

# Informationalism, globalisation and trilingualism. An analysis of the statistics of Linguistic Practices in Small and Medium Companies in Catalonia

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## Summary

Based on the data from two surveys conducted by the Secretariat of Linguistic Policy of the Department of the Presidency of the Generalitat of Catalonia,<sup>1</sup> this article makes an analysis of the effects of globalisation and informationalism on the linguistic behaviour of small and medium service companies in Catalonia. It concludes with the ambivalent effects of the growing importance of English over the use of Spanish and Catalan in these companies.

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## 1. Introduction

This article analyses the linguistic behaviour of the small and medium service companies in Catalonia.<sup>2</sup> This behaviour is explained on the basis of the processes of globalisation and informationalisation of the economy. For this reason we have chosen three main independent variables: a) the degree of linguistic intensity in job performance, as an indicator of the degree of importance of information management and knowledge production in the productive activity; b) the national origin of the capital and c) the degree of internationalisation of customers, as indicators of the internationalisation of the economic activity.

In regard to linguistic behaviour, we concentrate on the differentiated use of Catalan, Spanish and English in the different communicative functions of companies. Catalan and English represent better than any other language in Catalonia the new dialogue relationship between what is local and what is global in detriment of the traditional centre-periphery relationship and which is articulated around the Spanish and Catalan languages. In the context of globalisation each language has a differentiated use in each activity, time and place (Coulmas, 2005). According to the data available, we defend that in the social and economic environment of Catalonia, Catalan and English are gaining in use and functions in detriment of Spanish. In fact, this affirmation adapts to the so-called *the language crisis of modernity* (Graddol, 2004), where monolingualism and the language of nation states have more and more difficulty in satisfying the communicative needs of citizens.

## 2. Informationalism and linguistic intensity

Industrial companies are taking a new step towards a new post-industrial order based on global, flexible, customer-adapted production and distribution. The central elements of competitiveness are to be found in the application of science, technology and knowledge management. Industrial activities lose importance in the face of activities that produce services, often in the form of information. In this context there is an increasing need to produce and manage symbols.

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1 This article has been possible thanks to the cession by the Secretariat of Linguistic Policy of the Generalitat of Catalonia of the individual results of two surveys conducted between 2005 and 2006 on the linguistic practices of small and medium service companies.

2 For a review of the latest research on linguistic behaviour in the business environment of Catalonia see Romani (2005), Solé, Castaño i Díaz (2005) and Riera (2005).

Information and knowledge are linguistically coded, and so there is an increase of the linguistic component required for production. A growing number of workers are dedicated to the manipulation of symbols to ensure better services, maintain the rhythm of innovation, and resolve complex new problems (Reich, 1993).

This orientation produces new social divisions linked to the intensity of knowledge. More specifically, a growing inequality is being produced between those that possess technological control and mass media resources and those that do not (Carnoy, Castells, Cohen, & Cardoso, 1993). According to Reich (1991), the growing importance of knowledge and in particular the manipulation of symbols in economic activity has influenced the unsuitability of the traditional classification of white-collar workers (office workers) and blue-collar workers (factory labourers).

Reich (1991) goes on to say that nowadays there are three groups of workers: 1) routine-production service workers, a category that includes industrial labourers, as well as workers of the information sector with very routine, repetitive and processing functions such as data processors; 2) in-person service workers, referring to workers who, even though their tasks may be routine and repetitive, are in direct contact with the final customer. This group includes jobs such as doormen, hospital orderlies, drivers, and 3) symbolic analysts, workers who dedicate much of their time to analysing the information contained in numeric and textual symbols; this group includes engineers, consultants, planners, lawyers, scientists. The required or crucial qualifications for a group of workers include analysis, evaluation, experimentation, collaboration, abstraction, systematic thinking and communication. The admission, status and opportunities for symbolic analysts are growing whereas the admittance, status and professional opportunities of the other two categories are waning.

The number of workers affected by linguistic diversity in the performance of their jobs has increased significantly during the second quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The evolution of working methods and of the nature of the goods produced, computerisation and the importance of services in the economy have transformed the nature of employment and made language a working instrument at all company levels. Heller (2005) indicates that what is new in the new globalised economy from a sociolinguistic point of view is not so much the globalisation but the economic conditions of the new economy, where if before we saw our physical work, we now see our intellectual and communicative work, both as a skill and a cultural artefact. This process means a mercantilisation of language and the growing development of the role of the linguistic worker in different business areas.

The effect of internationalisation of the markets and of the origin of capital are other key aspects that influence linguistic diversity. As companies develop operations in multiple foreign locations, their work force becomes more linguistically diversified. Companies have to manage vertical internal communication (between parent and subsidiary companies) and horizontally (between working groups of different subsidiaries), as well as external communication. Obviously, the new forms of organisation, more plain, with new hierarchical structures, imply greater communication between all members of the organisations. New practices and forms of organisation such as networked structures have extended linguistic needs to different levels of the hierarchical structure. Not only do executive directors often communicate in multiple languages, but so also do personnel at different levels of the organisation, such as secretaries or technicians (Charles i Marschan-Piekkari, 2002).

More decentralised and more independent organisational structures are more intensive from the linguistic point of view as they imply more volume and complexity of linguistic exchanges which, furthermore, involve a higher percentage of workers at different hierarchical levels. Janssens, Lambert and Steyaert (2004) pointed out that international communication is no longer the exclusive heritage of a group of executives expatriated from the parent company towards subsidiary companies. Supported by new technologies and increased mobility, a larger number of people on the staff regularly interact with colleagues and customers that speak languages other than their own (O'Hara-Devereaux i Johansen, 1994; Harris, 1998).





**Table 3. Distribution of the linguistic behaviour according to linguistic intensity (\*)**

|   |         | <i>Profile 1</i>                   | <i>Profile 2.A</i>            | <i>Profile 2.B</i>             | <i>Profile 3.A</i>    | <i>Profile 3.B</i>     | <b>Total</b> |
|---|---------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|--------------|
|   |         | Routine-production service workers | Low in-person service workers | High in-person service workers | Low symbolic analysts | High symbolic analysts |              |
| Total: 29 indicators <sup>5</sup>                                   | Catalan | 51.4                               | 33.4                          | 52.0                           | 54.2                  | 55.2                   | 52.8         |
|   | Spanish | 42.7                               | 60.2                          | 41.6                           | 39.5                  | 36.9                   | 40.5         |
|   | English | 2.2                                | 2.5                           | 2.5                            | 3.2                   | 4.1                    | 3.1          |
| Name of the company (v11)   | Catalan | 44.3                               | 23.0                          | 40.9                           | 45.4                  | 41.1                   | 42.3         |
|   | Spanish | 33.0                               | 51.1                          | 25.5                           | 33.2                  | 28.7                   | 31.4         |
|   | English | 2.8                                | 11.1                          | 8.7                            | 6.5                   | 11.4                   | 7.7          |
| Signs <sup>6</sup> (v12, v13, v14)                                  | Catalan | 51.5                               | 27.2                          | 61.0                           | 59.9                  | 64.2                   | 58.3         |
|   | Spanish | 35.2                               | 59.9                          | 25.0                           | 29.5                  | 21.2                   | 28.8         |
|   | English | 3.5                                | 2.6                           | 3.1                            | 2.6                   | 5.1                    | 3.6          |
| Advertising (v15, v16)  | Catalan | 53.5                               | 31.0                          | 48.7                           | 51.9                  | 51.0                   | 50.6         |
|   | Spanish | 38.7                               | 57.7                          | 43.8                           | 38.2                  | 41.6                   | 41.0         |
|   | English | 2.0                                | 3.7                           | 2.0                            | 3.9                   | 3.2                    | 3.0          |
| Training (v33a, v33b)   | Catalan | 52.2                               | 36.8                          | 45.7                           | 52.2                  | 51.9                   | 50.4         |
|   | Spanish | 45.4                               | 63.3                          | 51.0                           | 42.7                  | 42.8                   | 45.5         |
|   | English | 1.9                                | 0.0                           | 2.9                            | 4.9                   | 5.1                    | 3.9          |
| Communications with customers and suppliers (v53a, v55a, v55b, v56) | Catalan | 59.8                               | 39.1                          | 61.6                           | 61.4                  | 67.1                   | 61.8         |
|   | Spanish | 37.8                               | 57.3                          | 37.4                           | 37.0                  | 31.1                   | 36.3         |
|   | English | 1.3                                | 2.7                           | 0.7                            | 1.3                   | 1.2                    | 1.2          |
| Stationery, stamps and invoices (v41, v42, v44).                    | Catalan | 47.3                               | 23.6                          | 48.1                           | 47.7                  | 47.6                   | 46.7         |
|   | Spanish | 42.3                               | 61.0                          | 42.4                           | 41.0                  | 40.0                   | 42.0         |
|   | English | 2.4                                | 2.4                           | 2.1                            | 3.0                   | 3.4                    | 2.8          |
| Working documents (v61, v62, v63)                                   | Catalan | 46.6                               | 40.2                          | 53.7                           | 54.5                  | 58.1                   | 53.3         |
|   | Spanish | 53.1                               | 59.8                          | 45.4                           | 44.5                  | 39.8                   | 45.5         |
|   | English | 0.3                                | 0.0                           | 0.6                            | 1.0                   | 1.8                    | 1.0          |
| Working meetings (v64_1, v64_2)                                     | Catalan | 55.5                               | 50.9                          | 67.9                           | 71.0                  | 73.4                   | 67.2         |
|   | Spanish | 43.4                               | 49.1                          | 30.2                           | 26.3                  | 23.9                   | 30.6         |
|   | English | 0.2                                | 0.0                           | 0.0                            | 1.1                   | 1.3                    | 0.8          |
| Publications: (v57, v65)  | Catalan | 53.8                               | 58.3                          | 42.9                           | 51.4                  | 48.2                   | 48.5         |
|   | Spanish | 44.5                               | 70.8                          | 53.2                           | 44.8                  | 48.4                   | 48.2         |
|   | English | 0.9                                | 0.0                           | 2.6                            | 3.4                   | 3.4                    | 2.8          |
| <b>Total (n)</b>  |         | <b>153</b>                         | <b>28</b>                     | <b>111</b>                     | <b>214</b>            | <b>212</b>             | <b>718</b>   |

Source: developed from the data of the survey on linguistic practices in small and medium companies in Catalonia. (\*)Each data item corresponds to the mean percentage use of a language among a profile of companies according to its linguistic intensity. The participants were asked to make sure that the sum of the different languages for a function or indicator was 100%. The sum of Catalan+Spanish+English is not 100% in the table as they could indicate other languages. There was also the possibility that the indicator observed did not have linguistic significance.

In reference to profile 1, where we find workforces comprised of routine-production service workers, note the lesser presence of English in all profiles and one of the highest rates for the use of Spanish. The percentage of working documents in Spanish (53.1%) and working meetings employment (43.4%) are significantly higher. English is not present in almost any working document or meeting (0.2% and 0.3%).

The tendencies to increasing use of Catalan and English are practically lineal from profile 1 to Profile 3.B. with the exception of profile 2.A. There are few companies in this profile (28) in comparison with the other profiles, and the cases may not be very representative. If we consider

<sup>5</sup> Apart from the indicators shown in the table, the synthesis of indicators also includes: communications with public institutions (v54); automatic answering machine (v52a) and new communication environments: word processing software (v66); web home page (v18); electronic forms (v46); boilerplate e-mail texts (v45); new communication environments (messenger, chat, e-mail...) (v53\_b).

<sup>6</sup> The composition of the additional indicators is: signs: main sign (v12), interior signs (v13) and opening hours (v14); advertising: advertising (v15) and merchandising (v16); training: training material (v33a) and vehicular training language (v33b); Communications with customers and suppliers: oral communication with customers (v53a); with other companies in Catalonia (v55a); customers or users in Catalonia (v55b); suppliers in Catalonia (v56); stationery, stamps and invoices: stationery (v41); in-house or standard stamps (v42); invoices, receipts or tickets (v44); working documents: circulars, directives (v61); agenda of the day (v62); forms and internal printed matter (v63); work meetings: last two internal meetings (v64\_1;v64\_2); publications: regular publications (v57); annual report (v65).



|   |         |      |      |      |      |      |      |
|---|---------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Electronic forms (v46)  | Catalan | 40.5 | 12.8 | 33.7 | 36.3 | 30.7 | 34.1 |
|   | Spanish | 53.0 | 76.1 | 57.6 | 52.3 | 55.1 | 54.7 |
|   | English | 5.9  | 11.1 | 7.6  | 8.6  | 10.8 | 8.8  |
| Boilerplate e-mail texts (v45)                                      | Catalan | 47.8 | 27.3 | 49.1 | 49.3 | 46.5 | 47.5 |
|   | Spanish | 40.5 | 59.1 | 44.4 | 39.3 | 34.7 | 39.5 |
|   | English | 4.7  | 4.5  | 4.9  | 8.6  | 11.4 | 8.0  |
| New communication environments (messenger, chat, e-mail...) (v53_b) | Catalan | 53.4 | 41.1 | 54.2 | 55.6 | 56.5 | 54.9 |
|   | Spanish | 41.4 | 56.1 | 41.3 | 39.6 | 37.4 | 39.9 |
|   | English | 3.7  | 2.9  | 2.2  | 4.2  | 4.3  | 3.8  |
| Total (n)   |         | 153  | 28   | 111  | 214  | 212  | 718  |

Source: Developed from the data of the survey on linguistic practices in small and medium companies in Catalonia.

Finally, in this section it is important to note that companies of profile 3 (both A and B) are those that find more advantages and inconveniences in the use of Catalan, a fact that is no impediment for Catalan to be the most used language. The centrality of the language for these companies means that the use of different languages has a more reasoned component in function of competitive variables and not a simple unthinking adaptation to the environment.

**Table 5. Do you think that the use of Catalan in your organisation had advantages/ inconveniences?**

|              | Catalan has advantages |       |            |           | Total        | Catalan has inconveniences |       |            |           | Total        |
|--------------|------------------------|-------|------------|-----------|--------------|----------------------------|-------|------------|-----------|--------------|
|              | Yes                    | No    | Don't know | No answer |              | Yes                        | No    | Don't know | No answer |              |
| Profile 1    | 13.7%                  | 83.7% | 2.6%       |           | 100.0% (153) | 39.9%                      | 54.9% | 4.6%       | 0.7%      | 100.0% (153) |
| Profile 2. A | 14.3%                  | 82.1% | 3.6%       |           | 100.0% (28)  | 32.1%                      | 53.6% | 14.3%      | -         | 100.0% (28)  |
| Profile 2. B | 19.8%                  | 79.3% |            | 0.9%      | 100.0% (111) | 54.1%                      | 43.2% | 2.7%       | -         | 100.0% (111) |
| Profile 3.A  | 19.2%                  | 79.0% | 0.9%       | 0.9%      | 100.0% (214) | 48.1%                      | 46.3% | 4.7%       | 0.9%      | 100.0% (214) |
| Profile 3.B  | 20.8%                  | 77.8% | 0.5%       | 0.9%      | 100.0% (212) | 49.1%                      | 46.7% | 3.8%       | 0.5%      | 100.0% (212) |
| Total        | 18.4%                  | 79.8% | 1.1%       | 0.7%      | 100.0% (718) | 46.9%                      | 48.1% | 4.5%       | 0.6%      | 100.0% (718) |

Source: Developed from the data of the survey on linguistic practices in small and medium companies in Catalonia.

#### 4.2. Origen of the capital

The table below shows that the highest use of Catalan takes place in companies whose proprietors are Catalans (57.7%). In this case Spanish (36.8%) has a relatively low use, and the use of English (2%) is also very low. Even in new communicative environments, the use of English does not exceed 4%. The fact that the capital of the company is mainly from the rest of Spain produces a notable increase in the use of Spanish, in detriment, mainly, of Catalan. In this category the use of the Spanish drops to 40.1%. The increase of Spanish is notable: from 36.8% to 53%. The variation in English is of little significance, with an increase of 1.3%.

When we move more to the right of the table we see that internationalisation of the capital has a moderate effect on Spanish, which reaches 57.3% of the linguistic behaviour, even though it continues increasing compared to previous type, that is, companies with Spanish capital. The most evident effects of the internationalisation of capital are related to the significant reduction of Catalan (26.3%) and the high increase of English (to 11.1%). In these companies, then, the data indicate that the aggregate use of Catalan only doubles the use of English.

This type of companies with international capital are where the concept of trilingualism best describes the linguistic practices. English in companies with foreign capital is especially present for more symbolic reasons, such as the name of the company or the signs. But on highly instrumental environments such as training (18.1%), publications (14.1%) or the work environment based on



With abovementioned exception, the use of Catalan is not prejudiced by the internationalisation of the markets of the companies' customers and, on the other hand, the use of Spanish is reduced when the companies have customers in the rest of the world.

**Table 7. Distribution of linguistic behaviour according to the international distribution of customers**

|   |         | Customers only in Catalonia<br>n. 159 | Customers in Catalonia and Spain<br>n. 309 | Customers only in Catalonia and the rest of the world<br>n. 219 | Customers in Catalonia, Spain and the rest of the world<br>n. 18 | Without customers in Catalonia<br>n. 11 | Total<br>n. 716 |
|---|---------|---------------------------------------|--|---|--|---|-----------------|
| Total: 29 indicators  | Catalan | 54,5                                  | 53,4                                       | 74,8  | 50,6   | 19,6                                    | 52,8            |
|   | Spanish | 41,7                                  | 41,6                                       | 18,9  | 39,9   | 53,6                                    | 40,6            |
|   | English | 0,7                                   | 1,7  | 4,0   | 5,4  | 21,6                                    | 3,1             |
| Name of the company (v11)   | Catalan | 45,7                                  | 41,2                                       | 62,8  | 42,5   | 9,1                                     | 42,6            |
|   | Spanish | 34,1                                  | 34,6                                       | 6,7   | 27,3   | 50,0                                    | 31,7            |
|   | English | 2,8                                   | 4,5  | 16,7  | 13,5   | 27,3                                    | 7,6             |
| Signs (v12, v13, v14)   | Catalan | 62,0                                  | 56,7                                       | 75,3  | 58,6   | 7,3                                     | 58,4            |
|   | Spanish | 28,4                                  | 30,8                                       | 10,7  | 28,4   | 53,1                                    | 29,1            |
|   | English | 1,1                                   | 2,1  | 8,0   | 5,6  | 16,3                                    | 3,4             |
| Advertising (v15, v16)  | Catalan | 57,4                                  | 51,6                                       | 73,0  | 44,6   | 9,8                                     | 50,5            |
|   | Spanish | 37,5                                  | 43,7                                       | 21,0  | 40,6   | 66,9                                    | 41,2            |
|   | English | 0,6                                   | 1,0  | 2,4   | 6,8  | 12,8                                    | 3,0             |
| Training (v33a, v33b)   | Catalan | 55,0                                  | 50,9                                       | 87,4  | 45,4   | 29,2                                    | 50,6            |
|   | Spanish | 44,4                                  | 45,0                                       | 5,0   | 48,9   | 44,2                                    | 45,1            |
|   | English | 0,6                                   | 3,8  | 7,7   | 5,1  | 25,8                                    | 4,0             |
| Communications with customers and suppliers (v53a, v55a, v55b, v56) | Catalan | 60,0                                  | 63,6                                       | 76,3  | 60,5   | 27,5                                    | 61,7            |
|   | Spanish | 39,5                                  | 35,8                                       | 21,7  | 35,9   | 49,5                                    | 36,4            |
|   | English | 0,1                                   | 0,5  | 1,9   | 2,1  | 20,4                                    | 1,2             |
| Stationery, stamps and invoices (v41, v42, v44).                    | Catalan | 50,7                                  | 46,0                                       | 74,0  | 44,7   | 7,7                                     | 46,8            |
|   | Spanish | 41,4                                  | 45,1                                       | 18,5  | 39,8   | 64,5                                    | 42,3            |
|   | English | 0,6                                   | 0,9  | 3,1   | 5,7  | 15,6                                    | 2,6             |
| Working documents (v61, v62, v63)                                   | Catalan | 55,5                                  | 53,9                                       | 72,6  | 51,4   | 23,9                                    | 53,4            |
|   | Spanish | 44,2                                  | 45,9                                       | 22,1  | 46,6   | 63,3                                    | 45,4            |
|   | English | 0,1                                   | 0,1  | 4,4   | 1,9  | 12,8                                    | 1,0             |
| Working meetings (v64_1, v64_2)                                     | Catalan | 56,7                                  | 70,3                                       | 91,0  | 67,8   | 43,1                                    | 66,8            |
|   | Spanish | 41,4                                  | 28,5                                       | 6,4   | 28,9   | 46,8                                    | 31,1            |
|   | English | 0,2                                   | 0,3  | 2,1   | 1,3  | 10,1                                    | 0,8             |
| Publications (v57, v65)   | Catalan | 53,3                                  | 48,3                                       | 80,4  | 46,0   | 0,0                                     | 48,6            |
|   | Spanish | 45,8                                  | 50,1                                       | 17,1  | 48,6   | 68,3                                    | 48,1            |
|   | English | 0,8                                   | 1,2  | 2,5   | 4,5  | 31,7                                    | 2,8             |
| New communicative environments (v66, v18, v46, v45, v53_b)          | Catalan | 41,9                                  | 41,2                                       | 61,0  | 36,3   | 20,1                                    | 39,8            |
|   | Spanish | 54,8                                  | 52,6                                       | 34,6  | 49,7   | 42,8                                    | 51,4            |
|   | English | 1,7                                   | 3,8  | 2,4   | 10,5   | 37,1                                    | 6,2             |

Source: developed from the data of the survey on linguistic practices in small and medium companies in Catalonia.

## 5. Conclusions

In the sample as a whole there is a predominance in the use of Catalan above Spanish and far above English. The use of foreign languages is, in general, very low and undoubtedly related to the fact that there is a marked linguistic division of work between workers, so that those who have to make international communications are still a minority and that these communications occupy a very small part of the total work time. Only in companies with foreign capital does English reach rates of use that make this language an important new competitor to Catalan in practically all communicative functions without, according to the results, affecting Spanish in these companies.

Informationalism as a process that designates new forms of work and organisation does not, in general, have a negative effect on the Catalan language, but rather a positive one. We have seen how the profiles with greater linguistic intensity, that is in companies where the management of information and production of knowledge is more important, the use of Catalan and English increases in detriment of Spanish. The extension and reinforcement of Catalan in the university system, that in Catalonia this language be that of institutional prestige and that Catalan public







