Regional, state, and immigrants' heritage languages in high school: The effect of geographic origin and linguistic acculturation profiles on language attitudes

Isabel Sáenz-Hernández, Judit Janés, Josep Ubalde, Cecilio Lapresta-Rey

Abstract

Aims and Objectives/Purpose/Research Questions

This study explores the language attitudes that high school students of immigrant origin hold towards Catalan, Spanish and the heritage languages of immigrant communities, focusing on linguistic acculturation profiles at school and geographic origin of these students. It takes place in Catalonia (Spain), a multilingual setting where Spanish and Catalan have official status.

Design/Methodology/Approach

Using a 5-point Likert scale, 198 students of immigrant background were asked about their attitudes regarding these three languages, as well as questions regarding their linguistic acculturation profiles at school.

Data and Analysis

A K-means cluster analysis was conducted to create identity groups based on linguistic acculturation profiles at school. Then, a series of ANOVAs were run, first to analyze the relationship between linguistic acculturation profiles and attitudes towards heritage languages, Catalan, Spanish and secondly between linguistic acculturation profiles and continent of origin. A two-factor ANOVA was conducted to test the interaction effects between linguistic acculturation and geographic origin regarding language attitudes.

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Findings/Conclusions

Those in the acculturation profile that incorporates all three languages at school have significantly lower attitudes towards Catalan, suggesting that heritage language maintenance is perceived as incompatible with Catalan at school. As for geographic origin, the European origin group are more commonly placed in the Catalan assimilation acculturation profile than the African and Latin American groups. There is also a significant interaction effect between origin and acculturation profile, with the European multilingual group showing significantly less positive attitudes towards Catalan.

Originality

While other studies have explored immigrant attitudes towards Catalan and Spanish, very few have incorporated the wide range of unofficial languages present in the territory, like Arabic, Amazigh, or Romanian.

Significance/Implications.

These results complement previous general acculturation research showing that, for linguistic acculturation as well, racialized ethnic hierarchies affect the acculturation options available to different linguistic groups.

Keywords: immigration, heritage language, acculturation, language attitudes, integration, Catalonia

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Introduction

Language attitudes are key in the process of identity construction (Boninger et al., 1995; Lapresta-Rey et al., 2018), and as such, they play a vital role in immigrants' feelings of belonging to a new society (Sáenz-Hernández et al., 2022). They are also heavily influenced by language attitudes in the dominant society, and their ideas of what immigrant integration should be. In the case of teenagers, the school context is particularly crucial in assigning value and legitimacy to certain languages (Johnson & Johnson, 2015; Liu & Evans, 2016), which in turn regulates different linguistic groups' access to knowledge, friendship or material goods, acting as a form of symbolic domination (Bourdieu, 1982).

Even though acculturation profiles that include both the dominant and the heritage culture are generally associated with psychological benefits such as better self-esteem, wellbeing, and mental health (Berry & Sabatier, 2010; Retortillo & Rodriguez, 2010), the European school context tends to encourage assimilation profiles even considering the languages of immigrants as a hindrance for integration, particularly those coming from non-European countries (König et al., 2015; Liu & Evans, 2016; Sáenz-Hernández et al., 2023). This is especially salient in the case of racialized groups such as those of African origin, since language use is associated to the racial attributes assigned to the communities that speak it (Khan & Gallego-Balsà, 2021; Rosa & Flores, 2017).

The context of Catalonia (Spain) is particularly relevant, as it is both an important receptor of foreign residents as well as an officially multilingual territory. Previous research on language attitudes have highlighted that Catalan and Spanish are generally viewed in terms of opposition (Pujolar, 2010; Woolard & Frekko, 2013), but fewer studies have

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incorporated the attitudes towards the wide range of unofficial languages present in the territory, such as Arabic, Amazigh, or Romanian.

Thus, this study aims to explore the relationship between linguistic acculturation profiles that students of immigrant origin present in the school context, their attitudes towards Catalan, Spanish and the heritage languages of immigrant communities, and the effect of geographical origin.

Acculturation theory and linguistic acculturation

Acculturation can be described as the phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact causing changes in their original culture patterns (Redfield et al., 1936, p. 149). Berry's acculturation theory (Berry, 1997) and the subsequent modifications from Richard Bourhis et al. (1997), established four profiles, determined by the degree of heritage culture maintenance and the degree of adoption of the dominant culture: (1) assimilation: characterized by a high level of adoption of the culture of the dominant society and low heritage culture maintenance; (2) separation: low adoption of the dominant culture and high heritage culture maintenance; (3) integration: high adoption and maintenance of both, and (4) marginalization: characterized by not having strong ties to either culture.

Integration profiles, where both cultures and languages are maintained and treated as compatible, have been associated with higher levels of wellbeing, self-esteem and mental health (Berry & Sabatier, 2010; Retortillo & Rodriguez, 2010). However, these profiles are not freely selected by minorities. They are heavily influenced by the expectations of the dominant society as well as institutional requirements regarding residence permits, citizenship, among others. When immigrants are expected to assimilate into the cultural

and linguistic norms of the dominant group, any expression of their cultural background may be interpreted as lack of effort or disrespect towards the host society (Flubacher, 2016; Verdía Varela et al., 2020). This is particularly salient in the case of racialized groups, whose cultural and linguistic practices tend to be ascribed negative attributes such as incompatibility with the dominant society, backwardness or even crime and terrorism (Choudhury, 2021; Rosa & Flores, 2017). Thus, Bourhis et al.'s acculturation model (Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, & Senecal, 1997) built on Berry's model by incorporating the perspective of the dominant society regarding immigrant groups, and how it relates to the ethnic origin of said groups. The dominant society is more likely to support integration when it comes to valued cultural groups, while expectations of assimilation and segregation tend to be comparatively higher for devalued groups, influenced by cultural hierarchies shaped by colonial history (Kunst & Sam, 2014; Martín Rojo, 2010; Montreuil & Bourhis, 2001, 2004). Similarly, how immigrants construct their identity within these unequal power dynamics affects their ability and motivation to interact with the dominant society or learn the dominant language(s) (Ali, 2020; Kasstan et al., 2018).

Additionally, acculturation profiles and expectations tend to vary among different areas of life. The Relative Acculturation Extended Model (RAEM) postulates that immigrant groups will prioritize cultural maintenance in more private areas such as values and family customs, and they will lean more towards assimilation in more public domains such as work or school (Navas et al., 2007). The expectations of the dominant group also tend to follow this pattern (López-Padilla et al., 2021).

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Language attitudes and the role of school

Language is crucial to the process of identity building and group belonging, and as such, a major element of the acculturation process (Heller, 2008). The term 'heritage language' (HL) refers to the ancestral language of a speaker or community, which is different from the societal language, such as the languages of immigrant communities (Valdés, 2017). Linguistic acculturation patterns can be grouped into the same four profiles depending on the degree of maintenance of the HL and adoption of the language(s) of the host community (He, 2010; Lee, 2002). Additionally, these are shaped by language attitudes held by both minority and majority groups.

Language attitudes have been central to the study of language learning since the seminal works by (Gardner & Lambert, 1959, 1972). They can be defined as the individual's emotional and intellectual response towards certain languages, dialects and accents of their social context (Trudgill, 2003). Language attitudes are formed by three main elements (González-Riaño et al., 2019; Huguet & González-Riaño, 2004):

1. Personal needs: language attitudes are affected by the expectations that individuals' desire to achieve through use of certain languages.
2. Social group: The need for social cohesion and approval from one's valued social group may influence attitudes towards languages.
3. Information: which may be received through mass media (press, TV, social media, etc.) or direct experiences.

Given that immigrant groups' needs, social groups and experiences tend to differ from the dominant society, it is unsurprising that research shows that immigrants' language attitudes differ as well from the dominant group. In Catalonia, research tends to show that

people with no immigrant background tend to favor Catalan over Spanish, while the opposite is true for immigrants (Lapresta-Rey et al., 2010, 2018). However, this is a general overview that does not account for the diversity within immigrants that might influence language attitudes (such as cultural and linguistic proximity, experience of racism and migration prospects) or the wide variety of language attitudes within non-immigrants.

In the case of high school students, the school environment is key in assigning value and legitimacy to certain languages (Comellas et al., 2014; Johnson & Johnson, 2015; Sáenz-Hernández et al., 2021), which in turn influences how students are able to negotiate and express their identities (Liu & Evans, 2016). While Catalan, Spanish and English are legitimized by the school curriculum, teachers' attitudes towards HLs regulate how they are treated in school. A study that surveyed Catalan high-school students showed that 45% agreed to the statement that HLs should not have any role in school and should stay at home (Comellas et al., 2014). Other studies conducted in Catalan schools corroborate these results, showing that both teachers and students present highly assimilative attitudes towards these the HLs of immigrant students (Petreñas et al., 2019; Serra et al., 2015; Serra i Salamé, 2001).

Sociolinguistic context of Catalonia

Spanish, Catalan, Aranese Occitan and Catalan Sign Language, enjoy official status in Catalonia, although the region is commonly referred to as bilingual, since Spanish and Catalan are the most prevalent[1]. Catalan was given official status and defined as the

[1] Aranese Occitan has enjoyed the status of official language in Catalonia since 2010, but its use is limited to a small region called the Valley of Aran which is not part of this study (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2015).

territory's 'own language' after the repressive period of Franco's dictatorship (1939-1975), during which it was forbidden from public use. Concurrently, Spanish was defined as 'the state language', and made a compulsory subject in public education, while the rest of subjects would be conducted in Catalan (Pujolar, 2010).

With the steady arrival of foreign immigration since the year 2000, the official narrative changed the discourse around Catalan to a 'language for social cohesion', but this narrative coexists with the pervasive view of Catalan as an ethnically marked in-group language in opposition to the unmarked Spanish (Lapresta-Rey et al., 2019; Pujolar, 2010; Woolard & Frekko, 2013). Adult immigrants tend to consider learning Spanish more useful for communicating in and outside of Catalonia, and locals tend to reinforce this pattern by switching to Spanish by default when they encounter someone they perceive as a foreigner (Pujolar, 2010). The children of immigrants attend school in Catalan, but in their case as well regular communication in Catalan (as opposed to Spanish and particularly other heritage languages) makes them appear more integrated to the dominant group (Petreñas et al., 2019; Sáenz- Hernández et al., 2020; Sáenz-Hernández et al., 2021).

Currently 16.11% of the Catalan population have foreign nationalities, above the Spanish average of 11.42%. In the province of Lleida, where the study takes place, this ratio ascends to 18.21%, with Romanians and Moroccans having the largest presence, respectively accounting for 26.82% and 22.14% of the total foreign population in the province (IDESCAT, 2021). The latest Survey on Language Uses of the Population also

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Catalan Sign Language is the local language of the signing community in Catalonia, also official since 2010. The Catalan Federation for Deaf People (FESOCA) estimates around 25000 speakers (Quer, 2012). Due to these two languages' small number of speakers in localized communities, these study focuses on Catalan and Spanish as official local languages that are present in the students' school curriculum and everyday lives.

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showed that the province also has a higher-than-average use of Catalan, with 57% of people using mostly Catalan in their daily life, above the Catalan average of 36.1% (mostly due to the effect of a lower ratio in the highly populated province of Barcelona) (IDESCAT, 2018). While the survey shows Arabic as the third most common mother tongue in Catalonia, other studies estimate that Amazigh, a minoritized language from northern Africa, is the mother tongue of between 50% and 80% of the Moroccan diaspora in Catalonia (Barrieras, 2013; Tilmatine, 2005). This is not reflected in official reports due to the stigma associated to the language in northern Africa and the lack of knowledge of the Catalan population.

Objectives

The aim of this study was to explore the relationship between linguistic acculturation profiles, geographic origin, and attitudes towards Catalan, Spanish and the heritage languages of immigrant communities. More specifically, we based the design on the following research questions:

1. What are the linguistic acculturation profiles of students of immigrant background within the school context?
2. What attitudes do students of immigrant background hold regarding Catalan, Spanish and their HLs and do they differ depending on their linguistic acculturation profile?
3. Are there differences in language attitudes depending on the students' geographic origin?
4. Are there any interaction effects between language attitudes and geographic origin when it comes to language attitudes?

Method

Participants

The participants in this study were 208 students of immigrant background from six high schools in the province of Lleida. These schools were selected using purposive sampling with a focus on linguistically and culturally diverse schools in a selection process that involved collaborative consultation with the Catalan Department of Education. For the purpose of the objectives of this study, we focused on participants from Europe, Latin America and Africa. Thus, 10 students of Asian descent were not included in the final analyses, resulting in a final sample of 198 students (47.2% female, 52.8% male).

They were in their 3rd and 4th years of secondary education and their ages ranged from 14 to 18 years (M = 15.31 SD = .064). As for their place of birth, 70.9% were born abroad, 28.1% were born in Catalonia and 1% in other areas of Spain. All of them had at least one parent born abroad. 90.9% of their fathers were born abroad, 5.6% were born in Catalonia and 3.5% in other areas of Spain. As for the mothers, 97% were born abroad, 2.5% were born in Catalonia and 0.5% in other areas of Spain.

Table 1. Participant distribution by continent and country

Continent	**Continent total**	**Country of origin**	**Country percentage within continent**
Africa	76	Morocco	67.11%
		Gambia	7.89%
		Algeria	6.58%
		Senegal	6.58%

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		Cameroun	2.63%
		Cote d'Ivoire	2.63%
		Ghana	2.63%
		Angola	1.32%
		Togo	1.32%
		Tunisia	1.32%
Latin America	43	Colombia	27.91%
		Argentina	16.28%
		Bolivia	16.28%
		Brazil	11.63%
		Dominican Republic	6.98%
		Ecuador	6.98%
		Paraguay	4.65%
		Peru	4.65%
		Venezuela	4.65%
Europe	79	Romania	53.16%
		Ukraine	21.52%
		Bulgaria	6.33%
		France	5.03%
		Italy	2.53%
		Moldavia	2.53%
		Russia	2.53%

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	United Kingdom	2.53%
	Andorra	1.27%
	Belgium	1.27%
	Germany	1.27%

Procedure

After obtaining the necessary permissions from the Department of Education, a research team visited six secondary education centers with a high ratio of foreign students in the province of Lleida (Catalonia, Spain) and administered a 45-minute-long questionnaire. Three of the high schools were located in the city of Lleida and three in smaller towns of the province.

Instrument

The participants were given a questionnaire inquiring about sociodemographic information such as age, gender, their place of birth, and their parents' birthplace and education level. Then they were asked to agree using a 5-point Likert scale to a series of questions regarding linguistic acculturation profiles. These were adapted from Navas et al.'s scales (Navas et al., 2005; Navas, Rojas, Pumares, Lozano, & Cuadrado, 2010) and adjusted to fit the multilingual context of Catalonia where a state language, a regional language and heritage languages must be taken into account.

Variables

Sociodemographic characteristics

Participants were asked to provide sociodemographic data such as their gender, age, age of arrival, place of birth, and parents' place of birth.

Linguistic acculturation at school

Berry's (2006) four acculturation profiles were adapted to focus on the linguistic domain of acculturation regarding Spanish, Catalan and Heritage languages. In the case of Latin American students whose HL was a different variety of Spanish they were told to refer to their specific dialect as the HL, and to Castilian Spanish in the questions about Spanish. The measure was adapted from (Navas et al., 2005, 2010), using a 5-point Likert scale with 1 meaning never and 5 meaning always. The questions had the following format:

- To what extent do you maintain your language
    - In class
    - With teachers
    - At recess
- To what extent do you adopt Catalan
    - In class
    - With teachers
    - At recess
- To what extent do you adopt Castilian Spanish
    - In class
    - With teachers
    - At recess

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Language attitudes

For language attitudes we used a questionnaire originally developed for the also bilingual context of Wales (Sharp et al., 1973), which had already been adapted to the context of Catalonia (González-Riaño et al., 2019; Ianos et al., 2020). The final measures were created by calculating the mean of 10 5-point Likert scale questions for each language. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .72 for the scale measuring attitudes towards Catalan, .73 for attitudes towards Spanish, and .76 for attitudes towards HLs. Again, Latin American students were asked to differentiate between their heritage variety of Spanish and the variety spoken in Spain. It included three separate scales:

- Language attitudes towards heritage languages
- Language attitudes towards Catalan
- Language attitudes towards Castilian Spanish

Data analysis

The analysis included descriptive statistics, chi square tests and ANOVAs. First, a K-means cluster analysis was conducted to create identity groups based on linguistic acculturation profiles at school. Various chi-square tests were conducted to test if linguistic acculturation groups differed in sociodemographic characteristics. Then, a series of ANOVAs were run, first to analyze the relationship between linguistic acculturation profiles and language attitudes towards heritage languages, Catalan, and Spanish and secondly between linguistic acculturation profiles and continent of origin. Finally, a two factor ANOVA was conducted to test the interaction effects between language attitudes and geographic origin regarding language attitudes.

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The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics, and the significance level used was .05.

Results

Linguistic acculturation at school

First, a k-means cluster analysis was conducted to create groups according to linguistic acculturation profiles. The analysis showed that the best fit model included three clusters, to which the participants were assigned. 25.3 % of participants had high scores for all three languages and were grouped under the Multilingual profile group. 37.4% had lower scores for their HL but high scores for Catalan and Cast. Spanish and they were assigned to the Spanish-Catalan Assimilation profile group. Finally, the remaining 37.4% presented high scores only for Catalan and were grouped under the Catalan Assimilation profile group (see table 2).

Table 2. Final centers of the clusters. Range 1-5.

		Multilingual (n=50)	Assimilation Sp-Cat (n=74)	Assimilation Catalan (n=74)
To what extent do you maintain your language	In class	3.89	1.31	1.85
	With teachers	3.44	1.05	1.23
	At recess	4.18	1.59	2.32
To what extent do you adopt Catalan	In class	3.44	3.95	4.44
	With teachers	3.56	4.17	4.65
	At recess	2.65	2.66	4.01
	In class	4.22	4.48	2.43

To what extent do you adopt Castilian Spanish	With teachers	3.65	4.27	2.24
	At recess	4.40	4.65	2.19

A chi-square test of independence (see table 3) showed that there was no significant association between gender and linguistic acculturation profile (X^2 (2, N = 198) = 0.757, p = .685). However, there was a significant association of continent and linguistic acculturation profile (X^2 (4, N = 198) = 56.524, p < .001).

Then, participants were grouped following Rumbaut's classification of generational cohorts: 'second generation' for those born in Spain (n=58), '1.75 generation' for those whose age of arrival was between 0 and 5 years of age (n=75), '1.5 generation' in the case of arrival between 6 and 12 years of age (n=52), and finally participants who arrived to Spain at a later age than 13 were classified as '1.25 generation' (n=10). Another chi square test was conducted comparing the first three groups, since the 1.25 generation group was too small, but it did not yield significant results (X^2 (4, N = 185) = 3.764, p = .439).

Table 3. Summary of Chi Square tests results comparing sociodemographic variables among the linguistic acculturation profile groups

Variable distribution within profile	**Categories**	**Multilingual (n=50)**	**Spanish and Catalan assimilation**	**Catalan assimilation (n= 74)**	**χ^2 – Cramer's V**

			(n=74)		
Gender (%)	Female	44	51.4	45.9	N/S
	Male	56	48.6	54.1	
Continent (%)	Africa	28	56.8	27	χ^2= 56.524*** V= .378
	America	54	8.1	13.5	
	Europe	18	35.1	59.5	
Generational cohort (%)	Born in Spain	30.2	37.1	26.4	N/S
	1-5 years old	34.9	41.4	43.1	
	6-12 years old	34.9	21.4	30.6	

*** $p < .001$

Linguistic acculturation profiles and language attitudes

Language attitudes were overall high for all languages as can be seen in table 4. On a scale of 1 to 5, participants had means of over 3.75 for all three measures. Attitudes towards the HLs were the most positive with a mean of 3.94, followed by Castilian Spanish (3.81) and Catalan (3.75).

Table 4. Summary of means and standard deviations for language attitudes for all participants.

Attitudes (all groups)	M	SD
HL	3.94	.66
Catalan	3.75	.71
Cast. Spanish	3.81	.64

When comparing linguistic acculturation groups, attitudes were still high with the lowest mean being 3.43 for attitudes towards Catalan in the Multilingual profile group (see table 5). A series of ANOVAs showed statistically significant differences in attitudes towards Catalan ($F(_{2,189}) = 7.47$, $p = .001$), but there were no significant differences in attitudes towards Cast. Spanish or heritage languages among linguistic acculturation groups.

Table 5. Summary of ANOVAs and post-hoc tests for language attitudes by linguistic acculturation profile groups.

Attitudes	**Multilingual (n=50)**		**Assimilation Sp-Cat (n=74)**		**Assimilation Catalan (n=74)**		**F(2,189)**	**η^2**
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
HL	3.81	0.67	3.92	0.63	4.04	0.68	N/S	
Catalan	3.43	0.76	3.78	0.75	3.92	0.57	7.467***	.075
Cast. Spanish	3.89	0.61	3.89	0.58	3.68	0.70	N/S	

*** $p < .001$

Tukey's HSD Test for multiple comparisons showed that the multilingual profile group had significantly lower means regarding attitudes towards Catalan compared to the Assimilation to Catalan and Spanish group ($p = 0.019$, 95% C.I. = [-0.66 -0.47]), and the

assimilation to Catalan group (p = 0.001, 95% C.I. = [-0.80, -0.19]). Considering that all acculturation groups used Catalan in their daily life, this may indicate an association between maintaining the HL and lower attitudes towards Catalan, as opposed to those who have assimilated to either one or both of the local official languages.

Language attitudes and continent

Attitudes were overall quite high for all languages in all origin groups as well, with a minimum of 3.49 (on a scale of 1 to 5) for attitudes towards Catalan in the Latin American origin group. A series of ANOVAs showed statistically significant differences in attitudes towards Catalan ($F(_{2,190}) = 3.69$, $p < .05$) and Cast. Spanish ($F(_{2,190}) = 4.27$, $p < .05$) , but not for HLs.

Table 6. Summary of ANOVAs and post-hoc tests for language attitudes by geographic origin groups.

Attitudes	**Africa (n=76)**		**Latin America (n=43)**		**Europe (n=79)**		**F(2,190)**	**η2**
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
HL	3.88	0.72	4.03	0.62	3.95	0.62	N/S	
Catalan	3.85	0.66	3.49	0.69	3.79	0.74	3.685*	.039
Cast. Spanish	3.76	0.63	4.05	0.58	3.71	0.65	4.266*	.044

* $p < .05$

Tukey's HSD Test for multiple comparisons showed that students of African origin had significantly better attitudes towards Catalan than students from Latin America (p = .026,

95% C.I. = [0.03, -0.69]). This may be related to the Latin American students identification with Spanish and societal perceptions of Spanish and Catalan as languages in opposition (Pujolar, 2010; Woolard & Frekko, 2013). This seems to be supported by the fact that students of Latin American origin also had significantly better attitudes towards Castilian Spanish than those of African and European descent (p = 0.049, 95% C.I. = [-0.00, -0.58]). Even though they were asked to distinguish their heritage variety of Spanish (defined as heritage language) from the local one, this distinction may not play a significant role in terms of attitudes.

Linguistic acculturation profiles, language attitudes, and continent

A two-way ANOVA was conducted that examined the effect of continent of origin and linguistic acculturation profile on language attitudes. There was a statistically significant interaction between the effects of continent of origin and linguistic acculturation profile on attitudes towards Catalan (F (4, 177) = 3.261, p = .013) but not for attitudes towards Castilian Spanish or HLs.

To explore these results regarding attitudes towards Catalan, we conducted three ANOVAS for each continent group. Only the European group had statistical differences among linguistic acculturation profiles. Tukey's HSD Test for multiple comparisons showed that the Multilingual profile group had significantly worse attitudes towards Catalan than the other two groups.

These results show that linguistic acculturation profile and geographical origin affect one another in their association with attitudes towards Catalan in a way that we do not find for the other languages, with particularly Europeans showing more variability between acculturation groups than other origins. Looking at the means in table 7, we can see that

the European Multilingual group has the lowest mean attitudes towards Catalan that we have seen in any other group towards any other language (2.89 on a scale of 1 to 5).

Table 7. Summary of ANOVAs and post-hoc tests for language attitudes towards Catalan by linguistic acculturation profiles and geographic origin groups.

Continent	**Multilingual**		**Assimilation Sp-Cat**		**Assimilation Catalan**		**F**	**η^2**
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Africa (n=76)	3.64	0.52	3.88	0.75	3.93	0.56	N/S	
Latin America (n=43)	3.52	0.78	3.45	0.58	3.43	0.47	N/S	.
Europe (n=79)	2.89	0.76	3.72	0.78	4.03	0.55	11.358***	.235

*** $p < .001$

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the attitudes towards Catalan, Spanish and the heritage languages held by students of immigrant of background, and the relationship between these language attitudes, linguistic acculturation profiles in the school context and geographic origin of the participants.

Since Catalan is the means of instruction, all students incorporate Catalan in their linguistic acculturation profiles at school. Among those that maintain their heritage

language at school (i.e., those in the multilingual profile) half are from Latin America, which could be expected. Even if they speak a different dialect of Spanish, the Castilian dialect of Spanish is official and one of the languages in the school curriculum, which may legitimize its use in school. Additionally, maintenance of Latin American Spanish may be considered more acceptable than other HLs to the majority group (Sáenz-Hernández et al., 2021). However, there is a high percentage of students with multilingual profiles coming from Africa and other European countries as well, whose HLs differ from the official languages.

However, when we looked at differences among groups, we mainly found significant differences regarding attitudes towards Catalan. This aligns with the literature that points out that Catalan is generally considered as politically marked in contrast with Spanish which is viewed as politically neutral. Woolard and Frekko (Woolard & Frekko, 2005) explained this phenomenon using the ideological constructs of legitimacy through authenticity or anonymity. Since Catalan is strongly associated to an ethnic group and viewed as an identity symbol (Pujolar, 2010), its legitimacy stems from its relationship to this group and therefore its authenticity. This may alienate people who don't feel like they belong to this ethnic group (Sabaté Dalmau, 2015). On the other hand, Spanish is viewed through the lens of anonymity since its lack of tangible ties to a specific ethnic group confers it a sense of neutrality. The high means in language attitudes towards not just Spanish but also the HLs suggests strong emotional ties and self-identification with the heritage ethnic group, which has also been found in previous research (Lapresta-Rey et al., 2022; Petreñas et al., 2019).

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It is notable that the multilingual profile group had significantly worse attitudes towards Catalan. Research shows that despite official documents praising linguistic diversity, the school environment promotes the invisibilization of HLs and assimilative practices (Johnson & Johnson, 2015a; Liu & Evans, 2016; Martín Rojo, 2010). Students report being reprimanded when using languages such as Romanian, Arabic or Amazigh in front of peers and teachers, and being asked to speak Catalan instead. They also recognize language maintenance as a source of potential discrimination (Sáenz-Hernández et al., 2021). This may result in Catalan being associated to assimilation pressures by those who maintain their HL and thus perceived as incompatible with HLs, explaining the relationship between HL maintenance and lower attitudes towards Catalan.

As for differences between continent groups, while the European and African groups didn't present big differences between their attitudes towards Castilian Spanish and Catalan, the Latin American group had considerably lower attitudes towards Catalan than Castilian Spanish. This was reflected in the ANOVA results, where Latin Americans presented significantly worse attitudes towards Catalan and significantly better attitudes towards Spanish than the African group, which has been found consistently in previous studies (Huguet & Janés, 2008; Lapresta-Rey et al., 2010). A qualitative study that explored the discourses associated with attitudes towards Catalan and Spanish in different ethnic groups showed that many students of Latin American background were unmotivated to learn Catalan since they felt a strong sense of identification with their Spanish, a language understood by locals, rendering Catalan unnecessary (Lapresta-Rey et al., 2010).

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The interaction effect between acculturation profile and continent also provided interesting results: only the European group had significant differences regarding attitudes towards Catalan, with the Multilingual profile group showing significantly lower scores. Research suggests that students of European origin may have the easiest time assimilating to Catalan linguistic norms, since the dominant society has more welcoming attitudes towards them (Montreuil & Bourhis, 2001, 2004), due to perceived cultural closeness and remanent ethnic hierarchies from colonial history (Duchêne & Heller, 2012; Rosa & Flores, 2017). Our data also supports this, as most of the students in the European origin group were in the Catalan Assimilation acculturation group as well. For this reason, it is particularly telling that only in the European group there was a significant relationship between maintaining the HL in class and lower attitudes towards Catalan. This may precisely because European immigrant students can assimilate easily to Catalan linguistic norms, those who wish to maintain their HL react negatively to Catalan, viewing as a symbol of assimilation.

Conclusion

This study analyzed the language attitudes that high school students of immigrant origin have towards Catalan, Spanish and the heritage languages and how they relate with linguistic acculturation profiles in the school context. It explored how geographic origin plays a crucial role in both, highlighting how linguistic adaptation to a new country is mediated by the social constraints of ethnic inequalities. Although the representativeness of the results is limited to the province where the study took place, the high ratio of immigration as well as Catalan use in the province of Lleida make it particularly suitable to explore complex relationships among languages of different status.

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Our results suggest that the linguistic adaptation of immigrants in the school context is affected by perceptions of incompatibility between certain linguistic and cultural groups. Dichotomous and exclusive linguistic identity orientations seem to be ineffective in Catalan transmission efforts, as they may alienate HL speakers. In terms of Catalan language policy, representing Catalonia as a region characterized by diverse languages, cultures and ethnicities may contribute to reframing these dichotomic identities in more flexible ways. In the school context, policy makers and educators have a responsibility to create inclusive linguistic programs that make space for the many languages in the region, official or not. While it is not feasible to expect teachers to be well educated on multiple languages and cultures, they should be expected to show interest and basic awareness of their students' backgrounds. Some curricular flexibility could allow teachers to adapt to the characteristics of the classroom and involve students in the learning process. If real integration is to be achieved, today's educators need to encourage new inclusive perceptions of what it means to be and speak Catalan, acknowledging the actual cultural and linguistic diversity of the territory.

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