

Review of the book:

Hawkey, James, (2018). Language Attitudes and Minority Rights: The case of Catalan in France. Palgrave Macmillan, ISBN 978-3-319-74597-8, £79.00.

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1 Introduction

The book investigates language attitudes and ideologies regarding the Catalan language in Northern Catalonia which, according to the author, is located in the south of France. It aims to address language policy and Linguistic Human Rights issues with regard to Catalan, as well as map language attitudes and ideologies through quantitative sociophonetic analysis and qualitative questionnaire and interview data. Specifically, the book addresses the following research questions:

1. In what ways does macrosociological category membership function as a predictor of language attitudes in Northern Catalonia?
2. To what extent do language attitudes correlate to the usage of local or supralocal linguistic variants?
3. What are the prevalent language ideologies in Northern Catalonia?
4. What are the primary language rights concerns in Northern Catalonia? How can our findings contribute to knowledge about language rights in analogous situations? (p.xii)

The book is divided into six chapters, providing research context, theoretical and methodological considerations, three results chapters (quantitative findings from the language attitudes questionnaire; quantitative findings from the sociophonetic study; qualitative findings from questionnaires and interviews); and a discussion chapter. The context chapter describes the geographical, historical-political, historical-linguistic and sociolinguistic background, which includes an exploration of the population's currently very low competence in Catalan as opposed to French. The theory and methods chapter introduces the instruments used, including the Language Attitude Questionnaire, the sociophonetic wordlist task and the Critical Discourse Analysis approach adopted for the qualitative element of the project.

The quantitative findings of the questionnaire study are presented according to a number of social variables. For example, with regard to 'occupation' the results show that attitudes towards the status values of Catalan – i.e. perceived characteristics such as 'confidence' - are lowest amongst students, which is explained by the language ideology of French dominance in schools. The same is found for the solidarity values of Catalan, i.e. perceived characteristics such as 'friendliness'. There are also variations in attitudes to status and solidarity values with regard to regional factors (father's and mother's place of birth, participant's residence). Regarding competence in Catalan, participants who self-reported higher language skills in Catalan were likely to evaluate it more highly. Regarding French status and solidarity, gender was found to play a role, with females more in praise of the instrumental value of French. Overall, French is evaluated as having higher status and solidarity values than Catalan: 'Whether people feel attached to Catalan as a language of solidarity or not, they are still likely to have high solidarity views of the French language. Given the strength of centralist French language ideologies, it is hardly surprising that French should be seen as the language of status by all. But the fact that it is also arguably the language of solidarity for all (even for self-declared Catalan speakers) is greatly interesting, and speaks to the power of the existing ideological hegemony. (p. 93)



The quantitative sociophonetic analysis links language attitudes and phonetics. Interestingly, positive attitudes towards Catalan with regard to status are linked with ‘supralocal’ phonetic variants; whereas positive views with regard to solidarity are positively correlated with local variants. Hawkey concludes:

“Participants who view Catalan as a language of status, utility, and potential overt prestige are aligning themselves with supralocal norms, characteristic of areas where Catalan is already a prestige language. Likewise, participants who view Catalan as a vehicle of solidarity are more focused on heritage concerns, and thus there is greater symbolic capital in adopting local variants, to be used to convey a credible identity that places a high value on attachment to Northern Catalonia, rather than other Catalan-speaking areas.” (p. 141)

The qualitative analysis explores participants’ responses in terms of Catalan in its geographical, social and political space. Geographical space is discussed with regard to (linguistic and other) differences within Northern Catalonia and its external boundaries. Regarding social space the research finds that Catalan can act ‘as an anchor to local culture’ (p. 158) for those who are proficient in the language. However, ‘support for the preservation of local customs is tempered by instrumental concerns linked to social advancement (framed by Bourdieu in terms of *cultural capital*), as well as by the existence of a sense of French national identity’ (p. 159). Participants do not seem to feel ambivalent about having two linguistic and cultural identities (Catalan, French). However, the two languages have clear social functions:

“French not only fulfils instrumental, ‘status’ roles, but also is able to act as the primary ‘language of identification’ (to borrow a term from the Generalitat de Catalunya’s questionnaires regarding linguistic usage). The Catalan language and culture are perfectly capable of serving as an identity marker, but are not seen as rich enough in Bourdieusian cultural capital to operate convincingly as a tool of social advancement.” (p. 159).

The discussion chapter applies the findings to debates around regional and minority languages, rights and education and links these to current language rights in Northern Catalonia. The short conclusion gives concise responses to the research questions based on the findings of the study.

The book addresses important sociolinguistic and political questions. The case study of Catalan in Southern France serves as a useful vehicle for the debate of language minority rights, language attitudes and language ideologies. The strengths of the book lie in its incorporation of qualitative as well as quantitative data and its inclusion of phonetic analysis. Both are highly innovative for a study of language attitudes. The different areas of expertise – sociolinguistic, sociophonetics, discourse analytic, historical, political – are merged into a convincing argument that reveals the complexities surrounding language attitudes without ever losing coherence. I highly recommend this book to all students of Catalan, as well as to those of sociolinguistics and critical discourse analysis.