



# The politics of plurilingualism: Immersion, translanguaging, and school autonomy in Catalonia

Iker Erdocia

School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies, Dublin City University, Ireland

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## ABSTRACT

This paper aims to investigate the politics of plurilingualism in education and, more concretely, the various interests at play behind the introduction of innovations by education authorities in Catalonia, Spain. To do this, the paper critically examines the linguistic model of language in education and the public debate that its introduction generated, focusing on three themes: immersion, translanguaging, and school autonomy. The model, which acknowledges cultural diversity and values plurilingualism, would appear to embrace developments in the field of multi/plurilingual research, although there have been disparate interpretations of the policy. But this case also represents the “politics of innovation”, that is, the invocation of international educational trends for political purposes. The paper (a) argues that sociolinguistic scholars should seriously scrutinise how research may become a sociopolitical tool external to sociolinguistics, and (b) claims that sociolinguists should be more attentive to how we lend our own professional concepts to political agendas.

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## 1. Introduction

The “multilingual turn” (May, 2014; Conteh & Meier, 2014), an alternative perspective to still-dominant monolingual theories and pedagogies, imposes new challenges on the academic terrain of language and education, but this “paradigm shift” (Piccardo, 2013) has far-reaching implications at the societal level. The foundational assumption of multilingualism acknowledges the social reality of long-settled linguistically diverse political communities as well as the new cultural and language correlations within territorial boundaries configured by increasing migration trends in a fast-changing world. An attempt to acknowledge diversity has been put in place in Catalonia and is clearly exemplified in the following public claim made by Josep Bargalló, the regional minister for education: “This was a bilingual country 40 years ago but it is nowadays clearly plurilingual”<sup>1</sup> (1.2. See Table 1 for reference codes). However, recognising multilingualism or plurilingualism<sup>2</sup> in a com-

plex bilingual regime<sup>3 4</sup> in which language has become a major source of political strife is a political development which is not exempt from potential risks, as we shall see.

This article reports on responses to a top-down attempt to establish a plurilingual model in the educational system of Catalonia. More specifically, I critically examine the policy document *El model lingüístic del sistema educatiu de Catalunya - L'aprenentatge i l'ús de les llengües en un context educatiu*: “The linguistic model for the educational system of Catalonia – Language learning and use in a multilingual and multicultural educative context”. This document was released in October 2018, and I consider it along with discourses on multi/plurilingual education in the ensuing public debate and their consequences. The policy document under analysis lays out some ideas that conflict with the widely established conception of education – including the Catalan immersion programme<sup>5</sup> – as being delivered through a single preferred language as the medium of instruction (MI). The language used as the MI in

<sup>3</sup> I use the term “bilingual regime” as the ideological and institutional setting governing bilingual policy choices.

<sup>4</sup> Occitan also has an official status in Catalonia. Because this language appears in my corpus to only a minimal extent, I have opted to simplify the discussion by leaving aside consideration of this language.

<sup>5</sup> This study considers the education system as a whole but, nonetheless, concentrates primarily on the immersion context as a result of this programme being constantly referred to in public discussions of the policy.

<sup>1</sup> All extracts have been translated by the author.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout the article, I follow the conceptual distinction set by the Council of Europe (2001) between “multilingualism” (coexisting languages) and “plurilingualism” (individuals’ linguistic repertoires and language use). When the terminological use is blurred, I use the term “multi/plurilingualism”.

**Table 1**  
Documents included in the analysis (with reference codes).

Level	Document type	Author/Source	Date
(1)Policy	(1.1) Policy document (73 pages)	Department of Education, Generalitat de Catalunya	23 Oct 2018
	(1.2) Interview	Josep Bargalló/ <i>VilaWeb</i>	24 Oct 2018
	(1.3) Public statement	Joaquim Arenas/ <i>El Nacional</i>	24 Oct 2018
(2)Academia	(2.1) Interview	Xavier Vila/ <i>La Vanguardia</i>	29 Oct 2018
	(2.2) Opinion piece	Albert Branchadell/ <i>El Periódico</i>	30 Oct 2018
	(2.3) Interview	Carme Junyent/ <i>VilaWeb</i>	30 Oct 2018
(3)Teaching	(3.1) Opinion piece	Pilar Gargallo, Federació de Moviments de Renovació Pedagògica de Catalunya/ <i>El País</i>	24 Oct 2018
	(3.2) Forum (19 participants)	Educators and teachers/Organised by <i>VilaWeb</i>	25 Oct 2018
	(3.3) Report (13 pages)	Sindicat de l'Ensenyament de Catalunya (USTEC-STEs)	27 Oct 2018
(4)Activism	(4.1) Press release	Plataforma per la Llengua	24 Oct 2018
(5) Professional association	(5.1) Declaration	Societat Catalana de Sociolingüística (SOCS)	15 Jan 2019

education is precisely the most contentious topic, and what quickly arose was a certain level of confusion, controversy, justification, and contestation by parts of the education sector and in the public domain.

As values and beliefs associated with language often have a consistent and persistent character (Sonntag, 2000), it is not surprising that planned innovations are not always effectively implemented. More often than not, the outcomes of linguistic research in this area pose challenges for components of education such as the language models that are in use, preconceived views on learning, and firmly established practices. However, this case is noteworthy because, unlike the more frequent top-down cases in which policies tend to ignore research-based arguments (see e.g. Cándara & Hopkins, 2010), here education authorities invoke innovative and research-based guidelines on plurilingualism about both language learning and the organisation and management of educational institutions. In this situation, it is not educational planners but other stakeholders (i.e., language activists and the teaching sector) who opposed and confronted the proposed innovation. Yet, a full reading of the complex sociopolitical context of Catalonia is essential to understand the different interests in play behind this turn in language education policy. Consequently, my analysis adopts a multi-layered structure in discussing the plurilingual model in the Catalan public realm as part of a conceptualisation of language policy in education as a multidisciplinary social phenomenon. The specific questions I ask in this paper are: How are the constituent parts of the model of plurilingual education explained and interpreted in the public discussion that followed its presentation? What interests are at play behind this language policy?

I start by providing an overview of the conceptual underpinnings of the components of the policy document that I focus on, and I follow this with a description of the policy context in Catalonia. I move on to present the methodology and then the analysis of both the policy document and its interpretations. I conclude with a discussion of the key findings and their implications for research on sociolinguistics. In a nutshell, I show how current sociolinguistic research trends are deployed in politics and argue that sociolinguists should seriously scrutinise how research may become a sociopolitical tool in the hands of external interests. This case is of particular import because it reflects the complexity of interests at play behind the discourses of innovation in language education policy. This study can therefore be fruitfully used to illuminate other scenarios beyond the Catalan one, in which sociolinguistic concepts are co-opted for purposes other than education.

## 2. Trends in multi/plurilingualism: conceptualisations, practices, and consequences

My analysis focuses on the concepts of immersion, translanguaging, and school autonomy based on the Catalanian sociolin-

guistic context. The last two of these emerge from a single theoretical foundation, a relatively new way of thinking about the ontological status of language. I draw partly on earlier work in linguistic anthropology (Hymes, 1968) and on the linguistic notions of “language myth” (Harris, 1981) and “emergent grammar” (Hopper, 1998). According to this view, which adopts a postmodern and critical perspective, language is seen as “contingent, shifting, and produced in particular, rather than having some prior ontological status” (Pennycook, 2006: 63). The nature of language is dynamic, fluid, and complex and any outcome is the result of an unending and never-completed process. To put it another way, far from being a bounded system tied to a nation or territory, language is depicted as speech and discourse, that is, “a repertoire of semiotic devices” for communication at the disposal of the individual speaker (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007: 189).

Translanguaging is perhaps the most commonly used concept that has emerged from this conception of language practice (see Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Otsuji & Pennycook, 2011; Jørgensen, Karrebæk, Madsen & Møller, 2011). Although this idea was originally conceived of as the alternation of languages and language skills interacting in the classroom in a bilingual context (Lewis, Jones & Baker, 2012) – that is, it was grounded in a discrete approach to languages – translanguaging has been developed into a practical theory of language or an applied linguistic theory (Li, 2018). Translingual practices are defined as communicative acts performed by speakers in which different linguistic features and multimodalities are deployed (García, 2009). This conceptualisation goes beyond named languages such as Spanish<sup>6</sup> or Catalan and certain practices derived from them (e.g. code-switching and translation). In addition, some scholars (e.g. García & Li, 2014) argue that translanguaging aims at liberating language education from the societal and political constraints imposed by monolingual and monoglossic ideologies.<sup>7</sup> This “translingual turn” (Leung & Valdés, 2019), then, disrupts other traditional concepts used in education (e.g. native speaker, second/foreign/additional language, and bilingual and immersion education) and requires a different pedagogical mindset in terms of curriculum principles, class management, task designs, assessment, and so on.

In this paper, I take a soft stance towards rethinking the ontological essence of named languages. I recognise the validity of a discrete approach to language with regard to social identity, sociolinguistic behaviour, and language policy (Otheguy, García & Reid, 2015). As Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (2008) point out for the domain of law, the use of “language” as a bounded object in most policy education documents, media reports, and in open

<sup>6</sup> Although *castellà/castellano* ‘Castilian’ is the common designation for this language in Catalonia, I choose to use *Spanish* here as more suitable for an international audience.

<sup>7</sup> See Jaspers (2018) for a critical stance on this point.

debate derives from folk linguistics. More generally, this is a case of what Brubaker (2004: 8) critically calls “groupism”, a tendency “to take discrete, bounded groups as basic constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflicts, and fundamental units of social analysis”. I am not uncritically accepting the inevitability of these assumptions in public discourse. However, my focus is not on the extent to which the policy document is coherent with a certain notion of language, culture, or nation. In fact, I consider that the pedagogies and ways of managing language proposed in the document tentatively break with the linguistically foundationalist and at times essentialist perspective – or ideology of authenticity as Woolard (2016) puts it – traditionally adopted by Catalan authorities. Instead, I concentrate on the new “language of plurilingualism” presented by the policy document itself and on the reactions it generated, some of which contradict the core elements of a plurilingual approach.

Hence, my perspective on the implications of certain conceptions of the nature of language on language education policy is rather pragmatic: I consider the Catalan case under analysis here as a reasonable top-down language education policy response to an existing sociolinguistic situation in a historically minoritised language context. In this manner, following the recommendations of the research carried out in the Basque Country (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; Leonet, Cenoz & Gorter, 2017), I am taking into account the possible negative impact of (a) a version of translanguaging that is not sensitive to context, and of (b) limitless school autonomy on the revitalisation endeavour for regional languages.

### 3. Language policy in education: the context

Catalan became widespread in schools in Catalonia after the advent of democracy in Spain, once education was devolved to the autonomous community in 1981. Catalan schooling is of particular significance for self-government, since language is a core part of Catalanism<sup>8</sup> and national identity has been specifically enhanced through cultural promotion and language policies (Cramerí, 2000). Act 7/1983 on Language Normalisation,<sup>9</sup> which was passed with a broad consensus, was the first milestone in promoting the knowledge of and use of Catalan in all domains of public life including education. The act specified that Catalan is the *llengua pròpia* (literally, “own language”) of the region and established the *model de conjunció en català* under which Catalan is the language of normal use in education. The administration was charged with implementing measures that would avoid segregating pupils based on their first language. The main objective for education was to ensure that students became competent in Catalan as well as in Spanish. In the early 1980s, the use of different combinations of the two languages as the medium of instruction led to a lack of sufficient competence in Catalan in those areas where Spanish was the first language of the majority of the population (Arenas, 1990). Consequently, the Catalan Department of Education adopted and progressively implemented a pedagogic programme based on the experience of French immersion programmes in Quebec.

Catalan immersion programmes in dominant Spanish-speaking areas came about as the result of a combination of parent initiative, pilot projects, and political measures to expand this model. Immersion programmes apply to public and government-subsidised private schools with more than 70% non-Catalan-speaking pupils (Vila, 2011). These programmes are not imple-

mented in secondary education, notwithstanding the regulation of a minimum number of contact hours in Catalan and Spanish. Subsequent legal provisions<sup>10</sup> confirmed Catalan as the MI and reinforced its position in the educational system.

The prominent status conferred on Catalan in education and, more generally, in public domains, was opposed by some groups and led to the judicialisation of language policy in the region. One of the major controversies is the absence of public schooling with Spanish as MI (see Garvía & Miley, 2013; Calero & Choi, 2019), in contrast to the situation in the other bilingual regimes of Spain. In considering this, the Constitutional Court denied the existence of a right to language choice in education (337/1994). However while the constitutionality of the linguistic model was upheld, successive court rulings were in favour of the extension of teaching hours in Spanish where this was demanded. In the end, the High Court of Justice of Catalonia ruled in 2014 that 25% of class hours should be taught in Spanish, but this ruling was not straightforwardly implemented by political authorities in the region. These and other judicial decisions,<sup>11</sup> which derived from complaints lodged by national-level parties from the centre-right spectrum, have often been taken as external interference in the sovereignty of the regional parliament. Through the years, a sense of grievance deepened and part of the Catalanist movement evolved towards a pro-independence stance.

The present study is strongly influenced by the historical significance reserved for the Catalan language in the education system (Hoffmann, 2000; Clua, 2017). Not only that, this investigation is undoubtedly affected by the current political, institutional, and sociocultural circumstances in which Catalan education is embedded. This study is situated in a cooling-off (but still highly volatile) period after the implosion of the political process that culminated in the short-lived unilateral declaration of independence in 2017. In 2018, the abrupt change of central government and the reconfiguration of political parties supporting the new regional government have favoured a slight rapprochement between the administrations.

In essence, language management in Catalonia is an issue of great sensitivity. However, it does not exclusively affect relations between governments, it also has the potential to generate misunderstandings within the regional administration. In fact, the various parties of the Catalan government coalition have different political agendas. For instance, Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC), the party responsible for the Department of Education, strongly promotes political strategies that include the Spanish-speaking population in the pro-independence movement. However, such strategies, including the new linguistic model in education, do not have unanimous support within the pro-independence movement. Some believe that the current linguistic regime stymies any ongoing promotion of Catalan in the public sphere, particularly in education, and consider that the most favourable scenario for language maintenance purposes is that Catalan should be the territorial language in a future independent Catalonia (see, for example, the *Manifest* of the Grup Koiné<sup>12</sup>). It is in this political climate of uncertainty and frustration after the failed endeavour to gain independence that education through Catalan, perhaps the most valuable element of self-government, may have been undermined not by centralist forces based in Madrid, but by “friendly fire” or internal allies in Catalonia.

<sup>8</sup> Catalanism is a historical movement that demands recognition for the distinctive features of Catalan culture and, more recently, the self-government of institutions.

<sup>9</sup> “Language normalisation” is a common term in the Spanish context because of its use in the title of this act. It refers to policies designed to re-establish regional languages in normal social usage.

<sup>10</sup> Decree 75/92, Act 1/1998 on Language Policy, the Statute of Autonomy of 2006, and Act 12/2009 on Education.

<sup>11</sup> Some parts of the original Statute of Autonomy of 2006 were declared unconstitutional, including the preferential status assigned to Catalan in education (article 6).

<sup>12</sup> See <http://llenguairepublica.cat/manifest/> (accessed 18 May 2019).

#### 4. Methodology

Within the theoretical position I am adopting, language policy is not seen as something static, but rather as a discourse that adapts to changing circumstances, interests or investments. My analytical framework applies Fairclough's (2013) conception of discourse as social practice to the language policy domain. I regard language policy in education as a multilayered interaction, which in practice comprises heterogeneous and interconnected domains of social organisation (Mortimer & Wortham, 2015) in the process of interpretation, negotiation, and construction of values and beliefs associated with language at the institutional level (Blackledge, 2005). I situate discourse and policy-making within an approach to bi/multilingual education understood in terms of the relationship between the various interest groups in a power conflict (Paulston, 1992). In line with the recent reconceptualisation of the macro-micro distinction in language policy (Johnson & Stephens, 2018), discursive events are understood as interactional practices at different scales and moving across social domains that are intended to lead to meaningful action on language management (Wortham & Reyes, 2015).

Methodologically, my approach involves working with different sets of data from various stakeholders and sources. The empirical material divides into five levels. The first level contains (1.1) the policy document that sparked the subsequent public discussion, (1.2) an interview in which the regional minister of education addresses some points that had been raised by critics, and (1.3) a public statement by a prominent educational policy-maker (Joaquim Arenas). The second level examines (2.1-2.3) the views of three Catalan academics on the new linguistic model of language in education. The third level focuses on (3.1-3.3) the final interpreters and implementers of language policy in the classroom and reports on the perspectives of educators and teachers' associations. The fourth level includes (4.1) a press release by language activists, who are dynamic actors with an important influence on language issues in Catalonia. One example of their privileged position in the political sphere is that language activists secured a meeting to discuss the new model with the regional education minister one day after the official presentation of the document.<sup>13</sup> The last level considers (5.1) a professional association in the field of sociolinguistics. The data includes an extensive range of texts, such as policy documents, interviews, opinion pieces, public statements, forums, and reports (see Table 1).

The corpus consists of the policy document on the linguistic model in education itself, and the reactions generated by the public presentation of the policy document,<sup>14</sup> and covers a period of three months although all documents except one are from the first week following the presentation (October 2018). This issue came to occupy a significant place in regional and national media and on social networks, including public engagement of some members of the regional government. But the public debate occurred in a very concentrated time frame, at the end of which it was said that another phase of negotiation and redesign would be entered into, outside the media spotlight. The period covered by the corpus is clearly highly constricted for yielding definite insights into the workings of the document and the surrounding controversy, and this temporal scope is one of the limitations of the analysis.

Mass media would seem to play an important role in the configuration of language ideologies, in language policy-making in education and, more particularly, in MI policy (Tollefson, 2015;

**Table 2**

Patterns underlying the three topics.

Topics	Patterns
Immersion	Changes in the linguistic model Diverging opinions Politics and policy
Translanguaging	Emphasis on teaching methodologies Nature of translanguaging Effects on Catalan
School autonomy	Limited autonomy and external control Adversarial model

Erdocia, 2019; for the Catalan context, see Atkinson, 2018; Pujolar, 2007). As such, my data are drawn from a keyword search for the terms 'linguistic model', 'plurilingual education', and 'immersion' in online versions of printed Catalan newspapers in both Spanish and Catalan, including the Catalonian editions of Madrid-based press. I also include an equivalent number of the most widely read online press in the period under investigation.<sup>15</sup> Items were selected for inclusion in the corpus if they were made by identifiable actors or groups who are involved in policy, academia, teaching, activism or a relevant professional group. Again it is worth emphasising that the scope of the analysis is constrained by the sample size and the data selection. Including other social actors, focusing more extensively on only some of them, or simply using other criteria for the search would probably have implications for the results.

For the analysis of the texts, I use an interpretative approach, whereby I rely on qualitative content analysis (see Kondracki, Wellman & Amundson, 2002; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) to inductively trace keywords, concepts, and salient themes corresponding to the three topics under research. During the first stage, I identified themes that occur repeatedly (i.e., 'teaching hours', 'methodology', 'languages plan') and made connections between their appearance in the policy text and in the rest of the corpus. I began by coding the empirical data to identify and organise the three initial tendencies and patterns that emerged from the corpus: the nature of the changes proposed in the policy document, their potential impact on the previous model, and the contrasting interpretations of the plurilingual model. After multiple, in-depth readings of the corpus, I revised or supplemented some of the initial codes with new ones, re-examined the trends and patterns, and then finalised the categorisation of the data (see Table 2). During this second stage of the analysis, I paid particular attention to the political context to gain a more accurate insight into the potential interests at play behind the policy. My interpretation and claims are based on the patterns resulting from this reorganisation of the data.

The process and the outcome of qualitative research are not without an influence from my researcher's subjectivity. Too often, researchers are in some fashion attached to one of the groups under investigation or embody the values of the object under investigation. Indeed, this is partly the case for the present author, who is open to arguments in favour of historically minoritised languages, but considers himself as an outsider socially, emotionally, and academically in the case of Catalan. To mitigate my own biases, I applied a quality control to the analytic process. My approach consisted in an iterative interaction between the research design and implementation to ensure congruence. In order to achieve validity and trustworthiness and ensure rigour in my methods, I applied verification strategies for the analytic process (Morse, Barnett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers, 2002): I systematically checked my data and constantly confirmed the fit of data and the conceptual

<sup>13</sup> After the meeting, the activists informed the public that they were invited to start negotiations to amend the model. No news about the outcome of these negotiations have emerged since then.

<sup>14</sup> The document was released on April 2018. However, public discussion did not intensify until the public presentation in October 2018.

<sup>15</sup> Based on circulation figures for October 2018, from <https://www.ojdinteractiva.es/mitjans-digital-en-catala#>.

work of interpretation. In what follows I use verbatim quotations to reflect the voices of the actors and to show connections between excerpted data and the results. In the discussion section, to make clear the support for my interpretation and my claims, I indicate for each claim the reference code (see Table 1) for the document(s) on which the claim is grounded. That said, I assume that my subjectivities may have influenced part of my interpretations. This is another limitation of this study.

## 5. Analysis: the politics of the plurilingual model

*The linguistic model for the educational system of Catalonia* is a 72-page document drawn up by the Department of Education of the Generalitat de Catalunya. The document resulted from a joint working group involving officials and specialists from the department, researchers, and representatives of universities, and advisors from the Council of Europe, which met intermittently over a four year period. Among its objectives are adapting to methodological developments in plurilingual education and, more generally, accommodating to the changes in human mobility that Catalan society has undergone.

The multi/plurilingual turn can be felt in objectives such as the use of individual linguistic repertoires, the enhancement of plurilingual competence, and the recognition of the value of the languages of foreign students. Although the document does not specify any conceptual differences, the terminology chosen follows the distinction set by the Council of Europe (2001): the concepts “multiculturalism” and “multilingualism” are only used to refer to society, the educative context, or the classroom while, conversely, the linguistic model, the proposed methodology, and students’ competence are described as being “pluri/intercultural” and “plurilingual”.

Overall, the new model intends to consolidate the education system throughout Catalan in a time of super-diversity, cultural complexity, and linguistic multiplicity. The document endorses the principles stated in the current educative legislation in which the programme of immersion is claimed to ensure social cohesion and equal opportunities for all students, no matter their first language, by ensuring they are proficient in the co-official languages and have a sufficient knowledge of two additional languages. However, Catalan is the language that constitutes the cornerstone of the plurilingual education plan. To put it another way, Catalan is the reference language for teaching, administrative, and communicative purposes, whereas the other curricular languages – Spanish and a number of selected foreign languages – are taught or used as the MI only during the instruction time allocated to them by each school’s languages plan.<sup>16</sup> The new model also stipulates that Catalan is the language to be used in after-school activities, including in the school canteen, and specifies that the language plan should determine the role to be played by the heritage languages that are represented in each educational institution.

In the following, I outline the findings, organised into three topics: immersion, translanguaging, and school autonomy. For the sake of clarity, I begin with the formulation and content of the policy document in relation to the topic, and then turn to the reactions that the document generated. Both the presentation and my interpretations are grounded in the patterns from the analysis (see Table 2). I have purposely selected excerpts to accompany my interpretive commentaries on the basis of their conciseness and their clarity in representing the patterns.

### 5.1. Immersion

#### 5.1.1. Policy formulation

The positioning of Catalan as the language of expression and communication in schools is connected to its sociolinguistically weaker status in comparison to Spanish. The policy document states that

the objective is to provide the less potent language socially with preferential spaces in order to make the language visible and to counterbalance prevailing linguistic practices. (1.1, p. 17)

In other words, the basic premise is that Catalan is a minoritised language in Catalonia and consequently needs public promotion. However, somewhat surprisingly the document notes that there may be contexts in which the balance between languages is not in favour of Spanish. This point implies a new approach to the widely accepted idea that Catalan is the minority and minoritised language in the region. For the first time in language policy in Catalonia since the implementation of the Act on Language Normalisation through Catalan, the document admits that

in contexts in which Spanish does not have that social presence [a majority position] and is not the first language of a significant part of the student body, an approach analogous to Catalan immersion should be used. If exposure time in Spanish does not lead to the same language competence as is acquired for Catalan, the school will have to incorporate curricular content modules in Spanish into its languages plan and to programme activities to strengthen students’ oral expression. (1.1, p. 31)

It is not clear whether this statement is simply based on an assumption or if it results from research-based evidence, suggesting that the current system does not ensure competence in both official languages, and in particular, competence in Spanish. More importantly, it also raises questions around how this kind of approach can be made compatible with a model in which Catalan is the reference language in the school. Specifically, an “approach analogous to Catalan immersion” – that is to say, a sort of Spanish immersion only for oral purposes – contrasts with such statements as the following

Catalan needs to be the language used in lectures, in student-teacher interactions, and in learning and evaluation activities. (1.1, p. 18)

Admittedly, the model conceives of both Spanish and a selection of foreign languages being the MI for non-linguistic subjects, but only during a restricted instruction time. But having said that, it is unclear how it would be possible to increase the number of content modules taught through Spanish or other curricular languages without reducing the number of hours allocated to the reference language for teaching, namely Catalan. Finally, one could consider that the statement “the school will have to incorporate curricular content modules in Spanish” is more than a simple guideline for some schools in Catalan-speaking areas, but making this mandatory would contradict the autonomy conferred to schools by the policy to design their own language plans.

#### 5.1.2. Policy interpretations: immersion

Josep Bargalló, the regional minister of education who is ultimately responsible for the department which drew up the policy document, is the foremost advocate for the new model. Amid severe criticism and demands for his resignation on media and social networking sites, he agreed to an interview that was published in the digital newspaper *VilaWeb* only one day after the public presentation of the policy document. In that interview, he adopted a defensive tone when asserting that the new model does

<sup>16</sup> The Order EDU/221/2007 enabled educational institutions to use Spanish and other languages as a MI for non-linguistic subjects since 2007.

not change the role assigned to languages at school, and that educational institutions must ensure that Catalan is the MI. For instance, he categorically dismissed the idea that the new linguistic model dismantles the current immersion system in Catalan and the language allocation policy. This point is captured in the following statement:

No law or school hours are modified; nothing at all. Immersion continues as it has been and I even think that the presence of Catalan as the school language is clearer. (1.2)

In his opinion, Catalan will not only maintain its referential status in schools but will take on a heightened importance. Assertions of this nature while explaining a plurilingual model can only be interpreted as an attempt to respond to some inflamed public reactions to the policy announcement. Later in the interview, the interviewer was insistent in asking if there will be more hours allocated to Spanish in widely Catalan-speaking zones. The regional minister responded that

nothing that is being done at the moment [around Catalan as the MI] will be changed downwards [...] if Catalan is underrepresented in a given school environment, there needs to be an increase of Catalan at that school, while if the underrepresented language is Spanish, there needs to be an increase of Spanish. (1.2)

So how is this seeming contradiction between maintaining the same amount of time with Catalan as the MI, on the one hand, and the reinforcement of Spanish where relevant and the introduction of heritage languages, on the other hand, resolved? The minister's responses are rather elusive: he reiterates that the policy document is not a decree but a document containing guidelines for better language teaching. This and further comments on the proposed approach to language teaching go on to suggest that pedagogy plays a crucial part in the plurilingual conception of the model (see Section 5.2).

However, the reading of the plurilingual model leaves room for diverging interpretations around the identification and scope of which languages can be a MI in the education system. The differing perspectives can be seen by comparing the next excerpts from two opinion pieces. In the first one, the scholar Albert Branchadell refers to the minister's indication that Catalan is and will be the MI and that this is unmodifiable; in response, the scholar says:

He should know that an education system with only one language [Catalan] as the medium of instruction may be called several things, but not a plurilingual system. (2.2)

In contrast, the educator Pilar Gargallo focuses on Catalan MI and immersion from the point of view of the legal requirement for students to acquire bilingual competence in both official languages. Her opinion piece concludes that

immersion can be in either language [Spanish and Catalan] and the proportion will be determined by each school following pedagogic, territorial, and social criteria. (3.1)

These contrasting interpretations with regard to MI suggest a lack of definition and clarity in the policy text and in the minister's explanations.

As policymaking is also a political activity (Stone, 1997), it is perhaps inevitable that political readings and comments about the policy document emerge. For instance, the education union USTEC-STE focuses its criticism on the minister's party (ERC). They consider that the department's actions on the education model follow the strategy of that party to gain political advantage and broaden their electoral support. Another example of the intertwining between language policy and politics is the reason given by the Soci-

etat Catalana de Sociolingüística to not endorse the document. This professional association argues that because it is formed by

people with diverse profiles and sensibilities about how language policies should be, [...] it would make no sense for the society to endorse a document like this one since political mobilisation is not the objective of SOCS. (5.1)

To sum up, interpretations of the policy change introduced in the new model differ considerably, as do understandings of what multi/plurilingualism entails for the established education throughout Catalonia. Perhaps more importantly, there is a marked discrepancy, if not a contradiction, between some of the new model's points on languages as MI and the minister's explanations. The minister seems to underline that there are no essential changes in the linguistic model by expressing that the current situation will basically continue untouched. One cannot but wonder what really motivates such a stance towards a document created by his own department. An obvious initial thought would be that it is an attempt to calm some of the public reaction that the policy announcement generated. However, bearing in mind the pivotal role of language issues in Catalonia's politics, as noted by documents from the teaching and professional levels, another possible answer is that the plurilingual approach also pursues a political goal.

## 5.2. Translanguaging

### 5.2.1. Policy formulation

The section on didactic strategies makes up a substantial part of the policy document. Drawing on research on multi/plurilingual and translanguaging pedagogies in settings of linguistic diversity (e.g. Cummins, 2007; Lasagabaster & García, 2014), the document aims to overcome monolingual instructional strategies in order to reinforce the target languages learned in the classroom by emphasising the controlled use of students' languages. The recommendations include the incorporation into teaching of those competence-based linguistic activities, cross-comprehension practices and metalinguistic awareness that facilitate interlinguistic transfer and communicative projects involving the active and passive use of various languages. A justification for this pedagogy is that

translanguaging activities such as reading texts in one language and discussing their content in another language and intralinguistic or interlinguistic transformation activities [...] promote an in-depth learning of the topic. (1.1, p. 23)

Translanguaging is only conceived as a cognitively based pedagogy with no references to its transformative nature in education. The document adopts a European perspective and does not distinguish epistemologically between plurilingualism and translanguaging (García & Otheguy, 2020).

Despite the emphasis on plurilingualism and translanguaging, however, the centrality of the Catalan language in public education continues to be a basic tenet of the model. Repeated allusions to the existing legal provision that establishes Catalan as the MI raises doubts about the extent to which translanguaging practices have been embraced. Most significantly, in parallel with the acknowledgement of the pedagogical benefits of the plurilingual approach, the document considers that the strategy of involving students' languages does not entail downsizing either the students' or the instructor's use of the language being taught. The argument put forward is that the focus is always the continued use of the target language, and the teaching seeks to provide learners with the maximum level of rich and meaningful input.

In sum, the relevance of translanguaging practices in this circumscribed understanding of plurilingual pedagogy might thus be

considered as limited or deliberately ambiguous in scope. For its pedagogical criteria such as “projects in which several languages are integrated” (1.1, p. 25) are to be implemented to their full extent, it is not altogether clear how students’ exposure to and production of the target language would not be affected in one way or other. This is of particular relevance in immersion settings, where Catalan is unequivocally the target language. Likewise, the stress on the control over students’ and instructors’ language practices suggests the restrictive scope of translanguaging envisioned in this policy statement.

### 5.2.2. Policy interpretations: translanguaging

As mentioned in Section 5.1, the regional minister signalled the new pedagogical criteria as being the key move towards plurilingualism, because

this document is a guide for institutions to understand that this is a plurilingual country with several hundred languages and the way of teaching languages has changed around the world and so it also needs improvement here. (1.2)

Put another way, although the legal regulation remains the same, the sociolinguistic configuration changes and so does pedagogy. But the emphasis on language teaching methodologies in the minister’s responses to questions about the allocation of hours to Spanish or other languages suggests that the notion of new pedagogies is being utilised for purposes other than education. For instance, when asked what he would respond to those people who compare the new policy document with trilingual models in other bilingual regions in Spain, which were highly contested by minority language advocates, he reiterated that the new model in Catalonia

is not a law. It does not change school. It does not modify the role of languages in school. It is a guideline to better teach languages, all languages. The Partido Popular of the [Balearic] Islands wanted to replace Catalan using the introduction of English as an excuse. (1.2)

Here, the minister is distancing himself from this sort of trilingual model and from the political forces against linguistic normalisation. But this answer also targets critics within the pro-Catalan public and he is apparently using pedagogy to defend a distinct space within the Catalanist side, one that is open to other forms of language in education. One of his main messages in the interview is the centrality of Catalan in education, but the use of rhetorical mechanisms such as “I insist”, “I say again”, “once more”, and so on (1.2) make it seem as though this central role has to be invoked in all of his statements. One possible explanation is that the minister’s address is intended to transmit his party’s firm commitment to education through Catalan.

References to the political context when explicitly commenting on plurilingual competence also emerge. For instance, the academic Xavier Vila expresses a belief that the document can assist in what he called the “depoliticisation” of languages in education. He emphasised the scope of translanguaging-based practice and concluded:

I applaud that the department published this document to depoliticise language learning. In reality to de-party-ise it [*despartiditzar*], referring to distancing it from party politics]. We have been for many years in an absurd polarised environment [...] Instructional material in English, presentations in Catalan, student interaction in different languages ... How can one speak about percentages? (2.1)

This last sentence is perhaps the best illustration of the implications of translanguaging for the policy process. From this point of

view, if our knowledge of how languages are acquired leads to pedagogical innovation aimed at conforming to the research evidence, then policy formulation needs to be correspondingly adapted to the new conceptualisations of language teaching and learning. At this point, however, one could ask: Is translanguaging a mere technicality? Does a focus on language methodology or innovation really depoliticise the linguistic model as is being asserted?

For the education union USTEC-STEs, plurilingualism is imbued with “the competence jargon” (3.3, p. 6) of European institutions and is disconnected from political attempts to undermine the use and prestige of Catalan. They show a reluctance to uncritically accept innovative proposals as the next extract exemplifies:

A careful reading allows the detection of certain “time bombs”, which makes us pessimists. It is as if an academic and politically correct rhetoric, with certain well-intentioned ideas and with a focus on obvious evidence, is used to disguise the complete abandonment of the defence of immersion. (3.3, p. 3)

At least for some, it is not clear that innovation contributes to depoliticise highly politicised contexts such as this one. Moreover, the union’s report expresses concerns about the real intentions of the new model. This is particularly visible in their later commentary on translanguaging:

to conceal this reality [the use of Spanish as well as English as a MI], the text uses inflexions and digressions [...] (such as translanguaging). We understand this as to lecture in a language other than Catalan. (3.3, p. 6)

Here, the union oversimplifies the notion of translanguaging, which is depicted as a mere euphemism for the admission of other languages as a MI. On the one hand, this reflects the complex implications of certain conceptualisations of language in a linguistic regime of “resistance” to a hegemonic language. The expectations of certain pedagogies and ways of managing languages, supported by scholars and practitioners around the world, can be held back by less ambitious endeavours to reconcile plurilingualism and minority languages. On the other hand, this can be an example of the sometimes ambiguous role of pro-minority language organisations and language advocates: notwithstanding their spaces for activism and resistance, their idea of bounded languages, re-inscribed linguistic hegemonies, and even teaching methodology may be conservative (Deumert, 2018).

Finally, whilst several teachers acknowledged the good intentions of the plurilingual approach, many depicted it as unrealistic and warned about the detrimental effects of the model on the normalisation of Catalan. In general, the stress on other languages is framed as complicating the already unbalanced coexistence of Catalan and Spanish. For instance, a secondary teacher described her experience in an adverse environment for Catalan as MI in the following terms:

I realise that the language I really use is Spanish [...] Spanish is the language through which students understand me. They are all Spanish speakers and the mother tongue of 20-25% of them is Arabic. My presentations and exams are written in Catalan but I spend my day translating. Actually, at least in this secondary institution, students do not know Catalan. Catalan is only a written language for them and they have no interest in learning it. (3.2, participant 1)

In addition to highlighting the attitudinal difficulties towards Catalan encountered in a given context (see Codó & Patiño-Santos, 2014), this excerpt questions acritical and supposedly neutral discourses on translanguaging and, more importantly, problematises top-down conceptualisations of translanguaging as a global methodology ready to be satisfactorily implemented without considering micro-level contextual factors.

### 5.3. School autonomy

#### 5.3.1. Policy formulation

School autonomy was first established in Catalonia under previous legal regulations. In particular, Decree-Law 102 of 2010 already announced the core organisational arrangements set out in the new model document. What is new in this document is that, under school autonomy, educational institutions must draw up a public-access language plan in which the new plurilingual approach takes a concrete form. The plan is the result of the decisions agreed to by the educational staff around language teaching and learning and linguistic usage in their particular educational institution. As an integral part of the education plan, the languages plan's function is to serve as a pedagogical and managerial tool for everyday practice in schools.

The policy document provides guidance about how to draft and implement the language plan. The criteria to be considered consist of the sociolinguistic context, pupils' linguistic knowledge and needs, internal and external evaluations, and teachers' linguistic competence. The strategic areas around which the plan is devised include the pivotal role assigned to the Catalan language, language management in formal and non-formal education, and linguistic and methodological organisation.

As in other parts of the text, there is some ambiguity over the mandatory establishment of Catalan as the MI while allowing the inclusion of other MIs. This point is illustrated in the following extracts. In the section on linguistic usage to be included in the languages plan, the document states that

schools need to ensure that Catalan is the MI normally used in learning and in interaction within the education community. (1.1, p. 62)

However, in the next paragraph the document leaves open the option for other languages:

in order to guarantee the learning and use of Catalan [...] and to foster plurilingualism among students, necessary mechanisms and strategies must be planned for a reasoned establishment of what languages are used in teachers' expositions, in didactic material, in textbooks, and in learning and assessment activities and in what languages and contexts of use student-teacher interactions take place. (1.1, p. 62)

Once again, the weight assigned to Catalan may threaten to overshadow the plurilingual objective of schools.

The languages plan results from an increase in the degree of educational decentralisation. But it also creates new obligations, such as the shift of responsibility for empowering pupils linguistically, which is now transferred from the administration to individual educational institutions. Thus, the duty to ensure the linguistic competence prescribed by law rests upon schools in accordance with the sociolinguistic environment in which they are situated. Although this is a relevant change, perhaps unsurprisingly, the subsequent debate focused on external control rather than on responsibility.

#### 5.3.2. Policy interpretations: school autonomy

The primary concern reflected in the public debate about the power of schools to make their own decisions is not so much on the introduction of foreign languages as MI but whether schools could increase the presence of Spanish as a MI under the autonomy proposals. Once again, impressions differ. Xavier Vila is among those who consider the new model a step forward in the process of normalisation. When asked about the suspicions that have been raised by some around the greater level of school autonomy, he acknowledged that Spanish could be reinforced in some schools, but

emphasised that the autonomy given to schools is limited, since Catalan is the default MI.

Despite the presence of voices such as Vila in the debate, most of the views do not represent an acquiescent stance towards the way school autonomy is articulated in the policy document. One example of this is the question posed by Plataforma per la Llengua to the Education Department: What general framework will regulate school autonomy and what organism will authorise each school's linguistic project? Their demand for clarification also included a request for information on how it will be determined whether a zone is "strongly Catalanised or Castilianised". This is an important point because the appeal to linguistic zones in the policy document can be understood as referring to a sort of linguistic territoriality principle that is not defined. This and other vague points discussed above convey the impression that the policy formulation may be deliberately ambiguous as a result of anticipating a critical reception in some sectors of education.

The linguist Carme Junyent insisted that the document has been drafted based on a false assumption:

bearing in mind how things have been done until now, the fact of whether [the application of the model] depends on each school administration or not would seem to make no difference. In the end, everybody [all schools] has basically done what they wanted. (2.3)

In commenting on the role of school inspectors in this matter, she asserts that the use of Spanish as a MI instead of Catalan is well known by the Sub-Directorate General of Inspection, an institution of the central administration. This comment illustrates the existing mistrust between the central and sub-state administrations.

From a more political point of view, one of the teachers accused those parties, organisations, and education unions that are against secession as being the main obstacle to the implementation of Catalan as MI in secondary schools in the Barcelona metropolitan area. However, criticism is not only directed at groups against independence. In the words of the educational policy-maker Joaquim Arenas, nation-building is the objective of the *escola catalana* (Catalan school). He further noted that the new policy tries

not to offend those who do not consider Catalan as the most important national feature. (1.3)

The possible addressees of this comment include pro-independence groups who defend a bilingual policy for an independent Catalonia, including ERC, the party of the minister of education.

The spectrum of views is completed with the regional minister denying that putting schools in charge of language plans is a risky undertaking. On this matter, he promised a new inspection body under regional control, a measure that is not mentioned in the policy document. The regional body of inspectors

will clearly work in a different way. Now they do far too much bureaucratic work and what we want them to be is pedagogical leaders. (1.2)

This kind of comment reflects how discourses on language management delineate an adversarial model based upon the representations of the two administrations as antithetical rivals. As schools' language plans must be made publicly available, the minister added that

families, students, everybody will know the plan and will be in a position to sound the alert if it is not being fulfilled. (1.2)

Consequently, he rejects the idea that a hypothetical school situated in an area with a hostile environment towards Catalan could stand against immersion. Significantly, the actors represented in

the sample of this study do not comment on a hypothetical situation in which schools in Catalan-speaking areas might firmly oppose, for language ideological reasons, an increase of contact hours in Spanish. The lack of comments of this type is not coincidental as the corpus contains no stances questioning the normalisation of Catalan or considering other MI preferences (Garvía & Miley, 2017).

## 6. Discussion

When a politician claims that “this is already a plurilingual country due to the strong great impact of immigration” (1.2), this should be more than an incidental description or a mere categorisation of a given situation in order to be convincing or to be something other than a mere signal of virtue. In an unexpected move towards a normatively based support for diversity and a valorisation of students’ plurilingual repertoires, the Catalan Department of Education decided to open up space for plurilingualism and to adapt the education system to an already changed social reality in Catalonia.

An important feature of the new model is that for some in the teaching sector (3.2, 3.3) it poses conceptual and practical challenges to the well-accepted notion of education through Catalan while at the same time it is presented and interpreted by its advocates as underscoring and even reinforcing the position of Catalan (1.2, 2.1). The lack of clarity in the policy text with regard to MI, intentional or otherwise, is at least partly responsible for the confusion among the general public about how to interpret the model, leading to a need for speedy additional explanations by the representative of the Department of Education. Despite this, the policy document has been criticised by many stakeholders.

All in all, the introduction of guidelines and a proposed plurilingual mindset for school decision-making processes in a region with a medium-sized language has proven to be disruptive for various reasons. On the one hand, the points of the policy document analysed above caused a controversy that was covered extensively by the media and prompted an uproar on social networking sites that engaged some members of the regional government. The unanticipated external and internal pressure provoked a speedy public clarification by the regional minister aimed at calming down critical educative and political sector actors. On the other hand, in the absence of participation in the policy-making process or consensus around the outcomes, compliance with the new standards automatically becomes a straightforward top-down procedure. It can be expected that the actual adoption of the plurilingual model will not be devoid of difficulties. In addition, a sense of language advocacy, of a civic duty to maintain the existing state of affairs – and the consequent reluctance to change – on which many educators (3.2, 3.3) based their criticism hinders consideration of the model’s potential contribution.

In this context, moving on to my research questions, the discursive practices of immersion exemplified in the previous section show that there is an established tendency to a uniform understanding of the conception of immersion, the first element of the analysis. As Björklund and Mard-Miettinen (2015) note, the varied implementation of immersion education throughout the world has challenged the idea that there is a single definition of immersion. Bilingual programmes differ greatly in their use of the second language, but a generally recognised minimum for identifying a programme as an immersion programme is 50% of the prescribed non-language-related curriculum (Genesee, 2004). This allows a certain flexibility about how immersion is conceived, including in Catalonia. For the multi/plurilingual turn in language policy in education in Catalonia to be credible, there needs to be a refinement of the conception of immersion as generally understood (a single preferred language as the MI), and a relaxation in its application. This would facilitate the accommodation of plurilin-

gualism. To be sure, statements imbued with political connotations such as “immersion continues as it has been” (1.2), made by the regional minister, do not contribute to or enhance the credibility of the plurilingual approach. What remains to be seen is whether and how the plurilingual policy is able to overcome the firmly established school-based rationales that favour Catalan over other MI options, especially over the possibility of Spanish as a MI in non-immersion settings. All this is not to say that the animated debate is only a matter of definitions, of course. A number of parties in the research corpus (3.2, 3.3, 4.1) expressed concerns about implementation, such as the possible impact that the model might have in those areas which are hostile towards normalisation, or the presence of competing factions in school decision-making processes. There are also other issues mentioned less often, such as the budgetary and personnel resources required, or the issue of which foreign languages will be chosen and by what process. These concerns need responses.

Let us now turn to the other two constituents of the analysis, translanguaging and school autonomy. A translanguaging pedagogy is introduced in the new model. Even though this does not mean that translanguaging has not been used as a classroom practice previously, this pedagogical approach has now gained full policy legitimacy. But to what extent? Certainly not to the extent that translanguaging entails a de-naturalisation of named languages in school (García & Otheguy, 2020). Despite some general acknowledgements of the value of the document’s pedagogical foundations at the academic level (2.2), the true scope of translanguaging is frequently undervalued. This favours the idea of language education with only a single MI, on the one hand, and a multi-monolingual, code-switching, and idealised language practice, on the other hand. Given the loose representation of translanguaging in the policy document itself and in the minister’s explanations, I have tried to show that this is more an opportunistic invocation of internationally fashionable education trends than it is a bold endeavour to achieve a transformation in education. Translanguaging could simply be part of a movement to outflank critics of Catalan education who argue that immersion is reactionary (Woolard, 2016). In that case, translanguaging would serve as a necessary investment in “linguistic fluidity” to overcome resistance to the “linguistic fixity” of immersion, in Jaspers & Madsen’s (2019) words.

This leads us to expect that, in this environment in which a widely held belief in bounded languages prevails, incentivising an allegedly neutral or cognitively based pedagogy of translanguaging to permeate throughout the sector of teachers and school administrators may well be a challenge for the new model (cf. Lasagabaster & García, 2014). The same applies for teachers adopting a plurilingual stance and engaging with the plurilingual resources in the classroom. Here it is convenient to note the role of teachers as final policy-making agents – a strong indication of the potential difficulties to be surmounted by a model which is presented as guidance rather than as prescriptive regulation. Further qualitative and empirical research is needed on understanding the potential discrepancy between policy and practice.

In the same way, the interpretations (1.2, 2.3) guiding the overall discussion on school autonomy largely emphasise the mechanisms which will be used to monitor any decisions made by school administrations about the language(s) used as MI, and the need for regional supervisory bodies to validate language practices. This shows how the presence of an adversarial relationship between administrations, based upon political competition and dispute, focuses the debate on control rather than on agency or other key aspects, such as the reasons for the further development of administrative decentralisation policies in schools and their potential social impact. On this particular issue, it is not clear if the new model entails a more localised understanding of modes of governmentality or, instead, seeks to extend control over schools by first

regulating linguistic usage (preferably in Catalan) in non-formal education spaces. It is also unclear how and to what extent schools in widely Catalan-speaking zones should incorporate curricular content modules in Spanish. Making this mandatory, as the policy document suggests, would contradict the autonomy conferred upon schools by the policy itself to design their own languages plans.

Nonetheless, the across-the-board criticism by teaching representatives and language advocates levelled at the exclusive top-down nature of the plurilingual model leads us to consider the policy-making process from two perspectives. On the one hand, top-down approaches – no matter how innovative, beneficial, or seemingly neutral – are often considered as technocratic, thus reducing the policy cycle to policy enforcement. By contrast, multiple sources on multi/plurilingual policy-making, mutual encounter, and reciprocity can lead to a more attuned outcome to the realities of the community (Lo Bianco, 2018; Erdocia, in press). On the other hand, the analysis of public debate about bilingual education in other contexts has shown the unreceptiveness of most participants to research-based arguments (Cummins, 1999). The question that follows is: In minority contexts with a strong preference for a given MI, is it possible to devise a plurilingual policy-making procedure which is open to public influence, including those bottom-up initiatives through which a particular language is supported at the expense of other MI options? This case study shows that language activists (4.1) and part of the teaching sector (3.2, 3.3) advocate for the maintenance of the status quo rather than attempting to initiate innovative courses of action to widen collective political engagement. This suggests that integrating every realm in the first stages of the policy cycle would likely have obstructed the attempt to include innovative measures in language education. But excluding stakeholders who will necessarily be involved in implementing it may well result in the failure of the plurilingual model.

Focusing now on the political interests at play behind the policy, this is a case where plurilingual education is part of “politics as usual”. First, while the model sets the scene for an increase in the number of language options available and expands the recognition of pupils’ linguistic repertoires, the policy circumvents an unresolved contentious issue based on conflicting legitimacies. Simply put, the emphasis by Catalan authorities (1.2) on the need and the duty to comply with language regulations in relation to Catalan stands in stark contrast to their reluctance to implement the judgement of the High Court of Justice of Catalonia stating a mandatory time allocation to Spanish. Indeed, Catalan MI is connected in the corpus to wider sociocultural values and ideologies of nation whereas Spanish MI is only framed as a legal requirement with no other explicit legitimating arguments. Secondly, discrepancies and contradictions between some of the new model’s tenets and the minister’s explanations (1.2), as well as claims that his party is only playing politics with strategies on language policy (1.3, 3.2, 3.3), indicate that plurilingualism and, more generally, the “language of innovation” are a subject of political wrangling. More concretely, educational trends are part of the existing political competition among pro-independence forces.

## 7. Conclusion

In view of the preeminence of the position assigned to Catalan in the plurilingual model itself and in most interpretations of it, the case under discussion is not an example in which hybridity, fluidity, and multiplicity are embraced with unqualified optimism (Kubota, 2014). Nor is it a case in which other linguistic inequalities in relation to the historically minoritised nature of Catalan are being naturalised or obscured. Rather, the data analysed here indicate that education authorities jumped hastily and lightly on the bandwagon of plurilingualism without really taking it seriously.

This has so far prevented a transparent debate about the consequences of the implementation of an academically valued conceptualisation of language (fluidity) over a more fixed but still socially and politically valued approach to language in education.

This case reflects what can be called the “politics of innovation”, that is, the invocation of international educational trends for political purposes. Sociolinguistic concepts are not only invoked but also neutralised and de-naturalised in certain discourses of innovation that intend to attain desired political ends. For instance, translanguaging, detached from any connotation of resistance and transformation, is uncritically appropriated and included in the new model. This may well be one of the consequences of translanguaging having become both a dominating force (Jaspers, 2018) and a fashionable trend.

This study contributes to the growing critique of how sociolinguists and language-related professionals employ new terms and how we develop and lend our own professional concepts to political and ideological agendas. This critical stance should be in place regardless of our own possible beliefs about language endangerment or our potential concerns around past injustices in relation to language, both frequently invoked issues in discourses around Catalonia. In line with the concerns that Jaspers and Madsen (2019) have expressed about sociolinguistic trends and their effects, I conclude by arguing that our critical scrutiny should not be restricted to the political implications of sociolinguistic research. Instead, we should seriously consider how our own professional concepts are deployed to play politics as part of the complexities of the exercise of power. Otherwise, what is at risk is that the concepts we develop and defend and, more generally, our research itself can come to be seen as sociopolitical tools in the hands of external interests.

## Appendix: Documents included in the analysis

(1.1)

Generalitat de Catalunya (2018). El model lingüístic del sistema educatiu de Catalunya - L’aprenentatge i l’ús de les llengües en un context educatiu. *Departament d’Ensenyament*: <http://ensenyament.gencat.cat/web/.content/home/departament/publicacions/monografies/model-linguistic/model-linguistic-Catalunya-CAT.pdf>

(1.2)

Bargalló, Josep (2018). El català és i serà la llengua vehicular i això no ho toca ningú. *Vilaweb*: <https://www.vilaweb.cat/noticies/josep-bargallo-el-catala-es-i-sera-la-llengua-vehicular-i-aixo-no-ho-toca-ningu/>

(1.3)

Arenas, Joaquim (2018). El catalán pierde fuerza. *El Nacional*: [https://www.elnacional.cat/es/politica/joaquim-arenas-immersion-catalan-modelo-linguistico-bargallo\\_317457\\_102.html](https://www.elnacional.cat/es/politica/joaquim-arenas-immersion-catalan-modelo-linguistico-bargallo_317457_102.html)

(2.1)

Vila, Xavier (2018). El català surt reforçat amb el document lingüístic. *La Vanguardia*: <http://epaper.lavanguardia.com/la-vanguardia/la-vanguardia-catala/2018-10-29>

(2.2)

Branchadell, Albert (2018). Desblindar la inmersión. *El Periódico*: <https://www.elperiodico.com/es/opinion/20181030/articulo-opinion-albert-branchadell-desblindar-la-inmersion-bargallo-escuela-catalana-7119898>

(2.3)

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(3.1)

Gargallo, Pilar (2018). Un modelo plurilingüe en un mundo intercultural. *El País*: [https://elpais.com/sociedad/2018/10/24/actualidad/1540362233\\_224362.html](https://elpais.com/sociedad/2018/10/24/actualidad/1540362233_224362.html)

(3.2)

Vilaweb (2018). Educadors i filòlegs, subscriptors de Vilaweb, opinen sobre el model lingüístic a l'escola. *Vilaweb*: <https://www.vilaweb.cat/noticies/els-subscriptors-educadors-o-filolegs-opinen-sobre-el-model-linguistic-a-lescola/>

(3.3)

USTEC•STEs (2018). El model lingüístic del sistema educatiu de Catalunya. Informe valoratiu: [https://www.sindicat.net/llengua/valorac\\_model\\_ling\\_sist\\_educ\\_Catalunya.pdf](https://www.sindicat.net/llengua/valorac_model_ling_sist_educ_Catalunya.pdf)

(4.1)

Plataforma per la Llengua (2018). Reunió d'urgència amb Ensenyament aquesta tarda per mostrar la nostra preocupació pel nou model lingüístic: <https://www.plataforma-llengua.cat/que-fem/noticies/4121/reunio-durgencia-amb-ensenyament-aquesta-tarda-per-mostrar-la-nuestra-preocupacio-pel-nou-model-linguistic>

(5.1)

Societat Catalana de Sociolingüística (2019). Declaració de la SOCS sobre el document de plurilingüisme: <https://blogs.iec.cat/socs/2019/01/15/declaracio-de-la-socs-sobre-el-document-de-plurilinguisme/>

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