Catalonia: A successful case of language immersion education?

James Hawkey
Université Sorbonne Nouvelle -Paris 3, France

In recent years, the Catalan language in Spain has gone from receiving no institutional support under the Franco dictatorship (1939-1975) to being the predominant language of administration and education. Such a volte face has been possible in part due to a comprehensive range of language revitalisation policies, introduced since Spain’s transition to democracy after Franco’s death. But to what extent have the aims of these policies been met? Focusing on language-in-education policies, this presentation will discuss the consequences of the shift from Spanish-medium to largely Catalan-medium language immersion education.

The Llei de Normalització Lingüística (Language Normalisation Law) of 1983 is a fundamental piece of Catalan linguistic legislature, and has as one of its aims the diffusion of knowledge of the Catalan language. According to official, government-endorsed testing, the awareness of non-normative language usage is considered a key component of Catalan language knowledge. This paper focuses on the awareness of non-normative language use as a specific Catalan language skill.

This presentation will discuss the results of an innovative fieldwork experiment conducted in Barcelona which aims to reveal the extent to which participants of different generations are aware of non-normative language use in Catalan. The older participants were educated in Spanish under the Franco regime, while the younger participants were beneficiaries of the current Catalan language immersion education system. The abilities of each age group to identify non-normative language use in Catalan will allow us to draw conclusions as to whether the current language immersion education system is meeting its objectives. Is knowledge of normative Catalan being spread through the population of Catalonia? How successful is the language immersion education system in Catalonia?

Keywords: Language-in-education policy, Language contact, Language immersion education.