sus parlamentos, sus instituciones, su, su, su moneda incluso, y sus reyes, evidentemente. Lo que pasa es que nuestro rey era ya castellano, de dinastía castellana, entonces, eh, a ver, se dieron más posibilidades a Castilla ¿no?, (R asiente). O sea, el peso, del reino, lo llevó Castilla. Entonces esto coincidió con por ejemplo, el descubrimiento de América y el, la decadencia de la, del mar Mediterráneo, o sea, el comercio por la Mediterránea y los catalanes. Entonces, una serie de situaciones que llevaron a la debilitación de la corona Catalano-Aragonesa.

L: I consider myself a Catalanist, and I think that all good Catalans would have to be Catalanists. Its part and parcel, you know? Because when you say “Catalanism”, you’re speaking of an ideology, of feelings (R nods), you know? I mean, being Catalan is more than just speaking a language, you know?

R: Okay. So, are you a separate ethnic group?

L: Yea, yea, uh huh. I would say so, like the people of the Basque Country or the Portuguese. You see, the difference between the Portuguese and us is singular and minimal: they had the luck to achieve independence and we had the bad luck not to. I don’t want to get wrapped up in historical issues, but you know that the Catholic kings, that is, the two kingdoms, maintained their parliaments, their institutions, even their own monetary systems, and of course, their own kings. What happened is that our king was already Castilian, from the Castilian dynasty, so, well, more possibilities were given to Castile, you know? (R nods). In other words, Castile carried the weight of the unified kingdom. This coincided with, for example, the discovery of America and the decline of the Mediterranean Sea, that is, Catalan trade on the Mediterranean. So, there were a series of situations that led to the weakening of the Confederation of Catalonia and Aragon.

page 7, lines 6-30;

R: ¿Qué te sugiere España?

L: Uí, me sugiere, eh, no libertad, no, no posibilidad de expresar lo que sentimos y opresión... Es lo que sucedió con Franco, y es lo que sucedió con los reyes Católicos... ..Por eso España es totalmente, yo perso-, particularmente no me considero española, y yo digo sin miedo y, y bien alto ¿no? Es que es, es, está muy vinculado con mi manera de pensar; yo no me siento española pero en absoluto.

R: What does Spain suggest to you?

L: Oh boy. It suggests no freedom, no possibility of expressing what we feel, and oppression... That’s what happened with Franco, with the Catholic Kings... ..That’s why Spain is totally- personally I don’t consider myself Spanish, and I’ll say it with no fear, loud and clear. It is very linked to my way of thinking. I don’t feel Spanish in the slightest.

page 8 lines 4-13;

R: O sea, para ti la historia viene vinculada en tu vida, o sea—

L: Sí sí sí, o sea la, la situación presente se explica por la historia, evidentemente. Es decir ... Pido la independencia por la situación, por aspectos históricos, porque es que antes éramos independientes y ahora no lo somos.

R: So, for you, history is linked to your life?

L: Most definitely. The present situation is explained through history, obviously. In other words... I seek independence because of the situation, for historical aspects, because before we were independent and now we are not.

page 9, lines 5-19;

L: No podemos, no podemos perder de vista lo que hemos sido, porque si no, si, si olvidamos, lo que hemos sido, pues olvidamos nuestra memoria colectiva, y esto es muy fuerte para un pueblo.

R: Así que tenéis una memoria colectiva —

L: Sí claro.

R: Bien presente, ¿no?

L: Sí. No todos los catalanes ¿eh? Y aquí está lo negativo, porque es que, pienso que hay mucha descatalanización, es decir, mucha gente que es catalana pero que no se siente catalana. Es catalana en cuanto a nivel oficial, o sea a nivel de, de documentos, ¿eh? Es decir, porque vive en Cataluña o porque ella misma se define como catalana, pero no es catalana de sentimiento, no. No siente, no, no, o sea, le da igual ser —

R: Para ti esa persona realmente no es catalana.

L: No, claro, para mí no lo es, no lo es. Pero digo que estas, que esta persona que se define como catalana, ummmm, quizás da una imagen de catalán, pues equivocada para mí, ¿no?

L: We can't lose sight of what we have been, because if we don't- if we forget what we've been, well then we forget our collective memory, and that is very important for a people.

R: So you have a collective memory?

L: Well of course.

R: With you at all times?

L: Yea. Not all Catalans, eh? And here is the negative part, because I think there is a lot of de-Catalanization. That is, a lot of people are Catalans but they don't feel Catalan. They are legally Catalan as far as documents go, because they live in Catalonia or because they identify themselves as Catalans, but they are not Catalans by the way they feel about things. They don't feel, I mean, it's the same to them —

R: For you such people are not Catalans.

L: No, of course not. For me they are not. People like that who identify themselves as Catalans, well, they give an erroneous image of what it means to be Catalan, at least for me.

Group identities are often based in part on significant experiences and watershed events shared by all the group members, recalled generation after generation. The performance of oral histories as verbal art can be tantamount to membership cards in such groups. They serve to indoctrinate the young who were not yet born when such events occurred and they can rejuvenate the old who may have experienced some of these events personally. Furthermore, such performances serve as a sort of daily affirmation, a comforting mantra that binds any one individual to the rest of the group, who also practice this way of speaking. Thus, Laura hedged that she didn't want to get wrapped up in "cuestiones de historia", but that's exactly what she did to practice her habitus and perform her identity for me. In performing narrative histories that have almost become ritualized in genre, Catalanist individuals like Laura distinguish themselves from other Spaniards and even from other

Catalans through their identity-constructing practice of continuously recalling group persecution and lost freedoms. This analysis receives support from Le Page & Tabouret-Keller (1985: 181), who note that “the individual creates for himself the patterns of his linguistic behaviour so as to resemble those of the group or groups with which from time to time he wishes to be identified, or so as to be unlike those from whom he wishes to be distinguished”.

While instantiations of group history are the heart of habitus, Bourdieu’s (1991: 234) view of individual practice is that individuals compete in a social market to impose their vision of their own position in this world by asserting different forms of capital to invite others to share in their views of the universe. For some people in Barcelona, recounting stories of an idealized past may constitute ways of speaking that are intended (consciously or not) to generate profit in the linguistic and social markets. Such speakers could be said to possess a high degree of linguistic capital, because they would have the ability to negotiate a linguistic, social, or ideological (political) market and distinguish themselves in it, through their ways of speaking. This linguistic capital could go hand in hand with economic and cultural capital as well because, at least in Catalonia, being Catalan is often a coveted identity. Indeed, Doyle (1996) noted that children of immigrants were most prone to associate things Catalan with a glorious and artistic history. It is no coincidence that Doyle also found children of immigrants most prone to viewing the Catalan language as highly instrumental in finding employment.

4. Conclusions

In this paper I have attempted to demonstrate that linguistic practices that result from everyday face-to-face interactions can constitute identities. One such practice in Catalonia has been and continues to be language choice. Another such practice has to do with the performance of a particular sort of verbal art; that is, the creative and meaningful retelling of an idealized shared group history of accomplishment and repression. Such performances can be seen as individual acts of identity or manipulations of linguistic capital that rely on shared conventions of group affiliation. My analysis has viewed language use as an expression of actual social realities that also serves to (re)produce the realities themselves. This interdisciplinary approach, combining habitus theory and sociolinguistic theory on the political economy of language, has been able to deconstruct one complex construction of identities in a bilingual community in a manner that would be impossible to articulate in terms of conventional qualitative analysis. The split-level analysis by which Catalanist identities are

constructed from shared group histories and individual ways of speaking constitutes a significant step towards bridging community and individual bilingual practice.

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