Language transmission in Catalan/Spanish-Japanese families in Catalonia: language use, parents’ efforts and attitudes toward languages

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This study investigates language transmission between social bilingualism and family bi-/multilingualism in the case of Catalan/Spanish-Japanese families in Catalonia.

Main question of my research is how would be the language transmission when more than two languages are potentially used in a family, and some of them are socially weaker and/or lesser international status. Specifically, the study explores: 1) How do these families organize their language use?; 2) How do the parents perceive the languages involved?; 3) What efforts do they make to promote their children’s language acquisition?; and 4) What kind of problems do they have with languages?

The data for this case study have been collected through a questionnaire survey with twenty-nine linguistically mixed families of Japanese, Catalan and/or Spanish living in Catalonia. Some small subset of these families has been selected for semi-structured interviews and semi-participant observations to obtain more detailed data about the questions mentioned above.

The findings suggest that there is a variety of language use pattern depending on family type, parents’ language policy and their attitude toward languages. As for Catalan, in particular, local spouses’ attitude has a great influence on that of Japanese spouses and on family language use. As a whole, the parents show positive attitude toward children’s bi-/multilingual acquisition. Most of them perceive Catalan and Japanese as socially weak languages which need a special effort to maintain them, so they give them much more importance than to Spanish. In this way, Catalan and Japanese are successfully transmitted with a significant presence in these families. The study also confirms that most of the parents communicate with each other in Spanish, but it does not generate any defection in the transmission of Catalan. Finally, it is noteworthy that they often have no common language when all the family members participate in the interaction.

Keywords: ”Catalan”, ”Japanese”, ”language transmission”.