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The Writing's on the Wall:

Interpreting Language Choice in Catalonia's Linguistic Landscape

by

Marguerite Judith Morlan

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Romance Languages and Literatures

and the Designated Emphasis

in

European Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in Charge:

Professor Justin Davidson, Chair
Professor Mairi McLaughlin
Professor Michael Newman
Professor Isaac L. Bleaman

Summer 2026

The Writing's on the Wall:

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By

Marguerite Judith Morlan

Abstract

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Designated Emphasis in European Studies

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Justin Davidson, Chair

This dissertation examines language choice and language ideologies in Catalonia, Spain. Catalonia is a multilingual region characterized by a minoritized autochthonous language (Catalan), ongoing political conflict surrounding autonomy and independence, and major demographic transformation. Together, these conditions make Catalonia a compelling site for examining ideological distinctions between languages.

The dissertation investigates which languages are used most often for messages about different topics in Catalonia's vernacular linguistic landscape (LL), defined here as expressive, non-commercial public signage whose language choice is not governed by language-policy requirements (e.g., graffiti, stickers, posters, banners, and community murals). To examine why different language–topic combinations may feel more natural or appropriate in the LL, the dissertation pairs a topic-based analysis of approximately 10,000 signs from 21 Catalan towns and neighborhoods with interview data from 60 Catalan–Spanish bilinguals born and raised in Catalonia. It shows that language choice in public writing is not random but shaped by socially shared beliefs about language and identity. In doing so, it highlights vernacular signage as both a site of multilingual practice and a valuable window into broader ideological processes that shape language use in contemporary Catalonia. The analysis is guided by the following research questions:

1. RQ1. Which languages are used most often for different topics in Catalonia's vernacular linguistic landscape?
2. RQ2. To what extent do language–topic patterns vary across communities with different linguistic profiles?
3. RQ3. What language ideologies are revealed by locally raised Catalans' interpretations of language choice in the linguistic landscape?

The topic-based analysis of Catalonia's vernacular LL reveals clear domain divergence. Catalan predominates in societally oriented signs about national and partisan politics, social causes, and community issues, while Spanish and English are far more common in intimate signs about vulgar or taboo topics and sentimentality. These patterns are generally consistent among the 21 towns and neighborhoods, which span both the Spanish-dominant Barcelona Metropolitan Area and the more Catalan-dominant regional territories outside it. However, cross-site variation is more visible for societal topics, where Spanish appears at higher rates in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area; for intimate topics, the dominance of Spanish and English remains stable even in more Catalan-dominant areas. Taken together, these patterns suggest that broad social beliefs about language shape language choice across topics, while local demographics affect how strongly those patterns appear in each site.

Qualitative interview data illuminate some of the ideologies that shape these distributions. Participants' metalinguistic evaluations indicate their perceptions that Catalan indexes local belonging, is commonly used by community organizations and progressive groups, and aligns with pro-independence political stances. In discussions of community-oriented signage, Catalan was linked to local authenticity and insider status. Participants trace an association between Catalan and progressive causes back to the dictatorship of Francisco Franco and extend that throughline into the present by viewing political graffiti in Catalan as a symbol of resistance to a Spanish state some of them describe as repressive.

By contrast, participants' explanations of vulgar/taboo and sentimental signage point to a different ideological cluster. Spanish and English are cast as global languages associated with popular culture and youth prestige. Many participants feel that the registers and formulaic phrases often observed in sexual, derogatory, and amorous graffiti are heavily shaped by socialization in television, movies, music, and other entertainment domains where offerings in Spanish and English are substantially greater than in Catalan. As a result, they perceive Spanish and English as more impactful for messages related to vulgarity, insults, and love in public signage. Although Catalan is associated with belonging, civic engagement, and favorable social qualities, its rarity in vulgar and sentimental signage led many Catalan-dominant participants to question whether the language is viewed as fully usable across all registers. The substantial presence of English in intimate signage suggests that register gaps long noted for Catalan are filled not only by Spanish, but also by globalized English.

At the same time, many interviewees link Spanish in vulgar and sentimental signage to presumed sign creator identities, often ascribing authorship to immigrants and socioeconomically marginalized groups they perceive as more Spanish speaking. Such perspectives reveal how evaluations of language in the LL can serve as proxies for broader judgments about class, migration, and belonging. In speaking about sentimentality specifically, some interviewees associate the mother tongue with strong emotions, reinforcing their belief that creators of intimate signage are from Spanish-dominant groups. Finally, they view foreign languages as effective for drawing attention in public signage, an ideology they believe could help explain the strong presence of English throughout the corpus.

Methodologically, this dissertation demonstrates how topic-based coding and interview-supported interpretation can reveal ideological patterns in the LL that aggregate language counts alone would obscure. In doing so, it contributes to Catalan sociolinguistics by showing how minoritized and hegemonic languages come to be associated with different topics, registers, speakers, and forms of belonging in the public domain amid demographic change and political tension.

For Bruno

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To our wonderful Sofia Soleil, and to our child on the way: being your mother has been the greatest privilege and honor of my life. The whole world is yours. Take everything you want from it.

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Frontispiece

Graffiti in Spanish and Catalan: "¡Arriba España!" [Up with Spain!], a slogan associated with Falangism and the Franco dictatorship, and "Als Països Catalans, en català!" [In the Catalan Countries, in Catalan!], alongside a crossed-out estelada, Taüll.



Note. Photograph by Bruno Morlan.

Chapter 1: Introduction

It was different walking around Barcelona in March 2021 compared to my previous visits. The streets that were normally bustling with tourists felt oddly empty in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the absence of the crowds, my gaze made its way to the walls, where I found myself in quiet dialogue with abundant graffiti. Many interesting messages made me pause and reflect. My favorites were the poetic ones: "*Si quieres volar, seré tu cielo*" [If you want to fly, I'll be your sky].[1]

I was eager to come across some Catalan examples like these, as I had been immersed in Catalan study at the time. While the walls were replete with graffiti in Catalan advocating political and social causes, I noticed that informal messages such as romantic notes, provocative vulgarities, and aggressive personal insults were relatively rare in Catalan compared to the abundance of such messages written in Spanish.[2] I came to Catalonia to investigate what guided people's choices between Catalan and Spanish in different contexts. Although I had planned to explore the topic via surveys and observations about students' language practices, another abundant data source called out to me from the walls I passed during my daily strolls.

This dissertation examines how language choice varies by topic in Catalonia's vernacular linguistic landscape (LL) and how Catalans' evaluations of these patterns reflect prevailing language ideologies. I use *vernacular LL* to refer to expressive, non-commercial public signage whose language choice is not governed by language-policy requirements. I systematically documented 10,221 vernacular signs, including graffiti, stickers, posters, murals, stencils, and banners from the public walls of 21 Catalan towns and neighborhoods. I then coded the language, topic, and location of each artifact to assess divergences in language predominance by topic. To gain insight into the forces that shape these divergences, I interviewed 60 Catalan–Spanish bilinguals born and raised in Catalonia, including 4 sign creators and 56 sign observers. Their perceptions of language choice in vernacular artifacts reveal salient ideologies about language in Catalan society. The investigation considers the following research questions:

1. RQ1. Which languages are used most often for different topics in Catalonia's vernacular LL?
2. RQ2. To what extent do language–topic patterns vary across communities with different linguistic profiles?
3. RQ3. What language ideologies are revealed by locally raised Catalans' interpretations of language choice in the LL?

The dissertation is organized as follows. In Chapter 2, I present the theoretical framework underpinning the investigation. I first consider multilingualism in minoritized-language contexts, addressing both a language-conflict perspective and linguistic cosmopolitanism as a unique state of affairs that has supported stable bilingualism in Catalonia in recent years. I then introduce the concept of language ideologies, explain how ideologies connect language to social identity and

[1] Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this dissertation are my own.

[2] Throughout this dissertation, I use *Spanish* for the language commonly referred to within Spain as *castellano* in Spanish and *castellà* in Catalan. Although *Castilian* also appears in English-language scholarship (e.g., Woolard, 2016), Spanish is the English term more commonly used locally and is more readily distinguishable from Catalan in tables and charts.

belonging, and highlight language attitudes as a productive point of access to them. Finally, I discuss the LL as a site of multilingual practice and ideological meaning. I detail key developments in LL scholarship, give special attention to vernacular signage, and define the scope of the LL examined in this dissertation.

Chapter 3 details the mixed-methods project design. I present and justify key methodological choices, including survey area selection, documentation and coding of the vernacular signs, procedures of quantitative analysis, recruitment of locally raised Catalan collaborators, the interview process, and qualitative data analysis. I also reflect on how my positionality factored into the project design, highlighting the value of collaborative approaches in LL research.

Chapter 4 presents the LL results and addresses the first two research questions. I report the language–topic patterns in the LL to establish the empirical context. I highlight the five most salient topics from the corpus and show the relative proportions of signs written in each language by topic. I then compare the language–topic distributions across survey areas with different linguistic profiles.

In Chapter 5, these language–topic patterns are interpreted through locally raised Catalans' metalinguistic evaluations, which are integrated with broader discussions of language ideologies in Catalonia. I compare participants' hypothetical language choice for vernacular signage about each of the five topics featured in Chapter 4 with the patterns observed in the LL. I then highlight key themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews and relate them to prevailing language ideologies. I show that patterns of language choice in the LL reflect recurring ideological associations linking languages to political stance, local belonging, civic engagement, communicative reach, socioeconomic status, migration, emotional resonance, and popular and youth culture. I also relate these ideological associations to participants' evaluative perceptions of vulgarity, forcefulness, eroticism, romanticism, refinement, and social appeal across languages. Throughout this analysis, I consider variation across participants, showing that these ideologies are patterned but not uniform.

In the conclusion, I synthesize the dissertation's main findings and reflect on their implications for research on language ideologies in Catalonia, the LL, and mixed-methods sociolinguistic inquiry. I also outline promising directions for future research on language use in Catalonia and other minoritized-language contexts.

To understand the dynamics at play in the LL, this investigation is first situated historically, politically, and culturally. The following sections outline key demographic, political, and sociolinguistic conditions that shape language use in Catalonia.

1.1 Who is Catalan? Migration and Demographic Transformation

It is essential to clarify what is meant by "Catalan" for the purpose of this work. Contemporary sociolinguistics avoids the maintenance of ethnocentrism or ethnic essentialism (Hall-Lew & Yaeger-Dror, 2014), and there are no self-evident criteria that qualify someone as Catalan. First, I clarify that this dissertation's geographical scope is limited to the Autonomous Community of Catalonia, and readers can assume that references to Catalans in this work pertain to people in this area. However, many outside of Catalonia also have a Catalan identity, rooted in a feeling of connection to a larger cultural entity known as the *Països Catalans* [Catalan Countries]. This entity includes Andorra, Northern Catalonia in France, the city of Alghero (l'Alguer) in Sardinia, and various places in Spain: the Valencian Community, the Balearic Islands, a section of Aragon

known as the Franja de Ponent, and a small area of Murcia known as El Carxe (Hawkey, 2018). Catalan-identifying communities also exist outside these areas, including in diasporic settings such as the United States (Juarros-Daussà, 2013).

Because of Catalonia's long history of migration, Catalan cultural identity cannot be treated as fixed or homogeneous. Woolard (2016, p. 6, emphasis in original) describes Catalonia as "a *terra de pas* ('land of passage' or frontier zone) that has mingled and absorbed different peoples over the centuries." At the beginning of the 20th century, Catalonia's population was generally monolingual in Catalan (Solé i Camardons, 2017). However, the role of language in Catalan identity has evolved alongside demographic changes. These demographic changes did not result from a single homogeneous migration stream. In the immediate period following the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), the regime of dictator Francisco Franco purged teachers and other civil servants from public institutions, resulting in a reorganization that included the arrival of some state personnel to Catalonia from elsewhere in Spain (Fabre, 2003).

In the 1950s, Catalonia experienced an industrial boom. As the wealthiest region in Spain, it attracted mass waves of labor migrants from other parts of Spain over the subsequent two decades (Domingo i Valls, 2013). By the time of Franco's death in 1975, 38% of residents in Catalonia had no Catalan origins (Vann, 2026). At the end of the century, people who identified as primarily Spanish speakers constituted more than half the population of the Barcelona Metropolitan Area (Newman et al., 2020). As described by Branchadell (2006, p. 130), "the Catalan language began the twentieth century being the only language of most Catalans and ended the century being the first language of only half the population, unknown by a significant part of the other half, which had Spanish as their usual language" (translation by Cetrà, 2019).

Jordi Pujol, the first president of Catalonia after the return of democracy, famously said, "All those who live and work here (and who want to be) are Catalan" (quoted in Woolard, 2016, p. 6). His definition of Catalans did not mention prerequisite knowledge or use of the Catalan language. However, Pujol first said this in the mid 1950s amidst Franco's repression of the Catalan language and the mass migratory wave of Spanish-speakers from other parts of Spain to Catalonia. Decades later, he clarified in an interview with Cetrà (2019) that the Catalan language is a key national identity marker in Catalonia (even if not a prerequisite for individual belonging), and that without it Catalonia wouldn't exist as a nation.

The initial decades following the mid-century migration from elsewhere in Spain were characterized by an ethnolinguistic distinction between the locally salient categories *catalans* and *castellans*. The former were understood to be L1 Catalan speakers with family origins in Catalonia, whereas the latter spoke Spanish as an L1 and had either migrated from or descended from migrants from other Spanish autonomous communities. Woolard (2016, p. 300) explains that in the early years of post-Franco autonomy in the late 1970s and early 1980s, "Catalan social identity was reserved to those who spoke Catalan as a first and habitual language." Pujolar and Gonzàlez (2013) explain that these ethnolinguistic divisions traditionally paralleled class divisions. *Catalans* typically occupied semi-skilled and skilled professions, while *castellans* largely supplied the less-skilled workforce for the expanding industries that had attracted the migration boom.

As these migrants raised children and grandchildren in Catalonia, scholars noted an attenuation of the link between language use and ethnic origin in Catalonia (Woolard, 2016). Reflecting on his longitudinal fieldwork between 1995 and 2017, Vann (2026, p. 236, emphasis in original) observes that "local understandings of Catalan identities appeared to be in flux," and that "the word *catalán* itself seemingly exhibited a variable state of lexical meaning." He goes on to say that by 2017, some speakers perceived Catalan vitality as more secure and therefore expressed

less urgency about whether Catalans used Catalan or Spanish in everyday interaction. Massaguer Comes (2024) identifies institutional changes that contributed to this shift, attributing the delinking of L1 and ethnic identity to post-Franco linguistic revitalization policies that fueled bilingual proficiency among people of Spanish-speaking origin in Catalonia. Sinner (2002, p. 161) argued in this period that "The mother tongue cannot be at the centre of notions of cultural identity," because bilingualism was so widespread in Catalonia by this point that most young people called themselves Catalan regardless of their first language or preferred tongue. Together, these accounts suggest that Catalan identity has become more inclusive, even though language still indexes belonging in powerful ways. Individuals whose L1 is not Catalan can still claim Catalan identity, but the use of Catalan remains a key way in which people publicly and symbolically express that identity.

According to Pujolar and Gonzàlez (2013), another significant boon to the delinking of language and ethnicity is an idea they refer to as linguistic *mudes*—key biographical junctures, such as a change in educational or work setting, a new romantic partnership, or having children—at which many Spanish speakers begin to adopt Catalan as their habitual language (or, to a lesser extent, Catalan speakers adopt Spanish). In the twenty-first century, then, language ideologies seemed to be evolving in ways that pointed to the de-ethnicization of Catalan usage in Catalonia and opened Catalan identity to a wider population (Newman et al., 2008; Newman et al., 2020; Pujolar & Gonzàlez, 2013).

Despite this reduced association between Catalan use and ethnic origin, Ianos et al. (2017) state that the Catalan language remains the most salient symbol of Catalan culture and identity. Boix-Fuster and Sanz (2008) similarly root Catalan identity in *ius linguae* or linguistic practice: anyone who speaks Catalan habitually in daily life, even if it was not their home language, can claim to be Catalan. This view is echoed across the literature. Lladonosa (2013, p. 147) states, "*la llengua ha estat . . . el gran eix definitori de la identitat nacional*" [language has been the central defining axis of national identity], and Massaguer Comes (2024, p. 35) identifies "*la llengua catalana com a símbol principal de la catalanitat*" [the Catalan language as the main symbol of Catalan identity].

Furthermore, Massaguer Comes (2022) describes how a new mass wave of international migration to Catalonia since the beginning of the twenty-first century has started to counteract the effects of the post-Franco linguistic normalization policies. The percentage of Catalonia's population constituted by international residents rose 184.4% from 2003 to 2023, and nearly one in four current residents of Catalonia aged 15 and older was born abroad (Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya [Idescat], 2023). This wave of international immigrants is much more heterogeneous than that of the mid-twentieth century. Accordingly, Massaguer Comes (2024) explains that these demographic-linguistic shifts have created new social categories that overlap with existing ones, with language serving as a central resource for negotiating belonging and shaping access to economic and social capital.

Woolard (2016) observes that at an official level, Catalan nationalism is a civic rather than an ethnic movement that is inclusive of residents of Spanish and immigrant origin. Despite this, Trenchs-Parera and Newman (2015, p. 498) observe that the new international immigrants have not experienced the same level of acceptance enjoyed by Spanish migrants' descendants. They explain:

> This welcome was extended to 'new Catalans' who looked like old ones, came from a similar culture . . . and spoke a related albeit threatening language. These comforting commonalities are no longer in play for the current prospective new Catalans, and a new nostalgic discourse has emerged that blames them for a host of social and economic problems, echoing xenophobic and racist discourses elsewhere in Europe.

Coupled with the fact that locals tend to address immigrants (and their Catalan-born children) in Spanish based on perceived differences in phenotype (Trenchs-Parera & Newman, 2015), immigrants face obstacles to adopting Catalan linguistic and cultural identities. As a result, not all newcomers feel welcomed into Catalan society, nor do all of them seek to identify as Catalan. In particular, Newman et al. (2008) show that Spanish-speaking Latin Americans have less favorable attitudes toward Catalan than do other immigrants or local native Spanish speakers. Trenchs-Parera et al. (2014) observe an identity of pan-Hispanicism among Latin American immigrants, marked by a preference for Spanish with a mix of Latin American dialectal features that stands in opposition to European Spanish.

However, many immigrants do choose to identify affectively and intellectually with the Catalan identity. In so doing, they offer identity narratives that continue to debunk the essentialist definitions of Catalanity that were popular in the twentieth century. In "Am I Catalan, Mom?" Sanjuán-Pastor (2015) examines Najat El Hachmi's everyday struggles in navigating the social and cultural realities of her Catalan-Amazigh self. As an immigrant who moved to Catalonia at eight years old from Morocco, El Hachmi describes many experiences that show how identity reflects both the identities we claim for ourselves and those that others ascribe to us (see also Almarcha París, 2019; Linares, 2020).

Language policy planners now ponder how to support Catalan linguistic vitality in the face of this demographic evolution, and what these demolinguistic changes mean for Catalan identity more broadly. Immigrants are aware that acquisition of Catalan can help them gain social acceptance and advance in the labor market (Rendón, 2007), and language planners understand that new speakers' adoption of Catalan is necessary to ensure its future vitality (Vila i Moreno et al., 2018; Strubell, 2001). For this reason, language policy over the past two decades has been shaped by the notion of *convivència*: the getting along and peaceful coexistence of diverse communities in Catalonia (Newman et al., 2020). This principle recognizes the plurilingual, multiethnic nature of contemporary Catalonia, while encouraging Catalan linguistic adoption via "integration policies [that] involve enhancing immigrants' sense of belonging in Catalonia before Spain" (Juarez Miro, 2020, p. 12). Central among these policies is the prioritization of Catalan as the language of instruction in primary and secondary schools, with Catalan language support offered to immigrants in *aules d'acollida* (reception classes). Crucially, school is often the only space where immigrants are socialized in Catalan. Their experiences in these reception classes correlate with their attitudes toward Catalan and their linguistic behavior (Newman et al., 2013).

With the complexities of the contemporary context in mind, this dissertation considers language practices across diverse communities in Catalonia, while drawing on the linguistic and cultural expertise of 60 individuals who were born and raised in Catalonia. I will refer to these participants and others raised in Catalonia as *locally raised Catalans*. This shorthand indicates long-term socialization in the research context and does not denote ethnicity or require self-identification as Catalan, given that notions of Catalan identity are heterogeneous and continually changing (Massaguer Comes, 2022; Pujolar & Gonzàlez, 2013; Woolard, 2016). Residence in Catalonia does not necessarily entail identification as Catalan, and many people living outside

Catalonia identify as Catalan, whether in other territories of the broader *Països Catalans* or in diasporic communities with ties to these lands. Although this dissertation focuses on language ideologies as they circulate among locally raised Catalans residing in Catalonia, the language ideologies of other resident and diasporic groups represent fruitful avenues for future research.

1.2 Political and Sociolinguistic Background

Spanish was never an autochthonous language in what is now Catalonia. As described by Solé i Camardons (2017), prior to the eleventh century Latin was used in formal domains, while Catalan was the language of the people in informal and colloquial contexts. Spanish had not appeared by this time, and Catalan poets wrote in Occitan. From the twelfth century onward, Catalan started gaining ground as a high and cultured language. It replaced Latin in formal contexts, and poets began writing in Catalan. In the seventeenth century, Northern Catalonia was ceded to France in the 1659 Treaty of the Pyrenees. Around this period, Catalonia's aristocracy was increasingly Hispanicized, and Spanish gained greater prominence in courtly and administrative domains, even as Catalan remained widely used in both formal and informal contexts.

The War of the Spanish Succession culminated in the Decrees of *Nova Planta* (1707–1716), which abolished Catalonia's autonomous institutions and imposed Spanish as the only language of administration and education, effectively excluding Catalan from formal domains (Vila i Moreno & Galindo Soler, 2009). Despite this, Catalan remained the only language spoken by everyday people (*el poble*) through the nineteenth century. Spanish thus gained ground in formal settings but had not yet been introduced in informal ones. It could be said that 99% of the population at this point remained monolingual in Catalan, with the exception of foreign bureaucrats (Solé i Camardons, 2017).

The nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of the *Renaixença* (1833-1880), a "cultural and literary movement inspired by Romanticism that led to a renewed Catalan cultural awareness and that, in turn, provided the basis for the emergence of Catalan political consciousness" (Etherington, 2010, p. 1814). Of significance from this period is the 1833 publication of Bonaventura Carles Aribau's "*Oda a la Pàtria*" [Ode to the Fatherland]. This work equates Catalan with the homeland itself (Cetrà, 2019), expressing nostalgia for Catalonia through the recovery of its language as a marker of cultural and emotional belonging. Owing in part to the *Renaixença*, Catalan achieved increased prestige and visibility in literature, journalism, and other formal domains.

Bilingualization of the Catalan population began in the early twentieth century through mass literacy instruction in Spanish, compulsory service in the Spanish military, and the first major waves of immigration. The Catalan bourgeoisie initially supported the military dictatorship of General Miguel Primo de Rivera (1923–1930), believing that his regime might accommodate Catalan demands. Instead, the regime prohibited the public use of Catalan and the display of the Catalan flag, dissolved nationalist organizations and municipal councils, and abolished the Mancomunitat (1914–1925), an administrative entity uniting Catalonia's four provinces and the first institution of Catalan self-government (Cetrà, 2019).

After a brief respite during which Catalonia regained significant self-government under the Second Republic, its Statute of Autonomy was nullified by General Francisco Franco following the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. The Franco dictatorship (1939–1975) once again prohibited the public use of Catalan (Preston, 2012), making Spanish the language of formal institutions. The regime also subjected teachers and other public employees to ideological purges

designed to enforce political and institutional loyalty to the dictatorship (Fabre, 2003; Grana Gil, 2010). The resulting reorganization brought some civil servants from elsewhere in Spain into Catalan institutions, although many personnel already residing in Catalonia also retained or gained positions and participated, willingly or under pressure, in implementing Francoist policies (Fabre, 2003). Beyond excluding Catalan from formal domains, the dictatorship suppressed free speech and the press, and speaking Catalan in public could result in fines or imprisonment (Vann, 2026). Together with the mass labor migration from elsewhere in Spain described in the previous section, these forms of linguistic repression contributed to the progressive bilingualization of the Catalan-speaking population, the growth of monolingual Spanish-speaking sectors, and the expansion of Spanish into informal domains.

Despite the ethnolinguistic division that was socially salient in this era, language, geographic origin, and political allegiance did not align neatly. Whereas personnel in educational and governmental institutions were subjected to loyalty screening and coercive measures intended to enforce compliance with the Franco regime (Fabre, 2003; Grana Gil, 2010), many labor migrants from elsewhere in Spain did not support the regime. Under these conditions, Catalan could function for some migrants as a resource for resistance to repression rather than solely as an index of ethnic origin (M. Newman, personal communication, July 9, 2026). Its use could therefore carry oppositional political meaning even among people of Spanish-speaking migrant origin. The linguistic conflict in Catalonia was therefore unique in that it cut across the categories of Catalan-speaking locals and Spanish-speaking migrants rather than mapping neatly onto a binary ethnolinguistic division.

According to Solé i Camardons (2017), the next logical step under the conditions promoted by the Franco regime would have been the disappearance of Catalan in both formal and informal spaces. This is what occurred in Northern Catalonia, where it is now barely spoken by young people as an L1. Rendón (2007) points out that the use of Catalan has also been steadily decreasing in the Valencian Community and the Balearic Islands since 1930.

In Catalonia things have been different, however, helped in large part by sustained social and institutional efforts to strengthen Catalan in formal domains like television, radio, the press, and schooling. Since Franco's death and the restoration of democracy and autonomy in the late 1970s, Catalan language planners and policymakers have been involved in a continual process of *normalització lingüística* [linguistic normalization] (Ninyoles, 2008), with the goal of promoting the use of Catalan across private, public, and social spheres (Newman et al., 2020). Newman and Trenchs-Parera (2015) explain that Catalan grammarian and language standardizer Pompeu Fabra originally used *normalization* to refer only to the establishment of linguistic norms, but the term later acquired a second meaning rooted in the goal of making Catalan "normal" by restoring its widespread use across registers (p. 287). Vann (2026, p. 42) describes this broader objective as "the process of promoting universal usage of Catalan in all areas of daily life so that such use would become a normal thing." These goals were translated into policy through the 1983 *Llei de Normalització Lingüística* [Law of Linguistic Normalization], which implemented the 1979 Statute of Autonomy's recognition of Catalan as a co-official language alongside Spanish. The law established Catalan as the language of instruction in the education system and promoted its use across public administration, mass media, culture, and signage.

In the modern context, Solé i Camardons (2017, p. 32) summarizes the situation of Catalan as follows: "*A Catalunya es parla moltíssim del català però no es parla moltíssim en català*" [In Catalonia people often speak about Catalan, but don't often speak in Catalan]. The most recent Survey on Language Uses of the Population (Idescat, 2023) shows that this claim is an

exaggeration, while still empirically supporting the idea that knowledge of Catalan is much higher than use.

Among Catalonia's population aged 15 and older, 93.4% report being able to understand Catalan and 80.4% report being able to speak it, but only 32.6% report Catalan as their sole habitual language, compared with 46.5% for Spanish. Birthplace is a key variable in both knowledge and use. Most people born in Catalonia (50.9%) report Catalan as their sole habitual language, whereas only 9.9% of those born elsewhere in Spain and 4.1% of those born abroad do the same. By contrast, Spanish is the sole habitual language of 77.0% of those born elsewhere in Spain and 56.8% of those born abroad, compared with 33.5% of those born in Catalonia. Because people born elsewhere in Spain or abroad together constitute more than one third of Catalonia's population, these substantial differences in habitual language use have considerable consequences for the overall sociolinguistic balance. Table 1 summarizes these contrasts and provides additional information about reported knowledge of Catalan within each birthplace group.

Table 1
Catalan Knowledge and Habitual Language by Birthplace

	Birthplace			
	Catalonia	**Rest of Spain**	**Abroad**	**Total**
Proportion of Catalonia's population	63.0%	14.6%	22.5%	100%
Can understand Catalan	99.7%	91.4%	79.6%	93.4%
Can speak Catalan	97.8%	63.1%	50.5%	80.4%
Report Catalan as sole habitual language	50.9%	9.9%	4.1%	32.6%
Report Spanish as sole habitual language	33.5%	77.0%	56.8%	46.5%

Note. Percentages refer to Catalonia's population aged 15 and older. Data from Idescat (2023). Darker blue shading indicates higher percentages among the birthplace-specific language measures.

Also noteworthy is a substantial decrease in habitual Catalan use from 2003 to 2023 (46.0% to 32.6%; Idescat, 2023), even though the proportion of the population born in Catalonia changed only modestly over the same period (66% to 63%). The key demographic shift has been from immigrants born in other regions of Spain to immigrants born abroad. As shown in Table 1, international immigrants now constitute nearly a quarter of Catalonia's residents. Because immigrants from other parts of Spain are more than twice as likely to adopt Catalan as their habitual language than international immigrants (Idescat, 2023), this change in the composition of the migrant population has had important consequences for Catalan use.

These demographic shifts intersect with age and geography. Table 2 shows that younger groups are proportionally less likely to have Catalan as their habitual language than older groups. Birthplace is also a crucial factor here, however, as 40% of Catalonia's population aged 25 to 45 was born abroad. Finally, survey data show a vast difference in habitual Catalan usage within and

outside of the Barcelona Metropolitan Area (24.7% versus 46.3%, respectively, Idescat, 2025). International immigration has been particularly high in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area (Newman et al., 2020), again signaling the significance of migratory patterns and demographic transformation for Catalan vitality.

Table 2
Catalan as Sole Habitual Language by Age Group

Age	15-29 years	30-44 years	45-64 years	65 years and older
Report Catalan as sole habitual language	29.2%	25.8%	34.0%	40.6%

Note. Data from Idescat (2023).

Beyond these demographic dynamics, habitual usage of Catalan has been negatively impacted by the asymmetrical power relations between Catalonia and Spain. Articles 6.1 and 6.2 of Catalonia's 2006 Statute of Autonomy asserted Catalan as the language of "normal and preferential use" in public administration, education, and the media, and stated that citizens of Catalonia have the right and duty to know both Catalan and Spanish (Spain, 2006, Art. 6). However, several provisions of the 2006 Statute were annulled or reinterpreted by Constitutional Court Judgment 31/2010, which rejected any "preferential" status for Catalan over Spanish and stated the "duty to know Catalan" cannot be understood as a generally enforceable legal obligation (Tribunal Constitucional, 2010). As a result, while the Catalan government may promote newcomers' acquisition of Catalan through schooling and civic programs, it operates within a Spanish-dominant legal framework and lacks the authority to make Catalan proficiency a legal or administrative condition for residence (Flors-Mas, 2021).

Fueled in part by the 2010 Constitutional Court ruling, political upheaval has arisen in recent years related to the reemergence of a secessionist movement known as *El Procés* that seeks independence from Spain (Balcells et al., 2021). Secessionist sentiment ramped up after the 2010 ruling declared parts of Catalonia's updated 2006 Statute of Autonomy to be unconstitutional, including those described in the previous paragraph and all articles that defined Catalonia as a nation (Juarez Miro, 2020). Pro-Catalan forces were victorious in the 2015 Catalan elections, and the Catalan government passed a law calling for a referendum on self-determination. Although this law was suspended by the Spanish Constitutional Court, over two million people voted on independence on October 1, 2017 (henceforth referred to with the numeronym "1-O"). Of those who voted, representing 43% of eligible voters, 90% were in favor of independence and 8% were against it (Byrne & Marcet, 2024).

The *Guardia Civil* (Spanish national police) disrupted the vote and celebrations with violence. According to Catalan Health Authorities, over 1000 people received medical attention due to injuries they sustained from the actions of Spanish police who were trying to stop the vote (Shields, 2022). The Spanish government dissolved the Catalan parliament, and Spanish authorities prosecuted political officials and civic leaders involved in organizing the referendum. In October 2019, the Spanish Supreme Court sentenced nine of twelve defendants to between nine and thirteen years in prison, for a combined total of approximately 100 years (Anderson, 2020). Several other Catalan political leaders left Spain to avoid prosecution, including the then president

of Catalonia, Carles Puigdemont (Juarez Miro, 2020). Furthermore, the Spanish government applied a decree linked to article 155 of the Spanish Constitution that suppressed Catalonia's autonomy for an eight-month period following the referendum (Sabaté-Dalmau, 2025). Transnational institutions such as Human Rights Watch characterized these events as Spain's most serious sociopolitical crisis since the transition to democracy (Balcells et al., 2021).

Support for independence has since waned, with only 40% of residents currently in favor and 52% opposed (Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió [CEO], 2025). Political graffiti referencing these events has been abundant in the LL in the post-referendum years. Byrne and Marcet (2024) and Sabaté-Dalmau (2025) show that in political discourse in the LL, language choice often aligns with stance: Catalan is typically associated with pro-independence sentiment, whereas Spanish marks unionist positions. In this way, the recent political tensions have contributed to a renewed salience of ethnolinguistic identity boundaries that had previously been attenuated.

1.3 Linguistic Styles and Expressive Functions in a Minoritized Context

Catalan is among the 15 most spoken languages in Europe. With around ten million speakers, more people speak Catalan than sovereign-state national languages such as Danish and Finnish (Eberhard et al., 2023). Although it is not recognized as an official language of the European Union, it has more speakers than several of the 24 languages that do enjoy this distinction (Plataforma per la Llengua, 2022). In this sense, Catalonia offers a unique case of a European community that has been remarkably successful in maintaining the vitality of its autochthonous language despite centuries of state-level minoritization (Cetrà, 2019).

As Tenedero (2017) notes, the term *minority language* can be misleading insofar as it suggests a small number of speakers, whereas *minoritized language* more accurately captures processes of language subordination and unequal power relations. Building on this distinction, I adopt *minoritized language* as the more appropriate term for describing the contemporary situation of Catalan in Catalonia, a perspective echoed by some of the Catalan participants in this research. This conceptualization aligns with Kasbarian's (1997, p. 188) definition of a minoritized language as "*une langue dont les valeurs ne sont pas reconnues sur la scène interactionnelle par les locuteurs d'une langue sociolinguistiquement dominante*" [a language whose value is not recognized in interactional settings by speakers of a sociolinguistically dominant language].

Indeed, although 93.4% of Catalonia's population now understands Catalan and its institutional presence remains strong (Idescat, 2023), scholars have long noted persistent asymmetries between formal competence and informal use. While linguistic normalization policies have successfully expanded Catalan's use in educational and other formal domains, gaps persist in key spheres of socialization and in informal and transgressive registers. In the early years of the post-Franco revitalization efforts, Woolard (1989) identified such gaps in playful and irreverent forms of expression in Catalan. She suggested that sometimes Spanish terms create a more humorous or provocative impact because they "carry connotations that the Catalan equivalents might not" (p. 65). Referencing his fieldwork with working-class youth in Barcelona, Pujolar (2001) notes, "Spanish was generally experienced as a fully functional language, while Catalan was seen as limited in its expressive potential" (p. 184). Catalan was associated with voices of femininity and authority since his participants' main exposure to it was in the school system. As a result, "Spanish . . . sounded tougher and cooler, and it was more appropriate to evoke transgressive characters" (p. 205).

Echoing this idea, Frekko (2009) posits that the repression endured by Catalan under the Franco regime resulted in a situation where Catalan did not have sufficient resources, registers, or contrasts to account for all social roles, making recourse to Spanish necessary. In extracts from ethnographic and media data, she found that Spanish was often used to portray lusty and desirable figures, as the idea of Catalan sexuality provoked laughter. As a representation of this language ideology, she cites the novel *El amante bilingüe* by Juan Marsé in which the Catalan-speaking protagonist (with a catalanized version of the author's name) creates a Spanish-speaking alter ego to win back his wife after she leaves him for a Spanish-speaking shoe shiner. She states the "depiction of Catalan as difficult, middle-class, and unsexy points to its ideological reduction to a single institutionally based standard register" (p. 88), thus undermining the idea it can represent everyone in Catalonia. Accordingly, Frekko (2011) explains how Catalan speakers on talk radio draw on a heteroglossic repertoire of verbal forms by using Spanish in set phrases and to model the talk of real or imagined Spanish speakers.

In a study on the evolution of language attitudes of linguistically diverse adolescents in urban Catalonia, Newman et al. (2008, p. 310) state, "Only Spanish has a full presence in all registers, and inter-group conversations remain predominantly in that language." They highlight that even L1-Spanish speakers who use Catalan actively report preferring Spanish in informal registers, though they do not reject Catalan or its use as the medium of instruction. Newman et al. (2013) find that Spanish-speaking Latin American newcomers in Catalonia find Catalan to be defective in lower registers.

More recently, Millán (2020) describes code switches into Spanish between Catalan-dominant characters in insults and sexual comments in *Merlí*, a contemporary Catalan television series. She explains these switches are intended to imbue the situations with social meaning. In one such example, the notoriously buttoned-up Catalan teacher exclaims to his similarly Catalan-dominant girlfriend, "*¡Háblame en castellano, Mireia!*" [Talk to me in Spanish, Mireia!] the first time they have sexual relations.

Similar dynamics have been observed in social media. Massaguer Comes et al. (2021) identify gaps in Catalan-language content on YouTube and Instagram in domains such as gaming, fashion, and celebrity news. They attribute these gaps to a lack of normalized use of Catalan in related domains prior to the eruption of social media, such as video games and gossip magazines. They also discuss negative connotations attributed to the Catalan language and its speakers, such as "*poc guai*" [uncool] and "*molt refinat*" [very refined] (p. 42) that factor into many influencers' choice to create content in Spanish. They identify these connotations as a continuation of language ideologies identified in Pujolar's (2001) aforementioned fieldwork linking Catalan to school and institutional settings, making it less suitable than Spanish for expressing rebellion, masculinity, and transgression. The second author, Flors-Mas, clarifies in a podcast episode that such connotations do not reflect inherent linguistic qualities that make languages more suitable for different kinds of discourse, but rather links that speakers have developed based on the domains, people, and socialization spheres that they associate with those languages (Catalunya Ràdio, 2025). Together, these findings suggest that Catalan remains weakly associated with certain informal, vulgar, provocative, and youth-oriented registers that dominate popular culture. The present dissertation extends this line of research by including in its scope vulgar and informal registers in vernacular signage, a site where sign creators have autonomy over language choice.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

This dissertation explores the relationship between language choice and social meaning. I position this work primarily within sociolinguistics, while drawing on concepts that are also relevant to linguistic anthropology and the sociology of language. I do not treat these fields as identical, nor do I attempt to determine their disciplinary boundaries. Rather, I approach them as overlapping traditions whose labels are often shaped by academic context and scholarly audience.

Comparing Anglophone and Francophone contexts, Ayres-Bennett and McLaughlin (2024, p. 2) note that differences in scholarly traditions "often relate to the academic and socio-cultural contexts in which scholars are working." For example, linguistic anthropology as a named discipline is largely perceived as a North American scholarly tradition (Piller, 2015). However, core linguistic anthropological concepts such as indexicality, ideology, and semiotic processes circulate globally, often under the label of sociolinguistics in European and other contexts.

In line with Marnette's (2005, p. 2) broader argument that theoretical traditions often "benefit from being combined into a harmonious whole," this dissertation treats sociolinguistic and linguistic anthropological approaches as overlapping and complementary perspectives on language and meaning-making. Accordingly, this chapter emphasizes concepts that transcend perceived disciplinary boundaries, especially those that help explain how language choice becomes socially meaningful in Catalonia's vernacular LL. The sections that follow outline the concepts that guide this dissertation's analysis, drawing on theories of multilingualism and language ideologies, and on LL scholarship that treats public signage as a site where multilingual practice and ideological meaning intersect.

2.1 Multilingualism

Following contemporary sociolinguistic usage, I treat multilingualism as an umbrella term referring to the use of more than one language by individuals or communities, with bilingualism representing the two-language instance of multilingualism (Cenoz, 2013). Multilingualism is widespread globally and is better understood as a common rather than anomalous sociolinguistic condition (Pavlenko, 2005). Multilinguals rarely use their languages to equal degrees or for identical purposes, nor do they typically possess equivalent proficiency across them (Grosjean, 1982, 1998).

At the societal level, I follow Weinreich's (1953/1968) conceptualization of multilingualism as the coexistence of two or more languages within a community. Multilingual societies often associate different languages with distinct domains, social groups, and communicative functions. Weinreich's (1953/1968) *Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems* and Haugen's (1953) *The Norwegian Language in America: A Study of Bilingual Behavior* are two foundational studies of multilingualism in its social context. Both examined relationships between linguistic practices and social factors such as geographic location, ethnicity, religion, sex, age, and social class.

Although the boundaries among languages are not always clear or uncontested, language categories remain ideologically powerful and have social consequences for education, immigration, culture, and identity (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011). The term *language* itself is not neutral because it implies a status and level of recognition not enjoyed by varieties labeled as *dialects* or *patois*, terms that dominant groups have often applied inconsistently. Grosjean (1982) notes that classifying minoritized languages as dialects or patois can imbue them with negative

connotations such as coarseness and lack of refinement. In Northern Catalonia, Peytaví Deixona (2021) describes how Catalan underwent "patoisisation," an extreme form of dialectalization through which it was belittled as one of France's so-called regional languages. In Spain, Catalan has been recognized as a language since the Middle Ages, yet the Franco regime sought to subordinate it by presenting it in schools as a mere dialect of Spanish, which was treated as Spain's only legitimate language (Newman et al., 2020; Vann, 2026).

Throughout this dissertation, I use language labels such as Catalan, Spanish, and English that are socially recognized and politically meaningful to sign creators, observers, and interview participants. Their use as analytic categories does not imply that the boundaries among languages are always unambiguous. Rather, these labels reflect distinctions that are meaningful in public and private life in Catalonia.

As discussed in the Introduction, Catalonia is characterized by widespread Catalan–Spanish bilingualism alongside substantial linguistic diversity linked to immigration. The remainder of this section examines the social dynamics of multilingualism in Catalonia, providing context for the subsequent discussion of how language ideologies shape the social meanings of language choice.

2.1.1 Language Conflict and Stable Multilingualism

Like many minoritized languages, Catalan is used in multilingual societies where it coexists with more powerful state languages, including Spanish in Spain, French in France, and Italian in Alghero, Sardinia. According to Weinreich (1953/1968), widespread multilingualism can precede language shift, understood here as "the replacement of one language by another as the primary means of communication and socialization within a community" (Potowski, 2013, p. 321). Emphasizing the unequal conditions under which language shift may occur, Solé i Camardons (2017, p. 28) sees language conflict as inherent to the societal bilingualism that characterizes Catalan-speaking contexts:

> *Si no entenem el concept de 'conflicte lingüístic', dificilment podrem entendre el de bilingüisme . . . No hi ha una 'realitat bilingüe' ni unes determinades 'decisions' o tries individuals a favor del 'bilingüisme', sinó unes estructures sociopolítiques que han imposat la bilingüització en una llengua dominant d'uns determinats individus que parlen una llengua que ha esdevingut llengua dominada. El que cadascú fa amb les llengües ve determinat per aquelles estructures sociopolítiques*
>
> [If we don't understand the concept of "linguistic conflict," we will hardly be able to understand bilingualism . . . There is no "bilingual reality," nor any set of individual "decisions" or choices in favor of "bilingualism," but rather sociopolitical structures that have imposed bilingualization in a dominant language on certain individuals who speak a language that has become dominated. What each person does with the languages is determined by those sociopolitical structures].

This conflict model is useful because it foregrounds the asymmetrical power relations that make Catalan–Spanish bilingualism politically unequal rather than simply a matter of individual preference. However, Solé i Camardons's claim that sociopolitical structures determine what each

person does with language leaves less room for the role of individual agency in language use and language choice.

The asymmetry identified by the conflict model also concerns who bears the burden of bilingualism. Solé i Camardons (2017) argues that members of a so-called bilingual community may experience bilingualism as an obligation, aligning with Aracil's (1982) view that bilingualism can mask unequal power relations in which speakers of the minoritized language are expected to accommodate to the dominant language without reciprocal accommodation. Similarly, Cetrà (2019, p. 93) notes that "bilingualism is a loaded term in Catalonia, rejected by defenders of the system as designed principally to facilitate individuals' monolingualism in Spanish."

This perspective became especially salient in Catalonia following the mid-twentieth-century migration wave, when Catalan identity came to be widely associated with those who spoke Catalan as a first and habitual language (Woolard, 2016). Despite this historical ethnolinguistic differentiation, Catalonia has developed social and institutional mechanisms that have fostered relatively stable bilingual practices over the life course. According to Pujolar et al. (2010), a largely monolingual primary socialization in Catalonia often develops into widespread bilingualism through key biographical moments at which habitual linguistic practices change, such as entering a new educational or professional setting or becoming a parent. Pujolar and Gonzàlez (2013) refer to these biographical junctures as *mudes* and note that language policies associated with some of them have contributed to the relative stability of bilingualism in Catalonia.

Newman et al. (2013) point to evidence of relative stability in Catalan–Spanish bilingualism, noting that many Spanish-dominant speakers adopt multilingual practices in adulthood through employment, childcare, and other changes in their social lives. This relative stability contrasts with Northern Catalonia, where French has largely replaced Catalan and other regional minority languages (Trefault, 2016). Trefault argues that diglossia more accurately characterizes this context of advanced language shift. By contrast, Cetrà (2019) contends that traditional diglossia does not adequately describe Catalonia in Spain, which he characterizes as a rare case of relatively stable bilingualism. Keating (2001) attributes this stability in part to the decision of post-Franco Catalan political elites to reject an exclusively ethnic conception of the nation, allowing for the gradual development of a more inclusive basis for Catalan identity.

Comellas (2016, p. 155) notes that in twenty-first-century Catalonia, "immigration, much more than language shift, has been the leading cause behind the drop in the percentage of the population whose first language is Catalan." Ramallo (2018) therefore emphasizes the need to look beyond Catalan–Spanish bilingualism and language conflict to account for the broader sociolinguistic complexity of contemporary Catalonia.

In the 1970s and 1980s, it became common for Catalan speakers to accommodate Spanish-speaking migrants and their descendants by switching to Spanish, rather than sustaining bilingual conversations in which each interlocutor continued speaking a different language. Because of the linguistic restrictions imposed during the Franco regime, Catalan-speaking residents were generally bilingual in Spanish, whereas many Spanish-speaking residents did not know Catalan. This asymmetry contributed to a widespread, internalized norm whereby Catalan speakers defaulted to Spanish with unfamiliar interlocutors, a pattern known in the Catalan sociolinguistic literature as linguistic convergence (Pujolar et al., 2010). Frekko (2011) likewise notes that early linguistic-anthropological research in Catalonia identified accommodation to Spanish as the traditional norm for language choice in conversation.

This pattern aligns closely with Kasbarian's (1997, p. 188) account of asymmetrical bilingualism, according to which "*les locuteurs de la langue minorée se conformant pratiquement*

aux normes d'usage et d'interaction produites par leurs interlocuteurs" [speakers of a minoritized language conform in practice to the norms of usage and interaction produced by their interlocutors]. In the Catalan–Spanish context, the convergence norm has historically positioned Catalan speakers as those expected to accommodate to Spanish speakers. Its persistence in contemporary Catalonia continues to limit many immigrants' opportunities to use Catalan in everyday interactions. At the same time, Catalan's minoritized status relative to Spanish does not mean that it occupies the same position relative to all other languages in Catalonia. In relation to many immigrant languages, including Arabic, Urdu, Amazigh, and Romanian, Catalan holds greater institutional status as a language of schooling and administration.

Vila i Moreno et al. (2023) argue that the convergence norm often entails racialized assumptions whereby interlocutors perceived as foreigners are presumed to have limited proficiency in Catalan. Trenchs-Parera and Newman (2015) report that immigrants frequently express surprise at this norm and feel that it impedes their progress in acquiring Catalan proficiency. The practice may also communicate that Catalan is unnecessary for everyday interaction, since many local residents will readily switch to Spanish. In these ways, the convergence norm and the processes of othering associated with it may create ongoing challenges for the acquisition and use of Catalan within multilingual Catalonia.

2.1.2 Linguistic Cosmopolitanism and Minoritized-Language Vitality

While language-conflict models highlight the risks that unequal multilingualism may pose for minoritized languages, other scholars emphasize that multilingual coexistence can also support minoritized-language vitality. Sedivy (2021) argues that linguistic diversity does not necessarily produce conflict when speakers interact meaningfully across linguistic differences. Similarly, Cenoz and Gorter (2017) contend that the isolation that helped some minoritized languages survive in the past is neither realistic nor desirable in a globalized world. At the same time, they acknowledge that language contact does not have equivalent consequences for languages with different levels of power. Dominant languages can incorporate features from minoritized languages without threatening their vitality, whereas extensive influence from dominant languages may pose greater risks for minoritized ones. This perspective is useful in Catalonia because it recognizes the potential benefits of multilingual coexistence without overlooking the asymmetrical relationship between Catalan and Spanish. Language contact in Catalonia is not limited to languages commonly spoken in face-to-face interaction. As McLaughlin (2018) notes, contact with English often occurs indirectly through media, music, popular culture, and other globalized institutions.

These perceived risks can encourage linguistic purism among defenders of minoritized languages. In contexts shaped by assimilation, linguistic insecurity may lead speakers to regard forms associated with dominant languages as contaminating or illegitimate (Baioud & Khuanuud, 2022; Piller, 2015). Yet purist expectations may themselves discourage language use by making speakers fear criticism when their speech incorporates features associated with other languages (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017). As Woolard (1998a, p. 17) observes, movements to protect minoritized languages may therefore reproduce some of the same notions of linguistic purity historically used to marginalize them. Such expectations can be especially disempowering for younger speakers (Osterkorn & Vetter, 2015). Cenoz and Gorter (2017) consequently advocate supporting minoritized-language development through multilingual coexistence and more flexible expectations about legitimate language use.

In Catalonia, a certain level of acceptance of multilingualism was observed as early as the 1960s in Spanish migrants' positive evaluations of Catalan (Badia i Margarit, 1969). Newman et al. (2008) have found that openness to bilingual behavior and positive evaluations of both Catalan and Spanish have contributed to an optimistic prognosis for long-term Catalan-Spanish bilingualism. They use the term "linguistic cosmopolitanism" to describe this modern state of language attitudes in Catalonia, in which getting along and respect are widespread values. They report: "Active bilingualism is then perceived as a tool for social harmony because it shows a willingness to respect a group associated with another language" (p. 328). Because of this mutual respect, they believe knowledge of Catalan and a willingness to use it will likely remain valued even though Spanish will likely continue to dominate informal usage in L1-Spanish communities.

Linguistic cosmopolitanism helps explain why Catalonia does not conform to deterministic versions of the language-conflict model. Despite enduring asymmetries between Catalan and Spanish, Catalan has maintained substantial institutional and social vitality, while multilingual competence and active bilingualism have often been framed as resources for coexistence. Newman et al. (2008) associate this orientation with the legacy of linguistic normalization and the development of a more inclusive basis for Catalan identity.

Catalan-Spanish bilingualism, then, serves as a tool for cosmopolitan identity construction (Newman et al., 2020; Frekko, 2009; Woolard & Frekko, 2013). Catalan continues to provide a brand of distinctiveness and authenticity as an emblem of Catalan identity (Woolard, 2016), while Spanish provides access to global networks. Recent scholarship therefore suggests that the dismantling of rigid, essentialist identity profiles has aided Catalan vitality, though some researchers have highlighted the repoliticization of language in Catalonia as a threat to these harmonious processes (Juarez Miro, 2020; Oller et al., 2021).

Multilingual competence also provides additional linguistic resources which speakers can leverage to express different identities. This flexibility is key, for as Sedivy (2021, p. 210) suggests, fostering such forms of dual identity may offer a path toward preserving linguistic diversity without making language "a symbol in a tug of war of exclusive loyalties." In this sense, linguistic vitality is aided if newcomers feel they can embrace a Catalan identity, even if it is not their exclusive identity. Native speakers are motivated to preserve their languages because of language's link to identity, and learners are motivated to learn smaller languages because of a newfound sense of identity and belonging that only becomes compelling enough if that language permits a way of being that no other language allows (Sedivy, 2021).

2.1.3 Multilingual Practices and Language Choice

Scholarship on multilingualism has examined code-switching, borrowing, calquing, and other contact-related phenomena. These phenomena are relevant to vernacular signage because many inscriptions in this dissertation incorporate forms conventionally associated with different languages. In brief and decontextualized signs, however, it is often difficult to determine whether a particular form is best classified as a code-switch, borrowing, or calque. I therefore use *multilingual* as a broad label for inscriptions containing lexical or grammatical forms associated with more than one language, focusing less on assigning every instance to a specific contact category.

It is also not always clear whether a statement or inscription should be classified as multilingual at all. Speakers may differ in whether they perceive a form as belonging to another language or as having become integrated into the language of the longer inscription in which it

appears. Budzhak-Jones and Poplack (1997), for example, found that Ukrainian speakers treated certain English-origin nouns as integrated into Ukrainian discourse even before those forms were widely established throughout the broader speech community. A similar issue arises in Section 5.5, where participants describe some English-origin borrowings and formulaic expressions as having become integrated into Spanish or Catalan through everyday use while remaining recognizable as English in origin.

To apply the multilingual category consistently in this investigation, when part of an inscription could plausibly be assigned to more than one language, or when its status as multilingual was uncertain, I consulted the dictionaries of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans (IEC, n.d.) and the Real Academia Española (RAE, n.d.). One example is "Stop *pobresa*" [Stop poverty] (see Figure 41). Although *stop* appears on traffic signs in Spain, it is not included in the IEC dictionary, while the RAE includes it but labels it *voz inglesa* [English term], thereby preserving its explicit association with English even as it documents the form's established use in Spanish. I therefore coded "stop" as English and the inscription as multilingual because it combines that form with the Catalan noun *pobresa*. I recognize that speakers may classify such forms differently and that dictionary classifications do not eliminate all ambiguity. Nevertheless, consulting these reference works provided a transparent and consistent basis for coding uncertain cases. Section 3.1.3 outlines the full coding procedure.

Although practices that combine forms associated with different languages are often scrutinized, scholars have challenged the assumption that they reflect laziness or limited linguistic proficiency (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; Gardner-Chloros, 2009). Poplack (1979, p. 72), for example, characterizes code-switching as "a verbal skill requiring a large degree of competence in more than one language rather than a defect arising from insufficient knowledge of one or the other." Multilingual choices may instead expand the expressive possibilities available to speakers and writers, including for rhetorical and aesthetic purposes (Sedivy, 2021).

Functionally, then, multilinguals often switch languages to communicate something beyond the literal meaning of their words (Gardner-Chloros, 2009), an aim that monolinguals often achieve by switching between dialects, registers, and levels of formality (Bell, 1984). Weinreich (1953/1968) describes how multilinguals may employ lexical borrowings from a language endowed with prestige to display the social status symbolized by knowledge of that language. Haspelmath (2009) echoes this idea, claiming that speakers use a word from another language even if they have a perfectly good word for the same concept in their own language because they want to be associated with the prestige of the donor language. He explains, "The way we talk (or write) is not only determined by the ideas we want to get across, but also by the impression we want to convey on others, and by the kind of social identity that we want to be associated with" (p. 48). Grosjean (1982) similarly notes that multilingual practices may be motivated by positive attitudes toward another language or by the prestige associated with its speakers. On the contrary, lexical borrowing may be utilized in slangy speech precisely because of unfavorable associations connected to the source language, or for comic effect.

In synthesizing interpretations across studies on the prevalence of English-derived forms in French sports discourse (often labeled *anglicismes* in French), McLaughlin (2018) points to both the technical nature and the connotative values of these terms as motivations for their use. She also notes the role of calques in identity construction for bilingual speakers. On the topic of English-derived forms, Pavlenko (2005) discusses how many English words are adopted worldwide because of the culture-specific concepts and values they carry. From a more structural perspective, Weinreich (1953/1968) suggested that borrowing can also be motivated by lexical

need, particularly if speakers feel another language offers more precise or nuanced ways of expressing related concepts than their L1. Grosjean (1982) points out that even word length can influence borrowing. Specifically, Higa (1979) explains that the shorter of a native and a foreign synonym tends to be kept in Japanese. Taken together, these studies show that multilingual practices can be motivated by a range of overlapping factors, including technical specificity, connotative value, identity construction, lexical need, concision, and what Backus and Dorleijn (2009) describe as a conscious or subconscious urge to say something in the way it is said in another language.

Multilingual speakers may be especially attuned to differences in meaning and cultural association across languages. Lowie (1945, p. 257) observed that "[the bilingual person] has insights not granted in quite so vivid a manner to others. He cannot help constantly comparing modes of expression; and what others recognize as an abstract principle is to him an ever-recurring vital experience—the incommensurability of different languages." Because forms associated with different languages may not carry equivalent affective force, cultural associations, or social meanings, multilingual choices cannot always be explained solely by communicative need. They may also serve indexical and ideological functions.

These motivations are shaped in part by how speakers and writers orient themselves to actual or imagined interlocutors. Bell's (1984) theory of audience design argues that linguistic choices are fundamentally informed by the identities and expectations of addressees. While I do not assume that topic and setting matter primarily because they index particular audiences, Bell's framework is useful for understanding language choice as oriented toward imagined addressees.

Although vernacular signage differs from interactional communication in that it is often produced without the expectation of an immediate response, LL research has emphasized that sign creation is nonetheless a socially communicative act (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010). As stated by Matras and Gaiser (2020, p. 121), "the addressee dimension, in the sense of the intended effect of the message on the addressee, is essential to the study of LL just as it is to the analysis of speech events." Given that audience design helps shape sign creators' language choices in public texts, those choices depend on shared understandings of what particular languages and linguistic forms signify. Language ideologies help create these shared understandings, making them essential to interpreting language choice in the linguistic landscape.

2.2 Language Ideologies

In her introduction to the volume she co-edited on language ideologies, Woolard (1998a) notes there is no strict consensus on a definition of the term, largely because different disciplines foreground distinct aspects of how people understand language. Anthropological definitions emphasize the common-sense cultural beliefs that speakers hold about language. Rumsey (1990) describes them as "shared bodies of commonsense notions about the nature of language in the world," while Heath (1989) frames them as the "self-evident ideas and objectives a group holds concerning the roles of language in social experience." Others underscore the political and moral dimensions of beliefs about language. Irvine (1989) describes language ideologies as "the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests," and more recent work (e.g., Kroskrity, 2010; Cavanaugh, 2020) emphasizes how they are entangled with power, authority, and socioeconomic structures that relate to individual and group interests.

A unifying thread that runs through this body of work is that language ideologies bridge linguistic and social theory. They illuminate how cultural beliefs about language shape and are shaped by patterns of language use, institutions of power, identities, and political histories (Woolard, 1998a). In line with this orientation, I adopt Piller's (2015, p. 4) definition of language ideologies as "beliefs, feelings, and conceptions about language that are socially shared and relate language and society." This definition is especially useful for the present dissertation because its emphasis on beliefs, feelings, and conceptions aligns closely with the interview-based nature of the analysis. Participants' explanations of why particular languages feel more natural or appropriate for certain topics often reveal assumptions about language and social life. Because the analysis seeks to identify recurring patterns across the interview pool, Piller's emphasis on socially shared understandings is also relevant. Some of these shared assumptions are explicitly tied to morality, politics, power, and class, while others relate more to everyday evaluations of comfort, expressiveness, emotional force, and linguistic suitability. Piller's broader definition therefore provides a flexible framework for analyzing the range of ideologies that emerge in participants' metalinguistic commentary.

Following Silverstein (1979), I assume a dialectical relationship whereby language ideologies and patterns of language choice mutually influence and reinforce one another. This view assigns language ideologies an active role in shaping linguistic practices and treats speakers as agents of linguistic and ideological change. It marked a departure from approaches in linguistics and anthropology that often treated speakers' explicit reflections on language as secondary or unreliable evidence (Woolard, 1998a). Franz Boas, a foundational figure in anthropology, regarded speakers' evaluations of speech forms as irrelevant to the explanation of linguistic structure, referring to their reflections on language use as "the misleading and disturbing factors of secondary explanations . . . so clearly affected by . . . faulty reasoning" (Boas, 1911, pp. 69–71). In this view, non-linguist speakers could not reliably interpret linguistic facts, and their linguistic consciousness offered little analytic value (Kroskrity, 2010).

Silverstein's (1979) claim that language ideology can actively shape linguistic structure therefore marked an important shift, bringing language ideologies from the margins toward the center of linguistic analysis. In his view, speakers' awareness of language and their culturally mediated beliefs about its structure and use are critical components of the "linguistic fact," or the full body of data necessary for understanding language scientifically (Silverstein, 1985). From this perspective, linguistic structure and language ideology mutually influence and reinforce one another, and neither can be understood as wholly independent of the other (Rumsey, 1990).

Crucially, linguistic anthropologists highlight the fact that language ideologies are not monolithic (Piller, 2015). Given the variability and contradictions that exist within cultures and individuals, the notion of cultural uniformity is problematic. Rather than reflecting a single shared culture, ideology is rooted in the experience of a particular social position (Woolard, 1998a). There is a plurality of meaningful social divisions in any society, and the ways in which social categories intersect and diverge mean that ideologies vary across individuals and social positions (Agha, 2003). Moreover, not all members of a given social group may demonstrate equal levels of awareness of those ideologies. Language ideologies are therefore characterized by their multiplicity, which scholars increasingly link to power relations among groups with different interests (Piller, 2015). As Kroskrity (2010, p. 195) explains, "A member's notions of what is 'true', 'morally good', or 'aesthetically pleasing' about language and discourse are grounded in social experience and often demonstrably tied to political-economic interests." In this sense,

language ideologies are mediated by speakers' cultural experiences and the socioeconomic and political structures that surround them (Cavanaugh, 2020).

Despite the fractured and contested nature of language ideologies, Kroskrity (1998) argues that some become dominant insofar as they are institutionalized through language policy, school curricula, style guides, and media norms. In this process, socially authoritative bodies shape and reproduce these ideologies, resulting in them becoming widely shared throughout a community. Because of this, Piller (2015, p. 7) cautions that "Language ideologies are deployed in the interests of a society's dominant group and serve to justify social inequality." As a salient example, she notes how in the United States, the standard language ideology that views Mainstream U.S. English as aesthetically, morally, and intellectually superior to other ways of speaking marginalizes native speakers of African American Language, Southern English, and Spanish.

Accordingly, language ideologies matter because they connect seemingly ordinary comments and beliefs about language to broader social consequences. As Linares (2020, pp. 22–23) explains, "Language ideologies are not really about language at all but instead signal whom we are trying to . . . characterize; comments about language serve as a proxy for underlying representations of perceived cultural differences, race, and social class." In this sense, language ideologies connect evaluations of language to broader judgments about people and social groups. They are politically, morally, and aesthetically loaded evaluations of speech practices that shape identities, hierarchies of cultural value, and the direction of linguistic and social change (Gal, 2023; Woolard, 1998a). For this reason, language ideology research can help scholars engage audiences outside academia in conversations about social justice and access to power (Briggs, 1993; Cavanaugh, 2020; Piller, 2015), while also contributing to scholarship and advocacy surrounding multilingual sustainability and the vitality of minoritized languages (Gal, 2023). The next section describes various processes through which linguistic forms become linked to social meanings.

2.2.1 Linking Language to Social Meaning

This section examines semiotic processes through which linguistic forms become linked to social meanings. These processes help explain how language ideologies are formed and naturalized, as speakers come to associate particular languages or features with social identities and domains of use. I begin with indexicality. Silverstein (1979, 1985) argued that all language use is indexical, meaning that language does not only refer to things, but also points to social meanings. This position marked a shift from traditions that prioritized referential meaning over the social and connotational significance of linguistic forms.

Drawing on Peirce's (1932) notion of indexicality, Silverstein conceptualizes linguistic features as signs that point to social categories. His theory of indexical order (1996) outlines how linguistic features become socially meaningful: in first-order indexicality, features are correlated with groups of speakers (e.g., Catalan may be statistically associated with older or more rural speakers, while Spanish may be associated with urban residents or some immigrant-origin populations). In second-order indexicality, people begin to interpret patterns of language use as socially meaningful. For example, if Catalan is often associated with rural speakers, some listeners may come to hear Catalan as sounding more "authentically Catalan." Similarly, if Spanish is associated with Barcelona or immigration, some listeners may come to hear Spanish as signaling those identities, even when those associations are not always accurate. When linguistic forms become linked with a certain kind of people, these social associations may come to be treated as

if they were natural qualities of the languages themselves, rather than socially learned interpretations (Bourdieu, 1991; Woolard, 1998a).

Indexicality is relevant to language ideology because the social meanings attached to linguistic forms depend on shared assumptions about which kinds of speech belong to which kinds of people and domains. For this reason, Blommaert and Rampton (2011) argue that indexical associations provide a useful way to examine language ideologies empirically. They identify code switches as compelling evidence for the importance of studying signs' indexical and connotational significance, beyond just their referential meaning. They explain,

> When someone switches in speaking and/or writing into a different style or register, it is essential to consider more than the literal meaning of what they are saying. The style, register or code they have moved into is itself likely to carry associations that are somehow relevant to the specific activities and social relations in play. (p. 5)

Switching languages can serve to connect with or persuade participants in the interaction who value the qualities indexed by that language (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 1982).

These indexical associations are central to identity formation. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) link indexicality to identity, highlighting the fact that identity is not a fixed trait living inside people but rather something dynamic that is actively and constantly created. People use signs such as language to point to who they are and how they want to be seen. Linguistic features can index various personal traits and signal membership in social groups. These indexical links and the way people interpret language are shaped by locally shared ideologies about the kinds of speech that belong to different types of people. Identity thus reflects both the characteristics speakers claim for themselves and those assigned to them by others. Moreover, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) emphasize that identity is always relational, meaning it is difficult to understand any social identity in isolation. Rather, each group is defined in relation to various "others." In this sense, identity work is ideological because it depends on shared beliefs about the social meanings of linguistic forms.

Another process, enregisterment, helps explain how indexical links between language and identity become socially shared and recognizable, thereby contributing to language ideologies. Agha (2003) theorizes enregisterment as the process through which repeated interactions solidify linguistic features into recognizable social registers. A key component of this process is metalinguistic discourse, the explicit "talk about talk" found in newspapers, media, classrooms, and everyday conversation, where speech varieties are overtly mocked, praised, or contrasted. Through metalinguistic discourse and repeated interactional patterns, evaluative comments and behaviors can accumulate until particular linguistic features become associated with social categories and personal qualities. Through this cumulative process, linguistic features and languages themselves can become typified to the point that they index social qualities such as class, education, geographic location, or personality. In this way, enregisterment stabilizes indexical associations that connect how people talk to who they are understood to be, making those associations available as commonsense beliefs about language and social identity.

In addition to enregisterment, Irvine and Gal's (2000) semiotic processes of iconization, fractal recursivity, and erasure help explain how indexical links between language and social identity become naturalized within language ideologies. Iconization refers to how linguistic features come to be viewed not just as statistical correlates of a social group but also as transparent depictions of that group's distinctive traits. Even though these traits have nothing to do with the

structure of language, social stereotypes get mapped onto language as if they were inherent properties of it. For example, Massaguer Comes et al. (2021) note the perception among some Catalan Youtubers that Catalan is more "refined" than Spanish. Because Spanish may be associated with immigrants who are stereotyped as more working-class (Pujolar, 2007), some speakers may come to treat Catalan's phonetic or stylistic features as a natural expression of refinement and Spanish's features as a natural expression of lower socioeconomic status.

Recursivity refers to the extension of an ideological opposition from one level of social life onto another. In the Catalan case, a broad opposition between Catalan-speaking "locals" and Spanish-speaking "immigrants" may be reproduced at smaller scales, such as Catalan versus Spanish neighborhoods within a town, peer groups within a school, or members within a friend group. Recursivity matters because it allows a single ideological contrast to appear repeatedly across different social contexts, making the association between Catalan and local belonging, or Spanish and outsider status, seem more coherent and pervasive than it actually is.

Finally, erasure refers to the process through which facts that do not fit prevailing ideologies are ignored or minimized. In this dissertation, erasure is relevant to generalized assumptions that immigrants have lower Catalan proficiency or that racialized speakers are unlikely to be Catalan-speaking. Such assumptions obscure the experiences of immigrants who do learn and use Catalan, as well as those of locally raised Catalans who may be assumed to be immigrants because of their physical appearance.

Iconization, fractal recursivity, and erasure help explain how indexical links between language and social groups are formed and stabilized. In outlining how sociolinguists' ideas of indexicality have evolved, however, Eckert (2012) emphasizes that indexical meanings are not fixed. Studies from what is known as the first wave of sociolinguistics tended to treat linguistic features as first-order indexes by examining empirical correlations between those features and macrosocial categories such as class and gender. Speakers' language practices were viewed as largely reflecting the social categories into which they were placed. Second-wave ethnographic work showed that linguistic features are not simply reflections of speakers' identities. Rather, speakers use language to actively construct identities. Eckert (2008) formalized the third-wave perspective through her theory of the indexical field, in which linguistic features index a cluster of ideologically linked meanings rather than a single social group. Speakers are active agents whose language ideologies help shape which meanings get activated in specific contexts. For instance, suburban "burnouts" using urban vowels do not claim to be from the city; rather, their use of these vowels indexes toughness and autonomy (Eckert, 1989). Their reinterpretations change the social meaning of those vowel sounds. The next section builds on this discussion by examining how these ideological associations make language a powerful symbol of identity, belonging, and social group membership, particularly in Catalonia's minoritized-language context.

2.2.2 Language, Nationhood, and Social Belonging

Far from being a mere instrument of communication, language serves as a symbol of social identity and a badge of group membership (Grosjean, 1982). This idea is especially relevant in Catalonia, where the Catalan language has long been treated as a central symbol of national and cultural identity (Lladonosa, 2013; Massaguer Comes, 2024). A substantial body of research has shown that language choice in Catalonia is closely tied to ethnocultural identity, using methods such as questionnaires (Bernaus et al., 2007), ethnography (Pujolar, 2001; Woolard, 1997), interviews and focus groups (Trenchs-Parera & Newman, 2009; Woolard, 2011), guise-based perception

experiments (Davidson, 2019; Newman et al., 2008; Woolard, 1984), and the Implicit Association Test (Ianos et al., 2023).

Beyond merely signalling group membership, Kroskrity (2010) argues that language can naturalize and reinforce boundaries between social groups. Accordingly, he emphasizes that ideologies about language play a key role in social life because they produce and alter various kinds of social identities. In this way, ideologies frame language "as an enactment of a collective order" (Gal & Woolard, 1995, p. 130).

One globally hegemonic ideology is the "one nation, one language" ideology, which links language and national identity, although Woolard (1998a) makes clear that the equation of language and nation is an ideological construct rather than a natural fact. In France, this association developed gradually. Royal ordinances from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries increasingly privileged French over other regional vernaculars in legal and administrative domains, while the establishment of the French Academy in the seventeenth century linked the standardization and elaboration of French to the future of French society and the nation. During the French Revolution, the political link between linguistic and national unity tightened considerably as explicit efforts were made to establish French as the language of the Republic (Ayres-Bennett, 2024, pp. 166–167).

Aarsleff (1982) identifies Condillac as an important eighteenth-century philosopher of the French Enlightenment who theorized the relationship between language and nation, while another influential formulation is associated with late-eighteenth-century German Romanticism and Johann Gottfried Herder's characterization of language as the genius of a people (Woolard, 1998a). In *La nacionalitat catalana* [Catalan Nationality] (1906), Enric Prat de la Riba quotes Herder to support his argument that Catalonia is a natural nation, in contrast to the artificial Spanish state, due in large part to the Catalan language, which he places at the heart of the nation's spirit. Referencing the Catalan case, Cetrà (2019) explains that this organicist view treats language not simply as one marker of nationhood, but as the very soul of the nation and a key element of identity formation.

Anderson's (1983) notion of *imagined communities* explains how these essentialist ideas about language and peoplehood spread. In his view, print capitalism and standardized languages allowed for widespread exchange and communication below the elite, while colonial administrations organized diverse populations into larger political communities through shared languages and institutions. As a result, millions of speakers came to experience themselves as members of a single, linguistically defined nation. Although contemporary mobility and multilingualism complicate the "one nation, one language" ideology (Blommaert, 2010), it remains a powerful framework through which communities understand linguistic and social differences.

Work on language ideologies in Catalonia has long noted a connection between the Catalan language and local authenticity (Woolard, 2008). In a more extended historical analysis of the post-Franco period, Woolard (2016) explains how Catalan language planners during the transition to democracy had to navigate competing ideologies of authenticity and anonymity that positioned Catalan as an authentic, local language belonging to those who spoke it as a first language, and Spanish as an anonymous, public language available to all. She argues that Catalan linguistic authority has since moved to escape from the authenticity versus anonymity binary toward forms of cosmopolitanism, as discussed in Section 2.1.2.

These ideological links between language and belonging have been continually renegotiated in relation to immigration and language policy (Trenchs-Parera & Newman, 2015).

As discussed in Section 2.1.1, speakers racialized as non-Catalan may be addressed in Spanish regardless of their actual Catalan competence, showing how perceptions of linguistic ability can be shaped by social ideologies about origin and belonging (Vila i Moreno et al., 2023).

Catalonia offers a salient case of how ideologies connecting language and peoplehood become intensified in multilingual communities marked by struggles over language. According to Woolard (1998a, p. 17), the nationalist ideology of language and identity "underpins ethnic struggles to such an extent that lack of a distinct language can cast doubt on the legitimacy of a group's claim to nationhood." In minoritized-language contexts, language is viewed ideologically as the anchor of collective identity, and groups without this recognizable linguistic marker may feel they lack the symbolic means to assert themselves as a distinct people.

Accordingly, ideologies of collective belonging in these contexts may also intersect with concerns about language maintenance in such a way that favors linguistic purity and standardness. Pujolar (2001) describes how Spanish-dominant speakers in Catalonia are sometimes held to the standard of normative Catalan and scorned when they make "mistakes" or use *barbarismes*, a term that refers to Spanish-derived words or forms used when speaking Catalan. He explains that these prescriptive judgments of "incorrect" Catalan use often discourage speakers from wanting to use it. In later work, Trenchs-Parera and Newman (2015) note that despite evolutions in Catalan language policy that appeal to universal cosmopolitanism instead of traditional ethnonationalism, there are still some vestiges of ethnonationalism and linguistic purism with reference to Spanish contact, including the discouragement of *barbarismes*. These judgments are relevant to belonging because they can position some speakers as insufficiently legitimate users of Catalan, even when they make efforts to adopt the language.

2.2.3 Language Attitudes as an Access Point to Ideology

One way to observe language ideologies is by studying language attitudes. Language attitudes are understood here as socially learned evaluations of ways of speaking and their speakers (Garrett, 2010). They are observed in judgments, preferences, and metalinguistic commentary. While attitudes represent evaluative judgments about languages, varieties, or speakers, ideologies are the larger set of assumptions that make those evaluations seem reasonable or commonsensical (Carruthers et al., 2024). Accordingly, attitudes can give us insight into ideologies, because the judgments people make about ways of speaking often reflect broader social beliefs about language, identity, and difference. For example, if speakers describe one language as more "refined," "authentic," "beautiful," or "appropriate" for a given topic, those evaluations can reveal underlying assumptions about the people and domains they associate with that language. In this dissertation, evaluative comments expressed in interviews served as entry points for follow-up questions about the social experiences, associations, and assumptions shaping participants' perceptions of language choice.

Woolard (1998a) explains that the extensive body of scholarship on language attitudes in multilingual communities originated in a social psychological framework. In one of the first systematic methods for measuring language attitudes, Lambert et al.'s (1960) matched-guise experiment demonstrated that listeners evaluated speakers differently across a range of social traits when hearing them in different languages, unaware that multiple recordings had been produced by the same speakers. This finding illustrates an important implication described by Grosjean (1982), namely that attitudes toward a language or language variety become confounded with attitudes toward its speakers. Long before contemporary scholarship on language ideologies emerged,

Haugen (1956) observed that attitudes toward language are directed at speakers more than at linguistic structures themselves. For Haugen, this meant that such attitudes function as inter-group judgments and stereotypes with potentially profound psychological effects on speakers and their language use.

Research on language attitudes has also documented a perception of "multiple selves" that often arises from the systematic linking of a language with particular traits. Speakers may use French to seem romantic, Catalan to sound refined, and Spanish to appear tough, for example. This idea relates to a traditional Czech proverb, often translated as "Learn a new language, get a new soul" (Sedivy, 2021, p. 127). Indeed, Pavlenko (2006) reports that when 1,039 participants were asked whether they feel that they become different people when they change languages, nearly two thirds of them replied that they do. Furthermore, the perception of different selves was shared across early, late, and immigrant bilinguals, showing it to be "a more general part of bi- and multilingual experience" (p. 27). Qualitative data from Dewaele (2010a) similarly foreground participants' explanations that they feel like another person in a non-native language, and that they use that language to express strong emotions for precisely that reason.

Reflecting on bilinguals' claims that they have separate, language-specific personalities, Sedivy (2021, p. 119) suggests that many speakers experience language as "a portal into alternate ways of being," in the sense that their languages reflect distinct systems of values, behaviors, and emotions. She raises the possibility that these differences may not stem from linguistic structure itself, but from speakers' accumulated experiences within distinct language communities:

> Is there something inherent about the languages themselves that molds their speakers, nudging them into different worldviews? Or is the language simply a container for all of the teachings and attitudes that have been conveyed by those speaking it? Or perhaps the connection between languages and ways of being is somewhat of an illusion—maybe people behave differently in their languages simply because their two language communities happen to have different customs and social norms? In that case, the link between language and the sense of self could be more or less accidental. (pp. 119-120)

In line with Sedivy (2021), I argue that our sense of self in different languages depends on our relationship to those languages, rather than on anything that resides in the languages themselves. Recent research on the aesthetic perception of speech sounds further shows that judgments about whether languages sound beautiful, elegant, romantic, or intelligent are deeply shaped by sociocultural stereotypes, rather than arising from linguistic properties alone (Anikin et al., 2023; Reiterer et al., 2020).

These socially learned associations extend beyond judgments about languages and their speakers to the distinct affective roles multilinguals assign to their languages. Scholars have questioned, for example, how the emotional weight of the L1 compares to that of languages learned later in life. Dewaele (2008), for example, found that the perceived emotional weight of the phrase "I love you" was felt to be strongest in multilinguals' L1. By the same token, the strong emotional charge of the L1 may cause speakers to code switch to another language when they want to distance themselves from something that would feel too disturbing to express in the L1 (Dewaele, 2004). Likewise, codeswitching may temper emotional responses during anxiety-provoking discussions and allow speakers "to slide into a calmer, more rational skin" (Sedivy, 2021, p. 144).

Pavlenko (2012) offers the theory that taboo stimuli in the L1 produce stronger emotional reactions than stimuli in the L2 among late bilinguals because affective processing in the L1 is

more automatic than in the L2. Since greater interference effects are typically experienced in non-native languages, emotional stimuli in these languages provoke less electrodermal reactivity. As a result, she suggests that languages learned later in life may be processed more semantically than affectively. Qualitative data from Pavlenko (2006, p. 18) further show that participants report feeling more "real" and "natural" in their L1 and more "fake" and "artificial" in later learned languages.

Notwithstanding this evidence, Pavlenko (2005) makes clear that to think of the L1 as the language of emotions oversimplifies the relationship among language, emotions, and identities. In early commentary on bilingualism and emotional involvement, Weinreich (1953/1968, p. 78) noted that although a speaker's emotional bond is typically strongest with the L1, "emotional involvements of later life . . . are apt to produce conflicting or superior bonds . . . not every bilingual can unequivocally rank one of his languages as dominant on the grounds of emotional attachment."

In a similar vein, although Altarriba and Canary (2004) observed reduced affective priming effects among bilinguals who learned English as an L2 in school, they hypothesize this is because classroom learning often provides fewer emotionally rich contexts for language socialization, not necessarily because English was not the participants' L1. Taboo and swearwords, which appear to provoke the strongest physiological reactions, are typically not incorporated into language learning in school settings (Pavlenko, 2005). In the words of Sedivy (2021, p. 143), "the soul of a language . . . has to be earned by the life that accompanies it. It is not enough to learn the words and grammar."

Related to these insights, Harris et al. (2006) argue that language emotionality is linked to the emotional contexts in which a language was acquired and used and may be largely independent of age of acquisition. Multilinguals may assign their languages distinct affective roles by virtue of the fact that one is learned through interaction with caretakers or teachers, and another through interaction with peers. The most suitable language for emotional expression therefore varies, and scholars should be cautious not to presume the emotional salience of the L1. As Pavlenko (2005, p. 236) explains:

> Our favorite language is not always the one whose swearwords make us jump highest, and the language that affects us most is not always the one in which we choose to express our emotions. Similarly, different languages may index 'us' at different points in time or even in different segments of the same conversation.

In other words, language attitudes are entangled with the lives multilinguals have lived in each of their languages. Even in contexts like Catalonia, where two or more languages are often learned from infancy or early childhood, speakers can be socialized into different ways of using those languages to relate to others and index traits and emotions. These associations emerge from the social contexts and norms of emotional expression speakers have experienced in each language: who they have observed expressing anger, elegance, or charm, and in what contexts. Language is an integral part of all emotionally meaningful aspects of life, from communication in our interpersonal relationships to the beauty and horror that we witness in media and other cultural forms. As emotional memories accumulate, the languages associated with them sediment into distinct *affective repertoires*, a term Pavlenko (2005) uses to describe the set of emotional associations tied to a language.

These ideas help make sense of existing research on language attitudes in Catalonia, which provides an important backdrop for the analyses that follow in this dissertation. Studies have

repeatedly shown perceived limitations of Catalan in some informal and transgressive registers. As discussed in Section 1.3, despite widespread competence and strong institutional support, Catalan has been associated with school, authority, and formality, while Spanish has been perceived as more suitable for humor, insult, sexuality, and rebellion (Frekko, 2009, 2011; Massaguer Comes et al., 2021; Newman et al., 2008; Pujolar, 2001; Woolard, 1989). Frekko (2011) shows that Catalan-identifying speakers use "speech modeling" on talk radio, understood here as the deliberate stylization of Spanish to perform social characters through a kind of othered voice, often to project common wisdom or humor. Through this process, they draw on Spanish as a resource to project certain personal qualities while simultaneously distancing themselves from it, thereby maintaining a monoglot Catalan social identity.

These patterns do not reflect inherent properties of the languages themselves, but rather the domains, speakers, and affective experiences through which they have been socialized. In this sense, the comparatively lower presence of Catalan relative to Spanish in certain informal and transgressive registers is best understood as an outcome of linguistic minoritization and its aftereffects, which have limited the contexts in which Catalan is publicly associated with these registers.

In Chapter 5, participants' evaluations of which languages sound more forceful, beautiful, vulgar, or appropriate for particular topics are therefore treated as evidence of broader ideological associations linking languages to speakers, registers, identities, and domains of use. The final section of the theoretical framework turns to the LL itself, bringing together the preceding discussions of multilingualism and language ideologies by examining public signage as a site of multilingual practice in which ideological meanings are expressed and contested.

2.3 The Linguistic Landscape

Linguistic landscapes, in the sense of written inscriptions used to communicate in social settings, date back to antiquity (Kallen, 2023). Various studies throughout the twentieth century examined language use on public signs using methodological and analytic processes that resemble contemporary LL investigations. Minton (1950), for example, considered how the use of foreign languages and lexical innovations indexed prestige and higher social class in advertising signage. He categorized such investigations under what he termed "sociological linguistics". Lowenthal (1977) employed the term "linguistic landscaping" in his study on the importance of conscious choice in geographical names. Rapoport (1977) also used "linguistic landscaping" in his investigation of immigrant influence on place naming.

The *linguistic landscape* as a defined scholarly field, however, only rose to prominence in the late 1990s. Many LL scholars point to a seminal paper by Landry and Bourhis (1997) as the work that solidified the LL as an important branch of sociolinguistic inquiry. In this work, the authors frame LL research as emergent from the field of language planning, analyzing official and commercial signage in multilingual regions of Canada. They combine this analysis with surveys and experiments to examine how the salience of different languages in public space shapes perceptions of group status and ethnolinguistic vitality. They maintain that the LL serves both informational and symbolic functions, indicating the relative power and status of an area's linguistic communities. Moreover, they claim that the presence or absence of languages in public signage can influence people's linguistic behavior. In this way, the LL can both signal and shape a community's multilingual practices.

2.3.1 Catalonia: A Rich Tradition of Linguistic Landscape Scholarship

In the same year that Landry and Bourhis (1997) published their seminal study, Solé i Camardons and Romaní Olivé (1997) published a paper on linguistic uses in commercial signage in Barcelona. Despite publishing in the same year and highlighting similar assertions regarding how the LL may serve as an indicator of "*la vigoria i l'ús social"* [the vitality and social use] of a language (p. 58), their paper has been cited fewer than 20 times as of the time of writing, while Landry and Bourhis (1997) has been cited several thousand times. In a keynote address at the *Primer Congreso Internacional sobre Paisaje Lingüístico*, Professor José Franco Rodríguez emphasized that a major contributor to this discrepancy in crediting foundational studies of the discipline is the fact that Solé i Camardons and Romaní Olivé published their paper in Catalan, while Landry and Bourhis published in English (J. Franco Rodríguez, personal communication, November 9, 2022). Seen in this light, the linguistic landscape of LL scholarship itself mirrors patterns documented in LL research, insofar as scholars' choices of publication language reproduce existing language hierarchies and their underlying language ideologies.

Comajoan-Colomé (2013) explains that Catalonia was an apt site for LL research at the time the field formally emerged because the Catalan government commissioned a series of studies to measure the effectiveness of the Linguistic Normalization Law of 1983 and the Language Policy Law of 1998. He notes that "*el estudio del uso de distintas lenguas en los rótulos comerciales goza de cierta tradición en Cataluña a causa de la estipulación legislativa de que los rótulos tienen que estar al menos en catalán*" [the study of the use of different languages in commercial signage has a well-established tradition in Catalonia because of the legislative stipulation that signs must at least include Catalan] (p. 67).

Comajoan-Colomé (2013) details many such studies that reported comparative descriptions and percentages of Spanish and Catalan signs to assess compliance with these regulations. Across these compliance-oriented LL studies, a consistent division emerged between identifying (principal) and informative (secondary) signage. Solé i Camardons and Romaní Olivé (1997) observed that identifying signage (e.g., business names, trademarks) favored Catalan, whereas informative signage (e.g., opening hours, prices, menus) favored Spanish. Leprêtre Alemany and Romaní Olivé (2000) and Cazo and Romaní Olivé (2004) found similar results, noting that the Language Policy Law of 1998 may have played a role in reinforcing the Catalan/Spanish divide between identifying and informative signage. In a longitudinal study, García and Llaberia (2009) corroborated these findings, further supporting the idea that legal regulation affects identifying signage more strongly than informative signage. Solé i Camardons (1998) further noted that Catalan was used more in advertising signage for certain types of businesses such as banks and radio stations, but Spanish was favored for food and drink, construction, and home goods stores.

Other studies point to the relationship between the presence of languages in the LL and communities' demolinguistic profiles. Fabá & Llaberia (2008) reveal large inter-city variation in the presence of Catalan in signage in 15 cities in Catalonia. In her survey of two highly multilingual areas with high immigrant concentrations, the Raval neighborhood of Barcelona and the city of Santa Coloma de Gramenet, Grosso (2008) showed that Spanish dominates storefronts, but immigrant languages are more visible in personal and informal notices and reflect the demographic composition of the areas (e.g., Urdu in the Raval, Mandarin Chinese in Santa Coloma de Gramenet). In their study of major streets in three neighborhoods with contrasting linguistic profiles in Barcelona, Comajoan-Colomé and Long (2012) similarly demonstrated that even within

the same city, language choice in signage reflects local linguistic ecosystems. They also noted insufficient compliance with legislation mandating that commercial signage include Catalan, suggesting that some business owners feel that Spanish and other languages spoken in each neighborhood are more necessary than Catalan for many aspects of daily operations. Bertrán (2005) pointed out that it is not just immigrants but also tourists who impact the LL of Barcelona.

Taken together, early LL work in Catalonia foregrounds the fact that legal regulation strongly affects identifying signage but affects informal and informative signage to a much lesser extent. Furthermore, even under uniform legislation, public signage is reflective of the diversity in multilingual practices that exists among communities with different demolinguistic profiles. For this reason, and extending beyond the Catalan context, Moriarty (2014, p. 457) states that "The LL provides important clues to the nature of multilingualism in the community and often provides a more accurate account of the lived sociolinguistic reality of a given community than official language policies do."

2.3.2 Linguistic Landscape Research in Other Minoritized-Language Contexts

These insights from Catalonia align with findings from LL research in other minoritized-language contexts. Shohamy (2006, p. 10) states that the presence (or absence) of a language "sends direct and indirect messages with regard to the centrality versus the marginality of certain languages in society." Low representation of a minoritized language in public signs can signal to its speakers that their language is not valued and has little status in their society. In turn, this may dampen their desire to transmit that language to future generations and to identify as a distinctive ethnolinguistic group (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). On the other hand, the profusion of a minoritized language in the signage of tourist areas may be off-putting to local speakers who see its inclusion as little more than a marketing gimmick, as in the case of Irish in Belfast's Gaeltacht Quarter (Carden, 2012). Salo (2012) similarly found that the use of endangered Sámi languages in the LL of rural villages in the North Calotte area of Scandinavia may be restricted to a symbolic function that markets authenticity instead of a communicative function.

Multi-site investigations have commonly been employed to compare the presence of minoritized languages in areas of differing demographics or language policies. For example, Cenoz and Gorter (2006) documented the use of the minoritized language (Basque or Frisian), the state language (Spanish or Dutch), and English as an international language in the LL of a central shopping street in Donostia (Spain) and Ljouwert (the Netherlands). They noted that in Donostia, Basque had a decent presence; indeed, the percentage of artifacts containing Basque was higher than the percentage of Basque speakers in the region. However, Basque did not serve an informational purpose, as most people could understand the signs' information in Spanish. Rather, it served as an affective symbol of Basque identity. Frisian, on the other hand, was only marginally present in signage. The authors interpret this pattern as reflecting the fact that minoritized languages in the Netherlands do not enjoy the same official language-policy protections as minoritized languages in Spain.

Blackwood and Tufi (2015) observed a similar contrast in a study on minoritized languages in the LL of Naples and Marseille. In Naples, the minoritized language (Neapolitan, known locally as a *dialect*) was present in ways that indexed its symbolic and expressive value, its commodification, and its institutional support. In Marseille, by contrast, Occitan, particularly its Provençal varieties, was largely absent and seemed to be mostly restricted to spoken discourse. The near absence of written Occitan alongside French in Marseille, compared with the greater

relative presence of Neapolitan alongside Italian in Naples, is consistent with the longer history of institutional monolingualism in France. Blackwood and Tufi further note that Occitan, particularly Provençal, has traditionally been sustained in rural areas of France rather than in urban sites such as Marseille, unlike Neapolitan in Naples. Turning to other minoritized languages in Italy, Coluzzi (2009) found that Milanese and Friulian generally lacked visibility in Milan and Udine, respectively, despite locals' claims to the contrary. Similar patterns have been documented across multilingual settings worldwide (see Shohamy & Gorter, 2009, for an early synthesis), suggesting that the LL is a key site of multilingual practice where language use reflects and reproduces broader ideological hierarchies shaped by policy and social context.

2.3.3 From Language Visibility to Ideological Meaning

Building on early LL studies that focused on the quantitative salience of languages in signs, subsequent research has demonstrated how LL analysis can illuminate language ideologies (Lanza & Woldemariam, 2009). This line of work emphasizes that choices about which languages appear and in which contexts and locations are socially meaningful and ideologically loaded. Jaworski and Thurlow (2010, p. 11) state, "The presence or absence of a language on public signage, in combination with the type (or genre) of signs, their contents and style, are indicative of public and private language ideologies." The way in which minoritized language signage in particular indexes language ideologies has become a major point of emphasis in the LL literature (Hornsby & Vigers, 2012). From this perspective, patterns of language visibility in public signage are understood as the outcome of ideological processes that privilege certain languages while marginalizing others.

One way in which LL scholars have attempted to access language ideologies has been by incorporating people's perceptions of public signage. For example, Aiestaran et al. (2010) show that passersby in Spain's Basque Country perceive the LL as overwhelmingly Spanish-dominant regardless of the actual distribution of languages, and that Basque-L1 speakers report seeing less Basque than Spanish-L1 speakers do. These findings underscore how perceptions of the LL are shaped by linguistic identity and ideologies related to the status of different languages in society.

Recent LL research in Catalonia has been particularly active in adopting qualitative approaches that foreground ideological meaning. As Lipovsky (2019) shows in her study comparing official signage in Girona (Catalonia, Spain) and Perpignan (Northern Catalonia, France), qualitative methods are valuable because they supplement quantitative measures of language visibility with insight into underlying ideologies. In particular, she found that despite the presence of Catalan in 100% of the signs in the Girona corpus, Spanish was often given more prominent positioning in multilingual signs at the post office and train station, indicating its status as the preferred code in those sites. In Perpignan, Catalan is similarly less salient in multilingual signage where the French text appears more prominently. Moreover, nearly a fifth of signs are monolingual in French.

Morlan and Byrne (2024) conducted a qualitative analysis of the semantic content of graffiti and other unauthorized signs in two demographically distinct Barcelona neighbourhoods. Morlan (2026) extended this approach to two demographically distinct Catalan cities, enabling a more fine-grained consideration of how language choice in the LL varies by topic and indexes individual and collective identities.

In the period following the 2017 independence referendum, political graffiti has become a prominent focus in LL research in Catalonia. Byrne and Marcet (2024) show that graffiti in Girona, a city closely associated with the pro-independence movement, functions as a site for promoting

resistance, reclaiming public space, and reconstructing political identity amid ongoing independence debates. Sabaté-Dalmau (2025) similarly demonstrates that language choice in highway graffiti outside Igualada indexes political stance, with a Catalan/pro-secessionist versus Spanish/pro-unionist binary in graffiti standing in contrast to bilingual practices in everyday interaction. Taken together, these studies illustrate how unauthorized signage can make political conflict visible through language choice and other semiotic resources.

Moreover, LL scholarship has increasingly incorporated interviews with both sign creators and sign observers. As Kallen (2023, p. 281) argues, public written texts cannot be meaningfully analyzed in isolation from the people who create them and those who are influenced by them:

> Sign units alone can only provide incomplete information about the LL. Various techniques which involve working with people – whether sign instigators, sign viewers, or people for whom the LL is part of a wider framework of activity – provide distinctive insights into the life of the LL.

Earlier work on graffiti similarly rejects the notion that comprehensive meaning can be derived solely from public texts. As Phillips (1999, pp. 23, 25) puts it, "Graffiti is all about people. As a researcher, you need to get hold of a social situation on the ground in order to understand the story presented on the walls . . . Without people and context, graffiti are no more than the meanings our imaginations give them." Lomas (1973, cited in Phillips, 1999) similarly argues that true meaning is found in the relationship between the writer and the wall, rather than in the textual message alone.

Gorter and Cenoz (2008) add that triangulating traditional LL methods with interviews sheds light on how the LL contributes to the preservation of different languages. Crucially, triangulation in this sense refers to the combination of different kinds of data or methods to examine language choice from multiple angles, rather than replication in a simplistic sense. Beyond LL research specifically, similar methodological arguments have been made in multilingualism and language attitudes research more broadly (Dewaele & Pavlenko, 2002; Dewaele, 2004). Wierzbicka (2003, p. 577) emphasizes the need "to link the 'soft' subjective experience of bilingual persons with 'hard' objective evidence." These perspectives reinforce the value of combining quantitative observational data with interview-based methods in LL research, particularly when the goal is to examine language ideologies that cannot be inferred from public texts alone.

These collaborative and interview-based approaches ultimately foreground the importance of insider knowledge. As Gardner-Chloros (2009) argues, insider knowledge of the community is essential to properly understand the behavior of bilinguals. This point is especially salient for the present dissertation, given my positionality as a researcher working outside the sociolinguistic context in which I was raised.

2.3.4 Defining the Scope of the Linguistic Landscape

Evolutions in methodological approaches in LL research have paralleled shifts in how scholars conceptualize the scope of what is included in the LL, from road signs to graffiti to mobile advertisements. Numerous researchers have adhered to Landry and Bourhis's (1997, p. 25) foundational definition: "The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form

the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration." Since the work of Landry and Bourhis (1997), the definition of LL has evolved in ways that emphasize the wider social context (Gorter, 2006). Shohamy and Waksman (2009, p. 314) understand the LL in a more general way as "text presented and displayed in the public space." Scollon and Wong Scollon (2003) distinguish four LL discourses: *regulatory* and *infrastructural* artifacts are produced by official bodies, *commercial* artifacts by businesses, and *transgressive* artifacts by independent actors whose texts disrupt official discourse. These categories describe the primary source and function of an artifact rather than whether it is entirely free from institutional regulation; commercial signage, for example, may also be regulated by public authorities.

Studies such as Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) and Backhaus (2006) consolidated these four discourses into binary classifications such as *top-down* versus *bottom-up* and *official* versus *nonofficial*. The labels top-down and official pertain to artifacts that have been officially or municipally sanctioned by institutional agencies acting in accordance with local or central policies, while bottom-up and nonofficial group transgressive artifacts together with commercial signage.

Coupland (2010) has taken issue with this distinction, claiming that all artifacts in the LL have "from-above" qualities since they are a product of language-ideological forces and have intentionally been placed in the publicly visible sphere for a specific purpose. Pennycook (2009) similarly questions whether the top-down/bottom-up categories should be expanded to capture more nuance and complexity. Blackwood and Tufi (2015) also find these dichotomies to be too rigid and claim that they are not suitable for LL analysis.

Transgressive artifacts have acquired an increasingly prominent role in LL scholarship, with graffiti in particular serving as an important aspect of unsanctioned discourse (Backhaus, 2007). Although the term transgressive carries connotations of edginess or immorality in common parlance, Blackwood and Tufi (2015, p. 11) offer the caveat that "An act of transgression . . . is performed and recognized as such only in opposition to what is considered to be compliance with local norms." Local norms, if considered through the lens of legal regulations, would only permit text to be emplaced on public walls with the approval of official bodies or businesses. In this dissertation, there is no moral or evaluative component to the idea of transgressive artifacts. Rather, I understand the term as a heuristic label for signs placed in public space without official or commercial approval.

Regarding graffiti specifically, Blackwood and Tufi (2015) argue that it can be understood less as an act of transgression than as an act of identity, with the use of non-standard languages in graffiti contributing to their legitimization. In addition to indexing particular types of identity (Pennycook, 2010), graffiti also allows community members to express shared cultural values (Phillips, 1999). Muñoz Morán (2015) further emphasizes that graffiti should be understood as the product of economic, social, and ideological conditions in its surrounding environment, arguing that it serves as a faithful source of information for knowing about those who produce it.

Moreover, Radavičiūtė (2017) speaks to the importance of examining unsanctioned signage to have a comprehensive understanding of a community's linguistic practices. Transgressive signs represent expressions of a community's residents that are created with complete autonomy, unbound by the legal and institutional norms that shape the production of official and commercial signs. Transgressive artifacts are also valuable resources for examining the wider socio-political discourse of a community (Debras, 2019), which is of particular relevance in the politically tense context of contemporary Catalonia (Byrne & Marcet, 2024).

Although I draw on Scollon and Wong Scollon's (2003) category of transgressive signage, I use the term *vernacular signage* to more precisely describe the corpus analyzed in this

dissertation. Scollon and Wong Scollon's (2003, p. 146) understanding of a transgressive sign as one that "is in some way unauthorized" applies to most of the artifacts under investigation here, such as many graffiti, stickers, posters, banners, and stencils emplaced on public walls. However, authorization is not the defining criterion. Rather, vernacular signage refers to signs that represent everyday forms of public expression whose primary function is expressive, artistic, community-oriented, or grassroots rather than regulatory, administrative, or commercial. This term therefore allows for artifacts that may be authorized or facilitated by institutions, such as some school or community murals, when they function as forms of local expression rather than institutional communication. It also avoids the limitations of existing binaries in the LL literature, such as top-down/bottom-up and official/nonofficial, which would either include commercial signs that fall outside the aims of this investigation or exclude sanctioned artistic and community-oriented artifacts that are analytically relevant.

In applying this definition, classification was based on a sign's primary communicative function rather than on a systematic analysis of its aesthetic qualities. Signs were treated as vernacular when they did not primarily communicate regulations or administrative information or promote commercial goods and services, but instead contributed expression, commentary, identity, or community representation to public space. Artistic form could therefore inform classification, but it was not itself a focus of the analysis.

2.4 From Theory to Methodological Design

As this section has shown, the LL is a site where multilingual practice occurs and where language ideologies are reproduced and contested through everyday encounters with public texts. Patterns of language presence and absence in public space reflect ideological hierarchies shaped by history, policy, and demographic realities, motivating a shift in LL scholarship away from solely quantifying visibility toward examining the ideological meanings indexed by public texts.

Building on these insights, this dissertation investigates how language choice varies by topic in vernacular signage in Catalonia, and how these patterns signal language ideologies concerning the relative suitability of different languages across expressive functions in public written texts. Following Woolard's (1998a) observation that ideology is discovered not only in linguistic practice but also in explicit talk about language, I extend this analysis by incorporating locally raised Catalans' reflections on the LL. LL findings are used as prompts to elicit participants' beliefs about language choice and public writing, responding to calls within sociolinguistics to engage with metalinguistic processes by foregrounding speakers' beliefs about language and its relation to society (Coupland & Jaworski, 2004).

In this way, the LL serves both as a source of empirical data and as a focal point for anchoring broader conversations about societal linguistic norms. The next chapter outlines the methodological design of the investigation and the procedures used for data collection and analysis.

Chapter 3: Project Design

Building on the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2, this chapter details the empirical design and analytic procedures of the investigation. First, I discuss key methodological decisions pertinent to the collection and coding of the LL data, which informed the first two research questions. Then, I detail the procedures for the semi-structured interviews I conducted with locally raised Catalans. These conversations related LL patterns to broader language ideologies to address the third research question. This complementary mixed-methods approach combines the broad empirical coverage of the LL corpus with the interpretive depth of interview data, illuminating how language choice is linked to social meaning in Catalonia.

3.1 Linguistic Landscape Data Collection and Coding

The LL analysis draws on both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Blackwood and Tufi (2015) argue this symbiotic strategy is essential for maximizing the analytic potential of LL data. Throughout this section, I detail the key methodological decisions that informed the construction and coding of the LL corpus.

3.1.1 Survey Site Selection

Catalonia is divided into eight *vegueries* [regional territories], which are color-coded in Figure 1. The Barcelona Metropolitan Area (BMA) is the salmon-colored region outlined by the black box. Although 93.4% of Catalonia's population reports understanding Catalan, language use varies markedly between the BMA and the other seven regional territories. Within the BMA, 24.7% of residents report Catalan as their only habitual language, compared to 46.3% of residents outside the BMA (Idescat, 2025). Additionally, Hau (2016) underscores that the BMA is perceived to lack Catalanness compared to Catalonia's rural heartland. He draws on qualitative data from Catalan political activists who credit countryside residents with keeping the Catalan language and traditions alive. Accordingly, I sampled Catalan- and Spanish-dominant sites and both urban and rural areas inside and outside the BMA to test whether LL trends differ across demographic contexts. I documented the LL of 21 survey areas chosen to represent this demographic and geospatial diversity during approximately 350 hours of on-foot fieldwork conducted between May 2021 and July 2022.

Figure 1

Geographic distribution of survey areas across Catalonia's eight regional territories, with the Barcelona Metropolitan Area outlined in black. Base map created by Doomuu and licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International licence. Locators and outline box added by the author.



For urban areas, I selected the three cities with the highest and lowest percentages of residents reporting an ability to speak Catalan among Catalonia's 50 most populous cities. At the time of survey site selection, the Generalitat de Catalunya's 2015 *Informe de política lingüística* [language policy report] provided the most up-to-date rankings for these criteria based on census data from Idescat (2011). Per this report (Departament de Cultura, 2015), the three cities with the highest shares were Sant Cugat del Vallès (82.2%), Igualada (81.6%), and Girona (80.3%), while the three cities with the lowest shares were Santa Coloma de Gramenet (50.7%), L'Hospitalet de Llobregat (54.7%), and Cornellà de Llobregat (57.2%).

Given Barcelona's central role in Catalonia's demographic and sociolinguistic landscape, its inclusion was methodologically necessary. As the capital of the autonomous community, this city sits between the urban extremes of Catalan knowledge identified above, and levels of Catalan knowledge vary substantially by neighborhood. With this in mind, I included two higher-Catalan areas, La Vila de Gràcia (78.9%) and El Poblenou (77.3%), and two lower-Catalan areas, El Barri Gòtic (55.8%) and Sant Pere, Santa Caterina i la Ribera (57.7%), which includes the area commonly known as El Born. Early fieldwork showed these neighborhoods contained as many or more vernacular signs than entire towns, justifying their use as a reasonable point of comparison with other survey areas.

I also included 11 small towns among the survey areas to complement the 10 urban sites. As an initial set of selection criteria, I aimed to include one town per regional territory, holding constant population (5,000–15,000), socioeconomic index (90–100, with 100 corresponding to the average for Catalonia), and county-capital status. For six of the regional territories, I was able to find towns that met all these criteria. These towns and their reported percentages of Catalan speakers are Móra d'Ebre (84.2%), Ripoll (83.1%), Solsona (82.8%), La Seu d'Urgell (82.6%),

Montblanc (81.7%), and Les Borges Blanques (81.6%) (Idescat, 2011). In the BMA, no municipality had both the population and the socioeconomic index indicated, so two towns were chosen: Cardedeu (83.8%), which has a higher socioeconomic index than the target and a slightly larger population, and Badia del Vallès (52.8%), which has a lower socioeconomic index. In the Penedès regional territory, Santa Margarida i els Monjos (74.6%) was the most adequate choice since it meets all criteria except that it is not a county capital.

Finally, I selected two additional survey areas as special cases that reflect demographic trends not captured elsewhere. Salt (66.7%), located next to Girona, has a high immigrant population and has exhibited support for right-wing, anti-separatist parties in recent elections, alongside strong antifascist and antiracist movements. This political heterogeneity, in a town near the symbolic center of Catalonia's nationalist movement (Lepič, 2017), makes it a particularly informative site. Cadaqués (71.5%) was included to examine how non-official languages are represented in the LL of touristic areas near the French border.

Together, these 21 survey areas represent Catalan- and Spanish-dominant sites across urban and rural contexts, with 10 located inside the BMA and 11 outside the BMA. Table 3 summarizes key information about them, including the regional territory they belong to, their reported percentage of Catalan speakers, and the number of artifacts documented in each. Figure 1 maps their geographic distribution.

Table 3
Survey Area Characteristics and Artifacts Documented

Survey Area	**Regional Territory**	**Catalan Speakers (%)**	**Artifacts (N)**
Móra d'Ebre	Terres de l'Ebre	84.2%	439
Ripoll	Comarques Gironines	83.1%	569
Solsona	Comarques Centrals	82.8%	467
La Seu d'Urgell	L'Alt Pirineu i Aran	82.6%	606
Montblanc	Camp de Tarragona	81.7%	275
Les Borges Blanques	Ponent	81.6%	550
Igualada	Comarques Centrals	81.6%	306
Girona	Comarques Gironines	80.3%	960
Santa Margarida i els Monjos	El Penedès	74.6%	393
Cadaqués	Comarques Gironines	71.5%	144
Salt	Comarques Gironines	66.7%	325
Cardedeu	Barcelona Metropolitan Area	83.8%	321
Sant Cugat del Vallès		82.2%	280
La Vila de Gràcia		78.9%	989
El Poblenou		77.3%	877

Survey Area	Regional Territory	Catalan Speakers (%)	Artifacts (N)
Sant Pere, Santa Caterina i la Ribera	Barcelona Metropolitan Area	57.7%	256
Cornellà de Llobregat		57.2%	520
El Barri Gòtic		55.8%	598
L'Hospitalet de Llobregat		54.7%	678
Badia del Vallès		52.8%	357
Santa Coloma de Gramenet		50.7%	311
Total			10,221

Note. Reported percentages of Catalan speakers are based on 2011 census data used in the sources consulted during survey site selection, which were the most recent data available for these measures at the time.

The inclusion of rural survey areas responds directly to longstanding urban biases in LL research, particularly in those investigations that focus on vernacular forms of public writing such as graffiti. LL publications to date have privileged urban spaces because they are often sites where migration, multilingualism, commercial activity, policy development, street art, and protests are concentrated. Blackwood and Tufi (2015, p. 1) describe the city as "a privileged site of encounter and mobility, a laboratory of social and cultural activity, and a magnet for human energy. It is the repository of political and economic power and a container of crowds engaged in a wide variety of actions and with shifting boundaries." While the appeal of urban areas for LL research is undeniable, Kallen (2023, p. 300) cautions that this focus "has left many other settings unexamined, and all of them have their own LL dynamics."

Over half of Catalonia's population lives outside Barcelona and other provincial capitals, where most LL research to date has taken place (Idescat, 2024). Furthermore, the uptick in international immigration that Catalonia has experienced in the twenty-first century has not been unique to cities. As Moriarty (2014, p. 461) explains, "The similarities and differences between urban and rural sites are worth exploring because a further analysis of this nature can help us understand how mobility operates on a macro as well as a micro-level." From a methodological standpoint, then, the inclusion of smaller towns among the 21 survey areas is an innovative element of this dissertation that affords a more comprehensive examination of how the LL informs and is informed by language policy, practices, and ideologies.

Moreover, as Dunlevy (2020, pp. 238–239) points out in her survey of three border towns in Northern Spain, "Local LL actors in smaller towns have a more direct control and responsibility for the LL than LL actors in big cities, due to the influential LL agency exercised by multinational companies in cities." As a result, if this dissertation were to only include urban settings, the findings may likely reflect those that have already been observed in investigations worldwide, since similar effects of globalization are witnessed in cities of disparate geographic contexts. For example, the use of English in the LL to index modernity and cosmopolitanism in a globalized economy has been noted in many settings (see e.g., Karam et al., 2020).

In this way, surveys of rural sites offer diverse semiotic dimensions that remain underrepresented in the LL literature. In the words of Kallen (2023, p. 261), "Studies which feature globalisation as a research concern are not necessarily more insightful or important than those

which concentrate on local dynamics of meaning-making." With these considerations in mind, the inclusion of both urban and rural survey areas in this dissertation is intended to add to the rigor of the investigation and present a broader picture of dynamics in Catalonia's LL.

3.1.2 Defining the Scope of the Corpus: Sign Types and Survey Area Boundaries

As defined in Section 2.3.4, this dissertation focuses on what I have termed *vernacular signage* in the LL, understood here as signs that represent everyday forms of public expression whose primary function is expressive, artistic, community-oriented, or grassroots rather than regulatory, administrative, or commercial. This category includes a wide range of material forms, including but not limited to graffiti, stencils, murals, stickers, posters, banners, and more ephemeral forms such as messages traced in window dust with someone's finger. What unites these disparate artifacts is that their language choice is not directly governed by institutional policy requirements or commercial incentives. Sign creators therefore have a high degree of autonomy over the language choice and semantic content of their messages, making these artifacts suitable for investigating this dissertation's research questions.

This distinction is especially important in Catalonia, where language choice is institutionally regulated in commercial and other privately run establishments open to the public. By law, all signs, notices, and informational signage in public view must be written at least in Catalan (*Llei 1/1998 de política lingüística* [Catalonia's Language Policy Law], Art. 32.3, 1998). As a result, creators of these kinds of signs do not have the same autonomy in language choice as creators of vernacular signs.

As discussed in Section 2.3.4, many prior LL studies have employed a dichotomy between *top-down* signs, produced by official institutions and governments, and *bottom-up* signs, produced by businesses and individuals. This framework often groups transgressive and commercial signage together. Pennycook (2009) critiques the analytical usefulness of this distinction because it places signs with quite different communicative purposes, such as informative commercial signs and legally unsanctioned graffiti, in the same category. I also avoid this binary. Including commercial artifacts would mix signs whose language choices may reflect legal requirements with signs whose language choices more plausibly reflect individual preference or expressive intent. Likewise, automatically excluding all signs traditionally understood as top-down, in the sense of being commissioned or sanctioned by official bodies, would exclude some signs that add analytic value when they are artistically rather than commercially or administratively driven, such as some school and community murals.

Murals on public walls span a variety of topics and often reflect values, histories, and other matters that are important to their creators or to the surrounding community. Their automatic exclusion from the corpus would therefore be an imprudent omission. Moreover, it is not always evident which public murals are legally sanctioned. Multiple street artists in this dissertation's interview sample described creating elaborate murals in a piecemeal fashion, adding to them during nighttime hours in cases when they did not have authorization to create the artifact. They also discussed semi-sanctioned cases, such as murals supported by neighbors on a residential building but not formally approved by the local city council. For this reason, I broaden the scope of the corpus from purely transgressive artifacts, in Scollon and Wong Scollon's sense of unauthorized signs emplaced in public space, to vernacular signage, which includes some sanctioned or semi-sanctioned signs that are not subject to language-policy requirements and whose content offers insight into ideological meanings tied to language.

As a result of two municipal ordinances that have criminalized graffiti and street art, the vernacular LL of Barcelona and other areas in Catalonia has shifted over the past 25 years from detailed and meticulously crafted artifacts to quicker, more ephemeral objects such as posters, stencils, and stickers (Vilaseca, 2012). For this reason, these and similar objects are considered alongside graffiti and murals as crucial items of analysis.

For inclusion in the corpus, an artifact had to contain written linguistic material. Purely pictorial images, drawings, symbols, and other visual marks without text were therefore excluded. Visual and artistic features sometimes helped determine whether a text-bearing artifact met the study's definition of vernacular signage, particularly in distinguishing vernacular artifacts from official or administrative signage.

Having established which types of signs are included in the corpus, it is also essential to delineate the unit of analysis by specifying what counts as a sign. Numerous LL publications have privileged Backhaus's (2006, p. 55) definition of "any piece of written text within a spatially definable frame." While the discernment of what constitutes a spatially definable frame falls to the researcher, this has been widely considered to be a viable definition.

Given this dissertation's focus on vernacular artifacts, however, I adopt Dunlevy's (2020, p. 243) definition of a sign as "one writing act within a spatially definable frame" because vernacular sign creators often engage in palimpsestic and dialogic practices like writing over or responding to preexisting messages within the same frame. Dunlevy (2020, p. 243) explains, "This further distinction of one writing act is pertinent particularly when considering transgressive acts, where the writing over of, or responding to, a unit is considered a separate writing act to the original unit." Multiple vernacular sign creators often act within the same spatially definable frame, and it is therefore essential to consider both the semiotic choices they make as individual actors, including language choice, and how their signs work together in a shared frame.

By contrast, studies focused on commercial signage have often adopted much larger units of analysis. Cenoz and Gorter (2006) selected entire establishments as the unit of analysis in their survey of two commercial streets in Donostia and Leeuwarden. Their justification is that in the case of shops and establishments, all signs work together to "give an overall impression because each text belongs to a larger whole instead of being clearly separate" (p. 71).

Before LL became an established scholarly field, Solé i Camardons and Romaní Olivé (1997) carried out a series of large-N studies that similarly focused on establishment-level signage. However, they distinguished between the identifying sign of the establishment as one unit of analysis and all informative signage in the storefront as another (see also Karam et al., 2020). This separation was intentional, since for them the identifying sign served a different purpose than the informative signage, and thus deserved to be treated separately. On the other hand, messages in various spatially definable frames within the same shopfront had similar aims and did not have to be considered individually. These aggregation-based approaches are generally ill-suited to studies on the vernacular LL, where multiple creators and languages frequently interact within the same spatially definable frame, making the identification of individual writing acts necessary for the analysis.

Beyond defining what constitutes a sign and how it is segmented, the scope of each survey area must also be delimited spatially. While many LL studies document specific streets rather than whole communities, Blackwood and Tufi (2015) indicate that this practice can be vulnerable to accusations of arbitrary or biased survey-area selection. Therefore, to enhance methodological rigor, I systematically documented vernacular artifacts across all streets and outdoor public spaces within each community's boundaries as defined by the Generalitat de Catalunya (n.d.) for the 17

towns and cities and by the Ajuntament de Barcelona (n.d.) for the four Barcelona neighborhoods. All vernacular signs visible at the time of fieldwork were photographed.

The corpus does not capture signs that had been removed or painted over prior to documentation. In some sites, particularly Igualada and L'Hospitalet de Llobregat, there were numerous places where it appeared graffiti had recently been painted over, as in Figure 2.[3] Unsanctioned posters and stickers are also frequently taken down. Therefore, it is important to emphasize the ephemeral nature of vernacular artifacts. The patterns observed in the corpus represent a specific snapshot from the time of data collection. These patterns can change rapidly to reflect communities' evolving contexts.

Figure 2
Evidence suggesting a vernacular sign was painted over, Igualada



3.1.3 Coding the Signs

I imported all photographs into Adobe Lightroom Classic, which offers a function to create and apply tags to each photograph (Savela, 2018). Accordingly, I applied tags to code the language(s), location, and topic(s) of each sign, as well as other semiotic elements.

As laid out in Section 2.1, a substantial body of work shows that language boundaries are not always clear or uncontested. Moreover, forms common in vernacular signage, such as loan translations and creative spellings, do not always map neatly onto discrete language categories, complicating language assignment. With these limitations in mind, I applied the following pragmatic heuristics to assign language tags. These classifications were intended to facilitate the identification of aggregate patterns while acknowledging the ambiguity in some individual forms:

- **Individual language tags**: Forms that adhere to the orthographic, morphological, and diacritic conventions of one language were assigned the corresponding language tag, such as Catalan, Castilian, English, or French. Nonstandard spellings, grammar, and abbreviations, which are common in vernacular signage, did not alter assignment if they did not introduce forms belonging to another language (e.g., "I luv u" → English).

[3] Unless otherwise noted, all photographs reproduced in this dissertation were taken by the author.

- **Multilingual**: items with lexical material from multiple languages, with additional multi-language tags indicating language combinations (e.g. "Stop *pobresa*" → multilingual, English + Catalan).
- **Multivalent**: forms that are orthographically compatible with more than one language and lack contextual cues that would permit assignment to a single language (e.g., *Hola* → multivalent because the form is spelled identically in Catalan and Spanish and no surrounding material disambiguates it). This terminology follows Vann's (2026, p. 217) usage in the Catalan context for words "which could be Catalan, Castilian, English, or all three at once." The category is related to Woolard's (1998b) concept of bivalency.
- **Exclusions:** Illegible items and items determined to be commercial, regulatory, or administrative in nature were excluded. Standalone proper nouns referring to people, political parties, or teams were also excluded because they reflect official designations rather than the sign creator's language choice. Proper nouns appearing within longer inscriptions were retained, but only the accompanying text determined the language assignment (e.g., "Vox" → excluded because it refers to a Spanish political party; "Free Junqueras" → English because "Free" was coded as English, while "Junqueras," the name of a Catalan political figure, did not contribute to the language assignment).

In cases of uncertainty, for example when a word could plausibly be considered part of more than one language's lexicon, I consulted the dictionaries of the IEC (n.d.) and the RAE (n.d.) before determining language assignment.

Regarding location, tags were added both for the specific survey area and for the regional territory where the sign was documented. A tag was also added for the sign type. The following list shows all the sign types observed in the corpus, along with the criteria I followed to classify sign type:

- **Graffiti**: a sign inscribed directly onto a surface by hand, typically with spray paint, marker, pen, or paint.
- **Mural**: a larger hand-produced artifact painted directly onto a surface, typically with substantial visual content and often greater complexity in the composition than graffiti.
- **Stencil**: a sign produced by applying paint or ink through a cut-out template, resulting in repeated or standardized inscriptions and/or images.
- **Sticker**: a small, adhesive-backed artifact attached directly to a surface.
- **Poster**: a paper-based artifact adhered directly to a surface, typically with paste, glue, or tape, including both larger posters and smaller flyer-like notices.
- **Banner**: a larger, durable artifact made of fabric, vinyl, or similar material and typically hung or suspended in space instead of pasted to a surface.
- **Dust writing**: a message traced by hand in a layer of dust on a surface.
- **Painted cans**: a three-dimensional artifact composed of repurposed beverage cans, painted and inscribed with letters, then adhered to a surface.

Additional semiotic elements present in the signs were also tagged. Common examples include the *estelada*, the *senyera*, and the *llaç groc* [yellow ribbon], which at the time of fieldwork were widely understood as representing the Catalan independence flag, the flag of the Catalan nation and culture, and a call for the release of imprisoned Catalan separatist leaders, respectively (see Section 5.2 for more details).

LL scholarship has increasingly moved away from strictly quantitative methods of counting the numbers of signs in each language to more qualitative and mixed-methods approaches. Traditional quantitative approaches remain useful to highlight the visibility of languages in the public sphere (Lipovsky, 2019). In the case of vernacular discourse where sign creators can write about any topic, however, these quantitative techniques alone do not capture valuable ideological cues that can be gleaned from a topic-based analysis of signs' semantic content.

With this in mind, I applied tags corresponding to the topic(s) of each sign to allow for a deeper analysis conducive to discussions about language ideologies. These topic tags were derived inductively from signs' semantic content, following qualitative content analysis procedures that identify recurring themes and topics for systematic examination (Ben Said & Kasanga, 2016). Initial topic tags were assigned to each sign and then iteratively refined as semantically similar tags were grouped together. To ensure consistency, I developed and refined a coding guide throughout multiple coding passes conducted across the corpus. This process resulted in a final set of prominent topics across the corpus. Various subtopics were also tagged to meaningfully group the data. Artifacts from survey areas coded before the coding guide was finalized were recoded using the final guide. Ambiguous cases were discussed with a fellow LL scholar who has investigated vernacular signage in Catalonia. Table 4 shows the topics and subtopic groupings most relevant to the analysis. Items that did not fit cleanly with any of these were tagged as "Other."

Table 4
Prominent Topics in the Linguistic Landscape Corpus

Category	Topic	Illustrative subtopics
Societal topics	National/partisan politics	independence, amnesty/political prisoners, political parties, politicians, (anti-)fascism, anti-/pro-Spain
	Social causes	gender inequality, (anti-)racism, LGBTQ+ rights, environment/climate change
	Community issues	local civic norms (e.g. noise, cleanliness, public conduct), evictions, town/neighborhood-specific disputes, local pride, rural pride, (anti-)tourism, education
	Economic issues	evictions, poverty, (anti-)capitalism, communism, lay-offs, pensions, strikes
	Police	police brutality, ACAB,[4] Mossos d'Esquadra[5]
	War/international affairs	Ukraine/Russia conflict, Palestine/Israel conflict, refugees, non-Spanish or Catalan political prisoners, global hunger
	Culture/language	Catalan in school, support for Catalan, support for bilingualism, support for Spanish, cultural identity
Intimate topics	Vulgarity/taboo	explicit sexual references, personal insults, drug use
	Sentimentality	love, heartbreak, sadness, joy/happiness, personal empowerment, affectionate messages
	Abstract/philosophical musings	rhetorical questions, existence, consciousness, metacommentary, free will
	Signaling presence	"name(s) was/were here", tags

[4] An acronym corresponding to "All Cops Are Bastards."
[5] Catalonia's autonomous police force

Category	Topic	Illustrative subtopics
Intimate topics cont.	Non-romantic relationships	family, friendship, crew/squad
	Formulaic interactional phrases	salutation, farewell, thanks
Popular culture and personal interests	Arts	music genres, movie quotes, celebrity references
	Sports	chants, team references, player references, praise, trash-talking
	Technology	social media, television, phone use
Other		food names, makeup, onomatopoeias,

As shown in Table 4, the primary classification distinguished signs related to societal topics from those related to intimate topics. Except in rare cases of ambiguity, all signs received one of these two category tags. All relevant topic and subtopic tags were also applied to each sign. Because topics were not always mutually exclusive, subtopic tags were used to guide coding decisions and maintain consistency across the corpus. Signs that crossed these analytic boundaries could therefore receive multiple topic and/or subtopic tags, all of which were included in the quantitative analysis. These topic distinctions, and particularly the treatment of national/partisan politics as a discrete topic, reflect the coding framework used in this dissertation; they are not intended to suggest that feminism, LGBTQ+ rights, evictions, local disputes, and other social and community concerns are apolitical in a broader sense. For concision, the terms *politics* and *political artifacts* are used hereafter to refer specifically to the national/partisan politics category and the artifacts assigned that topic tag.

In graffiti culture, a *tag* is a sign creator's signature or nickname. Although I mentioned that proper names were generally excluded from the corpus when written in isolation (as tags often are), I made the methodological choice to include tags in the corpus because sign creators have autonomy over the language they choose for their name as a graffiti artist.

Once all topic tags were applied, I used them to filter the corpus data and calculate per-topic language proportions within each survey area and to compare language–topic distributions across communities with different linguistic profiles. Chi-square tests in R (v4.2.2; R Core Team, 2022) assessed significant differences in language–topic patterns at various stages of analysis.

3.2 Interview Data Collection and Coding

This part of the research is a collaboration with 60 locally raised Catalans who contributed their linguistic and cultural expertise through their interpretations of the LL data. Language ideologies were elicited from semi-structured interviews about the patterns of language choice in vernacular signage. The interview component was therefore designed to complement and help interpret the LL analysis. In this section I elaborate on my motivations for including interviews as additional data in this dissertation. I also describe the procedures for recruiting participants, carrying out the interviews, and analyzing the qualitative data.

3.2.1 The Value of Interviews in Linguistic Landscape Research

Kallen (2023) discusses a substantial body of scholarship that has used interviews to access sign creators' intentions and sign observers' interpretations of language use in public space. He cites Tixier's (1998) work with sign viewers in Grenoble as an early example. Subsequent work

expanded this approach across a range of contexts, including globalized neighborhoods (Collins & Slembrouch, 2007), Korean business communities in Northern California (Malinowski, 2009), and schoolscapes (LLs of schools) in Hungary (Szabó & Troyer, 2017; 2020). Other studies have examined different participant groups, including children's perceptions of language choice in the LL of Montreal and Vancouver (Dagenais et al., 2009).

Regarding the value of interviews in LL research, multiple scholars emphasize their role in expanding interpretive depth beyond what researcher-led analyses alone can provide. Thistlethwaite and Sebba (2015, p. 28), for instance, argue that interviews add "an important extra layer of interpretation which would likely have been missed by following the more typical researcher-led LL methodology." In their study of a medium-sized Irish town, a few of the Irish-language texts at the research site appeared to be non-official. However, interviews revealed that many had been influenced by language-promotion campaigns, despite initially appearing to have been produced independently. Drawing on this study, Lipovsky (2019) contends that insiders' interpretations elicited directly from LL actors offer indispensable and more reliable insights into sign creation than researchers' inferences alone. Similarly, Barni and Bagna (2015) stress that qualitative perspectives enable a more robust contextualization of signage within its social environment. Interview data complementing their LL analysis in various cities of Italy suggested a weak relationship between a language's visibility in an area and its vitality, challenging Landry and Bourhis's (1997, p. 34) contention that "the linguistic landscape may be the most visible marker of the linguistic vitality of the various ethnolinguistic groups living within a particular administrative or territorial enclave."

From a complementary perspective, Dunlevy (2020, p. 241) argues that LL research is strengthened when the local voice is represented: "The inclusion of interviews in the [LL] analysis introduces the perceptions of people from that community to the analysis, thus balancing the judgment of the researcher and delivering a more integrated and complete analysis." Since the LL not only reflects but also shapes language ideologies, she also mentions how interviews can help gauge perceptions of the impact of the LL on the evolving vitality of different languages. In minoritized-language contexts like Catalonia, Hornsby and Vigers (2012) state that sources such as interviews are particularly crucial for studies focused on nonofficial signage, as they allow researchers to glean perspectives on language ideologies related to the minoritized language.

The increasing use of interviews and other collaborative practices in LL research reflects broader participatory trends in sociolinguistics that emphasize speakers' linguistic expertise and metalinguistic knowledge (Bodó et al., 2022). Fully participatory approaches typically involve long-term immersion in the research context and the involvement of community members in defining research questions. While these elements do not characterize this dissertation, the inclusion of interview data is inspired by participatory approaches insofar as it seeks to foreground local perspectives instead of treating my interpretation as the whole story.

3.2.2 My Positionality in This Work

This approach also requires consideration of my own positionality as a non-Catalan researcher and a non-native speaker of both Catalan and Spanish. I was born and raised in a suburban community of the Midwestern United States and grew up speaking only English at home, similar to 90% of the residents in my hometown (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). I initially learned Spanish as a child in school, and my access to the language throughout my formative years was largely limited to educational contexts and cultural products such as literature, music, and television shows. Through

graduate study, travel, and expanding social circles, Spanish has gradually become a more central language in my daily life, as well as one I now speak at home alongside English (albeit in a non-peninsular variety).

I began studying Catalan as an adult because of an interest I developed in Catalonia's sociolinguistic context following the 2017 independence referendum, an interest that ultimately led to the pursuit of my doctoral research and the development of this dissertation. Unlike Spanish, I learned Catalan more organically through conversing with native speakers on language-learning applications and through media exposure. I continue to read, write, and listen to Catalan on a daily basis, and it is my habitual language when I am residing or traveling in Catalan-speaking lands.

In line with Dunlevy's (2020) ethnographic approach, I resided for extended periods of time over the course of five years in Catalonia, first as a visiting researcher leading sociolinguistic studies at a Catalan university, and then as a doctoral student carrying out fieldwork. Prior to and throughout the course of this research, I consumed daily news from Catalonia- and Spain-based networks and publications and participated in community events across many towns and cities. These experiences helped me to understand issues relevant to Catalans at the community, municipal, state, and global levels.

Although the advantages of researchers who come from the communities they study are evident, I sought to leverage my position as an outsider by presenting myself as someone eager to learn rather than someone with preestablished beliefs about the contentious issues that arose occasionally in interviews. Participants often asked me what I thought about Catalan independence, language policy, or other topics that we discussed. I never offered direct answers to these questions, and instead emphasized my role as a neutral and curious newcomer seeking to understand different perspectives about these complex topics. I prefaced interviews by reassuring participants that I was not looking for any kind of answers in particular, and that the "right" answers were those that most genuinely reflected their beliefs. This approach seemed to facilitate open discussion among participants with divergent political views and linguistic preferences.

3.2.3 Participant Recruitment and Profiles

I recruited 60 individuals born and raised in Catalonia to participate in semi-structured interviews: 4 sign creators and 56 sign observers. Creator recruitment was constrained by the limited number of artists who could be identified from works in the corpus and successfully contacted; four such artists participated. This project reflects a collaborative engagement with these participants, whose linguistic and cultural expertise shaped the analysis of the data. Their contributions were central to the interpretations developed in Chapter 5.

Prior to recruitment, ethical approval was obtained from the University of California, Berkeley Institutional Review Board, Committee for Protection of Human Subjects (protocol number 2022-05-15313). Ethical approval for this study did not extend to minors; therefore, all interviewees were at least 18 years old.

Most sign observers were recruited through free online language-learning platforms in which I was an active participant. Three were recruited through my professional network, and two were Catalan content creators whom I contacted on Instagram. I also recruited the four sign creators through Instagram, using the artist names or handles displayed alongside works I encountered while documenting the corpus.

All respondents were Catalan-Spanish bilinguals who were born and raised in Catalonia. I privileged these criteria based on the idea that a lifelong immersion in the sociocultural and

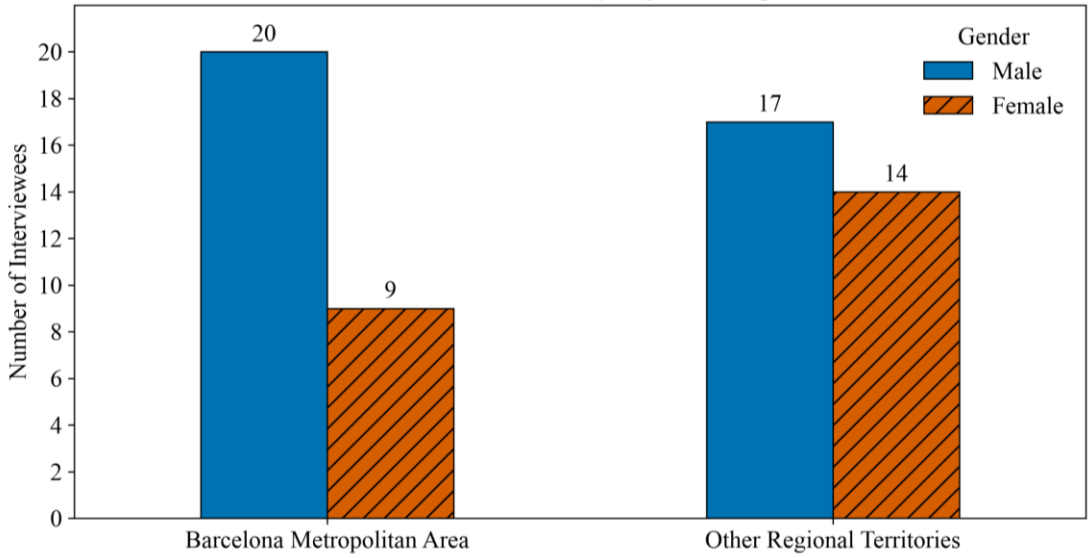
linguistic contexts of Catalonia fosters a deep familiarity with this community's language ideologies. Although participants of this profile were well suited to the particular aims of this dissertation, the perspectives of first-generation immigrants and other segments of society would be necessary for a more comprehensive understanding of language ideologies in Catalonia.

I employed purposive sampling to seek variation in participants' political perspectives, hometowns, ages, habitual language use, and family origins. The language-learning platforms facilitated informal conversations with a large pool of users from Catalonia. Through these exchanges, I learned about aspects of individuals' linguistic backgrounds, places of origin, ages, family histories, and, in some cases, political perspectives. I then invited individuals whose participation would broaden the range of backgrounds and viewpoints represented in the sample. In particular, I recruited some participants who were children of immigrants from other countries, many whose parents or grandparents came from other regions of Spain, and others whose families had lived in Catalonia for generations. Because family origins often intersect with habitual language use in Catalonia, this variation was relevant to the study's focus on language ideologies. The aim was not to produce a statistically representative sample, but to assess whether recurring language ideologies emerged across participants with varied experiences. Self-reported proficiency in Catalan, though not habitual use of the language, was a prerequisite for participation.

Participants ranged in age from 18 to 78 and came from 40 hometowns across all eight regional territories (see Figure 3). Based on the self-selected gender information provided in participants' online language-learning profiles, 37 identified as men and 23 as women. All participants used either of these two gender designations. Culturally, 35 (58.3%) identified as more Catalan than Spanish, 21 (35%) as both Catalan and Spanish, and 4 (6.7%) as Spanish but not Catalan. Politically, 22 (36.7%) expressed support for Catalan independence, 6 (10%) indicated previous support but current apathy or opposition, 15 (25%) expressed longstanding opposition, and 17 (28.3%) did not present a clear political position.

While this sample captures substantial variation in age, territorial background, linguistic and cultural identity, and political orientation, it nonetheless reflects a particular segment of the population with sufficient digital access and interest in language practices to participate in interviews, rather than a statistically representative cross-section of Catalan society. In line with Small (2009), additional interviews were sought until saturation in response patterns was observed.

Figure 3
Interviewee Gender by Regional Group



Among the interviewees were four street artists whose work appeared in the LL corpus. Sign creators' perspectives are shaped by their own artistic trajectories and political and linguistic positioning, which I describe where relevant in Chapter 5. Accordingly, this group of four is not treated as representative of community-wide ideologies. However, given that sign creators could uniquely provide firsthand insights into motivations for language choice in vernacular signage, their perspectives provide a crucial complement to the evaluations provided by the broader sample of 56 sign observers. Combining both sets of perspectives illuminates ideologies that shape the creation and interpretation of the LL.

3.2.4 Interview Procedures and Data Analysis

Interviews were carried out from March–August 2023. All participants provided informed consent, and all but three consented to recording, yielding 53 hours, 24 minutes, and 13 seconds of audio in total. Field notes supplemented the recordings. I conducted all interviews in Catalan or Spanish, according to participant preference.

First, participants described their demographic and linguistic background, discussing their parents' or guardians' origins and language use in their schools and communities. They also elaborated on their cultural identity and current language practices. This line of questioning established a demographic baseline so that later responses could be compared among respondents.

They were then asked to provide a few adjectives to describe the Spanish and Catalan languages. They were also asked which language they associated most strongly with qualities such as romanticism, pleasant sound, politeness, aggressiveness, and seductiveness, with the option of referring to languages beyond Catalan and Spanish. These prompts were designed to elicit affective connotations that participants attach to each language, allowing for comparison between these evaluative responses and later commentary on the LL findings. The adjectives mentioned in the prompts were informed by prior sociolinguistic literature about Catalonia (see Section 1.3).

Following this, participants were told to imagine themselves as graffiti artists and indicate which language they would use to create signs about the most prevalent topics identified in the LL

study, including insults, sex, love, politics, social causes, and community matters. To avoid a priming effect, I withheld the findings from my LL fieldwork until the end. Comparing the corpus patterns with participants' hypothetical choices enabled deeper reflection on the suitability of certain languages for different kinds of discourse in the LL.

Finally, participants were presented with a summary of the LL findings and a representative sample of ten images of signs addressing the five most salient topics. Cormier (2021) notes that photo-elicitation interviews are particularly effective in LL research and often yield richer, longer, and more emotionally involved responses than interviews without visual prompts. In this study, presenting the images after participants had stated their own language preferences grounded the aggregate findings in specific examples and allowed them to comment on the wording, tone, visual presentation, and likely social context of individual signs. Participants then discussed the factors they believed influenced language choice and identified commonalities and discrepancies between the LL findings and their own hypothetical choices for creating vernacular signs about each topic. The interview protocol appears in Appendix A.

As is characteristic of semi-structured interviewing, I aimed to cover the key thematic areas of the interview guide while following participants' leads when they expressed strong interest in particular topics. I prioritized facilitating rich and meaningful conversations about language use over strict adherence to the interview protocol's wording and sequence.

All audio was transcribed with Whisper, OpenAI's language model, using a Python script (Radford et al., 2023). Transcripts and notes were uploaded to Taguette, a qualitative data analysis platform that offers the ability to tag transcript fragments with a variety of applicable themes (e.g., "Influence of popular culture," "Socioeconomic factors"). Taguette provides a menu of all the thematic tags and their associated text fragments. Using this menu, I identified recurring themes across the interviews. These themes were linked to the language ideologies that are discussed throughout Chapter 5. An abridged list of salient interview themes appears in Appendix B.

3.3 Synthesizing the Linguistic Landscape and Interview Findings

During the interviews, I structured both the hypothetical language choice exercise and the explicit LL reflections around a core set of predominant topics from the corpus. This shared topic-based framework provided the basis for integrating the LL and interview datasets. More specifically, the LL analysis identifies quantitative language–topic patterns in the corpus, while the interviews help interpret those patterns by revealing participants' beliefs about the social meanings and perceived appropriateness of different languages across topics. Accordingly, the results are organized by topic: Chapter 4 presents the quantitative language distributions for the five most predominant topics in the LL, and Chapter 5 examines participants' metalinguistic explanations for why sign creators may find one language more suitable than others for those same topics. The interpretations discussed in Chapter 5 are informed by the most frequent thematic tags identified in Taguette.

Chapter 4: Language–Topic Patterns in the Linguistic Landscape

This chapter presents findings from the LL analysis. I begin by summarizing the overall distribution of language classifications in the analytic corpus, which provides necessary context for the language–topic analysis that follows. I then address the first research question by examining language–topic patterns across the corpus in the aggregate, before turning to the second research question concerning the geographic consistency of those patterns across the 21 survey areas. Together, these analyses establish the empirical context for Chapter 5, where the patterns are interpreted through locally raised Catalans' metalinguistic evaluations.

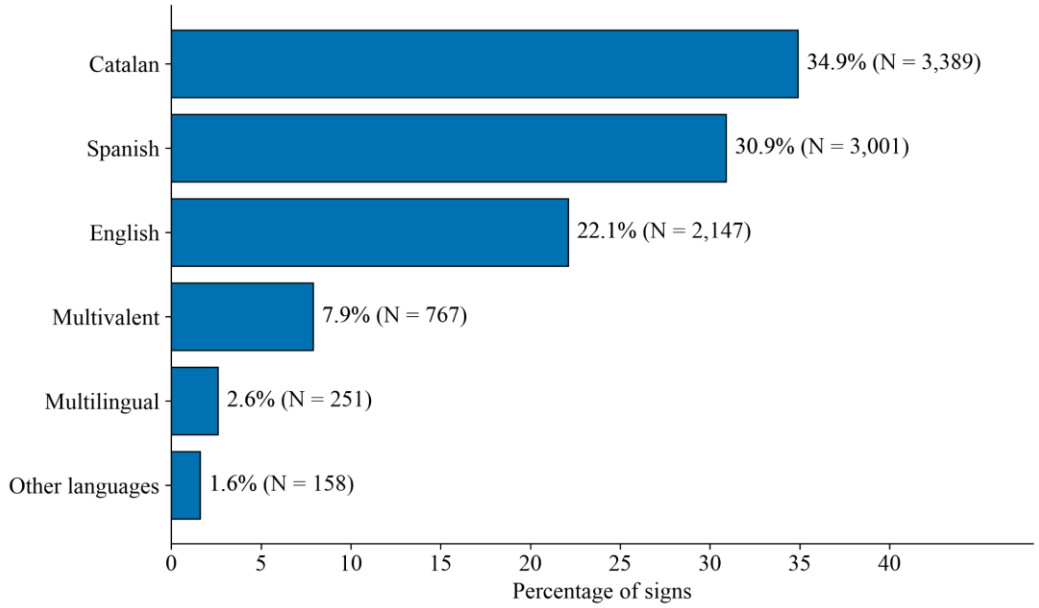
4.1 Corpus Overview and Overall Language Distribution

This section summarizes the analytic corpus and the overall distribution of language classifications before turning to language–topic patterns in Section 4.2. In total, 10,221 artifacts were photographed and uploaded to Adobe Lightroom Classic, where they were manually analyzed. As discussed in Section 3.1.3, signs were excluded if, upon closer examination, the text was illegible, contained only a proper noun, or had been produced on behalf of an official or commercial entity. After applying these criteria, 508 artifacts were excluded, yielding an analytic corpus of 9,713 signs.

Figure 4 presents the distribution of language classifications in the analytic corpus. In this figure, the labels Catalan, Spanish, English, and other languages indicate monolingual signs containing lexical material exclusively in that language. Catalan is the most prevalent, accounting for 34.9% of signs, followed by Spanish (30.9%) and English (22.1%). The remaining classifications constitute relatively small proportions of the corpus, with 7.9% of signs classified as multivalent, 2.6% as multilingual, and 1.6% as monolingual in other languages.

Figure 4

Distribution of Language Classifications in the Linguistic Landscape Corpus



Note. $N = 9{,}713$.

Catalan's position as the most frequent language in the corpus is notable given that Spanish is the language used most habitually in Catalonia overall (Idescat, 2023). Unlike official signage, vernacular signage is not subject to legal language requirements, meaning that sign creators can choose freely among their linguistic resources. Catalan's predominance in the vernacular LL therefore cannot be attributed directly to institutional language requirements. Nor should the language distribution of these inscriptions in the corpus necessarily mirror patterns of habitual language use, since independently authored public inscriptions constitute one distinct communicative domain rather than a representative sample of everyday interaction. Catalan's high visibility suggests that it remains especially salient for writing on outdoor public surfaces, even though it is minoritized and used less habitually than Spanish in everyday communication. The distributional language–topic patterns presented later in this chapter, together with participants' interpretations in Chapter 5, help clarify why this difference emerges.

The high presence of English is similarly noteworthy. Newman et al. (2020) frame Barcelona as a global city where English often functions as a lingua franca among diverse communities. However, English was widespread in the vernacular LL outside Barcelona as well (see Section 4.3), suggesting that its presence in the corpus cannot be explained exclusively by Barcelona's global-city status. Although 22.1% of signs in the corpus were monolingual in English, only about 10% of the population reports habitually using languages or language combinations other than Catalan or Spanish in everyday communication (Idescat, 2023). This is not an exact comparison, since the Idescat category includes languages beyond English. Nevertheless, it highlights the disproportionate visibility of English in vernacular signage relative to its everyday use. One possible explanation is that many English-language signs draw on short, repeatable phrases and slogans whose communicative demands are lower than those required for habitual spoken use. In this sense, English may function in the LL as a symbolic and stylistic resource, beyond its use as a language of everyday communication.

Although not an official language in Catalonia, English is reported separately from the 16 other non-official languages observed in the corpus because of its substantial presence in the dataset. This decision also reflects the fact that English often occupies a distinct sociolinguistic position from other non-official languages. As Chesley (2010) notes, English borrowings may operate differently from borrowings from other languages, demonstrating that not all contact languages hold the same status within a community. The remaining other languages category, while numerically limited, nonetheless reflects Catalonia's broader plurilingual diversity. A detailed breakdown of signs in other languages by survey area, language, and topic appears in Appendix C, Tables C1–C3.

Importantly, the overall predominance of Catalan masks topic-specific patterns. These patterns are the focus of Section 4.2.

4.2 Language–Topic Distributions in the Aggregate

The first research question investigates which topics tend to be expressed in different languages in Catalonia's vernacular LL. This section considers the corpus on an aggregate scale, while Section 4.3 examines site-level variation. A clear pattern emerged in the data in which signs addressing societal issues appear more often in Catalan, while signs concerning intimate matters appear more often in Spanish and English. The results are presented accordingly, with societal topics addressed in Section 4.2.1 and intimate topics in Section 4.2.2.

Because topic categories are not always mutually exclusive, the subtopic tags outlined in Section 3.1.3, Table 4, were used to guide coding decisions and maintain consistency across the

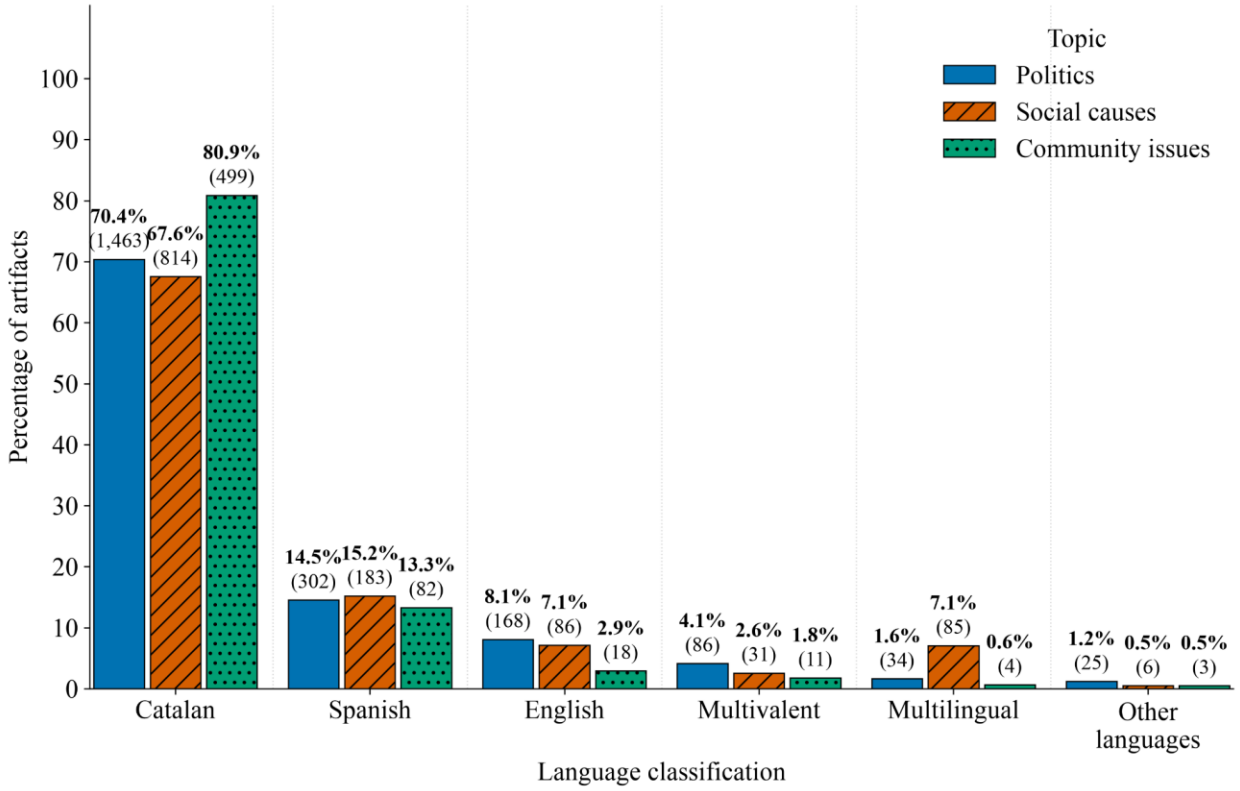
corpus. These distinctions do not imply that the boundaries between topics are always perfectly clear or fixed. Rather, they reflect the coding guidelines used in this dissertation to distinguish the primary focus of each artifact. For example, signs tagged as politics tended to address political parties, independence, amnesty for political prisoners, or fascism. Signs advocating LGBTQ+ rights and opposing local evictions, by contrast, were classified as social causes and community issues, respectively, although both issues can be understood as political in a broader sense. In a similar vein, the line between romantic sentiment and sexual expression is not always perfectly evident, but inscriptions classified as sentimentality generally clustered around the expression of emotions, while inscriptions referring to sexual acts without an emotional undertone were generally classified as vulgarity and taboo topics. When signs' semantic content crossed the topic boundaries outlined in Table 4, they could receive multiple topic and/or subtopic tags. All relevant tags were accounted for in the quantitative analysis.

4.2.1 Societal Topics

Figure 5 breaks down the three most frequent societal topics: politics, social causes, and community issues. Together, these three topics account for 85% of all signs about societal topics and serve as the focus of the analysis. Other societally oriented topics, including foreign conflicts and police, were present in the corpus but are not analyzed as focal topics because they were less frequent and less directly comparable to the interview prompts. As detailed in Table 4, political artifacts include signs about political parties, independence, amnesty for political prisoners, fascism, and Spain–Catalonia relations. Social-cause signs address broader issues such as gender inequality, racism and other forms of discrimination, LGBTQ+ rights, and climate change. Community-issue signs are more locally specific, including signs about civic norms, community pride, gentrification and evictions, or disputes tied to a particular town or neighborhood. The percentages reported alongside the raw counts represent the proportion of each language classification within a given topic.

Figure 5

Linguistic Classification of Societal Signs by Topic



Note. Percentages are shown above the bars, with raw counts in parentheses. Politics refers to the national and partisan politics topic. Politics, $N = 2{,}078$; social causes, $N = 1{,}205$; community issues, $N = 617$.

Figure 5 shows that Catalan predominates in signs about politics and social causes, accounting for approximately 70% and 68%, respectively, and reaches an even greater share in community signs (81%). Spanish has a comparatively limited presence, accounting for 15% of political signs, 15% of social-cause signs, and 13% of community signs. English and the remaining classifications are less frequent. Monolingual political signs appeared in ten distinct languages, and various multilingual combinations also occurred within this topic.

Starting with politics, it is important to contextualize the historical moment in which fieldwork was carried out when interpreting the predominance of Catalan in political signage. I documented the corpus between 2021 and 2022, within five years of the 2017 independence referendum and amid the broader aftermath of *El Procés*. During this period, debates surrounding Catalan autonomy, the imprisonment and exile of key politicians and civic leaders, and the relationship between Catalonia and the Spanish state remained highly visible in the news, on social media, and in everyday public discourse. The corpus reflects this context: 68% of political artifacts addressed independence, political prisoners or exile related to the referendum, or broader Spain–Catalonia tensions.

This historical context likely contributed both to the volume of political graffiti documented during fieldwork and to the particularly strong presence of Catalan within it. Several participants likewise described political graffiti as having proliferated during *El Procés*, an interpretation examined further in Section 5.2. The present results should therefore be understood as historically situated. A corpus documented before the independence movement intensified

might have contained fewer inscriptions concerning these issues and, consequently, a different distribution of languages within the political category. Although the data cannot establish what the pattern would have been at another historical moment, they suggest that *El Procés* intensified Catalan's existing association with political and territorial claims. Within this context, writing Catalan on public walls does more than convey political messages. It makes the language visible as a living public language and as part of a broader claim that Catalan-speaking communities, and their political concerns, occupy public space.

At the same time, multiple perspectives within these debates were represented in the LL. Some political artifacts in the corpus explicitly supported Spain, and several Spanish-language political signs appeared in dialogue with Catalan-language signs. Moreover, although language choice often aligned with political stance, that alignment was not categorical; political signage in Catalan was not uniformly pro-independence, nor was political signage in Spanish uniformly pro-unionist. It is therefore important to note that this dissertation compares languages used in vernacular signage, rather than measuring levels of pro-secessionist or pro-unionist sentiment. Because language choice is a key variable in this study, artifacts consisting only of symbols, numbers, or proper nouns were excluded unless accompanied by additional text. As a result, the language distributions reported here show how language is used as a resource for political expression, but do not serve as a direct measure of support for independence or unionism on public walls. This distinction is especially important given that opposition to independence outweighed support at the time fieldwork was carried out (CEO, 2022).

While political signs were often tied to debates over independence and the status of Catalonia within Spain, social-cause signs addressed broader issues such as feminism, anti-racism, LGBTQ+ rights, and climate change. Catalan's high presence in this topic indicates that the language does not appear only as a language of nationalist or pro-independence discourse, but also of broader progressive organizing and public claims of solidarity and justice. The organizational authorship of many social-cause signs likely contributes to this pattern, since several activist groups represented in the corpus are linked to political networks that are far-left, pro-Catalan, and pro-independence. Their use of Catalan in public signage should not be taken to mean that all participants in these circles use Catalan as their dominant language in everyday life. Rather, it suggests that social-cause signage often reflects group-level language practices and ideological positions, in which support for marginalized communities is articulated alongside support for a historically minoritized language.

Multilingual signs reach their highest proportional weight within social causes (7% of social-cause signs), and conversely, one third of all multilingual artifacts in the corpus address this topic. Among multilingual social-cause signs, the overwhelming majority combine Catalan and English (80%). Two thirds specifically pair the English *stop* with a social ill expressed in Catalan. This formula suggests that English is often used as a brief, recognizable resource related to protest discourse, while Catalan remains the language used to name the specific social problem. The pattern therefore does not indicate a shift away from Catalan in social-cause discourse. Rather, it shows how sign creators can draw on English's association with transnational protest while maintaining Catalan as the principal language of social activism in vernacular signage.

The *stop* + social ill formula is by far the most common lexical construction in the multilingual segment of the corpus: 77 artifacts include *stop*, compared with only 9 containing *fuck*, 5 containing *crew*, 3 containing *free*, and 2 containing *puta* [lit. "whore," used in these multilingual examples as an intensifier roughly meaning "fucking"]. Instances of *stop* are concentrated in political and social-cause messages, whereas *crew* appears primarily in presence-

signaling tags and *fuck* occurs across a wider variety of topics. A full breakdown of multilingual signs by language combination and topic is provided in Appendix D, Tables D1–D3. A more thorough discussion of multilingual *stop* constructions incorporating locally raised Catalans' perspectives appears in Section 5.3.

As explained in Section 2.1.3, *stop* was coded as English according to the dictionary-based procedure used for linguistically ambiguous forms, although its conventional use on traffic signs in Spain may make its linguistic affiliation less evident to some readers. Its use in these social-cause inscriptions nevertheless represents one available lexical choice rather than the only conventional means of expressing this meaning, as the corpus also includes Catalan formulations such as *Aturem els jocs olímpics* [Let us stop the Olympic Games] (see Figure 34). The exceptional frequency of *stop* is therefore treated here as a distinctive feature of these multilingual protest constructions rather than as grounds for excluding it from the English category.

Community issues show the strongest Catalan predominance among the societal topics, with 81% of signs in this category written in Catalan. This pattern is especially notable because community-oriented signs address concerns that are typically local in scope, such as neighborhood conditions, local initiatives, municipal decisions, and other issues that most directly affect residents rather than visitors. Catalan's high presence in this topic therefore suggests a particular association between the language and claims grounded in local community life. This finding strengthens and extends Morlan and Byrne's (2024) argument that Catalan has become emblematic of community-based discourse and advocacy on Barcelona's walls and is also consistent with broader work on Catalan's association with authenticity and local belonging (Woolard, 2008).

The organizational authorship visible in many community-oriented signs suggests that this pattern may also reflect the language practices of the civic and neighborhood collectives that produce them, rather than audience orientation alone. This interpretation can be understood within Catalonia's longstanding culture of associationism, in which a dense network of political, cultural, recreational, and neighborhood organizations has played a prominent role in community life (Museu d'Història de Catalunya, n.d.; Vann, 2026, pp. 120–121). This connection is explored further through participant commentary in Section 5.4.

The lower frequency of other societal topics, such as foreign conflicts and police, should also be interpreted in relation to the period of fieldwork. The corpus reflects vernacular signage documented between May 2021 and July 2022 and therefore captures the topics that were especially visible in public writing during that period. For example, while anti-police discourse did appear in the corpus, it often took the form of generalized slogans such as "ACAB" [All Cops Are Bastards], rather than locally specific references to the *Mossos d'Esquadra*, Catalonia's autonomous police force. Similarly, signage about foreign conflicts was present but comparatively limited. Subsequent visits to Catalonia after the outbreak of the Israel–Hamas war in October 2023 suggested, impressionistically, a greater visibility of signage related to the broader Israeli–Palestinian conflict. This later shift underscores that the distribution of topics analyzed in this chapter reflects a particular historical and geopolitical context, rather than serving as a fixed guide to vernacular public expression in Catalonia.

4.2.2 Intimate Topics

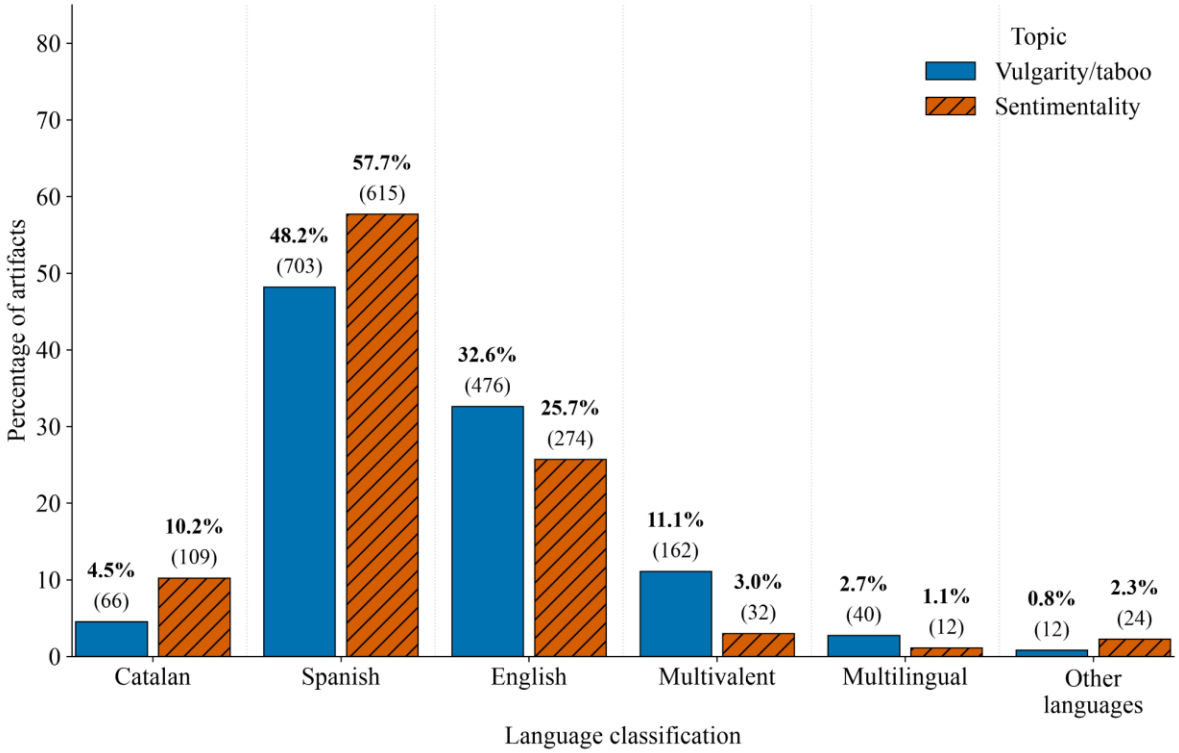
Figure 6 presents the two most frequent intimate topics in the LL corpus: vulgarity/taboo and sentimentality. Together these topics comprise 64% of signs about intimate topics and therefore serve as the analytic focus. As summarized in Table 4, vulgar/taboo signs contained personal insults and references to drug use or explicit sexuality, while sentimental messages were

limited to affective expressions primarily about love, heartbreak, sadness, joy, and personal empowerment.

Other intimate signs, including greetings, expressions of friendship, and graffiti tags, were present in the corpus but are not analyzed as focal topics because they were either less frequent, less directly comparable to the interview prompts, or more specific to graffiti-writing practices than to the broader expressive domains examined in this chapter.

Figure 6

Linguistic Classification of Intimate Signs by Topic



Note. Percentages are shown above the bars, with raw counts in parentheses. Vulgarity/taboo, $N = 1{,}459$; sentimentality, $N = 1{,}066$.

Figure 6 shows that the patterns observed for signs about societal topics reverse for intimate artifacts. In vulgar/taboo signs, Spanish (48%) and English (33%) dominate, whereas Catalan (5%) is scarce. Multivalent signs reach their highest proportional weight within the vulgarity and taboo content category (11% of vulgar/taboo signs). Most multivalent signs consist of the standalone word "*puta*" [whore], spelled identically in the dictionaries of the IEC (n.d.) and the RAE (n.d.). Here, only standalone or clearly personal uses (e.g. insults to personal acquaintances) were coded as vulgar/taboo. Forms targeting political entities (e.g. *puta Espanya*) were classified as political.

In signs about sentimentality, Spanish leads (58%), and English (26%) still appears more than twice as often as Catalan (10%). As in the case of politics, signs about sentimentality include monolingual signs in ten distinct languages alongside various multilingual combinations. Of the 21 survey areas, Cadaqués, near the French border, shows the highest representation of monolingual signs in other languages (6.38%; see Appendix Table C1). All but one of these signs are in French, and all concern intimate topics. The town's proximity to France and its prominence as a tourist destination help contextualize the relatively high representation of French in its vernacular LL.

The aggregate distribution suggests that, in comparison to societal topics, intimate topics draw on a different set of motivations and referents for language choice. Vulgar/taboo signs often consist of short, emotionally charged expressions whose expressive force depends partly on repeated exposure and recognizability. Sentimental signs similarly often draw on recognizable expressions of affection, joy, sadness, and heartbreak. In both cases, set phrases in Spanish and English may be especially salient because of their prominence in peer interaction, both in person and on social media, as well as in music, film, television, and other forms of popular culture. Since many societal signs serve to inform, argue a position, or call to action, they may be less likely than vulgar/taboo and sentimental signs to rely on short, formulaic expressions frequently encountered in these domains. Moreover, the brevity and familiarity of many insults, expletives, lewd expressions, and affective phrases mean that such signs can more easily be produced in languages that are not necessarily the creators' dominant or habitual language.

The higher presence of Spanish than Catalan in vulgar/taboo signage in particular aligns with prior research showing that Spanish may be perceived as sounding tougher and more appropriate for expressing transgression (Pujolar, 2001), while Catalan vulgarity may be perceived as less forceful or even humorous (Frekko, 2009). As discussed in the Introduction, these perceptions originated in part from Catalan's association with formal domains including institutional authority and schooling, especially through post-Franco revitalization efforts that aimed to undo the effects of twentieth-century linguistic repression. For residents who do not grow up with Catalan as their L1, informal and intimate registers may be less directly affected by language policy than institutional or educational registers, which may help explain why Catalan remains less prominent in vulgar/taboo signage. English, by contrast, is available to sign creators through globally recognizable profanity and sexual language that are frequently repeated in various forms of media.

The linguistic distribution of signs about sentimentality points to a related interpretation in that the high presence of Spanish and English for this topic may reflect not only sign creators' language dominance or proficiency, but also the salience of select romantic and affective phrases in popular music, film, television, and social media. In this sense, sentimental signs may be especially open to languages that carry aesthetic, romantic, or globally recognizable associations, even when those languages are not necessarily the sign creator's dominant language. The presence of French in Cadaqués fits this broader pattern, since French is not official in Catalonia but is locally available in that town through proximity to the French border, tourism, and broader cultural associations linking French with romance and affective expression (Dewaele, 2010b).

Importantly, these patterns are not categorical. Catalan appears in 5% of vulgar/taboo signs and 10% of sentimental signs. The point, then, is not that Catalan is unsuitable for expressing vulgarity or sentimentality on public walls, but that different languages may be more readily available for expressing certain conventionalized phrases and may have different degrees of perceived appropriateness across expressive domains.

4.2.3 Aggregate Statistical Pattern

To determine whether the differences in language choice across the five focal topics are statistically significant, I conducted a chi-square test of independence. The test revealed a statistically significant association between topic and language classification, $\chi^2(20) = 2961.90$, $p < .001$. In other words, the proportions of the different language classifications were not equally distributed across topics.

I then examined standardized residuals to identify the language–topic combinations that most strongly shaped this pattern. The residuals support the patterns observed in Figures 5 and 6. Catalan appears more often than expected in signs about politics, social causes, and community issues, whereas Spanish and English appear more often than expected in vulgar/taboo and sentimental signs. Multivalent artifacts are especially common in vulgar/taboo signs, multilingual artifacts in social-cause signs, and artifacts classified as other languages in signs about sentimentality. Taken together, these aggregate distributions reveal a clear split between societal and intimate topics. The next section examines whether these aggregate language–topic patterns vary across the 21 survey areas.

4.3 Cross-Site Consistency of Language–Topic Patterns

The second research question examines whether the aggregate language–topic patterns identified in Section 4.2 hold across communities with different linguistic profiles. This section considers the corpus at the site level, paying special attention to comparisons between survey areas located within and outside the Barcelona Metropolitan Area (BMA). As discussed in Section 1.2 in the Introduction, there is a substantial difference in habitual Catalan usage within and outside of the BMA, where immigration from abroad has been particularly concentrated. According to Idescat (2025), 46.3% of the population residing outside the BMA reports Catalan as a habitual language, whereas this figure is 24.7% within the BMA.

Accordingly, I have organized Tables 5 and 6 below regionally, grouping together the 11 survey areas located outside the BMA and the 10 sites within it. Within each regional group, the survey areas are arranged in descending order of their reported percentages of Catalan speakers (see Table 3). This ordering reflects the dissertation's focus on language choice. While population size is relevant to understanding the broader context of each survey area, the percentage of Catalan speakers provides a more relevant basis for comparing local linguistic profiles, especially because reported ability to speak Catalan varies substantially across sites.

In addition to the site-level data, I report the aggregate language distributions for each topic within the two regional groups (inside and outside the BMA). I also reproduce the overall corpus distributions from Figures 5 and 6 to facilitate comparison between the site-level data and the aggregate statistics. Since the number of signs documented differed among the survey areas, the regional and overall percentages were calculated by pooling artifact counts across the relevant survey areas rather than by averaging the site-level percentages. Smaller towns of fewer than 20,000 residents are indicated with asterisks.

Following the structure of Figures 5 and 6, Tables 5 and 6 present language distributions by topic: Table 5 focuses on the three most salient societal topics—politics, social causes, and community issues—while Table 6 focuses on the two most salient intimate topics—vulgarity/taboo and sentimentality. The percentages represent the distribution of language classifications within each site–topic cell. Heatmaps accompany the percentages, with darker-shaded cells representing a higher proportion of artifacts assigned that language classification. Monolingual signs in Catalan, Spanish, and English constitute 91% of the corpus for these five topics, making them predominant. For visual clarity, only the percentages for these three language classifications are shown in Tables 5 and 6. Therefore, percentages do not sum to 100%. The remaining language classifications by site (multivalent, multilingual, and other-language signs) appear in Appendix Tables E1 and E2.

Table 5
Catalan, Spanish, and English Distributions for Societal Signs by Site[6]

		Politics			Social Causes			Community Issues		
Survey Area	**Regional Territory**	**Cat**	**Span**	**Eng**	**Cat**	**Span**	**Eng**	**Cat**	**Span**	**Eng**
*Móra d'Ebre	Terres de l'Ebre	81%	9%	5%	89%	3%	0%	86%	14%	0%
*Ripoll	Comarques Gironines	80%	15%	2%	92%	0%	2%	87%	13%	0%
*Solsona	Comarques Centrals	77%	7%	11%	73%	2%	2%	100%	0%	0%
*La Seu d'Urgell	L'Alt Pirineu i Aran	76%	12%	7%	69%	2%	1%	81%	0%	0%
*Montblanc	Camp de Tarragona	87%	7%	1%	91%	9%	0%	100%	0%	0%
*Les Borges Blanques	Ponent	72%	17%	8%	89%	2%	4%	100%	0%	0%
Igualada	Comarques Centrals	72%	13%	8%	72%	16%	0%	95%	5%	0%
Girona	Comarques Gironines	77%	8%	9%	78%	7%	8%	88%	3%	6%
*Santa Margarida i els Monjos	El Penedès	71%	16%	3%	91%	2%	4%	92%	4%	4%
*Cadaqués	Comarques Gironines	82%	5%	9%	92%	8%	0%	100%	0%	0%
Salt	Comarques Gironines	80%	9%	5%	86%	0%	0%	91%	0%	9%
Aggregate outside the BMA		**77%**	**10%**	**7%**	**82%**	**3%**	**3%**	**92%**	**4%**	**2%**
*Cardedeu	BMA	60%	24%	10%	67%	6%	17%	100%	0%	0%
Sant Cugat del Vallès	BMA	60%	15%	10%	81%	10%	6%	100%	0%	0%
La Vila de Gràcia	BMA	72%	14%	8%	59%	29%	9%	92%	2%	1%
El Poblenou	BMA	58%	16%	15%	62%	7%	9%	88%	10%	3%
Sant Pere, Santa Caterina i la Ribera	BMA	55%	27%	15%	57%	0%	29%	80%	0%	20%
Cornellà de Llobregat	BMA	64%	25%	3%	43%	30%	11%	48%	44%	4%
El Barri Gòtic	BMA	59%	23%	6%	43%	42%	16%	0%	33%	0%
L'Hospitalet de Llobregat	BMA	37%	31%	8%	38%	38%	11%	52%	47%	0%
*Badia del Vallès	BMA	24%	40%	28%	50%	35%	0%	19%	43%	38%
Santa Coloma de Gramenet	BMA	22%	48%	13%	35%	35%	15%	27%	55%	0%
Aggregate inside the BMA		**60%**	**21%**	**10%**	**56%**	**25%**	**11%**	**75%**	**19%**	**3%**
Overall aggregate		**70%**	**15%**	**8%**	**68%**	**15%**	**7%**	**81%**	**13%**	**3%**

[6] BMA = Barcelona Metropolitan Area; Cat = Catalan; Span = Spanish; Eng = English.

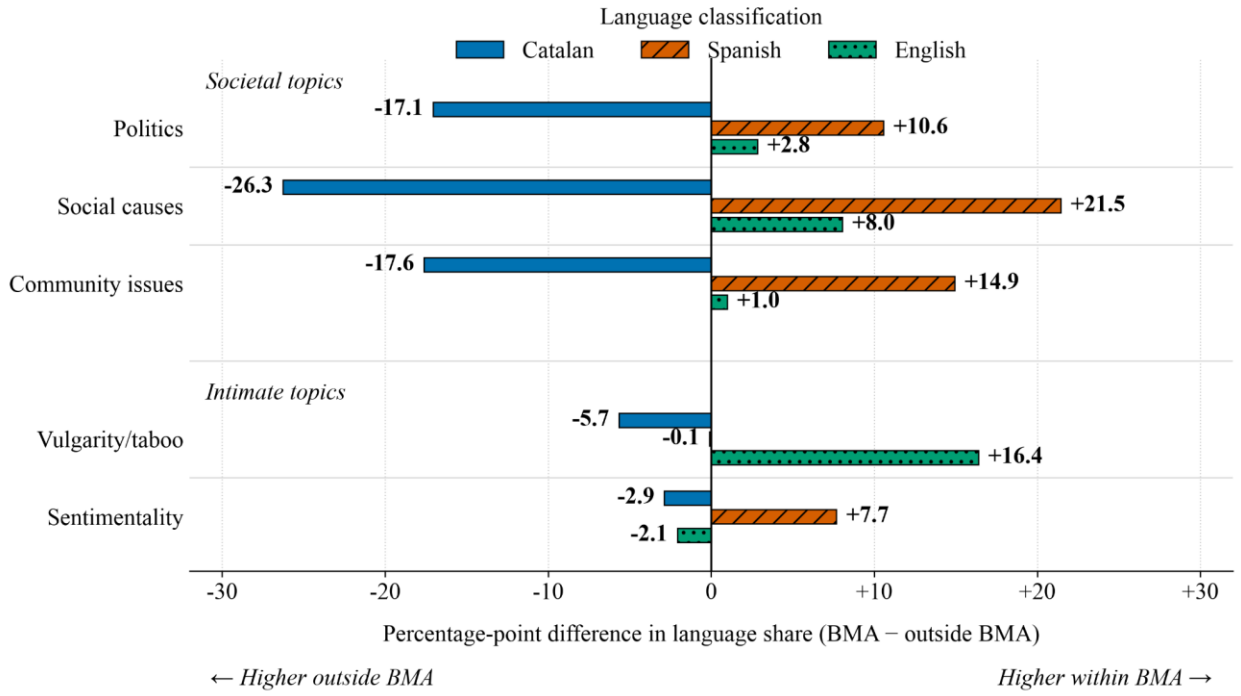
Table 6
Catalan, Spanish, and English Distributions for Intimate Signs by Site

		Vulgarity/Taboo			Sentimentality		
Survey Area	**Regional Territory**	**Cat**	**Span**	**Eng**	**Cat**	**Span**	**Eng**
*Móra d'Ebre	Terres de l'Ebre	10%	46%	15%	11%	66%	17%
*Ripoll	Comarques Gironines	8%	37%	29%	12%	39%	42%
*Solsona	Comarques Centrals	3%	58%	21%	8%	58%	33%
*La Seu d'Urgell	L'Alt Pirineu i Aran	7%	44%	22%	9%	63%	17%
*Montblanc	Camp de Tarragona	5%	60%	22%	4%	48%	43%
*Les Borges Blanques	Ponent	11%	60%	19%	32%	55%	6%
Igualada	Comarques Centrals	12%	65%	12%	13%	35%	35%
Girona	Comarques Gironines	8%	41%	39%	17%	41%	37%
*Santa Margarida i els Monjos	El Penedès	4%	51%	23%	7%	75%	16%
*Cadaqués	Comarques Gironines	11%	22%	56%	13%	43%	26%
Salt	Comarques Gironines	6%	36%	28%	4%	44%	28%
Aggregate outside the BMA		**7%**	**48%**	**25%**	**12%**	**53%**	**27%**
*Cardedeu	BMA	6%	52%	39%	32%	41%	21%
Sant Cugat del Vallès	BMA	12%	36%	45%	13%	63%	13%
La Vila de Gràcia	BMA	4%	44%	44%	23%	52%	23%
El Poblenou	BMA	2%	40%	47%	5%	43%	44%
Sant Pere, Santa Caterina i la Ribera	BMA	0%	5%	73%	6%	53%	38%
Cornellà de Llobregat	BMA	1%	59%	32%	5%	70%	20%
El Barri Gòtic	BMA	0%	38%	59%	7%	57%	27%
L'Hospitalet de Llobregat	BMA	0%	58%	33%	3%	72%	18%
*Badia del Vallès	BMA	0%	66%	12%	0%	86%	13%
Santa Coloma de Gramenet	BMA	0%	67%	26%	0%	90%	8%
Aggregate inside the BMA		**2%**	**48%**	**41%**	**9%**	**60%**	**25%**
Overall aggregate		**5%**	**48%**	**33%**	**10%**	**58%**	**26%**

To make the regional contrasts more visible, Figure 7 summarizes the percentage-point differences for each language–topic combination between the non-BMA and BMA aggregate percentages reported in Tables 5 and 6. Values were calculated by subtracting the aggregate percentage outside the BMA from the aggregate percentage within it. Positive values therefore

indicate a higher proportion of a language within the BMA, while negative values indicate a higher proportion outside it.

Figure 7
Regional Differences in Language Distribution by Topic



For societal topics, the site-level data in Table 5 show a high degree of alignment with the aggregate patterns discussed in Section 4.2. Catalan leads in 19 of the 21 sites for politics and social causes and in 18 of the 21 sites for community issues. The outliers are the four survey areas with the lowest reported percentages of Catalan speakers, all of which are located in the BMA: El Barri Gòtic, L'Hospitalet de Llobregat, Badia del Vallès, and Santa Coloma de Gramenet. Their divergence from the aggregate pattern is therefore consistent with their more Spanish-dominant sociolinguistic profiles, which may reduce the relative visibility of Catalan in vernacular signage. Of note, the 33% that appears for English community artifacts in El Barri Gòtic corresponds to just one sign; the other two community signs in this site were classified as multivalent.

Community-issue signage is especially notable because it shows the highest aggregate proportion of Catalan among the five focal topics, both outside and within the BMA (92% versus 75%, respectively). Although Catalan remains the preferred language for community-issue signage in 18 of the 21 survey areas and reaches especially high proportions outside the BMA, the BMA outliers show that Catalan's association with local belonging is not uniform across all communities. In Spanish-dominant or highly multilingual areas, Spanish or multilingual signage may be more accessible to many residents. Even so, the broader quantitative pattern suggests that Catalan carries a particular form of local authority in vernacular signage about community issues, indexing not only linguistic identity but also civic legitimacy and belonging in local public life.

The BMA/non-BMA comparison further highlights how local linguistic profiles shape the strength of societal language–topic patterns. The 11 non-BMA areas, shown at the top of Table 5, demonstrate a relatively uniform pattern in which Catalan is clearly dominant and never falls below 69%. The ten BMA sites, by contrast, display more variation, with Catalan showing less

dominance and proportions that tend to decrease alongside the sites' descending percentages of reported Catalan speakers. Even when Catalan is the most frequent language, the heat map shading reflects a more even language distribution in many BMA sites than in the non-BMA sites.

Examining Figure 7, we can see that relative to outside the BMA, the proportion of Spanish rises within the Spanish-dominant BMA by 11 percentage points for politics, 22 percentage points for social causes, and 15 percentage points for community issues. Even so, Table 5 shows that Catalan still leads by large margins for societal topics in the BMA, despite its lower habitual usage there. It appears nearly three times more often than Spanish for politics, more than twice as often for social causes, and nearly four times as often for community issues. This suggests that the language distribution of societal signage does not simply mirror patterns of habitual language use.

Table 6 shows that for intimate topics, the cross-site patterns are even more consistent with the aggregate findings. As the regional comparison in Figure 7 demonstrates, these topics generally vary less with local linguistic profiles than societal topics do, although vulgarity/taboo and sentimentality do not pattern identically. Spanish or English leads in all 21 sites for both vulgarity/taboo and sentimentality; not a single survey area reverses the pattern. English, a non-official language in Catalonia, is used in more monolingual signs than Catalan in 20/21 sites for vulgar/taboo messages and in 18/21 sites for sentimental ones. In vulgar/taboo signs in the BMA, it also appears nearly as often as Spanish (41% versus 48%, respectively). At the site level specifically, English is more predominant than Spanish in five sites for vulgar/taboo signs and in two sites for signs about sentimentality. These cases are mostly, though not exclusively, observed in Barcelona neighborhoods, including El Poblenou, Sant Pere, Santa Caterina i la Ribera, and El Barri Gòtic. This pattern is consistent with Newman et al.'s (2020) account of English as a lingua franca in an increasingly globalized Barcelona.

The regional and overall aggregate percentages, however, indicate that Spanish is the most prevalent linguistic classification for intimate artifacts corpus-wide, both within and outside the BMA. By contrast, Catalan rarely appears in signs about intimate topics. Even outside the BMA, where Catalan is used more habitually, it appears in only 7% of vulgar/taboo signs and 12% of signs about sentimentality, compared to Spanish percentages of 48% and 53%, respectively. Within the BMA, Cardedeu and La Vila de Gràcia complicate the general pattern of low Catalan in sentimentality: Catalan appears in 32% of sentimental artifacts in Cardedeu and 23% in La Vila de Gràcia. This finding adds nuance to the broader pattern of lower Catalan use in intimate signage within the BMA by showing that individual BMA sites can still display relatively high Catalan presence in specific topics.

Figure 7 shows that the percentage-point changes for Spanish and Catalan moving from outside the BMA to within it are more substantial for societal topics than for intimate topics. This suggests that community linguistic profiles may influence societal discourse more than vulgar/taboo or sentimental discourse in vernacular signage. At the same time, the degree of regional movement varies substantially across the five topics, showing that these shifts are not completely consistent within either the societal or the intimate category. Of the five focal topics, social causes show the largest regional shift, with Catalan decreasing by 26 percentage points and Spanish increasing by 22 percentage points within the BMA. Sentimentality shows the least regional movement, with relatively similar distributions for each language inside and outside the BMA.

The languages driving these regional contrasts also differ by topic. Among societal topics, the BMA/non-BMA contrast is driven primarily by increases in Spanish rather than English. Among intimate topics, however, vulgarity/taboo shows a different pattern: Spanish shows nearly

the same aggregate percentage across the two regional groups, while English rises sharply within the BMA compared to outside it. These differences indicate that the regional contrast is not simply a matter of Catalan decreasing and Spanish increasing in the BMA; rather, each topic draws on a somewhat different configuration of linguistic resources, with English playing a particularly important role in vulgarity/taboo.

The BMA/non-BMA distinction is therefore analytically useful, but individual survey areas sometimes show language distributions that are not fully captured by the regional aggregate percentages. Within the BMA, Sant Pere, Santa Caterina i la Ribera is especially notable because, for social causes and community issues, English appears at relatively high proportions while Spanish is absent. Outside the BMA, several sites show relatively even distributions of Spanish and English in intimate topics. For sentimentality, Ripoll, Montblanc, Igualada, and Girona all show Spanish and English within five percentage points of one another, with English slightly exceeding Spanish in Ripoll. In vulgar/taboo signs, Girona shows similar percentages of Spanish and English, while Cadaqués is a notable outlier with a substantially higher proportion of English than Spanish. These cases suggest that regional grouping illuminates broad tendencies, but individual survey areas still warrant attention as contexts that can shed light on community-level dynamics.

Overall, the predominance of Catalan for politics, social causes, and community issues and of Spanish and English for vulgarity/taboo and sentimentality scale up Morlan and Byrne's (2024) findings from two Barcelona neighborhoods to a broader sample that is more representative of the autonomous community as a whole. The cross-site examination demonstrates that, although there is some variability, these language–topic patterns are not driven by a small number of survey areas; rather, they are reflected in the BMA and non-BMA aggregate percentages, as well as in nearly all individual sites. The low presence of Catalan in vulgarity/taboo is especially consistent, with no site rising above 12%. In most cases, then, variation across communities is primarily a matter of degree, not direction.

Chapter 5 returns to these patterns from a different analytical perspective, examining how locally raised Catalans interpret the social meanings of Catalan, Spanish, English, and other languages in topics that are frequently observed in vernacular signage. By bringing these interviews together with the LL findings presented in this chapter, the next chapter examines the language ideologies that shape the social meanings associated with these language–topic distributions and broader language practices.

Chapter 5: Metalinguistic Evaluations of Language Choice in the Linguistic Landscape

In this chapter, I report and interpret qualitative results from semi-structured interviews with 60 locally raised Catalans (4 sign creators and 56 sign observers). These conversations shed light on attitudes and ideologies associated with the language–topic distributions detailed in Chapter 4.

First, in Section 5.1, I present the results of a hypothetical exercise in which participants indicated the language(s) they would use to make graffiti or other vernacular signage about the five topics highlighted in Section 4.2: politics, social causes, community issues, vulgarity/taboo, and sentimentality. I compare these hypothetical choices with the language patterns observed in the LL.

Then, in Sections 5.2–5.6, I examine each of the five topics in close detail, supplementing salient results from the quantitative and qualitative analyses with illustrative examples from the corpus. The hypothetical exercise described above contributes to this, as it allowed for deeper reflection in the final part of the interviews when participants explicitly considered the LL distributions and offered their beliefs regarding factors that may underpin them. Highlighting points of convergence and divergence between their hypothetical choices and the LL patterns encouraged particularly meaningful conversations on sign creator identity and how it relates to the perceived suitability of certain languages for different kinds of discourse in the LL.

This part of the analysis is organized by topic to reflect the structure of the interview guide, which asked participants to consider their own hypothetical language choices and the observed LL distributions separately for each topic. Moreover, this structure facilitates direct comparison between the language–topic distributions identified in Chapter 4 and participants' own reported choices and explanations.

Section 5.7 provides a synthesis of recurring ideological themes that cut across topics. To complement this synthesis, I report the adjectives participants most frequently used to describe Spanish and Catalan and, where relevant, relate the connotations of those descriptors to broader ideological associations that emerged in the interviews. Taken together, the analyses presented in this chapter demonstrate how the LL can be a productive focal point in broader conversations about language and society.

5.1 Hypothetical and Observed Language Choice Across Topics

After describing their demographic and linguistic background and connotations that they associate with Spanish and Catalan, participants were asked to indicate which language(s) they would use to create signs about a variety of topics. Sign creators were uniquely able to reflect on their language choice in real artifacts. However, given that all of them typically produce signs about a limited array of topics, each of them also provided hypothetical language choices for other topics. Although the topics I asked about were informed by the most salient topics that I observed in the LL analysis, I did not mention anything about the LL study or those findings until after this exercise, as I did not want participants' responses to be influenced by the patterns observed in the investigative corpus.

Table 7 presents a comparison of the languages that sign observers commonly reported they would use and the languages actually used for signs in the corpus about the five most salient topics. For visual clarity and relevance, only languages selected by at least a quarter of participants (N = 15) per topic are included in column two, and only languages used for at least a quarter of

signs per topic in the corpus are included in column three. Participants occasionally reported multiple hypothetical languages. The percentages shown in Table 7 reflect all reported languages, meaning the languages displayed may sum to over 100%. Participants' language choice and language patterns in the LL were determined to be "aligned" if all salient languages for a topic matched, "partially aligned" if one salient language matched but others did not, and "divergent" if participants' responses generally differed from the language patterns in the LL.

Table 7
Participants' Hypothetical Language Choices and Observed Linguistic Landscape Patterns by Topic

Topic	**Participants' language choice**	**Language patterns in the LL**	**Alignment**
Politics	Catalan (85%, N = 51)	Catalan (70%)	Aligned
Social causes	Catalan (53%, N = 32) Spanish (37%, N = 22) English (32%, N = 19)	Catalan (68%)	Partially aligned
Community	Catalan (95%, N = 57) Spanish (32%, N = 19)	Catalan (81%)	Partially aligned
Vulgarity/taboo	Spanish (77%, N = 46)	Spanish (48%) English (33%)	Partially aligned
Sentimentality	Most comfortable language, typically the L1 (73%, N = 44)	Spanish (58%) English (26%)	Divergent

Note. "Most comfortable language" refers to the language participants described as the one they commanded best or felt most comfortable using. In nearly all cases, this was also their L1, meaning the first language they acquired in childhood.

Overall, participants' responses show a fair degree of alignment with the language patterns in the LL. This is especially true for politics and community issues, for which Catalan was highly predominant in both corpus artifacts and participants' hypothetical choices. In both cases, the percentages observed for participants' hypothetical choices are approximately 15% higher than the percentages of political and community signs written in Catalan. It is important to keep in mind when comparing these columns, however, that interview participants could mention multiple languages, whereas those who created corpus artifacts had to either make a choice or make a multilingual sign. For political artifacts, for example, 78% (N = 47) of participants exclusively mentioned Catalan, while an additional 7% (N = 4) said they would equally consider Catalan or another language. For community signs, these figures were 68% (N = 41) and 27% (N = 16), respectively.

Social causes and vulgarity/taboo show partial alignment, in the sense that the language most frequently chosen by participants matched the most frequent language in the corpus. This was Catalan for social causes and Spanish for vulgarity/taboo. However, in the case of social causes, Spanish and English were also prevalent responses from participants but did not show a dominant presence in the corpus. Over two thirds of participants said they would use one of these two languages to make a sign about social causes, and 90% of this subgroup said their reason for this was wanting to reach the widest audience to address global human rights concerns. Several

interviewees also described multiple languages as plausible choices for a sign about a social cause that was important to them.

In a similar vein, English was commonly observed in vulgar/taboo artifacts in the LL alongside Spanish, but only Spanish received a substantial proportion of responses among respondents (77%, N = 46). Hypothetical language choice appeared to be more limited for this topic, whereas it was broader for social causes. A commonality between the LL and interview data for vulgarity/taboo is that Catalan was rare for both; only 5% of vulgar/taboo LL artifacts were written in Catalan, and only 15% of participants (N = 9) said they would use Catalan for a vulgar/taboo sign. Notably, nearly half of that subgroup (N = 4) acknowledged that Spanish is widely seen as better for vulgarity but said they take a militant stance on using Catalan in all contexts. Another clarified that she would use Catalan precisely because she thought it would make her sound more subtle and less aggressive.

The topic that showed the most divergence was sentimentality. As I will show throughout sections 5.2–5.5, participant responses for other topics consistently positioned particular languages as more suitable for certain kinds of expression, and these evaluations tended to overlap to some extent with the language–topic distributions observed in the LL. For sentimentality, on the other hand, the hypothetical responses focused less on identifying a language that was generally more suitable for sentimental expression than on foregrounding the individual's relationship with that language.

Around 73% of participants (N = 44) said they would choose the language they felt most comfortable using for this topic. The most frequent explanation was that expressing romantic sentiments in that language would feel more natural because it was the one they commanded best or used with greatest ease (N = 31). Because this language was also participants' L1 in nearly all cases, the distribution of L1s in Catalonia provides a useful approximate point of comparison. If the LL corpus mirrored this distribution, one would expect around one third of signs about sentimentality to be in Catalan and about one half to be in Spanish, with an additional 5.6% corresponding to speakers who identify both languages as their L1 (Idescat, 2023). Yet in the corpus, 58% are in Spanish, over one quarter are in English, and only 10% are in Catalan.

Having established a high-level comparison between participants' hypothetical language choices and the language–topic patterns observed in the LL, I now turn to the recurrent explanatory themes that emerged across the interviews. Interview quotes throughout the remainder of this chapter are provided in the original language of the interview, along with English glosses. I contextualize participants before introducing their words by reporting their gender and age, along with information about their political positioning and cultural and linguistic identity where relevant. Although participants were informed we could do the interview in whichever language they were most comfortable in, the language of the interviews did not always match participants' primary language of communication and often reflected instead the language in which I first conversed with them. An abridged list of all salient interview themes appears in Appendix B.

5.2 National and Partisan Politics

As reported in Section 5.1, participants' hypothetical language choices for political signs closely mirror the LL data: 70% of political signs in the LL are in Catalan, and 78% of interviewees (N = 47) would choose Catalan for a political message. An additional 7% (N = 4) would equally consider Catalan or another language. Interpretations regarding the predominance of Catalan in political signage often pointed to the politically charged era in which fieldwork was carried out,

within five years of the 2017 independence referendum and amidst the broader events of *El Procés*, Catalonia's movement for self-determination. Because independence was such a salient issue during this period, it occupied a prominent place in public consciousness in Catalonia and motivated many sign creators to express political messages in public space. Indeed, 68% of political artifacts in the corpus dealt with independence, political prisoners imprisoned or exiled in relation to the referendum, or broader tensions between Spain and Catalonia.

In addition to the heavy focus on the independence issue, political artifacts displayed more variety in terms of materiality and sign type than intimate signs, in line with other societal artifacts. Over half of political signs were banners, posters, stickers, murals, and stencils, whereas 87% of intimate signs were graffiti. Political signs also commonly incorporated pro-Catalan flag imagery and symbols. Figures 8–21 show a sample of the variety of sign types, while also illustrating the strong presence of independence-related discourse, symbolic imagery, and political contestation in the corpus.[7]

Figures 8–14 illustrate the predominance of Catalan nationalist and pro-independence messaging in the corpus, including calls for independence, support for political prisoners, and the circulation of symbols associated with *El Procés*. The *senyera*, visible in Figure 8, is known as the flag of the Catalan nation and culture, the most pre-eminent of Catalan symbols (Cattini, 2015), and a key emblem of Catalan identity (Anguera, 2010). The *estelada*, visible in Figures 9–12, contains a star design inspired by the Cuban flag that accompanies the *quadribarrada*, red-and-yellow striped pattern of the *senyera*. According to Albertí (2010, p. 245), "*és enarborada pels qui defensen la independència de Catalunya*" [it is raised by those who defend the independence of Catalonia]. Accordingly, the *estelada* is commonly interpreted in the contemporary era as a symbol of support for independence. The yellow ribbons observed across Figures 8 and 11–14 circulated widely in Catalonia as a call for the release of Catalan political leaders imprisoned or exiled in connection with the referendum.

Figure 8
Political banner in Catalan: "Llibertat presos polítics" [Free political prisoners] next to a yellow ribbon and a senyera, Solsona



[7] Figure captions throughout Chapter 5 preserve orthographic irregularities present in corpus artifacts unless doing so would compromise clarity. For consistency and readability, I capitalize only the first letter of each inscription and omit punctuation unless the inscription contains multiple sentences. In those cases, I retain punctuation between sentences in the figure captions.

Figure 9
Political banner in Catalan: "Llibertat presos polítics" [Free political prisoners] next to an estelada, Ripoll



Figure 10
Political graffiti in Catalan: "Independència" [Independence] next to an estelada, Ripoll



Figure 11
Political graffiti in Catalan: "Qui no es mou no sent les cadenes" [Those who don't move don't feel the chains] next to an estelada and a yellow ribbon, Salt

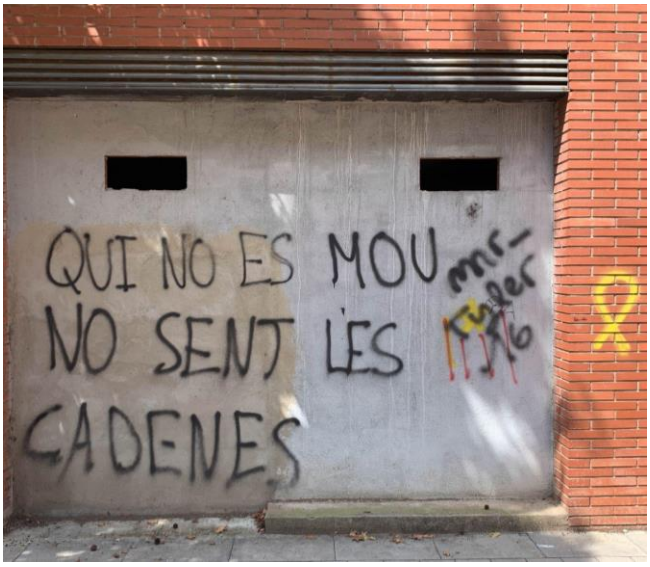


Figure 12
Political graffiti in Catalan: "Llibertat" [Freedom] next to a yellow ribbon and an estelada, El Poblenou



Figure 13
Political stencil in Catalan: "Llibertat presos polítics" [Free political prisoners] next to a yellow ribbon, Móra d'Ebre



Figure 14
Political banner in Catalan: "Llibertat presos polítics i exiliats" [Free political prisoners and exiles] next to two yellow ribbons, Girona



Figures 15 and 16 show that political signage in the corpus was not uniformly pro-independence, with some artifacts explicitly supporting Spain. Alongside signs such as "*Viva España*" [Long live Spain, Figure 15], the corpus also included many instances of "*Viva Franco*" [Long live Franco, Figure 16]. Given Franco's repression of Catalan language and culture during his dictatorship, this message could be read as an expression of support for an authoritarian vision of Spanish nationalism.

The phrase "*ni oblit ni Borbó*" [neither forgotten nor Bourbon] in Figure 17 is a play on the slogan "*ni oblit ni perdó*" [neither forgotten nor forgiven], widely associated in Catalonia with the events of October 1, 2017 and the repression surrounding the independence referendum. "*Borbó*" refers to the Bourbon dynasty of Spain's current monarchs. The declaration "*No tenim rei*" [We don't have a king] in Figure 18 similarly rejects the monarchy as a symbol of the Spanish state, while the terms corruption and fascism, printed over the Spanish coat of arms in Figure 19, likewise convey a critical view of the monarchy. Figure 20 shows that accusations of fascism are made by both anti-Spain and anti-Catalan contingents. In Figure 21, the phrase "*Fora les forces d'ocupació*" [Occupying forces, get out] is a slogan associated with pro-independence mobilization in Catalonia and is prominently used in demonstrations linked to *El Procés*. The poster's imagery suggests that *forces d'ocupació* refers primarily to the Guardia Civil, whose tricorn hat functions here as a metonym for Spanish state repression.

Figure 15
Political graffiti in Catalan: "Som republica" [We are a republic], written over political graffiti in Spanish, "Viva España" [Long live Spain], Cadaqués[8]



Figure 16
Political graffiti in Spanish: "Viva Franco" [Long live Franco] next to a heart, El Poblenou



[8] *República* is conventionally written with an acute accent on the *u*.

Figure 17
Political mural in Catalan: "U d'oct. 2017, Ni oblit ni borbó" [October 1 2017, neither forgotten nor Bourbon], Ripoll



Figure 18
Political stencil in Catalan: "No tenim rei" [We don't have a king] next to an estelada, Igualada

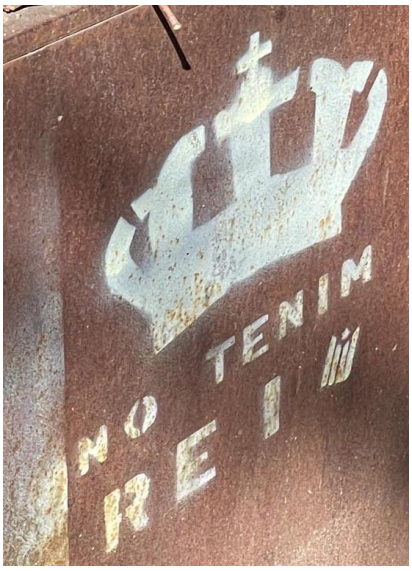


Figure 19
Political poster in Catalan: "Corrupció, clavegueres, feixisme, injustícia, venjança, manipulació, repressió" [Corruption, extralegal state power, fascism, injustice, revenge, manipulation, repression], printed over the Spanish coat of arms, Girona



Figure 20
Political graffiti in Spanish: "Anticatalanismo es fascismo" [Anticatalanism is fascism], created by altering a different political sign in Spanish, "Catalanismo es fascismo" [Catalanism is fascism], Girona



Figure 21
Political poster in Catalan: "Fora les forces d'ocupació, que se'n vagin! I que ens deixin en pau" [Get out occupying forces, leave! And leave us alone], Móra d'Ebre



Regarding the proliferation of political signage related to *El Procés*, Emma (female, 24), an independence supporter, suggested that the intensity of the post-referendum period provoked an urge for political expression:

(1) "*Molts d'aquests es van escriure durant el moment de l'auge de l'independentisme, i la gent tenia aquesta necessitat de comunicar missatges polítics. Però potser des de la part espanyola no hi havia aquesta necessitat i ansia de comunicar missatges polítics.*" (May 1, 2023)

[Many of these were written during the height of the independence movement, and people felt this need to communicate political messages. But perhaps on the Spanish side there was not the same need or urgency to communicate political messages.]

Emma's reflection hints at a sense of division between Spain and Catalonia that accompanied this politically heightened moment. It also suggests that the urge for political expression was perhaps felt more strongly by pro-separatists than by defenders of Spanish unity.

Participants commonly theorized that this may be because those who feel a need to protest are those who desire change, in this case referring to those who seek independence from the Spanish state. Rai (male, 32), another independence supporter, explained this idea in the following way:

(2) *"Suposo que a Catalunya en els últims anys el Procés ha estat molt actiu des de la part del 'sí', des de la part en favor del Procés, i no tant des de la part del 'no' . . . El 'no' està*

molt més passiu. Sabem que hi ha una quantitat de població que no està a favor de la independència i ja està, mentre que el 'sí' és el que s'ha mogut i és el que s'ha activat . . . Si ho penses, el 'no' és l'estatus quo, és a dir, el 'no' és les coses com són, el 'sí' és el que vol el canvi. Normalment les pintades de qualsevol tipus solen ser de la gent que busca un canvi, no pas de la gent que vol que les coses es mantinguin com estan." (July 6, 2023)

[I suppose that in Catalonia in recent years *El Procés* has been very active on the "yes" side, on the side in favor of the movement, and not so much on the "no" side . . . The "no" side has been much more passive. We know that there is a portion of the population that is not in favor of independence, and that's that, whereas the "yes" side is the one that has mobilized and become activated . . . If you think about it, the "no" side is the *status quo*, that is, the "no" side is things as they are now, while the "yes" side is the one that wants change. Graffiti of any kind is normally produced by people seeking change, not by people who want things to remain as they are.]

Rai believes that opponents of independence may not feel the same need to express themselves on public walls because the political situation already favors them. He believes this could explain why comparatively fewer anti-separatist signs in Spanish appeared in the corpus. While plausible, it is important to point out that Emma's and Rai's interpretations focus on political stance without addressing language choice explicitly. However, because their comments responded directly to my question about why most political signage in the corpus appeared in Catalan, their views seem to imply an alignment between language choice and political stance. This connection sheds light on a language ideology in which pro-independence political stances are understood as implicitly aligned with the Catalan language.

Alejandro (male, 25), the son of Colombian immigrants who identifies as politically neutral, demonstrated further evidence of this ideology by making a more explicit link between language choice in signage and political positioning:

(3) *"Son los catalanes los que intentan reivindicarse. Entonces quieren llamar más la atención, o sea impactar más. En cambio los hispanohablantes, lo que hay es ya lo que ellos quieren, o sea, el hablar español y todo. Para ellos ya está la situación que ellos quieren. En cambio, son los catalanes los que quieren cambiar la situación actual. Entonces son los que más tienen que hablar, los que más tienen que poner carteles o lo que sea."* (July 10, 2023)

[The Catalans are the ones trying to assert themselves. So they want to be noticed more, like to make more of an impact. By contrast, for Spanish speakers, what exists is already what they want, I mean like, being able to speak Spanish and everything. So for them the situation is already what they want. Catalans, by contrast, are the ones who want to change the current situation. So they are the ones who have a greater need to speak up, the ones who have more need to put up posters or whatever.]

Alejandro's reflection distinguishes "Catalans" from "Spanish speakers", a perspective that is reminiscent of common identity narratives from the mid-twentieth century immigration boom (see Section 1.1). It also collapses cultural, linguistic, and political identities, implicitly assuming that Catalans are those who not only speak Catalan as their primary language, but seek change via independence from Spain, and for that reason need to make their voices and their language heard in political signage.

Alicia (female, 24), a creator of Catalan-learning content on social media, also affirmed her perception of an ideology aligning language with political stance in public signage:

(4) *"Difícilment trobaràs una pintada en català a favor d'Espanya. Això sí que no ho he vist mai. De fet, em semblaria força estrany perquè aquest anticatalanisme sempre es fa des d'una perspectiva o des d'una posició parlant en castellà."* (July 7, 2023)

[You'd be unlikely to find graffiti in Catalan in support of Spain. That is something I've never seen. In fact, it would seem pretty strange to me, because this anti-Catalanism is always expressed from a Spanish-speaking perspective or position.]

Keeping in mind that language ideologies are broader beliefs about language and society that make evaluations of languages seem commonsensical (Carruthers et al., 2024), Alicia's thoughts indicate that the Catalan/pro-Catalonia and Spanish/pro-Spain dichotomy has become naturalized for her to the extent that it would seem strange to see one or the other language offer support for the perceived other collective on public walls.

Adding to this, David (male, 37), who identifies as culturally Catalan but does not support independence, noted that,

(5) *"Si están escritos en español, van en contra de Cataluña. Si están escritos en catalán, están en contra de España. Ahora mismo hay elecciones y el español y el catalán son un arma . . . La gente que habla políticamente catalán quiere defender su lengua, y la gente que habla español quiere defender España. Te digo que la lengua en España está muy politizada. Parece que si una persona hace un discurso en español, es que está en contra de Cataluña, y si una persona hace un discurso en catalán, parece ser que está en contra de España. En los idiomas está muy politizado."* (May 21, 2023)

[If they are written in Spanish, they're against Catalonia. If they are written in Catalan, they're against Spain. Right now there are elections, and Spanish and Catalan are being used as political weapons . . . Those who speak politically in Catalan are seen as defending their language, while those who speak Spanish are seen as defending Spain. Language in Spain is highly politicized. It often seems that if a person speaks in Spanish, they are perceived as being against Catalonia, whereas if a person speaks in Catalan, they are perceived as being against Spain. Language has become highly politicized.]

David claims that language use in political discourse in Catalonia has become highly politicized in the post-referendum era. Both he and the broader participant sample found Catalan's predominance in political signs unsurprising given the turmoil surrounding the independence referendum and its aftermath. Political signs in Spanish are certainly present, accounting for 21% of political signs in the BMA and 10% of political signs outside it. However, their proportional representation is considerably lower than that of political signs in Catalan, even though opposition to independence outweighed support by the time fieldwork was completed in 2022 (CEO, 2022).

Several other participants argued that when Spanish is used in political signs, it tends to respond to political statements, not to make them. Spanish-dominant Víctor (male, 37), stated,

(6) "*És que quan surten en castellà, no són a favor d'alguna cosa. Són com en resposta, reaccionaris*." (May 28, 2023)

[When they appear in Spanish, they're not in favor of anything. They're like in response, reactive.]

Víctor's belief that political signs in Spanish tend to be more reactive than assertive is supported by Carlos (male, 37), who identifies only as Spanish and opposes independence. Carlos stated that expressing a pro-Spanish or pro-Spain stance on public walls could lead to retribution from those who have a less favorable opinion of Spain, and he perceives that this group is more powerful in Catalonia. As a result, he explained, pro-Spain actors in the LL would be much more likely to alter an existing pro-Catalan artifact than to make their own declaration:

(7) *"Me daría miedo, tipo, yo cuelgo esto en mi casa [la bandera espanyola], a lo mejor alguien me tira una piedra a la ventana . . . Sí que es muy posible que encuentres, por ejemplo, una cosa mucho más tímida, el lazo amarillo y luego los que pintaban unas franjas rojas, como para decir 'esto es español.' O dicen 'ole' con las rayas rojas. Pero al final lo que tienes que ver es que este lazo es una acción y las rayas rojas son una reacción. Hay uno que está accionando y otro que está reaccionando. No están en el mismo nivel. No. Hay una idea que impera y hay otra idea que sale tímidamente de vez en cuando."* (July 7, 2023)

[I'd be scared, like, if I hang this in my house (the Spanish flag), someone might throw a rock through my window . . . What you're much more likely to find, for example, is something much more timid, the yellow ribbon and then people painting red stripes over it, as if to say "this is Spanish." Or they write "olé" with the red stripes. But ultimately what you have to realize is that this ribbon is an action and the red stripes are a reaction. One side is acting and the other is reacting. They are not on the same level. No. One idea prevails, and the other emerges timidly from time to time.]

In Carlos's view, pro-Spain voices tend to respond reactively to the more dominant pro-Catalonia discourse. Figure 22 illustrates his point. A sign creator converted a yellow ribbon, likely drawn by another LL actor, into the word "*Olé*" [Hurray], an expressive exclamation commonly associated with "Spanishness" via its association with certain cultural traditions including flamenco and bullfighting. The use of red spray paint around the yellow ribbon in the center creates a visual that resembles the red-yellow-red striped pattern of the Spanish flag.

Figure 22
Political graffiti in Spanish: "Ole" [Yay], created by writing around a yellow ribbon, Cornellà de Llobregat



It is true that over a quarter of Spanish-language political artifacts in the corpus appear in dialogue with Catalan-language political artifacts. However, it is not always clear that they are responses to Catalan signs, as many Catalan-language political inscriptions also contest or modify existing signs. Rather than treating one language as inherently declarative and the other as merely reactive, I understand these exchanges as part of a broader written dialogue in which language mediates political opposition, consistent with Sabaté-Dalmau (2025).

Some of the most active participants in this dialogue belong to youth organizations within the pro-independence left that are ideologically aligned with far-left parties such as the Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP), which fuses socialism, feminism, and anti-capitalism with secessionism. For example, the original sign in Figure 23 was created by La Forja, a left-wing, pro-independence youth organization. It features *estelades* in both the design and the logo, signaling secessionist alignment and casting "fascism" as the ideology of their opponents, implicitly the right-wing pro-unionist bloc. Another LL actor intervened by crossing out the *estelada* in the logo and adding "*Viva España*" [Long live Spain] in Spanish, thereby positioning both the Spanish language and a unionist stance against the original left-wing message.

Figure 23

Political graffiti in Spanish: "Viva España" [Long live Spain], written over a political mural in Catalan, "El poble mana, el govern obeeix. Res a negociar amb el feixisme" [The people command, the government obeys. Nothing to negotiate with fascism], Móra d'Ebre



While both right- and left-wing parties exist within the independence movement, the prolific Catalan-language signage of left-wing groups such as La Forja and Spanish-language responses from unionist actors produce a dialogic interplay aligning language and political ideology: Catalan/left-wing/pro-secessionists versus Spanish/right-wing/pro-unionists. As Sabaté-Dalmau (2025) notes, this polarized alignment on public walls contrasts with everyday bilingual practices in Catalonia. In the words of Oller et al. (2021, p. 13), "Amiable coexistence between the Catalan and Spanish languages . . . is an undeniable fact of daily life in Catalonia." This amiable coexistence does not appear to be replicated in political signage on public walls, however.

As noted in Section 4.2.1, the lower presence of Spanish text should not be understood as a direct measure of pro-unionist sentiment in the LL. Because language choice is a key variable in this dissertation, pro-unionist signs consisting only of a proper noun, number, or non-textual symbol were excluded unless accompanied by additional text (see Section 3.1.3). Common examples include "155," shorthand for Spain's suspension of Catalonia's autonomy under Article 155 of the Spanish constitution after the 2017 referendum, and "Vox," a far-right Spanish nationalist party. *Estelades* and other pro-independence symbols were likewise excluded if unaccompanied by text.

Within this scope, Catalan's predominance could reflect many pro-secessionists' emphasis on language as an essential component of their political identity. They fight for both political autonomy and a language that has endured longstanding state-level minoritization. Displaying Catalan on public walls alongside political affirmations therefore signals not only a political position, but also a claim to linguistic resistance and continued visibility of Catalan in public space.

Regarding explanations for why Catalan prevails in political signage in the LL, we have thus far seen participant perspectives that emphasize a politicization and polarization of language choice for political discourse, and a recurring theory that supporters of independence may feel a greater need to express their voices in public than those who desire continued unity with Spain. Carlos's commentary added another layer of interpretation, indicating that Spanish may appear less often because supporters of Spanish unity may fear retribution for expressing their views in Spanish.

This perception was echoed by María (female, 31), who has parents from Catalonia and Andalucía, describes herself as both Catalan and Spanish, and considers Spanish her primary language. She expressed the view that political discourse in Spanish is looked down upon in Catalonia, and tied this sentiment to a more general link between Catalan language use and belonging:

(8) *"Yo creo que todo es en catalán. Es más, está como 'mal visto' hacer política aquí en castellano, o sea, entre comillas. Es como que siempre tienden a decirte que no eres suficiente catalán. Que si ven que una familia, por ejemplo yo, ¿no? Que por un lado tengo familia castellana y familia catalana, si no soy catalana-catalana por los dos lados, y de mis abuelos, y de . . . Es como que no soy 100% catalana. Es como que no puedes ganar. Ni con el otro, ni con el otro."* (May 20, 2023)

[I think everything is in Catalan. In fact, it's almost like "a bad look" to do politics here in Spanish, so to speak. It's like they always tend to tell you that you are not Catalan enough. That if they see a family, for example mine, right? That has Spanish family on one side and Catalan family on the other, if I'm not Catalan-Catalan on both sides, and through my grandparents, and so on . . . it's as if I'm not 100% Catalan. It's like you can't win. Not with one side, nor with the other.]

María's perspective offers insight into a language ideology that links Catalan use with being an authentic Catalan. She mentions this explicitly in regard to political discourse, and implicitly in describing her progenitors' origins, having mentioned earlier in the interview that her family speaks only Spanish at home because her father's family immigrated from Andalucía.

Whereas the preceding perspectives linked Catalan with pro-independence political positioning, other participants challenged the rigidity of this alignment. Mónica (female, 32), who identifies as culturally Catalan but does not support independence, views the use of Catalan in political and administrative discourse as a tool for signaling local belonging regardless of political stance, adding to the language ideology that bestows Catalan with a sense of authenticity. Mónica stated,

(9) "*És igual si és d'independència o d'una altra cosa, jo crec que em dirigiria en català. Jo, per exemple, sempre penso que si parles la llengua del territori on estàs, estàs com més integrat. Llavors jo penso, si vaig a fer coses a l'Ajuntament i tal, allà intento parlar en català perquè dic, estem a Catalunya, la gent m'hi contestarà en català. Com, tipo, 'soc d'aquí', saps?*" (July 13, 2023)

[Regardless of whether it has to do with independence or something else, I think I would express myself in Catalan. I, for example, always think that if you speak the language of the territory you're in, you're like more integrated. So I think, if I go to deal with things at City Hall and what not, I try to speak in Catalan there because I tell myself, we are in Catalonia, people will answer me in Catalan. Like saying, 'I'm from here', you know?]

Mónica's reasoning suggests that Catalan in political signage may index local belonging even in the absence of an explicitly pro-independence stance.

Roser (female, 72) also adds nuance to the alignment of language and political stance described by other participants. She identifies as culturally Catalan but does not support independence. Unlike other participants, she sees Catalan as perfectly suitable for expressing a political opinion from any part of the unionist-separatist spectrum. She said that if she were to make political graffiti espousing her anti-independence views, she would do so in Catalan, which she believes is as much her language as that of those who support independence:

(10) "*Tal vez porque los que defienden la independencia es más importante para ellos, y los que no están a favor, pues, no les importa tanto. Si yo volviera a poner un mensaje en contra [de la independencia], yo también lo haría en catalán, porque el catalán es tan mío como de ellos*." (June 14, 2023)

[Perhaps because for those who support independence, it matters more, and for those who are not in favor, well, it doesn't matter as much to them. If I were to put up a message against it (independence), I would do it in Catalan all the same, because Catalan belongs just as much to me as it does to them.]

This view challenges the rigidity of the language/politics divide, in line with Newman et al. (2020), who describe a more complex relationship between language use and political positioning in Catalonia. They note, for example, that one prominent pro-independence organization explicitly identifies as a group of Spanish speakers. Vann (2026) more specifically links the rise of *Súmate* [Join in!], a pro-independence association for Spanish-speaking Catalans founded in 2013, to the growing acceptance of Spanish speakers as Catalans (see Section 1.1). He

points in particular to the political prominence of Gabriel Rufián, a *Súmate* leader of Andalusian descent who later became a member of Spain's Congress of Deputies for *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* [Republican Left of Catalonia], a Catalan nationalist political party.

This complexity is also visible in the corpus itself, where political positioning does not always align straightforwardly with expected language choice. Several corpus artifacts show that pro-Spain messages are not necessarily written in Spanish, nor are anti-Spain messages necessarily written in Catalan.

Figure 24 displays an interesting multilingual sign in which the "Long live" preceding "Spain" is written in Catalan, whereas the "Long live" preceding "Catalonia" is written in Spanish. This sign creator may have used language choice creatively to reverse the norms of "*Visca Catalunya*" and "*Viva España*," perhaps to provoke curiosity among sign observers or to promote a less divisive stance. In Figure 25, "*Puta España*" [Fucking Spain] is written in Spanish. It is unclear whether the sign creator wrote in Spanish because it is their primary language, or whether their language choice was motivated by the audience they hoped to reach with their message. The hammer-and-sickle symbol, signifying a far-left political struggle, is often incorporated into signage produced by left-wing groups such as La Forja (see Figure 23) and others described in Section 5.3. These groups typically produce signage in Catalan. No organizational authorship is clearly indicated here, however. Both Figures 24 and 25 illustrate that the imagined audience is an important factor alongside sign creator identity when interpreting language choice in the LL.

Figure 24

Multilingual political graffiti (Catalan + Spanish + Catalan): "Visca España, viva Catalunya" [Long live Spain, long live Catalonia], Badia del Vallès



Figure 25
Political graffiti in Spanish: "Puta España" [Fucking Spain], Cardedeu. Also visible is another political sign in Spanish, a sticker saying "Malditos bastardos" [Damn bastards] with a slash through a swastika. It is unclear whom the latter sign refers to.



Importantly, Mónica and Roser were two of many participants who made clear that they would never actually do graffiti in real life. It feels prudent, then, to highlight the perspective of a sign creator who participated in the interviews and who has designed numerous political murals and artifacts on public walls. Pro-independence street artist Ferran (male, 48) explained,

(11) "*Quan jo surto al carrer a reivindicar coses, si jo ho he d'escriure, vol dir que jo no tinc mitjans per utilitzar campanyes publicitàries, no tinc mitjans de comunicació, no tinc canals que sí té el poder. Qui té aquest discurs té canals molt més legítims. Aquestes vies [les pintades i els cartells] són vies antagonistes d'alguna manera. Dona la casualitat que el poder, encara que si sortíssim de Catalunya, aquí dona aquesta confluència entre l'hegemonia i el poder en castellà i l'alternativa o l'antagonisme en català.*" (July 5, 2023)

[When I go out to make political demands on public walls, if I have to write them myself, that means I do not have the resources to use promotional campaigns, I do not have media outlets, I do not have access to the same channels as those in power. Those promoting dominant discourses have much more legitimate channels. These approaches (graffiti and posters) are, in some sense, antagonistic approaches. It just so happens that, even though things would be different if we stepped outside Catalonia, here there is this convergence in which hegemony and power are in Spanish, while the alternative or antagonism is in Catalan.]

Ferran touches on the unauthorized, or "antagonistic" as he describes it, nature of graffiti and similar signs studied in this dissertation. His perspective frames Spanish as the hegemonic

language in standard public communication, leading those who wish to express themselves in Catalan to seek other channels. In this way, he suggests that unauthorized signage is powerful precisely because it allows those who do not have access to more "legitimate" vehicles of communication to disseminate messages in public. His account therefore suggests that language patterns in unauthorized signage should be understood in relation to the languages that dominate more formal channels of public communication. The unauthorized status of these signs may also heighten their significance. As Vallejo (2022, p. 273) notes in her discussion of contemporary graffiti, "the mere fact of their prohibition forces us to read them with greater care."

In an interesting contrast, Carlos opined in his reflection above that in the particular realm of public signage in Catalonia, pro-independence messages in Catalan constitute the dominant political discourse, and pro-Spain or Spanish voices can appear only in a timid way. We see, then, that perceptions of linguistic authority vary based on participants' backgrounds. Despite this variance, two common language ideologies have emerged from this analysis, one linking the pro-independence movement with Catalan (though not necessarily the inverse), and another linking Catalan with authenticity and local belonging.

5.3 Social Causes

For social causes, participants' hypothetical language choices partially align with the LL findings. Catalan was predominant in signs about social causes (68%), and Catalan was also the language most frequently selected by participants for this topic (53%, N = 32). As in the case of politics, signs about social causes displayed a wider variety of materials and sign types than intimate signage, representing not only graffiti but also stencils, posters, stickers, banners, and murals. Figures 26–38 illustrate this variety and the predominance of Catalan in messages advocating for various causes across the corpus.

Another parallel between political and social-cause artifacts is that signs about both topics often leverage non-textual semiotic resources to enhance their messages. This is especially apparent in feminist signs. Figures 26–28 make use of the color purple, which is widely associated with feminist movements internationally. Figure 26 is a sticker from 8 Mil Motius [8 Thousand Reasons], a Catalan feminist and anti-repression collective that emerged in response to the prosecution of activists involved in an International Women's Day strike in 2018. Figures 26 and 27 incorporate the female gender symbol and a raised fist, while Figure 28 depicts Angela Davis and the slogan "Feminism is the radical notion that women are people" in Catalan.

The creators of the mural in Figure 28 come from Arran and Endavant, which are distinct but closely aligned organizations within the Catalan *Esquerra Independentista* [pro-independence left]. Arran is a youth organization, while Endavant is a broader revolutionary political organization. As defined in Section 2.3.4, the mural remains an example of vernacular signage despite being produced by organized political groups because its content is expressive and its language choice is not dictated by institutional policy requirements or commercial incentives. Both Arran and Endavant are known for their prolific Catalan-language signage, as is La Forja, which created Figure 23. The *estelada* and star in their respective logos signal their support for Catalan independence. Endavant also produced the stencil in Figure 29, which calls for the wealthy to bear the costs of the crisis and is accompanied by an *estelada*, a hammer and sickle, and a raised fist. These symbols associate the sign with a pro-independence stance and far-left political struggle.

Figure 26
Social-cause sticker in Catalan: "A les feministes, la repressió no ens atura. 8 mil motius, 'Jo per elles i elles per mi'" [Repression does not stop feminists. 8 Thousand Reasons, "I for them, and they for me"], Sant Cugat del Vallès



Figure 27
Social-cause graffiti in Catalan: "Si s'aturen les dones, s'atura el món" [If women stop, the world stops], Ripoll



Figure 28
Social-cause mural in Catalan: "Feminisme és la idea radical que les dones són persones" [Feminism is the radical notion that women are people], Cardedeu



Figure 29
Social-cause stencil in Catalan: "Que la crisi la paguin els rics" [Make the rich pay for the crisis], Cardedeu



Figures 30–33 show additional murals in Catalan advocating for diversity, migrant children, equality, and the environment, respectively. Figure 30 was created by the Gironès chapter of La Forja. The mural expresses solidarity with three named individuals and advocates for their inclusion in the community while denouncing racism. Figure 31 displays support for juvenile migrants, implicitly advocating for inclusion and against deportation with the phrases "more bridges" and "fewer walls," respectively. Figure 32 asserts a desire for equality. It is not clear for whom equality is sought, but the first phrase stating that "Fighting is the path" suggests that it refers to groups that have faced marginalization. Dark paint covers the second phrase that identifies equality as the aim, suggesting that an LL observer took issue with the message and acted in protest. The mural in Figure 33 advocates protecting the environment, as do the poster and sticker in Figures 34 and 35, which are also written in Catalan. The phrase "Protest to keep the Pyrenees alive, stop the Olympic Games" in Figure 34 refers to Spain's bid to host the 2030 Winter Olympics. Protesters feared damage to the fragile ecosystem of the Pyrenees mountains. Spain withdrew its bid in June 2022, the same month that artifact was documented. The creator of the sticker saying "Fight for the planet" in Figure 35 is from Rebel·lió Extinció, the Catalan branch of Extinction Rebellion, an international movement promoting climate justice and care for the environment.

Figure 30

Social-cause mural in Catalan naming multiple individuals and stating: "Us volem a casa! + educació, -racisme" [We want you home! More education, less racism], Girona



Figure 31

Social-cause mural in Catalan: "Cap infant és il·legal, més ponts, menys murs" [No child is illegal, more bridges, fewer walls], L'Hospitalet de Llobregat



Figure 32

Social-cause mural in Catalan: "La lluita és el camí. La igualtat, el nostre destí" [The fight is the path. Equality, our destination], Badia del Vallès. The message is partially obscured by paint, likely thrown by a different actor.



Figure 33
Social-cause mural in Catalan: "La terra és la nostra llar, cuidem-la" [The earth is our home, let's take care of it], Salt



Figure 34
Social-cause poster in Catalan: "Manifestació per un pirineu viu. Aturem els jocs olímpics" [Protest to keep the Pyrenees alive. Stop the Olympic Games], Solsona



Figure 35
Social-cause sticker in Catalan: "Lluita pel planeta" [Fight for the planet], Girona



A plausible interpretation of Figure 36's phrase "*Estima com vulguis*" [Love however you want] in Catalan is an expression of support for the LGBTQ+ community, while Figure 37 advocates for inclusive sex and gender education on the wall of a secondary school, also in Catalan. Another sign visible in Figure 37 reads "*Hijos de puta*" [Sons of bitches] in Spanish. It is not clear whether this was written in response to the Catalan message, but it could plausibly have been. If this were the case, a linguistic contrast would parallel a contrast in values in this instance. In Figure 38, someone has hung a banner that reads "*La pau és justícia social*" [Peace is social justice] in Catalan, without specifying what social justice specifically entails.

Figure 36
Social-cause graffiti in Catalan: "Estima com vulguis" [Love however you want], El Poblenou



Figure 37
Social-cause graffiti in Catalan: "Educació sexual i de gènere inclusives" [Inclusive sex and gender education], Cardedeu. A vulgar/taboo graffiti message also appears in Spanish, "Hijos de puta" [Sons of bitches]. Faded ribbons appear around the artifacts that resemble the yellow ribbon.

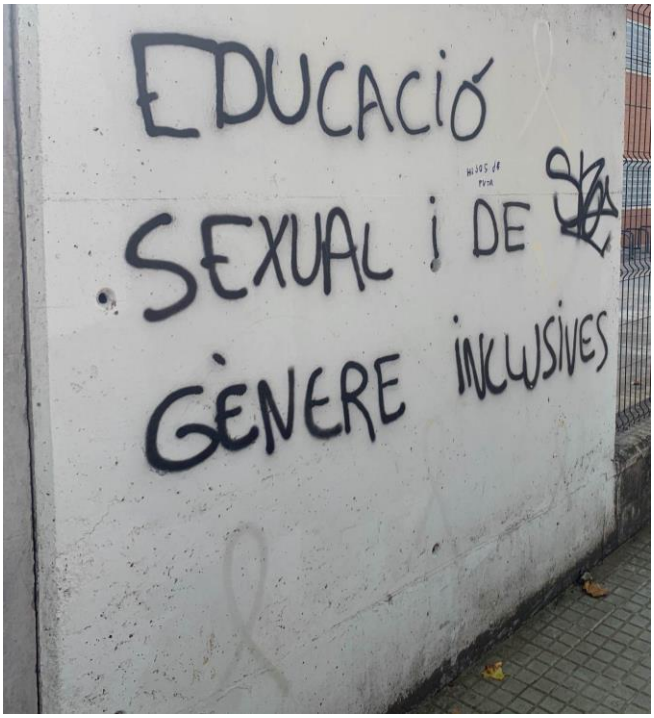


Figure 38
Social-cause banner in Catalan: "La pau és justícia social" [Peace is social justice], Salt



Despite the prominence of Catalan in both participants' hypothetical responses and the social-cause signs in the corpus, responses diverged more noticeably with respect to Spanish and English. Keeping in mind that interviewees could select more than one language in the hypothetical exercise, more than two-thirds of them (N = 41) said they would use Spanish or English to create graffiti about this topic. In the corpus, however, only 15% of social-cause signs were monolingual in Spanish, including Figure 39, which denounces animal abuse, sexism, and racism, and only 7% were monolingual in English, such as Figure 40, which expresses support for the Black Lives Matter movement. The alternative spelling "Lifes" suggests that the sign creator may not be a native speaker of English, although the sign was anonymous and this cannot be confirmed.

Figure 39
Social-cause graffiti in Spanish: "Prohibido el maltrato animal, el machismo, racismo" [No animal abuse, sexism, or racism], Solsona. A separate artifact in Catalan appears in response saying "Ben dit!!" [Well said!!]

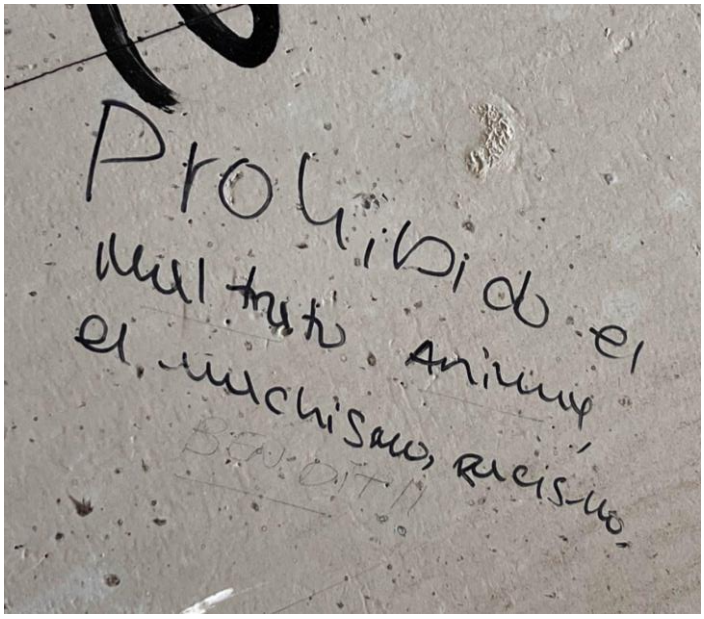


Figure 40
Social-cause graffiti in English: "Black Lifes Matter," L'Hospitalet de Llobregat



Of the participants who said they would use Spanish or English, 90% (N = 37) cited wanting to reach the widest audience possible when addressing concerns of a global scale. Figure 40 cannot necessarily be interpreted as evidence of this audience-oriented motivation, however. Although its creator was able to produce a sign in English supporting the cause, the use of English may reflect the circulation of the Black Lives Matter slogan as a recognizable fixed expression across languages and geographic contexts rather than a deliberate attempt to reach a wider audience. Nevertheless, reaching a broader audience emerged as a common rationale in the interviews. Núria (female, 33), for example, describes Catalan as her language but said she would

use English to write about social causes to reflect their universal nature and direct her message to a broader global public:

(12) "*Suposo que en aquest cas ho faria amb anglès. Com que parlem de reivindicacions, probablement de drets humans, crec que és una cosa molt globalitzadora, com molt estesa, i és important que arribi a tothom. Perquè el missatge arribi a tothom, ara mateix la llengua universal és l'anglès.*" (April 7, 2023)

[I guess in this case I would do it in English. Since we are talking about demands or claims, probably about human rights, I think it's something very globalizing, like very widespread, and it's important that it reach everyone. For the message to reach everyone, the universal language right now is English.]

Pere (male, 38), who identifies Spanish and Catalan equally as his languages, reported that he would use Spanish for similar reasons:

(13) "*Si és una cosa reivindicativa, tan important que és a nivell mundial, potser la faria en castellà que arribaria a més gent, el missatge.*" (June 16, 2023)

[If it were an activist message, something important on a global scale, I might do it in Spanish so that the message would reach more people.]

It is interesting that among participants who said they would use Spanish or English to create graffiti about a social cause, those who described Catalan as their language tended to choose English, whereas those who identified Spanish or both Catalan and Spanish as their languages tended to choose Spanish. This pattern may relate to Oakes' (2001) observation that some Basques and Catalans in Spain often use English rather than Spanish as a means of wider communication, since English is not perceived as threatening to their languages (Euskera and Catalan, respectively) in the same way as Spanish. Because this issue did not arise explicitly in the interviews, however, such an interpretation remains speculative.

Núria's and Pere's metalinguistic evaluations instantiate a language ideology that positions Spanish and English, but not Catalan, as dominant global languages. Both mentioned the appeal of using a language that is accessible to a broader population when writing about universal concerns, even if that writing appears on walls in Catalonia. This ideology also surfaces in the commentary of participants who said they would choose Catalan despite its more limited reach, because their priority in creating public signage would be to defend their language. Culturally Catalan Andreu (male, 42) explained,

(14) "*Tot i que arribi a menys gent, segurament ho faria en català . . . Com que és la meva llengua, si no la parlo jo o si no la parlem entre nosaltres, no sobreviurà.*" (July 10, 2023)

[Even if it reached fewer people, I'd probably do it in Catalan . . . Since it's my language, if I don't speak it, or if we don't speak it among ourselves, it won't survive.]

By expressing concern about the vitality of Catalan, Andreu offers a different perspective on this language ideology, foregrounding the need to support Catalan rather than prioritizing the wider reach associated with Spanish or English. In fact, the desire to use larger global languages did not appear to be a primary motivator for most sign creators in the corpus, since 68% of all signs about social causes and 75% of monolingual signs were in Catalan.

A look at the multilingual signs in the corpus helps bridge the partial misalignment between LL patterns and participants' hypothetical language choices. One third of multilingual signs addressed social causes; of these, 80% combined English and Catalan, and 67% specifically paired the English *stop* with a social ill in Catalan. Figure 41 exemplifies this formula with the phrase "Stop *pobresa*" [Stop poverty].

Figure 41
Multilingual social-cause graffiti (English + Catalan): "Stop pobresa" [Stop poverty], Santa Coloma de Gramenet



As explained in Section 3.1.3, I coded "stop" as English for consistency with the dictionary-based coding procedure used in this investigation. Its frequent use across a wide range of languages nevertheless means that its presence may not represent the same degree of active English selection as less conventional English lexical material. At the same time, the monosyllabic structure of *stop*, compared with the trisyllabic forms that might occur in equivalent protest slogans such as Spanish *paremos* and Catalan *aturem*, may make the English-derived form particularly punchy and effective at drawing attention. Grosjean (1982) notes that word length can influence borrowing, drawing on work by Higa (1979), who found that the shorter of a native and a foreign word tends to be kept in Japanese.

Word length alone, however, cannot fully account for the dominance of *stop* in activist slogans: Catalan offers a monosyllabic native equivalent in *prou* [enough], which is used in activist registers but is eschewed in favor of *stop* in Figure 41's inscription. The persistence of *stop* over *prou* in many signs points to additional factors at play, among them the global status of English (Trenchs-Parera & Newman, 2015) and its prestige in transnational protest discourse. Such multilingual forms show how sign creators leverage English's global status in their public commentary on social issues, in line with the language ideology identified by Núria. Moreover, because words like *stop* have a clear denotational meaning and widely shared connotations of protest and global activism, they are understandable for both English- and non-English-speaking audiences.

The use of red spray paint for Figure 41's message makes it more noticeable against the light gray background; Kress and van Leeuwen (2002, p. 357) associate the red end of the color spectrum with "energy, salience, and foregrounding." In this context, it may also evoke the conventional association of red with stop signs or danger, although the sign creator's intended motivation cannot be established.

Beyond highlighting the global reach of English, Catalan-dominant Dídac (male, 26) noted an additional impact of English lexical material in Catalan-framed multilingual constructions:

(15) "*Sona més* cool*, no? Sona més guai, ho remarques més, suposo. Crida l'atenció una paraula diferent.*" (May 28, 2023)

[It sounds cooler, right? It sounds cooler, you notice it more, I guess. A foreign word draws attention.]

Dídac's comment reflects a language ideology that associates foreign languages with social appeal and attention-grabbing potential, in line with Pérez-Sabater (2022). It is noteworthy that he used the English word "cool" while elaborating on this point in Catalan, thereby reproducing the very language ideology he alluded to.

Yet sign creators typically retained Catalan in multilingual combinations instead of creating monolingual signs in English. Consistent with this, 75% of monolingual social-cause signs were in Catalan. In addressing this, street artist Carlota (female, 45) discussed the value of Catalan as an index of localness, which she believes can be a powerful tool for those expressing social messages in public. She was born in Catalonia to Andalusian immigrants and mostly uses Spanish in her daily life. She explained,

(16) "*Sobre lo que son los mensajes sociales, todos tenemos la misma finalidad, es comunicar algo de lo que sientes. Y creo que hay una parte de la población que está más vinculada a las causas si están más en catalán. Por ejemplo, las frases que me has dicho como más LGBTI, si están en catalán, a lo mejor crean como un poco más situación de pertenencia, como algo más de aquí, como algo más sentimiento de 'yo soy de aquí, soy gay,' no sé. Es como gente que es de aquí y se siente como que debe de decirlo así, en catalán.*" (July 11, 2023)

[With regard to social messages, we all have the same goal, which is to communicate something we feel. And I think there is a part of the population that feels more connected to these causes when they are more in Catalan. For example, the phrases you mentioned that are more LGBTQ+-related, if they are in Catalan, maybe they create a bit more of a sense of belonging, something more from here, more of a feeling of "I'm from here, I'm gay," I don't know. It's like people who are from here and feel that they should say it that way, in Catalan.]

Carlota's perspective reflects the language ideology discussed in Section 5.2 that links Catalan to authenticity and local belonging. In her view, using Catalan for public messages about social causes can make those messages feel more locally rooted and more closely tied to the identities of local audiences who are likely to observe them. Carlota's reflection is also powerful because it shows that Catalan-dominant participants are not the only ones who perceive an ideological link between Catalan and local belonging.

The ideology identified in Section 5.2 linking pro-independence stances to the Catalan language also figured into discussions of language choice for signs about social causes. Many participants surmised that much of this signage is produced by groups from Catalonia's pro-independence left who advocate for gender equality, expanded social protections, the environment, and LGBTQ+ rights as a part of their broader ideological program alongside support for independence. These groups include, for example, La Forja (Figures 23 and 30), Endavant (Figures 28 and 29), Arran (Figures 28, 42, 52, and 54), and CUP (Figure 43). The pro-Catalan, pro-independence stances of these organizations help explain why they tend to produce signage in Catalan.

Catalan-dominant independence supporter Laia (female, 25) connected political and social activism and explicitly identified Catalan as the main language of communication in activist circles:

(17) "*La gent que està fent activisme polític també està fent activisme social. En cercles d'activisme, fins i tot la gent castellana que hi entra acaba parlant en català també perquè és la llengua vehicular de l'activisme, per dir-ho així.*" (August 7, 2023)

[People involved in political activism are also involved in social activism. In activist circles, even Spanish speakers who get involved end up speaking Catalan as well, because it is the main language used in activism, so to speak.]

Laia's reflection highlights an important nuance regarding language choice across domains. She acknowledges that many participants in these groups may use Spanish as their dominant language in everyday life but explains that Catalan becomes associated with activism related to social issues because it is the principal language of communication in these circles. Catalan therefore forms part of these speakers' broader linguistic repertoires (Blommaert, 2010, p. 102), even when it is not their habitual language, and the norms of the activist setting may lead them to select it for public signs about social issues.

Alba (female, 30), a culturally Catalan street artist critical of the Spanish state, offered historical insight into the perception of Catalan as the primary language used in social activism. She noted a reinforcement of the connection between Catalan and progressive organizing in the early 2010s as *El Procés* gained momentum, and traced this link to the Franco era when public use of Catalan and displays of Catalan culture were prohibited:

(18) "*Jo crec que la política i les causes progressistes solen ser causes que històricament van molt lligades. Fins a l'any 2012 o així, el moviment independentista va començar a créixer bastant i llavors va agafar molta més gent amb causes com d'esquerres, de la llengua . . . Llavors, a Catalunya, si eres d'esquerres, parlaves en català. I si ets d'esquerres, defenses l'habitatge social, defenses el feminisme. Els que solen donar suport a aquestes causes, i sobretot els que solen fer pintades, són d'esquerres. Són d'esquerres i són catalanoparlants. També hi ha gent d'esquerres que és castellana, però històricament el moviment d'esquerres a Catalunya sempre ha sigut en català, des de Franco . . . És gent de classe mitjana, catalana catalana, que té un punt com de rebel·lia, i llavors qüestiona el sistema. Crec que en molts casos, la classe mitjana parla en català, i la classe alta i la classe baixa parlen en castellà.*" (July 5, 2023)

[I think politics and progressive causes tend to be causes that have historically been closely linked. Around 2012 or so, the independence movement began to grow quite a bit, and then it drew in many more people associated with left-wing causes, language-related causes . . . So, in Catalonia, if you were left-wing, you spoke Catalan. And if you are left-wing, you support social housing, you support feminism. The people who tend to support these causes, and especially those who tend to make graffiti, are left-wing. They are left-wing and Catalan-speaking. There are also left-wing people who are Spanish-speaking, but historically the left-wing movement in Catalonia has always been in Catalan, since the Franco era . . . They are middle-class people, super Catalan, who have a kind of rebellious

streak, and so they question the system. I think that in many cases, the middle class speaks Catalan, while the upper class and the lower class speak Spanish.]

Alba's reflection also previews a class-based language ideology, as she associates Catalan-speaking activism with middle-class identities and Spanish with other socioeconomic positions. The relationship she draws between language and social class emerges again later in the dissertation and is examined in depth in Section 5.5.

To Alba's point about the link between political and social causes, the prolific Catalan-language signage from left-wing groups often combines secessionist, socialist, and feminist undertones. Figure 42 from Arran affirms these values textually (albeit with an unconventional spelling) and visually by incorporating the *estelada* independence flag, the hammer and sickle, and the female gender symbol as additional semiotic resources. The sign creator also signals the local identity of Arran's Ponent chapter.

Figure 42
Social-cause graffiti in Catalan: "Independència socialsme feminisme" [Independence social[i]sm feminism], Les Borges Blanques



As a pan-Catalan organization with chapters across the *Països Catalans*, Arran routinely uses Catalan in its public communications, and its graffiti in the corpus is no exception. The pro-independence, culturally Catalan, and progressive orientation of Arran and similar organizations helps explain Catalan's predominance in social-cause signs, as many of them are created by actors from these groups. Figure 43 shows another example from the far-left Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP) political party which highlights feminism, socialism, and environmentalism as core values that they claim alongside support for independence and a broader pan-Catalan identity across Catalan-speaking territories.

Figure 43

Social-cause poster in Catalan: "Per guanyar independència, socialisme, feminisme, ecologisme, Països Catalans" [To win independence, socialism, feminism, environmentalism, Catalan Countries], Girona. The CUP party logo at the bottom includes a faint estelada, and the organization's website is also listed. An LL actor has written and underlined the name "Carla" on the poster.



These Catalan-language signs are consistent with the language ideology described above that links Catalan to collective social activism. Moreover, the explicit organizational authorship of many political and social-cause signs highlights a distinction between individual and societal bilingualism: Catalan may function as the conventional language of an organization or activist circle even when some individual members use Spanish more frequently in everyday interactions. The signs therefore reflect group-level language norms rather than necessarily mirroring the habitual language practices of every person involved in their production. This pattern also resonates with participants' reflections on Catalonia's strong associationist culture, in which Catalan is often understood as the language of many civic and organizational spaces, a point explored further in Section 5.4.

Vann (2026) provides broader sociocultural context for this association. He identifies solidarity, community involvement, civic responsibility, respect for diversity, and human rights among the shared values emphasized in the Catalan-language educational and associationist environments in which younger generations have been socialized (pp. 49, 245–247). He notes, for example, that *esplais*, or youth associations, explicitly promote democracy, solidarity, cooperation, respect for diversity and human rights, and civic participation. Such spaces may therefore help reinforce an association between the Catalan language, collective civic engagement, and the progressive causes represented in the LL.

Participant commentary also linked Catalan-language social-cause activism to broader cultural perceptions of Catalonia as progressive and Spain as conservative. These perspectives involve an ideological alignment of linguistic, social, and political identity, similar to what was observed in Section 5.2. Speaking on feminist artifacts specifically, Catalan content creator Alicia (female, 24) said,

(19) "*Crec que hi ha una ideologia política que és molt present de l'idea d'uns països catalans hipotètics o utòpics on el feminisme ja ha de ser present. Per tant no em sorprèn que tot es fes en català perquè llengua, identitat i feminisme anaven de la mà . . . Crec que encara a ulls de la majoria de catalans, es veu l'estat espanyol com un estat conservador, no només en temes polítics sinó també en temes de gènere . . . crec que el que està intentant l'independentisme és de fer totalment el contrari, de dir, nosaltres hem de construir un estat on tota aquesta gent hi tingui cabuda, i apartar-nos una mica d'aquests ideals conservadors que venen del franquisme.*" (July 7, 2023)

[I think there is a very salient political ideology about the idea of the hypothetical or utopian Catalan Countries in which feminism is assumed to be present. For that reason, it does not surprise me that everything would be done in Catalan, since language, identity, and feminism went hand in hand . . . I think that, in the eyes of most Catalans, the Spanish state is still seen as conservative, not only in political terms but also in relation to gender . . . I think the independence movement is trying to do the exact opposite, to say, we have to build a state in which all these people have a place, and distance ourselves somewhat from the conservative ideals that have been passed down from Francoism.]

Alicia's comment reflects an alignment of linguistic and social identity, similar to the conflation of linguistic and political identities observed in Section 5.2. In her view, a more progressive Catalan social identity may be partly shaped in reaction to the conservative ideals associated with the Franco regime, including traditional gender norms that positioned women primarily within the domestic sphere and restricted their public roles.

A similar contrast between Catalan progressivism and Spanish traditionalism was also articulated by Carles (male, 50), who is Spanish-dominant and voted no in the independence referendum, yet supported Catalans' democratic right to vote and opposed the violence inflicted on voters by Spain's Guardia Civil and National Police on referendum day. In his view, Catalonia has long been oriented toward progress and modernity, while he perceives Spain as more rooted in old-fashioned values:

(20) "*Cataluña es el progreso. Cataluña es lo que está cerca de Europa. Ha aportado toda la industria y modernidad a España. O sea, la derecha siempre ha querido volver a tiempos pasados, a los antiguos valores, ¿sabes? Y Cataluña ha querido la modernidad, la europeza. Decían que, por ejemplo, que no había que europezar España, sino que había que españolizar Europa. En el tiempo de Franco decían que España era la reserva espiritual de Occidente, porque era católico. Pero, bueno, eran franquistas, eran nazis, ¿entiendes? Yo no te digo que sea bien ni que sea mal, pero es así. O la modernidad o la tradición, cada uno que elija.*" (May 17, 2023)

[Catalonia is progress. Catalonia is what is closest to Europe. It has brought all the industry and modernity to Spain. The political right, by contrast, has always wanted to return to the past, to traditional values, you know? And Catalonia has wanted modernity and a more European orientation. They used to say, for example, that Spain did not need to be Europeanized, but rather that Europe needed to be Spanishized. During the Franco era they said that Spain was the spiritual reserve of the West, because it was Catholic. But, well, they were Francoists, they were Nazis, you understand? I'm not saying whether that's good or bad, but that's how it is. Either modernity or tradition, each person can choose.]

Carles contrasts Catalonia with Spain by associating Catalonia with modernity, industry, and proximity to Europe, while linking Spain, particularly Francoist and conservative Spain, with tradition. His comments therefore position Catalonia itself as comparatively modern. Modernity is not associated exclusively with Catalonia or Catalan elsewhere in the data, however. In other interviews and in the corpus, English is linked to globalization, cosmopolitanism, and an international outlook. These associations similarly position English in relation to a modern, outward-looking orientation, although they do so through somewhat different ideological meanings than those Carles attributes to Catalonia.

The fact that Franco was invoked across many interviews suggests that, for some participants, Franco functions as a metonym for a broader history of repression associated with the Spanish state. This is similar to how the "Viva Franco" message in Figure 16 (Section 5.2) may be used to signal support for Spanish nationalism, even in the contemporary era. In this view, defending Catalan and defending social causes such as feminism or other human-rights issues can be seen as part of the same broader struggle against forms of repression some participants believe have long existed in Spain.

Borja (male, 34) identifies Catalan as his language, but lives in a Spanish-dominant town in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area. Reflecting on the conscious and consistent effort he makes to defend his language through habitual use in a place where Catalan is less widely spoken, he described how in Catalonia the broader struggle in support of marginalized groups has historically also included defense of the Catalan language:

(21) "*La meva impressió és que des de la transició a la democràcia fins, ara tots els moviments socials ens han regalat aquesta idea que part de la lluita social implica també la normalització del català. Era vist com aquell compositiu i crec que simplement s'ha mantingut al llarg del temps com alguna cosa natural.*" (July 10, 2023)

[My impression is that, from the transition to democracy until now, all social movements have given us the idea that part of social struggle also involves the normalization of Catalan. It was seen as one component of that larger set of causes, and I think it has simply been maintained over time as something natural.]

He sees support for Catalan as part of a broader shared struggle for social justice, and believes this link could be related to the high presence of Catalan in public signage about social causes.

Taken together, these reflections reveal a tension between the imagined audience for social-cause messages and the local settings in which the signs are produced. Participants often positioned Spanish and English as global languages of broader reach, making them suitable for addressing universal concerns. Yet they also associated Catalan with local belonging, collective social organizing, and the language practices of activist circles within and beyond the pro-independence movement. Building on the quantitative pattern described in Section 4.2.1, participant commentary shows how the widespread use of Catalan for this topic can be understood as part of a wider struggle for social justice that includes the defense of language and culture alongside support for marginalized groups. This tension helps explain why Catalan predominates in the corpus even though many interviewees said they might choose Spanish or English. In practice, signs about social causes often emerge from local collectives for whom Catalan carries meanings that matter more than widespread communicative reach alone.

5.4 Community Issues

Catalan is used in 81% of signs about community issues in the LL. Even in the Spanish-dominant BMA, it appears in three-quarters. This aligns with the hypothetical choices of participants across ages, genders, hometowns, and ideological positionings, 95% of whom (N = 57) said they would use Catalan to make a sign with a community-specific message. Although 32% (N = 19) mentioned Spanish, 16 of those 19 participants said they would create a bilingual sign including Catalan and Spanish instead of a sign exclusively in Spanish. Three culturally Catalan participants in this group of 16 explicitly mentioned they would try to present Catalan as the preferred code in their bilingual sign, either via a bigger font size or more prominent positioning. Two participants said they would include English in a community-specific sign, and only one mentioned other languages, always in combination with Catalan for the three cases.

Figures 44–58 show the use of Catalan in community-oriented signs from both Spanish- and Catalan-dominant survey areas across all eight regional territories. In line with what was observed for the other two societal topics, community signage displays a larger variety of sign types than the two intimate topics, for which graffiti was the overwhelming medium.

The declaration of "We want the theater" in Figure 44 refers to a municipal theater that had been approved to be built in the town of Les Borges Blanques but did not come to fruition. The banner in Figure 45, along with many like it hanging throughout La Vila de Gràcia during the time of fieldwork, expresses neighborhood opposition to an initiative that would have destroyed some local homes on the Frígola Passage to establish a lower walkway.

Figure 44
Community-oriented stencil in Catalan: "Volem el teatre" [We want the theater], Les Borges Blanques



Figure 45

Community-oriented banner in Catalan: "Plataforma veïnal: No al vial de Passatge Frígola. 14 famílies poden perdre la llar. El vial no s'ho val. #novialpassatgefrigola" [Neighborhood platform: No to the Frígola Passage walkway. 14 families could lose their homes. The walkway is not worth it. #nofrigolapassagewalkway], La Vila de Gràcia



The referents of Figures 46 and 47 are places that began as occupied social centers. In Catalonia, occupied social centers are typically self-managed community spaces established in empty or abandoned buildings, where youth and neighborhood collectives organize activities such as assemblies, meals, concerts, workshops, and mutual-aid efforts. They form part of the broader *okupa* tradition, in which activists often occupy unused buildings to meet practical community needs (Galvão Debelle et al., 2018; Vilaseca, 2013). Because these centers often exist in a precarious legal situation, even when they become important neighborhood spaces they may still face threats of closure or eviction from owners or public authorities. This was the case for Casal Popular Tres Lliris, a youth collective in La Vila de Gràcia that produced the sticker shown in Figure 46, and El Pati del Rovell, a self-managed community space in Salt referenced in Figure 47. Supporters of both spaces mobilized in efforts to prevent eviction and preserve them as community spaces. During fieldwork, I documented many stickers and stencils from the former collective throughout La Vila de Gràcia. The phrase seen in the sticker, "*Ens hi va la Vila*," is a play on words based on the expression "*Ens hi va la vida*" [Our lives are at stake], suggesting that the future of La Vila de Gràcia is at stake for supporters of the Casal Popular Tres Lliris.

Figure 46

Community-oriented sticker in Catalan: "Casal Popular Tres Lliris, el bàtec de la vila. Ens hi va la vila" [Three Lilies Youth House, the heartbeat of the neighborhood. La Vila (de Gràcia) is on the line], La Vila de Gràcia



Figure 47

Community-oriented graffiti in Catalan: "El Pati del Rovell es queda" [The Rovell social center is here to stay], Salt. This graffiti appears alongside a swastika, an inscription that reads "Bro," potentially shorthand for "brother" and synonymous with "mate" or "dude," and several tags and individual names.



The mural promoting reading in Figure 48 appears in a park near Santa Margarida i els Monjos's local library. The mural in Figure 49 implicitly claims a Catalan identity for the Raval neighborhood of Santa Coloma de Gramenet, declaring "*Som Raval*" [We are Raval] alongside various positive virtues, all written in Catalan. This is notable, since Santa Coloma de Gramenet has the lowest percentage of Catalan speakers of the 21 survey areas covered in this dissertation (see Table 3 in Section 3.1.1). In a similar vein, the sticker seen in Figure 50 shows town-level support for locals in Catalan by stating "La Seu moves for you." "La Seu" is often used as shorthand for the full name of the town, La Seu d'Urgell. The mural in Figure 51, "*Solsona desnuclearitzada*" [denuclearized Solsona], most likely relates to the broader anti-nuclear and peace movement tradition in Catalonia.

Figure 48

Community-oriented mural in Catalan: "A Santa Margarida i els Monjos fomentem la lectura. La literatura que ens inspira" [In Santa Margarida i els Monjos we foster reading. Literature that inspires us], Santa Margarida i els Monjos. The names and likenesses of various celebrated authors accompany the text.



Figure 49
Community-oriented mural in Catalan: "Som Raval. Diversitat, valor, estima, honesitat, respecte" [We are Raval. Diversity, value, love, honesty, respect], Santa Coloma de Gramenet. Another LL actor has created a graffiti artifact in Spanish on the left side of the mural, "No peros" [No dogs], with an image of a dog crossed out.[9]



Figure 50
Community-oriented sticker in Catalan: "La Seu es mou per tu" [La Seu moves for you], La Seu d'Urgell



[9] "Honesitat" is conventionally spelled "honestitat." The word for "dogs" in Spanish is conventionally spelled "perros."

Figure 51
Community-oriented mural in Catalan: "Solsona desnuclearitzada, cases, visca la terra lliure" [Denuclearized Solsona, houses, long live the free land], Solsona. An estelada also appears in the mural.



A final example that specifically names the survey area appears in Figure 52, "*Les joves defensem Gràcia*" [Young people defend Gràcia]. This graffiti was produced by Arran, the youth organization that also created Figures 28 and 42 and that makes their pro-independence positioning evident with the *estelada* included alongside their signature. As in Figure 42, the creator indicated their local chapter identity by writing "Gràcia." Similar graffiti from Arran in La Vila de Gràcia suggest that the neighborhood needs to be defended from property speculators who drive up housing prices.

Figures 52 and 53 present a notable and strategic morphological choice used by actors from Arran and similar leftist groups: the use of the grammatically feminine definite article *Les* instead of the masculine *Els*, even though standard Catalan grammar treats the masculine form as the generic default for mixed-gender collective groups. I spoke with two individuals who have been involved in Arran's organizing efforts and political activities. Although they have not created graffiti themselves and were not part of the formal interview sample for this dissertation, they explained that it is common in political discourse and communications from Arran and other leftist groups such as CUP to use feminine grammatical forms as the generic default, including when male members refer to groups that include themselves. This practice has also been documented across CUP posters, social media, and public speech (Bach & Tomàs, 2017, pp. 152–164). Rather than presenting the people described as feminine, this marked usage challenges the masculine generic and signals commitments to gender inclusion and progressive politics. Vann (2026, p. 255) similarly reports that local commentators interpret this use of the feminine plural as a progressive practice that expresses positive attitudes toward particular groups and reflects a compassionate approach to inclusion.

Figure 52
Community-oriented graffiti in Catalan: "Les joves defensem Gràcia" [Young people defend Gràcia], La Vila de Gràcia



Figures 53–59 point to issues that affect community residents at the site level, but whose messages also resonate in other parts of Catalonia. Like Figure 34, Figure 53 signals opposition to Spain's bid to host the 2030 Olympic Games, though in this case from a perspective concerned less with environmental impacts than with young people's ability to continue affording life in the Pyrenees. As in Figure 52, the grammatically feminine definite article *Les* is used where the masculine *Els* might be expected in traditional usage. Figure 54 from Arran's Ponent chapter expresses small-town pride, connecting issues important to residents of Les Borges Blanques with those of rural communities more broadly. Figures 55 and 56 relate to education-related mobilization that was especially prominent in Catalonia in 2022, around the time of fieldwork. Figure 55 shows one of numerous posters calling for a teachers' strike in Móra d'Ebre, while the graffiti in Figure 56 calls on students not to attend class.

Figure 53
Community-oriented graffiti in Catalan: "Les joves volem viure al Pirineu, no als Jocs Olímpics" [The youth want to live in the Pyrenees, no to the Olympic Games], La Seu d'Urgell. Another actor has written an additional graffiti inscription in Catalan, "Les grans també" [Older people too].



Figure 54
Community-oriented graffiti in Catalan: "Lluita rural contra el capital. Orgull de poble" [Rural fight against the capital. Small-town pride], Les Borges Blanques



Figure 55
Community-oriented poster in Catalan: "Prou imposicions! Prou retallades! Anem a la vaga! Increment del personal d'atenció directa a l'alumnat" [Enough impositions! Enough cuts! Let's go on strike! We need more student-facing personnel], Móra d'Ebre. The logos of various teachers' unions appear at the bottom of the flyer.



Figure 56
Community-oriented graffiti in Catalan: "Buidem les aules" [Everyone out of the classrooms], Montblanc



Finally, Figures 57 and 58 specifically mention terms like "*veïna*" [neighbor] and "*barri*" [neighborhood], but they are motivated by the broader concern of mass tourism that has affected many areas of Catalonia. These artifacts were photographed in El Barri Gòtic and Sant Pere, Santa Caterina, i la Ribera, two neighborhoods in Barcelona's old town that have been particularly impacted by rising housing costs and other tourism-induced consequences that have resulted in the displacement of many lifelong Catalan residents by newcomers. The banner in Figure 57 and the graffiti in Figure 58 oppose the displacement of residents and the continued influx of tourists. Their use of Catalan suggests that the messages are oriented more toward building solidarity among local residents and addressing local authorities than toward directly targeting tourists themselves. However, variations on "Tourist go home" in English are common throughout Barcelona and other parts of Catalonia, as illustrated by the stencil in Figure 59 from Montblanc. In this case, it is reasonable to infer that foreign tourists themselves are the imagined audience.

Figure 57
Community-oriented banner in Catalan: "Cap veïna fora del barri" [Not a single neighbor kicked out of the neighborhood], El Barri Gòtic



Figure 58
Community-oriented graffiti in Catalan: "Ni una veïna menys, ni un turista més" [Neither one less neighbor, nor one more tourist], Sant Pere, Santa Caterina, i la Ribera

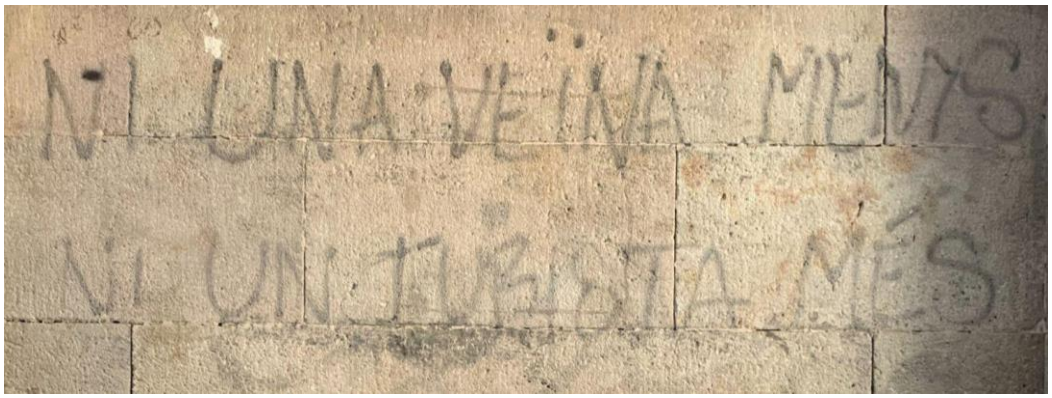
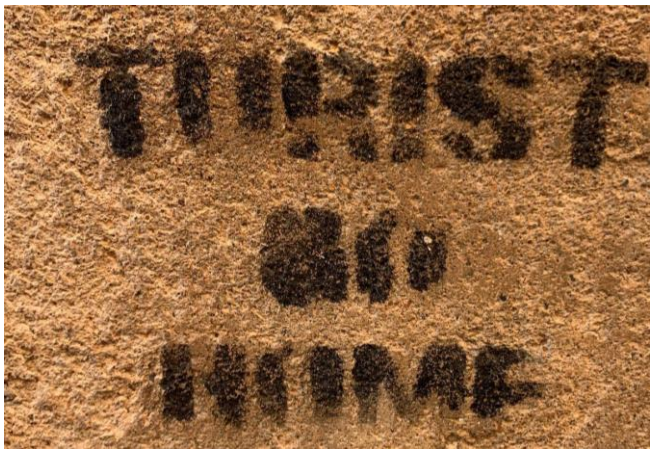


Figure 59
Community-oriented stencil in English: "T[o]urist go home," Montblanc



The sample of signs displayed in Figures 44–58 illustrates that, although habitual use of Catalan varies substantially across regional territories (Idescat, 2025), Catalan remains the predominant language of community-oriented signage at the aggregate level both inside and outside the BMA. This finding strengthens and extends Morlan and Byrne's (2024) Barcelona-based interpretation that Catalan has become emblematic of community-based discourse and advocacy on public walls. The broader geographic sample shows that this association reaches beyond Barcelona, while the participant commentary discussed below helps explain it by linking Catalan to local belonging, insider credibility, civic authority, and participation in community organizations.

Regarding the clear predominance of Catalan in community-oriented signage, a widely shared view is that community concerns expressed in Catalan resonate more with locals. Carmen (female, 33) is from a small village in the province of Lleida and now lives in a neighborhood of Barcelona that has both a high international population and a strong tourist presence. She distinguished between "*gent passatgera*" [those just passing through] and permanent residents, suggesting that community-oriented signage is really aimed at the latter because those are the people who are truly affected by local initiatives. For this reason, she stated that even in a non-Catalan-dominant neighborhood like El Born, Catalan would be better for signs about local issues because those reading it would see that the sign creator was a local:

(22) "*Quan parlem del que s'està passant aquí, li estic dient a la gent que està vivint aquí i he de parlar des de la terra. Llavors jo envio aquest missatge, i a través de la llengua us faig veure que soc d'aquí. Perquè afecta a casa, i a casa l'idioma és aquest [el català]. Si ja no l'utilitzem per aquests motius, quan l'utilitzarem? Encara que El Born sigui un barri que no sigui gaire català, faria servir català perquè és una part de Barcelona, i Barcelona és una part de Catalunya. Al cap i a la fi molta gent no catalanoparlant és gent passatgera. No li importa si fan un bloc de pisos turístics. Aquest missatge pot passar a la persona que és d'aquí de sempre o que estima la ciutat com a casa. A vegades quan estàs de pas, no l'estimes igual. Llavors aquest missatge aniria per a aquestes persones afectades*." (July 27, 2023)

[When we talk about what's happening here, I'm addressing the people who live here, and I have to speak from the land. So I write this message, and through my choice of language

I show that I'm from here. Because it affects home, and (Catalan) is the language of home. If we don't use it for these purposes, when will we use it? Even though El Born is not a very Catalan neighborhood, I would still use Catalan because it is part of Barcelona, and Barcelona is part of Catalonia. In the end, many people who don't speak Catalan are just passing through. They don't care if people's homes are turned into tourist apartments. This message is aimed instead at the person who's always been here or who loves the city as home. Sometimes, when you are just passing through, you do not love it in the same way. So this message would be aimed at the people who would actually be affected.]

Carmen's commentary reflects a language ideology also described in Sections 5.2 and 5.3 in which Catalan indexes local belonging. Although prior scholarship has documented the association between Catalan and local authenticity (Woolard, 2008), the present interviews show how this association becomes strategically relevant in community-oriented signage. A quarter of interviewees (N = 15) specifically mentioned that using Catalan lends credibility to sign creators and marks them as insiders, which they believed could help attract support for community issues.

Another reflection from Rafa (male, 28) aligns with Carmen's view that Catalan would be most suitable for this topic, both in big cities and smaller towns (implicitly, in areas that are more Spanish-dominant and Catalan-dominant, respectively). Rafa grew up in a large urban area but now lives in a village of a few hundred people. He said that in either context, Catalan would be best because it would prove to locals that the message is coming from "one of their own":

(23) "*En català, perquè crec que es té en millor consideració . . . perquè sembla que el missatge vingui dels teus, no de qualsevol altre que pugui haver vingut de fora . . . Crec que a les ciutats grans també seria millor en català per això mateix, perquè sembla que vingui des de la població més autòctona.*" (May 19, 2023)

[In Catalan, because I think it is looked on more favorably . . . because it makes the message seem like it is coming from one of your own, not from anyone else who may have come from elsewhere . . . I think that in big cities it would also be better in Catalan for that same reason, because it makes it seem like it is coming from the more local population.]

Enric (male, 35), a lifelong resident of a medium-sized city, similarly emphasized the sign observer's perception and explained that Catalan would be more adequate not just for ideological reasons, but also for strategic ones. Namely, language choice might contribute to the message being taken more seriously. He explained,

(24) "*Si fos un missatge en català, potser notaria una mica més que és d'algú de la teva pròpia terra . . . crec que es prendrien més en sèrio. El primer pensament que et ve és que és d'algú de casa, d'aquí del poble . . . el que llegeix, al veure que està [escrivint] algú d'aquí, potser pren més atenció.*" (June 15, 2023)

[If it were a message in Catalan, maybe I'd be a bit more aware that it was coming from someone from here . . . I think they'd be taken more seriously. The first thought you have is that it's from someone from home, from here from the village . . . whoever reads it, upon seeing that someone from here created it, might pay more attention.]

David (male, 37) also highlighted strategic aspects of using Catalan for this topic. A lifelong resident of Barcelona, he pointed out that Catalan indexes authority, thereby bestowing a message with a sense of public legitimacy:

(25) "*El catalán da un punto de importancia, de autoridad. La sensación de que oye, esto es un poquito más importante.*" (May 21, 2023)

[Catalan lends a certain sense of importance and authority. It creates the impression that, hey, this is a bit more important.]

This comment reveals an ideology that associates Catalan with authority. Importantly, the authority referenced here is not necessarily strictly governmental. It may also refer to the kind of legitimacy associated with prominent local voices in public life.

In line with this, Laia (female, 25) identified Catalan as the primary language used in community organizing and civic life in Catalonia. Speaking from her own experience growing up in a traditionally Catalan small town with substantial immigration and a sizable Spanish-dominant population, she claimed that even Spanish-dominant speakers may switch to Catalan if they become involved in civically active circles:

(26) "*Crec que la gent que està involucrada activament a la vida del poble és gent més aviat catalanoparlant, perquè la gent castellanoparlant sol viure en nuclis urbanístics apartats del poble. També, és un moviment estrany: durant els anys d'institut la gent parla més en castellà, és la llengua vehicular i de prestigi. Però un cop la gent està a fora de l'institut, la majoria de persones tornen al català. Fins i tot gent que havia de fer més castellanoparlants a l'institut, quan veu que la gran majoria de la gent que està activa al poble, la gent que fa activitats i que organitza les festes i coses així, parlen català, ells també comencen a parlar en català. Llavors el teixit associatiu, per dir-ho així, del poble és en català. Per tant, tu encara que siguis castellanoparlant, si vols reivindicar una cosa del poble, ho fas amb l'idioma en què es comunica al poble, que és el català.*" (August 7, 2023)

[I think the people who are actively involved in the life of the town tend to be more Catalan-speaking, because Spanish-speaking people tend to live in housing developments that are separated from the town itself. Also, it's an interesting pattern: during secondary school, people tend to speak more in Spanish, which is the dominant language of peer interaction and the prestige language. But once people are out of secondary school, most of them return to Catalan. Even people who had been more Spanish-speaking in secondary school, when they see that the vast majority of people who are active in the town, the people who run activities and organize the festivals and things like that, speak Catalan, they also start to speak Catalan. So the town's civic life, so to speak, is in Catalan. Therefore, even if you are Spanish-speaking, if you want to advocate for something related to the town, you do it in the language through which the town communicates, which is Catalan.]

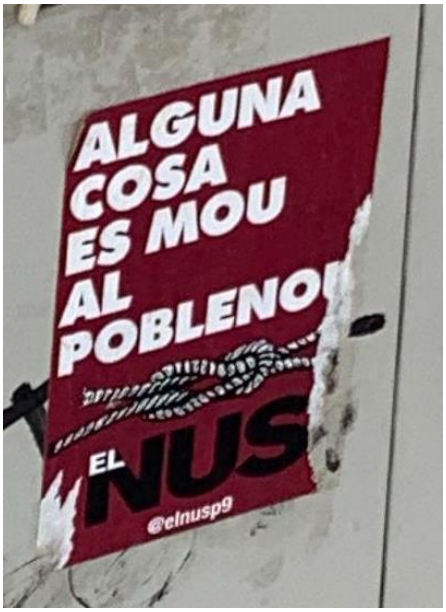
Laia's comments shed light on a number of language ideologies. The first is an ideology that identifies Spanish as the preferred code among youth, a point that will be explored further in Sections 5.5 and 5.6. The second is a language ideology that spatially positions Spanish as the language of those who live on the periphery and Catalan as the language of those who live in the town center. This spatial distinction may also reinforce broader ideologies of belonging, in which

Catalan speakers are perceived as more locally rooted or authentically connected to Catalonia, as reflected in María's comments in Section 5.2. Finally, Catalan is linked with civic life in Catalonia. In Laia's view, even those who are Spanish-dominant may switch to Catalan if they become involved in civic activities, ostensibly because they see that Catalan is the primary language used in these circles.

Figure 60 exemplifies Laia's point. This sticker was created by El Nus, a community organization in the Barcelona neighborhood of El Poblenou dedicated to combating gentrification. This sticker and El Nus's website are entirely in Catalan, supporting Laia's position that Catalan is the main language of communication in many community organizations, even in Spanish-dominant areas such as Barcelona. Catalan's role in local organizations therefore encourages its use in public signage about local issues.

Figure 60

Community-oriented sticker in Catalan: "Alguna cosa es mou al Poblenou . . . El Nus" [Something is brewing in El Poblenou . . . The Knot], El Poblenou



Laia's reference to the town's *teixit associatiu* provides one possible mechanism behind the aggregate pattern identified in Chapter 4. Catalan functions here not only as an index of local belonging but also as the language of many civic networks through which community activity is organized. This idea can be situated within Catalonia's longstanding culture of associationism. The Museu d'Història de Catalunya describes the richness of the country's associative fabric as a characteristic feature of Catalan society across the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, encompassing recreational, sporting, political, cultural, and neighborhood organizations (Museu d'Història de Catalunya, n.d.). Heinzman (2018, para. 7) traces the modern development of this tradition in part to the civic organizations established during the *Renaixença*. He explains, "During the mid- to late-1800s Renaixença (Rebirth or Renaissance), Catalans pushed to revive their language. Workers formed labor unions. Catalans birthed their culture of associationism by establishing non-governmental groups dedicated to preserving regional traditions." A 1987 Generalitat youth guide described associationism, interpersonal connections, and the formation of closely connected groups as characteristic of Catalan social life, even presenting the degree of

association among residents as a measure of a country's "sociality and humanity" (Institut Català de Serveis a la Joventut, 1987, as cited and translated in Vann, 2026, pp. 120–121). This history helps explain why participants such as Laia associate Catalan with the civic networks through which community advocacy takes place.

Laia's perspective also accords with Pujolar's (2001) account of Catalan-medium youth and volunteer organizations dating back to the Franco regime. Recent work (Puigdevall et al., 2022; Pujolar, 2024) likewise highlights civic and cultural associations such as Voluntariat per la Llengua and Colles de Diables as "safe spaces" where immigrants and Spanish-dominant speakers can use Catalan without fear of judgment, and where habitual Catalan users resist the widespread, internalized convergence norm of defaulting to Spanish with unknown interlocutors (Pujolar et al., 2010). Vann (2026, p. 247) similarly describes Catalan associationism as having helped welcome and integrate immigrants and refugees across linguistic and cultural differences.

Although the opinion that Catalan is most suitable for community-oriented signage was widespread, it was not entirely unanimous among participants. Jordi (male, 60) stated that Spanish would be more appropriate where he lives in L'Hospitalet de Llobregat, the third most Spanish-dominant of the 21 survey areas. Despite being Catalan-dominant himself, he said Spanish would be more practical in his community because it would reach the most people:

(27) "*Si veritatment és un assumpte d'importància de l'Hospitalet, si vols arribar al màxim número de gent, no ho pots fer en català, és impossible. Ho hauries de fer en castellà. Ja no per convicció, sinó per . . . Si veritatment el que t'interessa és que aquest missatge arribi al màxim número de gent possible, ho hauries de fer en castellà, sense dubtar*" (July 11, 2023)

[If it really is an issue of importance in L'Hospitalet, and you want to reach the greatest number of people, you cannot do it in Catalan, it's impossible. You'd have to do it in Spanish. Not out of conviction, but because . . . If what really matters to you is that the message reaches the greatest number of people possible, you'd have to do it in Spanish, without hesitation.]

Jordi's reflection shows that hometown context matters in discussions about language choice for public signage, nuancing the widespread preference for Catalan that was observed among most other participants. His comments also resonate with the language ideology discussed in Section 5.3 that positions Spanish as a dominant language that has wider reach than Catalan.

The mural in Figure 61 likewise challenges the otherwise widespread view that Catalan is the code of civic authority. This mural is from Santa Coloma de Gramenet, which, as mentioned above, is the most Spanish-dominant of this dissertation's 21 survey areas. Although I observed other community-oriented murals in Catalan in this city (e.g., Figure 49), the use of Spanish to say "Welcome to Santaco" shows that community representation is not only expressed through Catalan. The choice of Spanish may partly reflect the mural's orientation toward visitors or newcomers, since a welcome message is directed outward as well as toward local residents. Nevertheless, the inscription in white paint on the left of the mural reads "*Ajuntament de Santa Coloma*" [Santa Coloma city council], suggesting that the Spanish-language message was sanctioned by local authorities. In contrast to David's perception, this example shows that Spanish can also carry authoritative legitimacy at the municipal level.

Figure 61
Community-oriented mural in Spanish: "Bienvenid@s a Santaco" [Welcome to Santa Co(loma de Gramenet)], Santa Coloma de Gramenet



Other participants besides Jordi also acknowledged that including Spanish in a community-oriented sign would be practical in a Spanish-dominant area, but this group usually said that a bilingual sign in both Catalan and Spanish would be better than one exclusively in Catalan. Like Jordi, Borja (male, 34) lives in a Spanish-dominant town in the BMA. Speaking about his context, he said he would be open to creating a bilingual sign if the message were so important that it needed to be understood by all. However, he added that he would try to make the Catalan text more salient with a larger font size. According to Borja, the inclusion of Catalan would be nonnegotiable, as he believes that using Catalan in community contexts is the only way to demonstrate the importance of knowing Catalan. He explained,

(28) "*Crec que és l'única manera en què podem fer veure a la gent que el català és important. A més a més, al Prat [de Llobregat] la majoria de gent entén i sap llegir en català. Sí que hi ha un percentatge d'un 8–10% de pratencs que els costa llegir en català. Depenent de la importància del que estigui anunciant, potser el que podria fer és posar a sota més en petit la frase també en castellà, per si de cas. Si estàs anunciant, 'no passes per aquí, perquè si passes et cauràs per un forat i et moriràs,' pot ser un cartell bilingüe. Si és un cartell on estic dient que aquí hi ha obres i aquesta casa estarà un any en obres, doncs escolta, crec que ho pots posar bàsicament en català i segurament no passarà res.*" (July 10, 2023)

[I think it's the only way we can show people that Catalan is important. Besides, in El Prat (de Llobregat) most people understand and can read Catalan. There are around 8–10% of people from El Prat who have difficulty reading Catalan. Depending on how important the announcement is, maybe what I could do is put the phrase underneath in smaller print in Spanish as well, just in case. If you are announcing, "don't go through here, because if you do, you'll fall into a hole and die," it could be a bilingual sign. If it is a sign saying that there is construction here and this house will be under construction for a year, then listen, I think you can basically put it in Catalan and probably nothing will happen.]

Borja's comments, like Carmen's from earlier in this section ("If we don't use it for these purposes, when will we use it?"), reflect the language maintenance ideology identified in Section 5.3. In that section, Andreu expressed concerns about Catalan's vitality, saying, "If I don't speak it, or if we don't speak it among ourselves, it won't survive." Reflections across topics therefore underpin the ideology that Catalan is a minoritized language that needs support from its users. This

idea complements the ideology that Spanish is a broader global language accessible to all, since the latter helps position Catalan as the more vulnerable language in need of active support.

Like Jordi and Borja, Anna (female, 24) lives in a Spanish-dominant city in the BMA. Similar to Borja, she would prioritize Catalan in a community sign despite her demographic context. However, her motivation was less explicitly tied to the need to support Catalan, and more related to the idea that not using Catalan for a sign would be discriminatory against Spanish-dominant immigrants in her city whose interest in mastering Catalan may be impeded by limited opportunities for exposure to it. She stated:

(29) "*La zona on visc jo, que és el centre, és més catalanoparlant. Després la resta de barris, sí que són més castellanoparlants. Són els barris on es concentra més immigració moltes vegades. Llavors jo crec que ho faria en català i intentaria fer servir paraules que potser fossin bastant semblants al castellà perquè poguessin entendre-ho. Si jo mateixa ho faria en català, si estic fent el canvi, sento que també els estic discriminant d'alguna manera, no? Com dir, m'adreço a vosaltres i us considero diferents. Des del meu punt de vista, allunyant-me d'aquesta idea preconcebuda de ser mal educat [per mantenir el català], a mi em sembla més mal educat discriminar algú i parlar-li en una llengua que no parles tu normalment només pel fet de viure a un altre barri, per tenir una situació socioeconòmica diferent de la teva o per semblar de fora.*" (July 7, 2023)

[The area where I live, which is the town center, is more Catalan-speaking. Then the rest of the neighborhoods are more Spanish-speaking. They are often the neighborhoods where more immigrants are concentrated. So I think I would do it in Catalan and I would try to use words that might be fairly similar to Spanish so that they could understand it. If I myself would do it in Catalan, then if I switch, I feel that I'm also discriminating against them in some way, right? As if to say, I'm addressing you and I see you as different. From my point of view, moving away from this preconceived idea of being rude (for continuing to use Catalan), it seems ruder to me to discriminate against someone and speak to them in a language that you don't normally speak just because they live in another neighborhood, have a different socioeconomic situation from yours, or look foreign.]

Here, Anna brings up the widespread, internalized norm known as linguistic convergence, whereby Catalans default to Spanish with unknown interlocutors (Pujolar et al., 2010). Although this study examines language choice in signage rather than in everyday interactions, participants' metalinguistic evaluations of the LL frequently invoked convergence-oriented ideologies. While this convergence norm is commonly understood as a polite way to facilitate communication and put non-Catalan-dominant interlocutors at ease, Anna challenges this view, arguing that it is in fact more disrespectful to assume someone does not know Catalan and to deny them opportunities for exposure to the language.

If it is paramount for all community residents to understand a sign, Anna suggests using mutually intelligible words in the messaging instead of only writing in Spanish. A simple example of this can be seen in Figure 62. The message "No" next to a visual of someone urinating in the street is mutually intelligible across Catalan, Spanish, English, and other languages that may be natively spoken by the highly international population of El Barri Gòtic.

Figure 62
Multivalent community-oriented stencil: "No," El Barri Gòtic



Anna stated that it is discriminatory to assume someone will not understand Catalan because of their place of residence, socioeconomic situation, or physical features ("looking foreign"). Her reflection points to several related ideologies, including a class-based view in which linguistic dominance is assumed on socioeconomic grounds, a center–periphery ideology that places Spanish speakers on the outskirts of cities, and an ideology that links preference for Spanish to phenotype and, by extension, to immigration status. The latter ideology aligns with Vila i Moreno et al. (2023), who note that the convergence norm often entails racialized assumptions, whereby interlocutors perceived as foreigners are perceived to have low Catalan proficiency. This assumption was alluded to by 60% (N = 36) of interviewees, many of whom described it as linguistic discrimination or linguistic racism.

Previous research shows that many immigrants in Catalonia do prioritize Spanish, especially upon arrival, because of its perceived practicality and universality (Ali, 2020; Gore, 2002; Trenchs-Parera & Newman, 2009). At the same time, convergence ideologies constrain opportunities for immigrants to use Catalan in daily interactions, reinforcing their perception of Spanish as the more accessible choice. Thus, while convergence operates primarily in everyday communication, its salience in Catalonia's sociolinguistic context means it also surfaces in reflections on the LL.

Overall, the language ideologies gleaned from reflections on language choice in community-oriented signage largely align with those observed for other societal topics. Spanish is again described as a dominant language with wider reach than Catalan, while Catalan is positioned as a lesser-used language that requires support from its speakers. Catalan is also linked to local belonging and authenticity. Some participants believe these indexical qualities confer on Catalan a sense of local authority, and others extend this logic to Catalan's perceived status as the primary language of civic engagement. Spanish, meanwhile, is linked to speakers perceived as immigrants and/or as occupying more disadvantaged socioeconomic positions, including those living on the peripheries of cities whose centers are associated with more Catalan-dominant residents. Having examined participants' metalinguistic beliefs about language choice in societal signage, I now turn to the two most predominant intimate topics, where several of these ideologies resurface.

5.5 Vulgarity and Taboo Topics

In the LL, 48% of vulgar/taboo signs are monolingual in Spanish, and 33% are monolingual in English, making them the dominant languages. Catalan is scarce (5%), mirroring interview data. Only 15% of participants (N = 9) said they would use Catalan for a vulgar/taboo sign. Nearly half of these (N = 4) acknowledged that Spanish is widely seen as better for vulgarity, but said they take a militant stance on using Catalan in all contexts. Another clarified that she would use Catalan to sound more subtle and less aggressive. In line with Spanish's position as the most frequent language used for this topic in the corpus, 77% of interview participants said they would use Spanish to create a sign about a vulgar or taboo topic.

Figures 63–70 present a sample of corpus artifacts in Spanish for this topic across all eight regional territories, including in Catalan-dominant survey areas. As mentioned in Section 5.2, intimate signs concerning vulgar/taboo topics and sentimentality displayed much less variety in sign type than societal signs, with graffiti as the overwhelmingly preferred medium. Of all the topics analyzed in this dissertation, vulgar/taboo signs had the highest percentage of artifacts that were graffiti (92%).

Figures 63–65 display lewd messages, while Figure 66 alludes to drug use. Beyond marking a plural addressee, the second-person plural form *vais* in Figure 63 is characteristic of Peninsular Spanish (RAE & Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española [ASALE], 2025c). The vulgar noun *polla* is also strongly associated with colloquial Peninsular usage (Iwasaki, 2018). Together, these features construct a recognizably Peninsular Spanish voice, although they cannot confirm the sign creator's origin or habitual variety. Figures 67–70 contain a variety of personal insults, some of which can be interpreted as homophobic and misogynistic. Although the aggressive and cruel nature of these insults can be unsettling, they nonetheless form an important part of the everyday vernacular discourse found on public walls and therefore warrant analysis.

****Pages 115–117 contain images that some readers may find offensive, including sexually explicit, derogatory, homophobic, and misogynistic inscriptions, as well as references to drug use. Readers who prefer not to view this material may skip to the analysis on p. 118.****

Figure 63
Vulgar/taboo graffiti in Spanish: "Me vais a comer la polla" [You (pl.) are gonna suck my dick], Santa Margarida i els Monjos

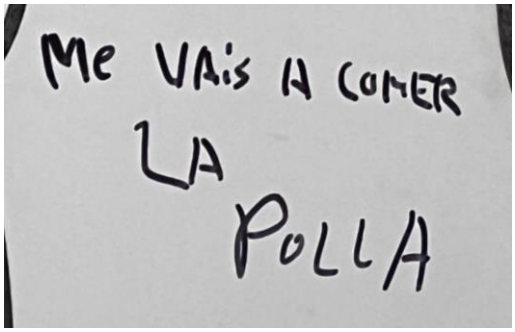


Figure 64
Vulgar/taboo graffiti in Spanish: "Mierdas" [Pieces of shit], "Hitler me la come entera" [Hitler sucks my whole dick], Les Borges Blanques



Figure 65
Vulgar/taboo graffiti in Spanish: "Comeme el ano" [Eat my asshole], La Seu d'Urgell[10]



[10] *Cómeme* is conventionally written with an acute accent on the *o*.

Figure 66
Vulgar/taboo graffiti in Spanish: "Están pinxando coca[ín]a" [They're injecting cocaine], Sant Pere, Santa Caterina i la Ribera[11]

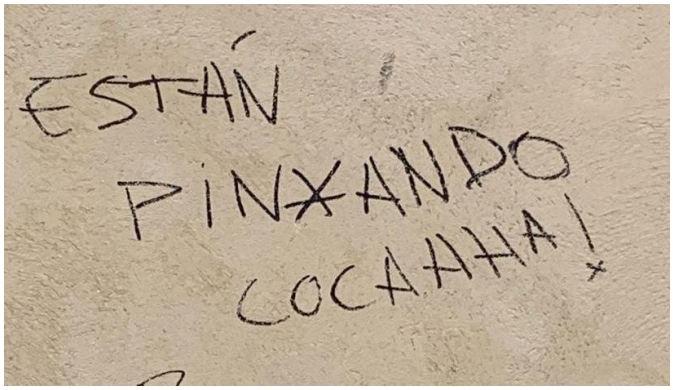


Figure 67
Vulgar/taboo graffiti in Spanish: "Quien lea eso es puto" [Whoever reads this is a fag], Igualada[12]

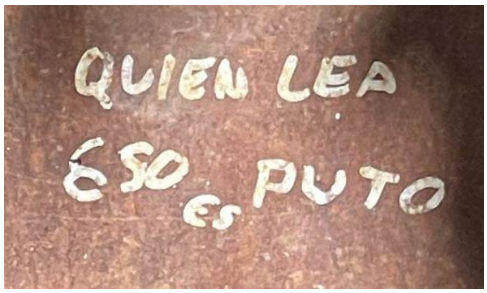


Figure 68
Vulgar/taboo graffiti in Spanish: "Feas" [Ugly], Cadaqués[13]



[11] "*pinxando*" is conventionally spelled "*pinchando*" in Spanish. The "x" may represent an influence of Catalan orthographic norms.
[12] The translation uses the homophobic slur *fag* rather than the neutral adjective *gay* to preserve the derogatory force of *puto*. Although *puto* can also denote a male prostitute, the formulaic construction here supports the homophobic reading.
[13] The Castilian adjective *feas* is feminine plural; the English translation does not preserve this gender and number marking and therefore loses some of the potentially female-directed negativity of the original morphology.

Figure 69
Vulgar/taboo graffiti in Spanish: "Borracha me caes mal, que solo te sabes caer en charcos de barro. Guarra" [You drunk, I can't stand you, all you know how to do is fall into muddy puddles. Slut], Montblanc. The addressee's name has been redacted to protect their privacy.

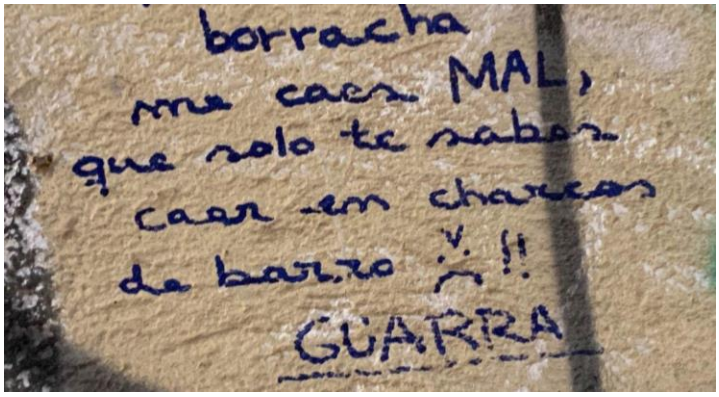
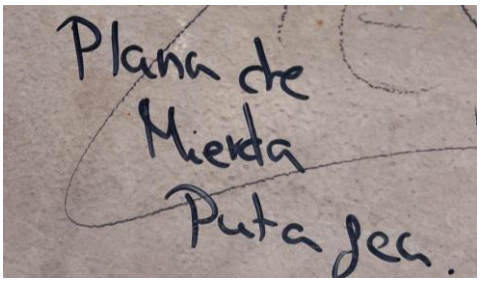


Figure 70
Vulgar/taboo graffiti in Spanish: "Plana de mierda puta fea" [Flat-chested, shitty, ugly whore], Móra d'Ebre. The addressee's name has been redacted to protect their privacy.



As discussed in Section 4.2, the vulgar/taboo topic had the highest proportional weight of artifacts that were coded as multivalent (11%, see Figures 5 and 6). This is in large part because of the common recurrence of the inscription "*puta*" [whore], spelled identically in the dictionaries of the IEC (n.d.) and the RAE (n.d.). This word appears in Figure 71 in a dust-writing artifact. Although dust writing was rare in the corpus, such artifacts most commonly contained vulgar/taboo messages.

Figure 71
Multivalent vulgar/taboo dust writing: "Puta" [Whore], Móra d'Ebre. A phallic image appears below the inscription.



In explaining their overwhelming preference for Spanish for this kind of signage, participants repeatedly highlighted an ideology positioning Spanish as a more aggressive and impactful language than Catalan, thus rendering it more suitable for insults and lewd comments. As for why Spanish is perceived as more forceful, some participants highlighted phonetic aspects related to how the languages sound. A few noted specific sounds such as [χ], which one participant described as sounding "*gutural*" [throaty] and "*enfadat*" [angry]. This voiceless uvular fricative is a salient phonetic feature of Spanish varieties typically spoken in Northern Spain.

Other participants elaborated on how the languages sound to them more broadly, without foregrounding specific phonetic cues. As Catalan-dominant Arnau (male, 40) put it,

(30) "*Quan necessitem insultar en català no sona fort, no sona contundent. En canvi en espanyol sí. Perquè el català s'assembla més al francès i és més refinat, i en canvi l'espanyol és més agressiu. La manera de pronunciar-lo, les paraules . . . sonen diferent. No sona amenaçador en català.*" (May 17, 2023)

[When we need to insult in Catalan it doesn't sound strong, it doesn't sound forceful. By contrast in Spanish it does. Because Catalan is more like French and is more refined, whereas Spanish is more aggressive. The way of pronouncing it, the words . . . they sound different. It doesn't sound threatening in Catalan.]

Here, Arnau describes Catalan as "refined" and Spanish, by contrast, as "aggressive." He links these evaluations directly to how the languages sound, as if the sounds themselves carry certain characterological traits.

This opinion was also shared by Spanish-dominant participants such as Víctor (male, 37), who lives in Barcelona. He added that,

(31) "*[El català] és més suau i sembla menys vulgar. No té tant d'impacte . . . No em xocaria tant. Fins i tot veuria més la component graciosa de dir aquesta frase en català. A vegades quan fem bromes d'un català superenfadat utilitzem frases que és zero enfadat, fa gaire riure. És com—tros d'ase. Ho utilitzem per fer bromes, però no té força.*" (May 28, 2023)

[(Catalan) is softer and seems less vulgar. It doesn't have as much impact . . . It wouldn't shock me as much. It would even sound kind of funny to say that kind of phrase in Catalan. Sometimes when we joke about a super-angry Catalan person, we use phrases that aren't angry at all, they're almost funny. It's like—*tros d'ase* (lit. "piece of donkey," roughly "idiot"). We use it jokingly, but it has no force.]

Víctor's view of Catalan as a language that is "softer," "less vulgar," and "has no force" aligns with Arnau's characterization of Catalan as "refined" and Spanish as comparatively "more aggressive." Importantly, Víctor names why these judgments matter; these characterizations can have the effect that when Catalan insults are used, a register that should be aggressive and crude flips into parody.

Although Arnau and Víctor insisted that the way Spanish and Catalan sound is what makes them more or less suitable for vulgar expression, an established idea in the sociolinguistic literature is that judgments about how languages sound are rarely actually about the sounds themselves. Rather, they reflect judgments about the people associated with different ways of speaking, drawing on broader social ideas about difference, inequality, and power (Agha, 2003; Grosjean,

1982; Kroskrity, 2010; Linares, 2020). In this way, perceived phonetic properties function as indexical links to particular social qualities.

In line with the idea that language attitudes often reflect attitudes toward the people who speak those languages, participants' beliefs about language choice frequently invoked assumptions about sign creators' sociodemographic profiles. Several interviewees attributed language choice to the kinds of people they believe tend to create graffiti and similar signage, often highlighting assumptions related to socioeconomic position and perceived immigration status. For example, Catalan-dominant Rai (male, 32) connected graffiti with sign creators from disadvantaged economic circumstances, a group he associates with Spanish-dominant immigrants:

(32) "*Si penso en un comentari profà a una paret, me l'imagino en castellà. És un tema que té menys a veure amb la llengua i més amb un tema socioeconòmic. Normalment, la gent de classes més baixes, podríem dir, són gent immigrant i solen tendir a parlar més en castellà. I són les que solen ficar pintades a les parets d'aquest tipus.*" (July 6, 2023)

[If I think of a profane comment on a wall, I imagine it in Spanish. It has less to do with language and more to do with a socioeconomic issue. Normally, people from lower classes are immigrants and they tend to speak more in Spanish. And they're the ones who tend to do graffiti like this.]

Rai's comment, and participants' responses more broadly, reveal a language ideology linking immigrants and socioeconomically disadvantaged individuals with Spanish use. Pujolar (2007) describes how mid-twentieth-century immigration contributed to urban patterns in which Spanish-dominant areas became associated with the working class and Catalan-dominant areas with the middle class (see also Pujolar & Gonzàlez, 2013, and Section 1.1). Nearly three quarters (N = 43) of participants alluded to this demolinguistic structure, surmising vulgar/taboo signs likely come from socioeconomically disadvantaged groups that they perceive to be disproportionately Spanish-speaking.

Official survey data support this perception of immigrants' language use: 72.9% of Catalonia's foreign-born population aged 15 and older report using Spanish habitually versus only 8.6% who report using Catalan habitually (Idescat, 2023). Regarding the link between language and social class, Frekko's (2013) work reveals a more complex relationship, problematizing the stereotypical equations "Catalan = middle-class" and "Spanish = working-class."

Despite these nuances, the attribution of vulgar/taboo signage to "lower-class Spanish-speaking immigrants" implicitly critiques Spaniards and foreigners by positioning them as an outgroup in contrast with a more proper, civic Catalan persona. This critique invoking perceived cultural differences was voiced by Oriol (male, 38), who is Catalan-dominant and lives in a city in the BMA where he senses that both Catalan and Spanish are used regularly:

(33) "*En la cultura catalana està mal vist fer una pintada d'altres temes més íntims, diguéssim. Els catalans som pijos, som més educats, no ens agrada embrutir les coses . . . El perfil de gent que fa grafitis és perfil de classe baixa, immigrants.*" (July 11, 2023)

[In Catalan culture it's frowned upon to make graffiti about more intimate topics, so to speak. We Catalans are posh, we have better manners, we don't like making things dirty . . . The kind of people who make graffiti are lower-class people, immigrants.]

Oriol's reflection makes a simplistic contrast between Catalans, on the one hand, and immigrants and individuals from lower socioeconomic positions, on the other, as if these categorizations were mutually exclusive. Like some participants quoted in earlier sections, he seems to assume the language use of different social groups without explicitly stating it. To explain why vulgar/taboo signs were comparatively rare in Catalan, he suggests that Catalans do not make vulgar/taboo graffiti. This in turn implies that Catalans are Catalan-dominant, that lower-class immigrants are not, and that graffiti in Spanish would necessarily be produced by Spanish-dominant speakers.

The corpus data complicate this association of graffiti with lower-class, Spanish-dominant immigrants. Although several participants linked the production of vernacular signage with lower social class and the use of Spanish, Catalan was the single most prevalent language in the corpus (34.9%). This divergence demonstrates the value of combining interview and LL data: the interviews reveal socially salient ideologies about who produces vernacular signage, whereas the corpus shows that these beliefs do not necessarily correspond to the observed distribution of languages. The mixed-methods approach therefore highlights a distinction between beliefs about signage and the linguistic practices observable in the landscape.

Moreover, sign-creator testimony further complicates the account that the low presence of Catalan in vulgar/taboo signage owes to sign creators' immigrant origins or their preference for Spanish in daily life. Street artist Aitor (male, 24) is a habitual Catalan speaker, takes a militant stance about defending the language and Catalan independence, and expresses pride in his multigenerational Catalan heritage. Despite this, he explained that he mostly uses Spanish in his signs (including some in the corpus) because he often draws on popular musical references:

(34) "*El català no té gaires referents de música agressiva o insults . . . tu vols sonar com a* underground*, i en català és molt més difícil perquè no existeix això, i la gent s'ho prendrà més a broma . . . Molts títols d'obres els escric en castellà perquè són extrets de música en castellà . . . la frase no quedaria tan bé [en català] . . . de vegades sí que existeixen equivalents, però la traducció no té el mateix efecte.*" (July 2, 2023)

[There aren't many cultural referents for Catalan in aggressive music or insults . . . you want to sound underground, and in Catalan it's a lot harder because that doesn't exist, and people will see it more like a joke . . . I write lots of titles for my art in Spanish because they're extracts from music in Spanish . . . the phrase wouldn't sound as good (in Catalan) . . . sometimes there are equivalents, but the translation doesn't carry the same weight.]

Aitor identifies music as a factor that motivates his use of Spanish in many of the artifacts he creates, despite using Catalan habitually in daily life. His perspective highlights that communicative intent, and therefore language choice, operates differently in the vernacular LL than in other communicative domains.

Furthermore, there is often a key difference in purpose between signs about societal and intimate topics. Signs about societal topics often serve to inform and call to action, requiring more text to justify their stances, whereas vulgar/taboo messages tend to be short, formulaic phrases intended to shock or provoke an emotional reaction. Sedivy (2021) explains that swear words or other taboo words are among the most emotionally potent in any language, and that "expressing an arousing strong emotion is a curse word's entire purpose" (p. 144). Aitor's comment that Catalan translations would not carry the same weight as the Spanish lyrics alludes to this purpose;

it is not simply the semantic meaning that a sign creator wants to communicate, but also the shock value.

In this way, Aitor's reflection points to a language ideology that paints languages as not perfectly commensurable. Pavlenko (2008, p. 147) argues that "emotion concepts vary across languages and that bilinguals' concepts may, in some cases, be distinct from those of monolingual speakers." She also posits that repeated experiences are essential to the formation of emotion concepts. Accordingly, frequency of exposure may play a role in why ostensibly equivalent terms may not give off the same connotation; translating oft-repeated formulaic phrases to Catalan may remove some of their shock value if the Catalan version is rarely heard.

Aitor's opinion that people would take insults in Catalan as more of a joke echoes Víctor's point above about how aggression in Catalan can come off as humorous. Arnau's evaluation of Spanish as more suitably aggressive complements Víctor's and Aitor's views of Catalan as soft and humorous in insulting contexts. Together, these comments suggest an ideological process of iconization (Irvine & Gal, 2000), through which Spanish comes to be imagined as inherently forceful and Catalan as comparatively soft, as if the languages themselves transparently embody the traits socially ascribed to their speakers.

Moreover, Aitor's allusion to music aligns with 87% (N = 52) of participants who believe that media shape language choice in vernacular signage about intimate topics. Indeed, the perceived greater availability of vulgar/taboo referents in Spanish in popular culture was the most frequent explanation for the dominance of Spanish over Catalan for this topic, rather than sign creator identity. Spanish-dominant Carles (male, 50) perceives gaps for Catalan-language content in certain domains such as rap music and pornography:

(35) "*El rap en catalán no es minoritario, es casi ridículo. No queda muy bien el rap en catalán. No es contundente. Es más erótico el castellano . . . No hay porno en catalán, por ejemplo.*" (May 17, 2023)

[Rap in Catalan isn't just rare, it's almost ridiculous. Rap doesn't sound right in Catalan. It's not forceful. Spanish is more erotic . . . There's no porn in Catalan, for example.]

Carles's judgments that "Rap doesn't sound right in Catalan" and that "Spanish is more erotic" suggest that he views the two languages as possessing inherent qualities that make them more apt for certain domains. Agha's (2003) notion of enregisterment, however, suggests a reverse causal relationship. Enregisterment refers to the process by which repeated interactions sediment linguistic features into recognizable social registers. If Catalan has historically had less presence in domains understood as forceful or erotic, then repeated exposure to other languages in those contexts may help explain why Catalan comes to be perceived as less forceful and less erotic, rather than those qualities being inherent to the language itself.

Importantly, Carles's perceptions were not categorical. A Catalan content creator from the interview sample stated that Catalan's presence in rap music has been rising, particularly since the pandemic. However, as discussed at the beginning of Section 5.5, the perceptions of Spanish as more forceful and erotic and of Catalan as comparatively soft and buttoned-up were widespread. Continuing the thread of explanations rooted in popular culture, Montse (female, 26) explained that formulaic vulgar/taboo messages are particularly susceptible to influence from popular culture, even in small Catalan-dominant villages such as the one she grew up in:

(36) "*Aquests temes són com més tabús . . . això ho aprens més a la tele, a les pel·lícules, i la tele la mirem en castellà . . . Els insults, els comentaris així més eròtics, no és una cosa que tu vegis a casa o a l'escola.*" (March 11, 2023)

[These topics are like more taboo . . . you learn about that more from TV and movies, and we watch TV in Spanish . . . insults, erotic comments, those aren't things you see at home or at school.]

Montse believes that, regardless of the dominant home, school, or community language, insults and erotic comments feel more automatic in Spanish because they are more often encountered in media such as television and movies. Catalan-language movies, music, television shows, and other media certainly exist; even before the rise of social media, Clots-Figueras and Masella (2013) note that since the mid-1980s Catalans have had access to a television channel broadcasting in Catalan (TV3), along with increased daily press in Catalan. At the same time, Frekko (2009) shows that some Catalan programming on TV3 has itself leaned into the stereotype of Catalan as "sexless," thereby reinforcing it. One example is the 2003 program *Amb llengua o sense* [With tongue or without]. Despite the presence of Catalan-language media and social media content, the reflections of Aitor, Carles, and Montse point to a language ideology that positions Spanish as dominant in popular culture.

Like popular culture, the LL may reinforce or alter a language's perceived suitability for particular functions. For example, repeated exposure to insults and erotic messages in Spanish on public walls may contribute to Spanish seeming more automatic for these functions, whereas greater visibility of comparable messages in Catalan or English could gradually broaden the linguistic resources that observers perceive as appropriate for these kinds of expression. Although this dissertation is not diachronic and therefore cannot establish whether exposure to the LL changes attitudes or behavior over time, Montse's commentary suggests that a similar process may also operate in the LL: repeated exposure to language–topic associations may contribute to the continued circulation or transformation of language ideologies, as may repeated exposure through popular media.

Moreover, perceptions of linguistic suitability for different domains are also shaped through everyday socialization beyond media and the LL. Even if Catalan is spoken at home and in the classroom, informal discourse related to sex and insults typically occurs more with peers than with parents and teachers. About one third of interviewees (disproportionately from the BMA) perceive that even though Catalan is the language of instruction in the classroom, Spanish prevails on the playground and among friends, echoing earlier findings on youth peer relations and adolescent media consumption (Bretxa i Riera, 2009; Vila i Moreno, 2004).

Comparing the perceived use of Spanish in youth peer relations with Laia's comment in Section 5.4 about neighborhood organizations that primarily communicate in Catalan, the findings demonstrate how socialization contexts shape language choice: Spanish may feel more impactful for vulgarity, while Catalan often suits cause-related organizing. Importantly, this pattern is neither categorical nor diglossic; both languages appear across registers, but the extent to which they are perceived as more or less appropriate for particular expressive functions tends to differ and reflects participants' lived linguistic trajectories. This resonates with Pavlenko's (2005) idea of affective repertoires, in which early bilinguals assign languages different affective roles based on the realms where they socialize in each language.

Thus, popular culture is not the whole explanation, especially in the case of Spanish, whose association with vulgarity is also reinforced through everyday peer socialization. Even so, several

participants extended this language ideology about dominance in popular culture to English as well as Spanish. For example, Catalan-dominant Carmen (female, 33) noted,

(37) "*Passa amb els insults, no es diu[en] en català, es diu[en] en castellà perquè estem més acostumats a veure aquest tipus de coses en xarxes socials, televisió, cinema. Hi ha molt més material en castellà o en anglès que en català.*" (July 27, 2023)

[It happens with insults, they're not said in Catalan, they're said in Spanish, because we're more accustomed to seeing this type of thing on social media, TV, movies. There's a lot more material in Spanish or in English than in Catalan]

Carmen's mention of the high availability of English offerings across media platforms relates to a point of misalignment between the LL findings and participant reflections: very few participants said they would use English to create a vulgar/taboo sign, yet 33% of vulgar/taboo signs in the corpus were monolingual in English, and many multilingual artifacts contained English as well. Figures 72–77 show a sample of these, with Figures 72–74 from inside the BMA and Figures 75–77 from outside of it.

Figure 72 displays a dialogue between two actors, both of whom express insults incorporating "fuck." Abel and Buckley (1977, as cited in Phillips, 1999) note that this word appears in a majority of the world's graffiti. Reflecting on both its frequency and its significance in graffiti as a medium, Phillips (1999, p. 23) argues that "whether or not it says so in so many words, the fuck you message is implicit in the use of graffiti as communication. The medium itself implies alienation, discontentment, marginality, repression, resentment, rebellion: no matter what it says, graffiti always implies a 'fuck you.'" In this sense, Figure 72 exemplifies not only vulgar language use but also the broader antagonistic stance that Phillips identifies as characteristic of graffiti.

Figures 73 and 74 present lewd remarks incorporating English, with the latter being one of three multilingual artifacts in the corpus that utilize the formula "Free + noun in Spanish or Catalan." In Figure 75, the repeated word "simp" is most plausibly an English-language internet slang insult, likely used here as a pejorative label for someone who is desperate or needy for someone's attention. The small "uwu" below, likely an internet emoticon associated with cuteness or playful affect, supports the reading that the inscription draws on an online or meme register. Figure 76 contains another insult in English, while Figure 77 features another sexually explicit remark.

****Pages 124–125 contain images that some readers may find offensive, including sexually explicit, derogatory, and misogynistic inscriptions. Readers who prefer not to view this material may skip to the analysis on p. 126.****

Figure 72
Vulgar/taboo graffiti in English: "Fucking bitches," "Fuck you," Cornellà de Llobregat



Figure 73
Vulgar/taboo graffiti in English: "Suck my clit," L'Hospitalet de Llobregat



Figure 74
Multilingual vulgar/taboo graffiti (English + Spanish): "Free pollas" [Free cocks], Sant Cugat del Vallès. A phallic image appears above the inscription.



Figure 75
Vulgar/taboo graffiti in English: "Simp" (repeated six times), with "uwu" below, Ripoll



Figure 76
Vulgar/taboo graffiti in English: "Bitch," Girona



Figure 77
Vulgar/taboo graffiti in English: "Send nudes," Solsona. The doodle above the inscription is most likely sexually themed.



For several participants, the presence of English in vulgar/taboo signage did not require broad English proficiency so much as familiarity with a limited set of recognizable vulgar expressions. Ousmane (male, 23), the son of Senegalese immigrants from a small town in the province of Girona, noted:

(38) "*Tot i que la gent no parla bé anglès, saben els insults*." (March 10, 2023)

[Even though people here don't speak English well, they know the insults.]

In line with Ousmane's line of thinking, music, movies, and television shows in English are riddled with formulaic phrases that can easily become integrated into a Catalan resident's lexicon, despite a relatively lower English dominance in Spain compared to other European countries (Education First, 2022). As Carmen and others suggested, then, the high consumption of media and popular culture from anglophonic countries could be a contributing factor to the greater presence of English than Catalan in vulgar/taboo artifacts. Given that LL scholarship shows signage can influence behavior (Landry & Bourhis, 1997), Spanish- and English-dominant popular culture and social media can likewise be understood as an online LL (Kallen, 2023) shaping the distribution of registers across languages.

The brevity of oft-repeated Spanish and English vulgarities may make them readily retrievable for habitual Catalan speakers, who may produce them with little conscious attention to language choice. This may help explain why the vulgarity/taboo category diverges so sharply from the overall corpus; Spanish and English constitute 48% and 33% of these signs, respectively, whereas Catalan accounts for only 5%, despite being the most prevalent language in the corpus as a whole. This interpretation also helps distinguish intimate-topic signage from more formal societal discourse, in which language choice may be more deliberate because sign creators have explicit motivations, such as indexing local authenticity and belonging. Jaume (male, 39), who identifies both Spanish and Catalan as his languages, alluded to the internalization of frequently repeated expressions when discussing Catalans' motivations for using English-derived forms:

(39) "*Jo crec que al principi era com més cool, i ara està super interioritzat.*" (May 25, 2023)

[I think at first it felt more cool, and now it's super internalized.]

Jaume's mention of internalized forms from other languages is consistent with Budzhak-Jones and Poplack's (1997) findings that native Ukrainian speakers interpret nouns from English as fully integrated in Ukrainian, even when they are not yet consolidated and widely used by society. Accordingly, this notion is consistent with Blommaert's (2010, p. 102) understanding of multilingualism as a repertoire of specific semiotic resources, including resources associated with different conventionally defined languages. Jaume's reflection also echoes language ideologies discussed in Section 5.3 that position English as a global language that carries social appeal in Catalonia. Roughly half of the interviewees (N = 26) hinted at this ideology by suggesting that sign creators may use English to appear cool, cosmopolitan, or modern. Dewaele (2004, p. 205) similarly observes that knowledge of swear words in a second language can be used to show off in social settings, citing a website that presents such knowledge as a marker of sophistication and worldliness.

Nuancing some participants' belief that sign creators use English to index socially appealing qualities, Emilia (female, 37) said that this motivation has nothing to do with her own use of English-derived forms. Originally from a highly Catalan-dominant small town in Terres de

l'Ebre, she has lived for years in a Barcelona neighborhood with a large international population and speaks many languages. She attributed her use of English-derived forms to greater exposure to them and to the more suitable connotations they sometimes carry:

(40) "*Alguna gent se pensa que tu fas això a posta i que vols ser com guai de dir, 'ah, és que soc més guai i viatjo . . . Parlo bé l'anglès . . . Mira,' saps? Però realment no és per això. Nosaltres parlem moltes llengües i és molt més fàcil accedir a aquesta paraula perquè l'has utilitzat més o perquè les paraules defineixen millor alguns conceptes. De vegades hi ha connotacions amb la paraula anglesa que no existeixen en l'equivalent català.*" (July 13, 2023)

[Some people think you do it on purpose and that you want to come off like cool by saying, "Oh, I'm cooler and I travel . . . I speak English well . . . Look at me," you know? But it's really not about that. We speak a lot of languages, and it's much easier to access that word because you've used it more, or because the words define some concepts better. Sometimes there are connotations with the English word that do not exist in its Catalan equivalent.]

Emilia's explanation that English forms are sometimes easier to access further supports the ideology of English as a dominant global language. Moreover, her comment that the English form sometimes carries connotations that the Catalan equivalent does not reflects a language ideology highlighted by Aitor, namely that languages are not perfectly commensurable. As in the case of Spanish, there is nothing inherently more vulgar about English forms than Catalan forms, but speakers' greater repeated exposure to insults and vulgarities in English than in Catalan may give them that impression.

Beyond explanations related to the accessibility and connotations of certain short phrases in English, about one fifth of participants (N = 11) theorized that English provides emotional distance from a vulgar/taboo message for sign creators who are non-native speakers. Anna (female, 24) is Catalan-dominant but lives in a city in the BMA with a substantial Spanish-dominant population. She noted,

(41) "*El tema de l'anglès, potser al ser d'una llengua que no és la teva per expressar aquest tipus d'idees, no et sona tan fort, i llavors no tens tanta vergonya a l'hora d'escriure a una paret . . . és una llengua que et sona una miqueta més forana i no té la mateixa implicació.*" (July 7, 2023)

[Since it's coming from a language that's not your own, it doesn't sound as strong, and so you're not as ashamed when writing on a wall . . . It sounds more foreign and doesn't have the same implication.]

Anna believes that sign creators may feel less shame when writing in a non-native language because the emotional force of the message feels weaker. Spanish-dominant Manuel (male, 53) complements this perspective by stating that writing in a non-native language allows a sign creator to conceal their identity, or present their identity in an innovative way:

(42) "*Si yo digo* 'suck my cock,' *como es una lengua ajena . . . Me oculta un poco en el . . . Es como si te pusieras un disfraz.*" (June 14, 2023)

[If I say "suck my cock," since it's a foreign language . . . I'm able to hide a bit in the . . . It's as if you were putting on a disguise.]

These reflections evoke a language ideology that connects the L1 to strong emotions. If the two sign creators in Figure 72 were non-L1 English speakers, for example, Anna's and Manuel's views imply they may have felt lower emotional force when writing profanities, consistent with earlier work from Bond and Lai (1986) and Javier and Marcos (1989) who show that bilinguals may codeswitch to their L2 to distance themselves from what they say. In the words of Dewaele (2004, p. 207), "Ideas that would be too disturbing when expressed in the first language are less anxiety-provoking in the second language." At the same time, work on bilingualism and emotionality cautions against treating the L1 as inherently or universally more emotional. Pavlenko (2005) shows that affective socialization in the L2 or other languages can occur when speakers develop personal memories and affective associations in those languages.

In this section, two language ideologies surfaced in commentary about the assumed identities of creators of vulgar/taboo signs, echoing patterns observed in previous sections: a class-based ideology associating Spanish speakers with more disadvantaged socioeconomic circumstances, and an ideology linking Spanish dominance with immigrant status. Additional ideologies also emerged, most notably the positioning of Spanish and English as dominant languages in popular culture and other media domains. As in Section 5.3, English was also linked to broader social appeal.

Recurring evaluations of Spanish as more forceful and erotic, and of Catalan as comparatively soft and less vulgar, suggest that these languages have come to be understood as embodying traits socially ascribed to their speakers in Catalan society through an ideological process of iconization (Irvine & Gal, 2000). The L1 was also linked to strong emotional force, while multiple participants expressed the view that languages are not perfectly commensurable, further illustrating how ideological processes shape which languages are seen as more suitable for particular functions.

5.6 Sentimentality

As with signs about social causes and vulgar/taboo topics, interviewees' hypothetical choices for creating signs about love and other strong feelings misaligned with LL patterns. Around 73% (N = 44) said they would choose their L1 for this topic. This contrasts with hypothetical language choices for the other four topics, for which participants identified specific languages as being most suitable, regardless of whether those languages were their L1. As a rough demographic point of comparison, approximately one third of Catalonia's population identifies Catalan as an L1 and about one half identifies Spanish, while 5.6% identify both (Idescat, 2023). These population-level proportions cannot be treated as an expected distribution for the corpus, however, because people who produce sentimental signs may not be representative of Catalonia's population as a whole. Nevertheless, the observed distribution of 58% Spanish, more than one quarter English, and only 10% Catalan does not straightforwardly reflect interviewees' stated preference to use their L1.

Figures 78–94 show a sample of artifacts from all eight regional territories that reflect this linguistic distribution. As was the case for vulgar/taboo signs, the sign type for corpus messages about sentimentality was most commonly graffiti (83%). Figures 78–85 show amorous graffiti in Spanish. While Figures 78 and 79 consist of short, formulaic expressions for "I love you," Figures 80–85 contain more elaborate and poetic expressions of love, affection, and emotional intimacy. Figures 79–82 include a heart icon and Figure 83 features an infinity symbol, additional semiotic

resources that enhance the affective charge of these signs. The use of *vos* where Peninsular Spanish would ordinarily use *ti* is consistent with a voseante variety of Spanish. Voseo occurs to varying degrees across Latin America and is particularly widespread in Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, and much of Central America (RAE & ASALE, 2025b). This feature may suggest that the sign creator or imagined addressee is associated with a voseante variety, although neither party's geographic origin nor habitual language use can be confirmed from the inscription alone. Moreover, the use of the simple preterite *desperté* [woke up] rather than the present perfect *he despertado* to describe an action that happened *hoy* [today] is likewise consistent with many Latin American varieties. This feature is not uniquely Latin American, however, because the distribution of the two past forms varies within both Spain and Latin America (RAE & ASALE, 2025a).

Figure 78
Sentimental graffiti in Spanish: "Te quiero" [I love you], Móra d'Ebre. The addressee's name has been redacted to protect their privacy.



Figure 79
Sentimental graffiti in Spanish: "Te amo" [I love you], Montblanc. A heart icon appears at the end of the inscription.



Figure 80
Sentimental graffiti in Spanish: "Eres la unica razon [por] la [que] [e]stoi [e]n [e]ste mundo" [You're the only reason I'm in this world], Les Borges Blanques.[14] *A heart icon with an x in the middle appears to the right of the inscription. It is unclear what the x indicates in this context and whether this icon was drawn by the same actor who wrote the sign.*



Figure 81
Sentimental graffiti in Spanish: "Dime que me amas" [Tell me you love me], Igualada. A heart icon appears above the inscription.



[14] The inscription contains several departures from conventional Spanish orthography: "*k*" abbreviates "*que*" [which]; "*stoi*" shortens "*estoy*" [I am] by omitting the initial e- and substituting i for y; the initial e- is omitted in the preposition "*en*" [in] and in the demonstrative adjective "*este*" [this]; and the accent marks on "*única*" [only] and "*razón*" [reason] are absent.

Figure 82
Sentimental graffiti in Spanish: "Porque el amor es un encuentro de sueños que deciden caminar juntos y superar cualquier tempestad" [Because love is a meeting of dreams that decide to walk together and overcome any storm], Salt. A heart icon appears at the end of the inscription.

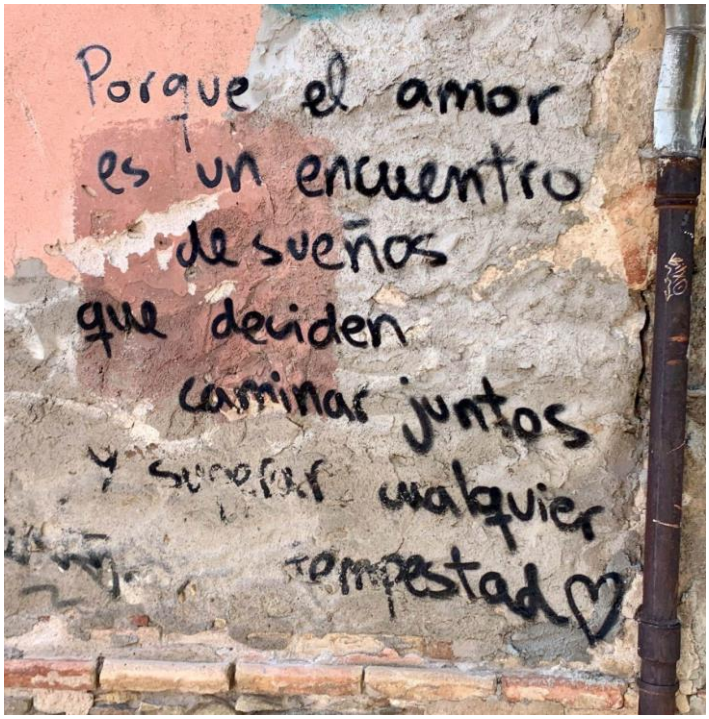


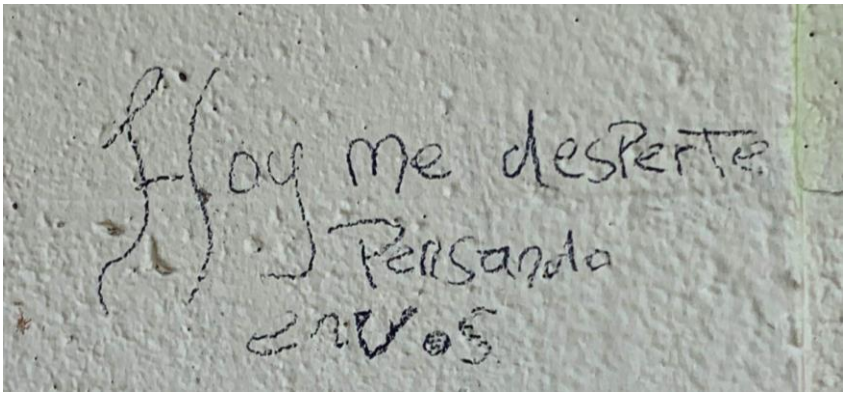
Figure 83
Sentimental graffiti in Spanish: "Seré tu cielo si quieres volar" [I'll be your sky if you want to fly], Santa Coloma de Gramenet. An infinity symbol appears at the end of the inscription.



Figure 84
Sentimental graffiti in Spanish: "Con quien reír, con quién llorar, con quién volverse a levantar" [Someone to laugh with, someone to cry with, someone to get up each day with], Santa Margarida i els Monjos.



Figure 85
Sentimental graffiti in Spanish: "Hoy me desperte pensando en vos" [Today I woke up thinking about you], El Poblenou[15]



Figures 86–88 illustrate sentimental graffiti in Spanish that refer to romantic conflict, separation, or unreciprocated affection. Figure 86 presents a written exchange in which the first message asks the addressee not to return, accompanied by a broken heart icon. A second, multilingual message responds to the first by accepting responsibility for the end of the relationship, although it is unclear whether the two sign creators knew each other personally. Figure 87 expresses continued affection for a former romantic partner in Spanish and includes a heart icon, while Figure 88 states that an unidentified third party does not love the addressee.

[15] *Desperté* is conventionally written with an acute accent on the final *e*.

Figure 86
Sentimental graffiti in Spanish: "No vuelvas" [Don't come back], Girona. A broken heart icon appears under this inscription. Both the text and the icon of the original sign were crossed out by another actor who created a multilingual sentimental artifact (English + Spanish): "Sorry fue mi culpa" [Sorry it was my fault].



Figure 87
Sentimental graffiti in Spanish: "Quiero a mi ex" [I love my ex], Ripoll. A heart icon appears at the end of the inscription.



Figure 88
Sentimental graffiti in Spanish: "No te ama" [He/she doesn't love you], La Seu d'Urgell



Figures 89–91 display sentimental graffiti in English. Figures 89 and 90 communicate sadness, with the latter incorporating a sad face. The formulaic expression "I love u" in Figure 91 uses an informal written register through the abbreviated form "u" for "you."

Figure 89
Sentimental graffiti in English: "Im so fucking broken," Montblanc[16]

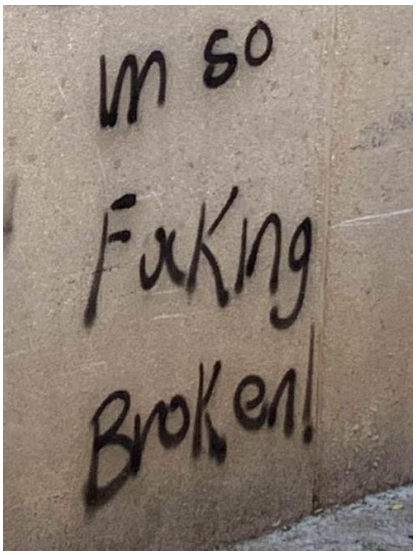


Figure 90
Sentimental graffiti in English: "I'm sad," L'Hospitalet de Llobregat



Figure 91
Sentimental graffiti in English: "I love u," Badia del Vallès[17]



[16] In conventional written English, "I'm" is typically written with an apostrophe marking the contraction of "I am."
[17] "U" is conventionally spelled "you."

Painted cans were not a frequent sign type in the corpus, representing less than 1% of artifacts. Yet when they did appear, their inscriptions were more often sentimental than associated with any of the other four topics discussed in this dissertation. Because painted cans were rare, this pattern may partly reflect the work of one person or a small group who often used them for sentimental messages. Similar handwriting and artistic styles across many of the cans support this possibility. Painting and placing a can also requires more time and planning than writing a quick message on a wall, which may make this form more likely to feature carefully designed, positive, or emotionally expressive content. It cannot be determined which of these explanations better accounts for the pattern. Figures 92 and 93 provide two examples of painted cans with sentimental messages. Figure 92 presents a message about love in English from a Barcelona neighborhood, while Figure 93 displays a similarly affectionate message in Catalan from Girona.

Figure 92
Sentimental painted cans in English: "Love is the best," El Poblenou



Figure 93
Sentimental painted cans in Catalan: "Et sento a prop" [I feel you close], Girona



More broadly, although the English expression "I love you" (Figure 91) and the Spanish variants "*Te amo*" (Figure 79), "*Te quiero*" (Figure 78), and "*TKM*" (an abbreviated form of "*te quiero mucho*") were much more frequent than the Catalan equivalent "*T'estimo*," the Catalan expression appeared both within and outside the BMA. Figure 94 presents a graffiti example from a Barcelona neighborhood.

Figure 94
Sentimental graffiti in Catalan: "Testimo" [I love you], Sant Pere, Santa Caterina i la Ribera[18]



Explanations for the predominance of Spanish in signs about sentimental topics paralleled accounts of vulgar/taboo signs, with participants frequently emphasizing presumed sign creators' sociodemographic profiles and the influence of popular culture. In explaining the relative scarcity of Catalan in signs about sentimentality, just under half of participants (N = 29) drew on a recurring stereotype that emerged in the interviews, portraying locally raised Catalans as less publicly expressive about their feelings than Spaniards or Latin Americans. This framing implied that sentimental signs in Spanish were likely authored by immigrants from these regions, but I treat it here as a language and cultural ideology articulated by participants rather than as evidence of an established difference in emotional behavior among these populations. One of these participants was Catalan-dominant Neus (female, 30), who takes a militant stance toward using Catalan in all interactions, except when comprehension is clearly impeded. She attributed the language distribution in sentimental signage to cultural factors:

(43) "*Crec que és una cosa cultural. La gent catalana no tendeix a fer cap pintada d'aquestes a testigos, perquè som una societat que culturalment no expressa tant els seus sentiments com la castellana o la sud-americana. És una societat que expressa l'afecte, però amb més distància. No som tan de dir paraules romàntiques. Ens sentiríem bastant incòmodes a fer una pintada d'aquestes*" (July 4, 2023)

[I think it's a cultural thing. Catalan people don't tend to do graffiti like these, because we're a society that culturally does not express its feelings as much as the Spanish or South American cultures. It's a society that does express affection, but with more distance. We're not so into saying romantic words. We would feel pretty uncomfortable making graffiti like this.]

[18] The typical Catalan spelling is "*t'estimo,*" with an apostrophe marking the elided direct object pronoun (te → t'). The graffiti omits the apostrophe.

In Neus's view, affective expression is imagined as more natural in one's L1, aligning with a language ideology discussed in the Vulgar/Taboo section that links the L1 to strong emotion. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, around 75% of participants (N = 44) said they would choose their L1 to make a sentimental sign, and the most frequent explanation was that romantic sentiments would feel more natural in the language in which they felt most comfortable (N = 31). This idea aligns with Dewaele (2004), who notes that languages learned earlier in life seem to have a stronger emotional hold on individuals than languages learned later, drawing on earlier work from Amati-Mehler et al. (1993), Javier (1989), and Santiago-Rivera and Altarriba (2002).

Moreover, by applying the L1 explanation for sentimental signage to the corpus, Neus implies that these signs are primarily authored by Spanish-dominant actors, whom she imagines as Spanish and Latin American immigrants who are more romantically expressive than Catalans. As mentioned above, this cultural stereotype appeared in nearly half of the interviews (N = 29), with several participants invoking the Catalan concept of *seny*. Although the term has no exact English equivalent, the IEC defines it in terms of mental balance and the capacity for sound perception, judgment, and action (IEC, n.d.). It is commonly associated with good sense, prudence, moderation, and self-restraint and is often contrasted with *rauxa*, or unreflective emotional impulse (Boadas Llavat, 2015, pp. 43–45). In Neus's view, the restraint associated with *seny* is difficult to reconcile with publicly expressing intense emotions through graffiti.

By posing immigrant authorship as an explanation for the predominance of Spanish in signs about sentimentality, Neus's commentary relates to another aforementioned language ideology linking Spanish use to immigrants born outside Catalonia. As discussed in Section 5.4 on Community Issues, this association can reinforce the widespread convergence norm whereby Catalan speakers default to Spanish with unknown interlocutors, especially when those interlocutors are racialized or otherwise perceived as foreign and presumed to have low Catalan proficiency (Vila i Moreno et al., 2023).

Her reflection also demonstrates how a language may become associated not only with a topic, but also with a broader ethnocultural community. In this framing, Spanish sentimental signage is interpreted not simply as evidence of language dominance, but as an index of expressive styles stereotypically associated with Spanish or Latin American identities.

Importantly, the stereotype-based inference presented by Neus does not fully align with the LL data, which show that Catalan is indeed used in sentimental signs, albeit much less frequently than Spanish and English (see Figure 6, Table 6, and Figures 93–94). Furthermore, some participants' reflections suggest that language choice in signage can at times be shaped more by topic than by the sign creator's dominant language. Raquel (female, 26), who identifies culturally as both Spanish and Catalan and uses both Spanish and Catalan habitually, explained that her choice of language for sentimental graffiti would depend on whether the message was intended to convey romantic love or sexual pleasure:

(44) "*El català, perquè és una llengua més fina, més bonica, més discreta i que queda bé en qualsevol cosa que sigui d'amor. Castellà també, perquè erotisme i sexy són conceptes i fets més pujats de to, més bèsties inclús. Vull dir . . . Clar, a veure, depèn del tipus d'amor que tu vulguis pintar, però si és alguna cosa més boja o que no és un sexe referit a l'amor, sinó que és un sexe referit al plaer, doncs faria castellà. Però si fos potser un tipus de pintada més referit a l'amor romàntic, doncs potser faria servir més el català.*" (March 23, 2023)

> [Catalan, because it's a more refined, more beautiful, more discreet language, and it suits anything to do with love. Spanish also, because eroticism and sexy are concepts and acts that are more risqué, even more animalistic. I mean . . . Yeah, let's see, it depends on the type of love you want to paint about, but if it's something wilder, or isn't sex tied to love, but rather sex tied to pleasure, then I'd use Spanish. But if it were a kind of graffiti more tied to romantic love, then I'd probably use Catalan.]

Raquel echoes some of the same evaluative judgments about Catalan and Spanish that were presented in Section 5.5: Catalan is characterized as subtle, refined, and soft, while Spanish is described as more erotic. She extends this contrast by mapping the two languages onto distinct registers of love, associating Catalan with romantic affection and Spanish with sexuality.

Her evaluations also align with a broader pattern across the participant pool: Catalan was generally associated with gentler qualities, while Spanish was more often characterized as strong, aggressive, and harsh (see Tables 8 and 9 in Section 5.7 for frequency counts of adjectives that participants used to describe each language). Another characterization made by 10% of participants (N = 6) is that Catalan is *afrancesat* [Frenchified]; two participants specifically said Catalan would be better than Spanish for sentimental signage because it is more similar to French.

In line with this, 15% of interviewees (N = 9) said they would choose French or Italian to make a sentimental sign. Neither language is official in Catalonia, nor was either an L1 for any of these respondents. Nevertheless, they evaluated French and Italian as beautiful, romantic languages well suited to expressions of affection. These judgments may reflect what Reiterer et al. (2020) call the "Latin Lover effect," or the recurring tendency to evaluate certain Romance languages as particularly attractive. Because Catalan and Spanish are also Romance languages, however, language-family membership alone cannot explain the participants' preferences. The fact that these participants are nonnative speakers may be relevant, given that Dewaele (2010b) found that nonnative speakers evaluated French as significantly more romantic and poetic than native speakers did. This finding suggests that nonnative speakers may be especially likely to idealize the language. More broadly, French's established image as a language of romance and Italian's associations with opera and expressive musicality show how aesthetic language judgments can be shaped by a combination of perceived acoustic qualities, familiarity with the languages, speaker characteristics, and broader sociocultural stereotypes (Dewaele, 2010b; Kogan & Reiterer, 2021; Reiterer et al., 2020). Figures 95 and 96 present affectionate messages in French and Italian, respectively.

Figure 95
Sentimental graffiti in French: "Tu es si jolie" [You are so pretty], Cardedeu



Figure 96
Sentimental graffiti in Italian: "Ti amo principess[a]" [I love you princess], La Seu d'Urgell



Interestingly, most participants explained foreign-language romanticization in terms of phonological properties, even though they were justifying language choice for a written rather than aural message. For example, David (male, 37) identifies both Catalan and Spanish equally as his languages, yet said that the intonation, rhythm, and phonetic properties of French would make it ideal for a sentimental sign:

(45) "*Para un graffiti con un sentimiento romántico y amoroso, el francés, ¿no? La entonación, el ritmo de la voz, la fonética, como las palabras se deslizan un poco por los labios . . . El alemán en cambio es más rígido, más duro. No se enamora el alemán.*" (May 21, 2023)

[For graffiti expressing a romantic or loving sentiment, French, right? The intonation, the rhythm of the voice, the phonetics, the way the words glide off the lips . . . German, by contrast, is more rigid, harsher. German doesn't make you fall in love.]

David evaluates French as attractive, soft, and flowing, in contrast to German, which he perceives as rigid and harsh. He goes so far as to say that "German doesn't make you fall in love." These attitudes point to an ideology that associates French, and in other cases Italian, with romanticism, thereby complementing the earlier ideology that certain foreign languages carry particular social or aesthetic appeal.

While most participants described French and Italian as romantic based on how they imagined the languages to sound, others emphasized cultural images that they associated with them. This distinction reflects the argument that aesthetic evaluations of languages may derive not only from perceived sound characteristics but also from social meanings attached to languages' speakers and cultures (Giles & Niedzielski, 1998; Reiterer et al., 2020). For example, when asked why French has acquired a romantic association, Spanish-dominant Vicenç (male, 28) responded:

(46) "*És el típic estereotip de la torre Eiffel, la parelleta amb la barra de pa.*" (May 27, 2023)

[It's the classic stereotype of the Eiffel Tower, the romantic couple walking with a baguette.]

Vicenç's explanation does not refer to any linguistic property of French. Instead, it describes widely circulating images of Paris, couples, and French culture. His response therefore illustrates how perceptions of a language can become indexically linked to broader cultural images,

while other participants' descriptions of French and Italian as soft or melodic show how perceived acoustic features can also influence these associations.

Some participants demonstrated awareness that they were drawing on stereotypes, while still basing their perceptions on lived experience. Júlia (female, 53), who lived in Italy for ten years, extended this romanticization to Neapolitan, an Italo-Romance language traditionally spoken in Naples and the surrounding region, by tying it both to phonological properties and to her perception of the affective intensity of its speakers:

(47) "*La sonoritat definitivament, i també la passió amb la qual trobo que els napolitans viuen aquests sentiments, la intensitat. Són gent que viu les coses de forma molt intensa, trobo. No sé, potser estic dient coses que semblen molt estereotipades i molt tòpiques, no?—els italians i el romantisme—però és que jo en deu anys allà, de veritat que em va sobtar.*" (May 2, 2023)

[The sonority, definitely, and also the passion with which I find Neapolitans live these feelings, the intensity. They are people who experience things very deeply, I think. I don't know, maybe I'm saying things that sound very stereotypical and clichéd, right?—Italians and romance—but in my ten years there, it really did strike me.]

Taken together, these accounts point to a shared ideology rather than a set of individual attitudes. Participants from varied linguistic backgrounds articulated similar evaluations of French, Italian, and, in Júlia's case, Neapolitan, drawing on phonological properties, cultural imaginaries, or both at once. Júlia recognized that her evaluation might sound stereotypical, but this did not lead her to dismiss it. Instead, she viewed a decade of personal experience as evidence that it was accurate. Her response shows how speakers can be partly aware of a language ideology while still treating it as valid because it appears to match what they have observed (Kroskrity, 2010, pp. 195–200). The romanticization of French, Italian, and related Romance varieties thus circulates as a language ideology that frames certain languages as inherently beautiful and well-suited to expressions of affection, complementing the ideology discussed in Sections 5.3 and 5.5 that foreign languages carry distinct social appeal.

In fact, other participants acknowledged the broader ideologies surrounding French and Italian while presenting individual attitudes that distanced themselves from those ideologies. Catalan-dominant Rafa (male, 28) rejected the stereotype of French as romantic and said he would instead prefer to express himself in Catalan, as it would feel more authentic to him:

(48) "*Català, perquè . . . Hi ha molta opinió que el francès és molt d'això [romàntic], però a mi no em sembla. A mi em sembla que el francès és molt pastelós. Crec que el francès és faixada i el català és sentiment. Crec que . . . No ho sé. És més real, més pur.*" (May 19, 2023)

[Catalan, because . . . A lot of people think that French is very romantic, but I don't think so. To me, French seems very cheesy. I think French is performative and Catalan is true feeling. I think . . . I don't know. It's more real, more pure.]

Here, Rafa frames French's romantic quality as performed or staged rather than genuinely felt. Catalan, by contrast, is associated with emotional authenticity. As his L1, it feels more apt for expressing real emotion. Rafa's view aligns with qualitative data from Pavlenko (2006, p. 18), which show that participants report feeling more "real" and "natural" in their L1 and more "fake"

and “artificial” in later-learned languages. His reflection therefore aligns with ideologies that associate the L1 with strong emotion and Catalan with authenticity, while countering the ideology that positions French as an inherently optimal language for romantic expression.

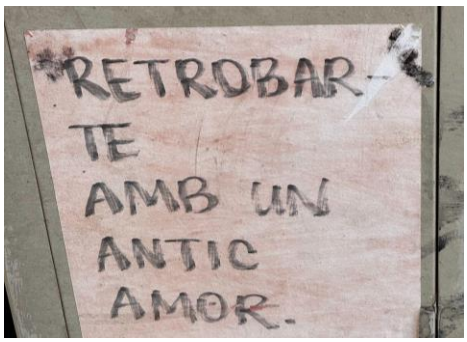
This perspective was also evident in the reflections of Alba (female, 30), one of the sign creators interviewed for this dissertation. Like Aitor (male, 24), the street artist discussed in Section 5.5, Alba identifies only Catalan as her language and emphasizes the importance of defending it. Unlike Aitor, who said he often writes in Spanish because of influences from popular culture, Alba noted that it feels natural for her to make all her posters in Catalan, regardless of subject matter:

(49) “*A cartells, sempre en català. La meva llengua materna és el català. En cap moment crucial de la meva vida, el castellà ha tingut un paper destacat. I crec que per expressar una cosa tan íntima o profunda, sempre triaria el català. Per tant, en cap moment vaig plantejar-me si ho havia de fer en un altre idioma. En tot cas, em vaig plantejar si ho hauria de fer en anglès, per si volia en algun moment fer-ho en altres ciutats, per exemple, o per arribar a un públic més internacional. Però llavors vaig pensar que, com que jo m’expresso en català, en català.*” (July 5, 2023)

[For signs, always in Catalan. My mother tongue is Catalan. At no crucial moment of my life has Spanish played a significant role. And I think that to express something so intimate or profound, I would always choose Catalan. So, at no point did I consider whether to do it in another language. That said, I did consider whether I should do it in English, in case at some point I wanted to paste posters in other cities, for example, or to reach a more international audience. But then I thought that, since I express myself in Catalan, I’ll stick to Catalan.]

Alba echoes the ideology connecting the L1 to strong emotions. She also acknowledges an ideology presented in earlier sections that positions English as a global language with wider reach, but ultimately prioritizes the importance of expressing herself publicly in her mother tongue. It is worth noting that Alba identified Spanish as more suitable for vulgar expression in everyday communication; however, since she does not create vulgar signs, she said this discrepancy was not relevant to language choice in her own street art. Figure 97 displays an example of a poster about love that Alba displayed in the LL of a Barcelona neighborhood.

Figure 97
Sentimental poster in Catalan by Alba (pseudonym): “Retrobar-te amb un antic amor” [Reconnecting with an old love], La Vila de Gràcia. Alba’s artist handle has been redacted to preserve participant anonymity.



The L1 for strong emotions ideology was also shared across generations. Mari Àngels (female, 73) and Josep (male, 78) are Catalan-dominant, lifelong residents of Barcelona. They have been married for nearly 50 years, and shared that although they could not imagine themselves ever creating graffiti, they would use Catalan to write about love if they were ever to do so:

(50) Mari Àngels: "*En català.*"

Josep: "*Sí. Sí, sí. En català.*"

Mari Àngels: "*És una llengua més romàntica . . . Jo crec que és per la connexió que tenim amb la llengua. Per nosaltres és més natural expressar un sentiment amb la pròpia llengua, que és la catalana.*" (June 12, 2023)

[Mari Àngels: In Catalan.

Josep: Yes. Yes, yes. In Catalan.

Mari Àngels: It's a more romantic language . . . I think it's because of the connection we have with the language. For us, it's more natural to express emotion in our own language, which is Catalan.]

Mari Àngels and Josep perceive Catalan as more romantic than Spanish, but Mari Àngels attributes this evaluation to their personal relationship with the language rather than to an inherent quality of Catalan. Her description of Catalan as *la pròpia llengua* [one's own language] resonates with the broader Catalan concept of *llengua pròpia*, a term used in the 1979 Catalan Statute of Autonomy to establish Catalan as Catalonia's "own language" and widely associated with the language's historical and territorial rootedness in Catalonia (Woolard, 2016). Here, however, the emphasis is intimate and biographical rather than primarily territorial or institutional. Catalan is "their own language" because it is the language in which they have lived, loved, and built a decades-long relationship.

The belief expressed by Mari Àngels and Josep that Catalan is more romantic was not categorical across the participant pool. Spanish-dominant Alejandro (male, 25), the son of Colombian immigrants, similarly identified his L1 as most appropriate for sentimental expression but complicated the view, common among Catalan-dominant participants, that Catalan is inherently more beautiful or romantic. When asked what language he would use to create sentimental graffiti, he said he would choose Spanish:

(51) "*En español. Me parece más bonito, más romántico. Y creo que me saldrían más palabras en español que en catalán . . . Lo del amor y todo eso es más insinuativo, son palabras que te salen de dentro, como sentimientos y todo eso. Y entonces igual te sale como que el idioma con el que más predomina, con el que piensas.*" (July 10, 2023)

[In Spanish. To me it seems more beautiful, more romantic. And I think I'd be better able to express it in Spanish than in Catalan . . . Love and all that is more evocative, they're words that come from inside, like feelings and all that. And so what comes out probably ends up being your dominant language, the one you think in.]

Alejandro thus mirrors Mari Àngels and Josep in describing his L1 as especially beautiful and romantic, but because his L1 is Spanish, his response complicates an interpretation of these qualities as inherent to Catalan. His comment that he would "be better able to express it in Spanish than in Catalan" further suggests that language dominance may operate alongside emotional attachment in shaping language choice.

As discussed in Section 2.2.3, prior empirical research has found that multilinguals perceived the emotional weight of the phrase "I love you" to be strongest in their L1 (Dewaele, 2008). This finding relates to language attitudes expressed by Catalan-dominant participants, who repeatedly asserted that the Catalan expression "*t'estimo*" sounds more beautiful than the Spanish expressions "*te quiero*" or "*te amo*" for "I love you." However, Pavlenko (2005) cautions that treating the L1 as the language of emotions is an oversimplification. Even in early commentary on bilingualism and emotions, Weinreich (1953/1968, p. 78) noted that although a speaker's emotional bond is typically strongest with the L1, "emotional involvements of later life . . . are apt to produce conflicting or superior bonds. . . . not every bilingual can unequivocally rank one of his languages as dominant on the grounds of emotional attachment."

One such later-life emotional bond could be a relationship with someone who has a different L1. In the context of signage, it is not only the sign creator's L1 that factors into the expression of romantic sentiment, but also the addressee's language and the language of the relationship. Matras and Gaiser (2020) argue that the addressee dimension is essential to the study of the LL, as it helps explain the linguistic decisions involved in sign creation. Catalan-dominant Carmen (female, 33), who lives in a highly multilingual and multicultural neighborhood of Barcelona, described how addressee considerations could help explain the predominance of Spanish in sentimental signage:

(52) "*Tinc una teoria. Un missatge d'amor és un missatge que està comprès per dues persones: un el que escriu el missatge i la persona que el rep. Perquè un grafiti d'amor sigui en català, s'ha de donar la coincidència que les dues persones siguin catalanoparlants. Si les dues persones són castellanoparlants, la probabilitat que sigui en castellà és 100%. Si una persona és castellanoparlant i l'altra és catalanoparlant, el missatge serà en castellà perquè el català parla en castellà, però no al revés. Ja és el doble de possibilitats que un missatge sigui en castellà i no en català. I amb anglès pot passar el mateix. Jo em puc enamorar d'un noi anglès; segurament soc jo la que parla anglès i no ell castellà la majoria de vegades a Espanya. Jo soc catalana, però [perquè sigui] en català les dues persones han de ser catalanoparlants, i moltes vegades t'enamores de gent* random*, no tothom és d'aquí.*" (July 27, 2023)

[I have a theory. A love message is a message that involves two people: the one who writes it and the one who receives it. For a love graffiti to be in Catalan, both people must happen to be Catalan speakers. If both are Spanish speakers, the probability that it's in Spanish is 100%. If one is Spanish-speaking and the other Catalan-speaking, the message will be in Spanish, because Catalan speakers speak Spanish, but not the reverse. That's already double the chance that a message will be in Spanish rather than Catalan. And the same can happen with English. I could fall in love with an English guy; surely I'd be the one speaking English, not him speaking Spanish most of the time in Spain. I'm Catalan, but for it to be in Catalan, both people have to be Catalan speakers, and you often fall in love with random people, not everyone is from here.]

Carmen's emphasis on the interlocutor's language aligns with Bell's (1984) theory of audience design, which argues that linguistic choices are fundamentally informed by the identities and expectations of addressees. Furthermore, her comment that "If one is Spanish-speaking and the other Catalan-speaking, the message will be in Spanish, because Catalan speakers speak Spanish, but not the reverse" points to the convergence norm of defaulting to Spanish unless all interlocutors are Catalan-dominant. Her generalization assumes that Catalan speakers are more likely than Spanish speakers to accommodate across languages, an expectation that, when reproduced on a large scale, can reinforce this convergence norm.

As with vulgar/taboo signs, participants' explanations for the relative scarcity of Catalan in signs about sentimentality also point to a language ideology that positions Spanish and English as dominant in popular culture. As mentioned in Section 5.5, 87% of participants (N = 52) believe that media shape language choice in vernacular signage about intimate topics. Catalan-dominant Laia (female, 25) explained that despite growing up in a traditionally Catalan small town, she often felt out of place at her secondary school, an environment where she perceived Spanish to be the more dominant and socially prestigious language. She pointed to popular culture's impact on young people's language attitudes and practices as a reason for this:

(53) "*Jo crec que el que explica una mica la ubiquitat del castellà és que les referències culturals són en castellà i anglès—sèries americanes, internet, un lloc on el castellà i l'anglès són molt, molt populars. Al final molta gent jove pensa que les coses en anglès són més guais que les coses en castellà, i que les coses en castellà són més guais que les coses en català. Pel que fa a l'absència de català, això és evidentment zero provat, però jo crec que la majoria de gent que fa aquestes pintades són gent d' entre 10 i 20 anys. 'Te amo,' 'Te quiero,' 'Siempre juntos'—aquest tipus de coses ho sol fer gent a l'institut. Són coses tan formulaiques que la gent ho escriu perquè és el que sempre diuen entre ells. I la llengua de prestigi, la llengua social i vehicular entre aquesta població d'adolescents a l'institut és el castellà.* (August 7, 2023)

[I think what partially explains the ubiquity of Spanish is that cultural references are in Spanish and English—American TV shows, the internet, spaces where Spanish and English are very, very popular. In the end, a lot of young people think things in English are cooler than things in Spanish, and that things in Spanish are cooler than things in Catalan. As for the absence of Catalan, this is obviously totally unproven, but I suspect the majority of people who make these graffiti are between 10 and 20 years old. '*Te amo*,' '*Te quiero*,' '*Siempre juntos*'—these kinds of things are usually written by people in secondary school. They're so formulaic that people write them because it's what they always say among themselves. And among this population of adolescents in secondary school, Spanish is both the prestige language and the main language of social interaction.]

Laia's comments relate to a language ideology that positions Spanish and English as carrying greater social prestige among youth, and suggest that popular culture exerts a particularly strong influence on this group, who may draw on such references for social acceptance. This perception was common, with about a quarter of interviewees (N = 13) attributing the low presence of Catalan in signs about intimate topics to the likelihood that most vernacular signage is produced by young people.

The analysis of societal signs, however, casts doubt on this view. Youth organizations such as La Forja and Arran produce abundant Catalan signage about societal and political topics,

suggesting substantial use of Catalan by young people on public walls. This supports participants' sense that youth are active sign creators, but undercuts claims that age alone explains Catalan's relative scarcity in signage about intimate topics. Official survey data further complicate a purely age-based explanation: Idescat (2023) reports that 29.2% of 15- to 29-year-olds habitually use Catalan, slightly below the overall rate of 32.6% but above the rate for those aged 30–44 (25.8%). Moreover, Newman et al. (2013) temper concerns about low Catalan use among youth, arguing that some rejection of Catalan may reflect age-specific identity concerns during adolescence, and that Spanish-dominant youth may later adopt bilingual or even predominantly Catalan practices as adults, particularly through childrearing or other life-stage changes. The age-based explanation therefore appears overgeneralized.

Even so, the interviews show that participants recognized youth peer practices as an important site of sociolinguistic change. Although youth language practices are heterogeneous and cannot straightforwardly predict future language use, Pujolar et al. (2010) argue that they can nevertheless offer insight into broader future sociolinguistic trends. This concern also appears in earlier language-planning discourse. In a mid-1990s document quoted by Vann (2026, p. 90), the Vice-Rector's Office of the Universitat de Barcelona emphasized the importance of language attitudes among the first generation of university students to have received instruction in Catalan: "*La situació social de la llengua i el progrés en la seva normalització depenen de les actituds de cada persona i, en particular, de la gent jove*" [The social situation of the language and progress in its normalization depend on each person's attitudes and, in particular, on those of young people].

Marc (male, 25) echoes Laia's theory about the influence of popular culture. As someone who describes himself as staunchly Catalan in all aspects, he supports this theory while explicitly rejecting Neus's claim from the opening of this section that the lower proportion of sentimental signs in Catalan results from Catalan-dominant individuals being more reserved or less emotionally expressive:

(54) "*No és que siguem tancats ni reservats, és perquè tenim el doble. És a dir, una persona de Catalunya escolta música en castellà i en català, té el doble d'oportunitats de trobar una cançó romàntica. Jo visc aquí i escolto música en castellà . . . Per tant, que no hi hagi pintades en català no vol dir que no siguem romàntics, sinó que no volem expressar-ho d'aquesta forma. Igual que la majoria de gent no sap formular una frase en anglès. Llavors la majoria de frases que s'escriuen així amoroses i tal són agafant frases de cançons. D'altra banda, és com una cosa, que tu parles anglès per semblar guai, però si sembla romàntic i sembla guai, és com que no hi lliguen. M'explico? Llavors quedaria com una mica estrany.*" (May 18, 2023)

[It's not that we're closed off or reserved, it's because we have double the access. That is, a person from Catalonia listens to music in both Spanish and Catalan, they have double the chances of finding a romantic song. I live here, and I listen to music in Spanish . . . So the fact that there aren't graffiti in Catalan doesn't mean we aren't romantic, but rather that we don't want to express it that way. Similarly, most people don't know how to formulate a sentence in English. So most of those love-type phrases that get written are taken from songs. On the other hand, it's like, you speak English to seem cool, but it can't really be both romantic and cool, it's like the two don't fit together. You know what I mean? So it would come off a little weird.]

Marc challenges Neus's cultural stereotype, stating that Catalan-dominant people like himself are neither reserved nor closed off. Instead, he argues that language choice in sentimental signage is shaped by popular-culture availability rather than speaker identity. In his account, Spanish appears because abundant musical references make Spanish romantic vocabulary salient, even to Catalan speakers.

In light of Laia's and Marc's reflections, as well as the fact that 28% of sentimental signs were coded as English, it is worth reiterating this dissertation's focus on language use in vernacular signage. As discussed in Section 3.1.3, this coding identifies the linguistic form of an inscription rather than implying that its creator was fluent in English or consciously switched codes. Brief written signs demand far less language proficiency from both creators and observers than face-to-face interactions do. While creators may imagine an audience and assign it a linguistic identity, the lower communicative demands of reading a sign compared with participating in spoken interaction allow for greater linguistic flexibility. Creators can also deploy short, formulaic expressions in a language they do not speak fluently, as Marc describes in relation to people who may not be fluent in English but can still produce a brief English-language sign. They can therefore incorporate English-language expressions into vernacular artifacts as a form of creative or affective expression with less fear of direct interpersonal judgment.

Figure 98, for example, features a short English phrase with an unconventional subject–verb agreement pattern ("Things ends"). Despite this, the sign effectively emplaces a sentimental message in English in public space. Piller and Takahashi (2006) note that emotion terms in English look desirable because of the economic and sociopolitical prestige accorded to the English language. Panayiotou (2004) further notes that such terms are also universally applicable.

Figure 98
Sentimental graffiti in English: "Things ends but memories are forever," Solsona[19]



[19] The verb "ends" would conventionally take the plural form here, "end."

In discussing patterns of language choice in sentimental signage, participants' explanations ranged from cultural stereotypes and the appeal of certain Romance languages to the influence of popular culture. A common language ideology that emerged in these discussions was the association of the L1 with authentic emotional expression. Other participants highlighted evaluative judgments that reflect more broadly circulating ideologies linking Catalan with softness, French and Italo-Romance varieties with romance, and Spanish with eroticism.

These evaluations were not categorical, however, reflecting a point well established in sociolinguistics: judgments about language are rarely only about language. As Niedzielski and Preston (2000, p. 9) explain, "A language attitude is, after all, not really an attitude to a language feature; it is an awakening of a set of beliefs about individuals or sorts of individuals through the filter of a linguistic performance" (see also Grosjean, 1982). In this section, participants' attitudes did not reflect inherent qualities of languages so much as broader social ideologies, including associations of Spanish with immigrants from other parts of Spain and Latin America, stereotypes of Catalans as more measured and refined, and the positioning of English and Spanish as languages with broader reach, youth prestige, and a dominant presence in popular culture.

Having analyzed participants' perspectives and corpus examples across all five topics, I now turn to the final section of this chapter. Section 5.7 synthesizes the recurring language attitudes and ideologies that surfaced across topics, considers participants' reactions to the overall language distributions in the corpus, and closes the chapter by situating these findings within broader scholarly discussions of Catalan vitality.

5.7 Recurring Language Ideologies Across Topics

This dissertation has examined how language choice varies by topic in Catalonia's vernacular LL and how locally raised Catalans interpret these language–topic patterns. Participants' reflections revealed a number of language ideologies, understood here as "beliefs, feelings, and conceptions about language that are socially shared and relate language and society" (Piller, 2015, p. 4). This section brings together recurring ideologies from across the five topics. It also draws on participants' broader language attitudes and their responses to the aggregate LL findings. The purpose is to clarify how participants interpreted the signs, including why certain language–topic pairings seemed expected or appropriate, what social identities they associated with sign creators, and what some patterns suggested to them about Catalan vitality. These ideologies were not shared equally across the participant pool. Some were widespread, while others varied according to participants' linguistic backgrounds and social positioning.

Participants widely aligned pro-independence stances, left-wing activism, civic engagement, and local belonging with Catalan. They used these associations as lenses through which to explain the predominance of Catalan in signage about societal topics such as politics, social causes, and community issues. The identification of Catalan with local authenticity contrasted with another recurring language ideology that positioned Spanish as the language of immigrants, an association that surfaced in discussions of both societal and intimate topics.

In line with Oakes's (2001) claim that ethnic identity, and indeed all social identities, rely on the existence of an "Other," many language ideologies presented in this chapter depended on contrast. In the Community Issues section, for example, a center-periphery distinction placed Catalan at the geospatial center of many communities and Spanish along the outskirts. Through a process of fractal recursivity (Irvine & Gal, 2000), this distinction was extended metaphorically in commentary such as María's to suggest that Catalan-dominant speakers hold a more central status

in Catalonia as "true Catalans," while Spanish-dominant speakers, whether immigrants or not, are relegated to a more peripheral sphere of Catalan identity.

On a related note, class-based ideologies emerged that associated Catalan with middle-class identities and Spanish with speakers from more disadvantaged socioeconomic circumstances. These reflections echo Pujolar's (2007) discussion of the sociolinguistic effects of mid-twentieth-century immigration in urban areas, through which Spanish-dominant areas came to be associated with the working class and Catalan-dominant areas with the middle class. Many interviewees drew on these associations to explain the predominance of Spanish in signage about intimate topics, presuming that graffiti and similar artifacts are often created by people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The present study did not collect demographic information about the creators of the corpus artifacts, however, so this assumption cannot be evaluated directly. Research conducted in other contexts also cautions against treating graffiti writers as a uniformly working-class population, since participation in graffiti-writing communities may extend across social classes (Lasley, 1995). These interview comments are therefore best understood as evidence of an enduring language-class ideology rather than as an accurate description of the sign creators' socioeconomic backgrounds.

Cultural stereotypes also surfaced in participants' explanations. Some Catalan-dominant participants portrayed Catalans, understood as other Catalan-dominant speakers like themselves, as reasonable, measured, and socially restrained in contrast to Spanish-dominant individuals, whom they perceived as more emotionally expressive. These group-level stereotypes may partly inform the widespread evaluative judgments that described Catalan as soft and refined and Spanish as comparatively forceful and erotic. Attitudes represent evaluative judgments about languages, varieties, or speakers, whereas ideologies are the larger set of assumptions that make those evaluations seem reasonable or commonsensical (Carruthers et al., 2024). These language attitudes therefore provide insight into language ideologies because the judgments people make about ways of speaking often reflect broader social beliefs about language, identity, and difference.

To determine whether the evaluations that recurred in participants' discussions of LL patterns also appeared in their broader language attitudes, I now turn to an adjective-elicitation task conducted earlier in the interviews. Before discussing hypothetical language choices for signage, each participant was asked to provide three adjectives describing Catalan and three describing Spanish. Presenting these responses here allows them to be considered alongside the recurring evaluations identified across the five topic-based sections. Tables 8 and 9 report the frequency of the adjectives mentioned, listed in descending order. Because most interviews were conducted in Catalan, adjectives provided in Spanish were translated into Catalan to facilitate comparison across responses. An exception was made for *barriobajero* [coarse, lowbrow; lit. "from the lower neighborhoods"], which participants usually said in Spanish even during Catalan-medium interviews, perhaps reflecting the class-based ideologies discussed in this chapter. Direct synonyms, such as *sec* and *aixut* [dry], were combined on a single line. Only adjectives mentioned by at least three participants are included.

Although participants offered a wide range of adjectives, several responses recurred across the participant pool. The 12 adjectives in Table 8 accounted for 53% of all responses describing Spanish, while the 16 adjectives in Table 9 accounted for 61% of those describing Catalan.

Table 8
Adjectives Describing Spanish: Frequencies and English Translations

Adjective	**Count**
Fort [strong]	23
Agressiu [aggressive]	9
Dur [harsh]	5
Impactant [striking]	5
Sec / Aixut [dry]	5
Contundent [forceful]	4
Vulgar [vulgar]	4
Barriobajero [coarse, lowbrow]	3
Bromista [joking]	3
Directe [direct]	3
Divertit [fun]	3
Formal [formal]	3

Table 9
Adjectives Describing Catalan: Frequencies and English Translations

Adjective	**Count**
Suau [soft]	18
Dolç [sweet]	12
Fi / Finet [dainty]	10
Afrancesat [Frenchified]	6
Bonic [beautiful]	6
Agradable [pleasant]	5
Romàntic [romantic]	5
Complicat [complicated]	4
Delicat [delicate]	4
Maco [nice]	4
Dificil [difficult]	3

Adjective	Count
Educat [polite]	3
Elegant [elegant]	3
Familiar [familiar, homey]	3
Melós [honeyed]	3
Refinat [refined]	3

Many of the key terms featured in Tables 8 and 9 resonate with descriptions provided by participants in their metalinguistic evaluations of language distributions in the LL. The predominance of Spanish in insults and vulgar signage was explained through the "aggressive" and "forceful" qualities that participants perceived the language to possess; in contrast, Catalan was framed as too "soft" and "dainty" to be taken seriously in signage evoking those registers. Considered through Irvine and Gal's (2000) framework of iconization, for some participants, the languages themselves have come to represent these qualities, as if they inherently embodied them. The widespread perception of Catalan as softer and Spanish as comparatively vulgar also points to the semiotic process of erasure, through which Catalan becomes viewed as ill-suited to insults and similar forms of expression, thereby narrowing the domains in which the language is perceived as appropriate, even among Catalan-dominant speakers.

English occupied a somewhat different ideological position in participants' reflections. Unlike Catalan and Spanish, it was rarely described as though it inherently possessed particular expressive qualities. Instead, participants primarily associated English with international reach, popular culture, youth, modernity, and social appeal. Descriptions of English as "cool" or "modern" therefore referred less to its supposed linguistic character than to the social meanings its use could evoke. This distinction helps explain how English can function both as a lingua franca and as a stylistic resource in vernacular signage. In signs about global social causes, it may be selected for its perceived accessibility to a wide audience. In vulgar or sentimental signs, however, even short, formulaic, or nonstandard English expressions can index a contemporary, cosmopolitan, rebellious, or pop-cultural style without requiring extensive English proficiency or an international audience. In these cases, simply displaying English may carry social value beyond the exact content of the expression.

Participants also shared aesthetic evaluations of French, Italian, and other Italo-Romance varieties, which they described as flowing and romantic. In line with Niedzielski and Preston's (2000) argument that language attitudes reflect judgments of individuals rather than linguistic forms, Oakes (2001) similarly cautions that perceptions about the aesthetic value of certain languages are actually language myths. He notes,

> Tests conducted within the field of social psychology of language have revealed that judgements of the type 'Italian is a beautiful language' and 'Arabic is a harsh language' are not founded on inherent values, so much as on cultural norms, pressures and connotations which reflect broader social attitudes towards the speakers of those languages (p. 52).

Language attitudes are therefore formed mainly by imposed societal norms rather than by inherent values of particular languages. These evaluative judgments make some languages seem more apt for certain kinds of expression, even when semantic equivalents exist in another language's lexicon. In turn, these attitudinal perceptions reflect and help sustain broader ideologies discussed in this chapter, such as the incommensurability of languages and the perceived suitability of the L1 for expressing strong emotion.

Although many of the attitudes and ideologies mentioned thus far in this section may give an impression of privileged and positive associations with Catalan, other ideologies suggest that some participants perceive the language to be in a precarious position. Both Spanish and non-official English were positioned as global languages with wider reach, a dominant presence in popular culture, and social prestige among youth. These associations emerged in discussions about nearly all topics, pointing to their salience among locally raised Catalans. By contrast, Catalan was occasionally described as a minoritized language in need of support. Participants such as Andreu and Carmen justified their hypothetical use of Catalan for signage by asking, if they did not use the language, particularly to write about important issues, then when would the language get used, and by whom?

In this vein, it is worthwhile to point out one final language ideology that emerged in relation to the LL findings for the two intimate topics. Only 13% (N = 8) of interviewees expressed surprise at any of the major findings outlined in Chapter 4; the relative lack of Catalan in sentimental and vulgar transgressive signage seemed logical to most participants. The fact that the comparatively reduced presence of Catalan in certain vulgar and informal registers in the LL was perceived as normal may suggest that participants would not expect it to be used in these registers in non-LL contexts either.

Participants were divided according to habitual language, however, in terms of whether their perceptions of the LL findings evoked any language ideologies related to Catalan vitality. Half the participants (N = 30) state they are concerned that the low presence of Catalan in intimate artifacts reflects tenuous future prospects for Catalan vitality, and all but one of this group claim Catalan as their language of identification and habitual usage. Rai (male, 32), for example, stated that a language cannot survive if it is not used in all registers:

(55) "*Crec que [els resultats són] clarament una indicació que està en perill, al final una llengua per estar viva s'ha d'utilitzar en tots els registres. Si només s'utilitzen en els registres oficials però no s'utilitza en el dia a dia és inutil . . . I a Catalunya evidentment tenim un problema que determinades classes baixes no utilitzen el català.*" (July 6, 2023)

[I think the results are clearly an indication that it is in danger. Ultimately, for a language to be alive, it has to be used in all registers. If it is only used in official registers but not in everyday life, it is useless . . . And in Catalonia, we clearly have a problem in that certain lower-class groups do not use Catalan.]

Rai's comment on vitality also surfaces the class-based ideology described throughout this chapter.

Borja (male, 34) clarified that his concern is not so much with what the LL findings may suggest about Catalan knowledge but rather with what they might signal about its use:

(56) "*Crec que [és preocupant], no tant perquè no hi hagi pintades en català, que això em dóna igual, sinó pel que hi ha darrere, pel que pot implicar. Perquè vol dir que hi ha certes persones que no veuen el català com a utilitzable en tots els formats . . . A nivell de coneixement, el català mai hauria estat millor. El problema que tenim ara no és de coneixement de la llengua, sinó d'ús. Hi ha moltes persones que no veuen la necessitat d'utilitzar-lo mai i clar, això pot acabar repercutint també en el coneixement . . . Encara que el coneguis, si mai l'has d'utilitzar en cap circumstància, per què els teus fills l'han d'aprendre, si no serveix per res?*" (July 10, 2023)

[I think it is worrying, not so much because there are no graffiti in Catalan, which I don't care about, but because of what lies behind it, what it may imply. Because it means that there are certain people who do not see Catalan as usable in all domains . . . In terms of knowledge, Catalan has never been better. The problem we have now is not knowledge of the language, but use. There are many people who don't see any need to ever use it, and of course, that can also end up affecting knowledge . . . Even if you know it, if you never have to use it under any circumstances, why should your children learn it, if it serves no purpose?]

Borja echoes Rai's point about the importance of a language being used in all registers. Official survey data confirm Borja's perception that despite very high levels of reported proficiency in Catalan, habitual use remains much lower (Idescat, 2023). Moreover, although he perceived knowledge of Catalan to be healthy and widespread throughout Catalonia, he worried this could change if asymmetrical patterns of language use continue.

Overall, the importance Rai and Borja attribute to seeing Catalan represented in signage reflects interview findings presented by Dunlevy (2020) in her work analyzing the LL of three towns in Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Galicia. Local residents asserted the importance of seeing Catalan, Euskera, and Galician, respectively, on the walls as well as using them in the spoken form. She concludes that the LL has helped with encouraging use and pride in these languages, and that their presence in the public space is an important way to assert local identity.

Importantly, Rai and Borja are both Catalan-dominant individuals who prioritize defending the language. The ideology of Catalan as a threatened language in need of support was voiced by 83% (N = 29/35) of Catalan-dominant participants, but there was only one case of a participant with Spanish or both languages as habitual languages who expressed a similarly pessimistic outlook. This discrepancy aligns with Pujolar et al. (2010), who explain that native Catalan speakers tend to be pessimistic about the future of Catalan, while native Spanish speakers of more hybridized origins are considerably more optimistic. The idea that Catalan-dominant individuals are more pessimistic about Catalan's future is also confirmed empirically by recent survey data (CEO, 2024): 67% of Catalan-dominant respondents believe that Catalan vitality will worsen in coming years, compared to only 33% of Spanish-dominant respondents.

While this dissertation does not assess Catalan vitality as a broader sociolinguistic phenomenon, it does show how participants interpreted the LL findings through ideologies related to vitality and the place of Catalan in their lives. These interpretations should also be understood as responses to participation in the research project itself. Seeing the aggregate signage patterns may have heightened participants' awareness of the limited use of Catalan in certain registers or encouraged them to reflect more closely on language practices they had previously taken for granted. Several participants later reported that the interviews had increased their awareness of language-choice patterns in public space and, for some, renewed their motivation to use Catalan

more consistently. The interview data therefore reflect both participants' existing language ideologies and the further reflection prompted by being shown the aggregate LL findings.

Read in the opposite direction, the interviews also deepened and complicated my interpretation of the LL corpus. Before conducting the interviews, I was struck by the consistency of the language–topic patterns across places with distinct sociolinguistic profiles, and individual signs that diverged from these patterns initially seemed to challenge the broader findings. Participants' reflections on language choice, however, highlighted the importance of individual agency, imagined audiences, local belonging, and the perceived suitability of particular languages for different forms of expression. Viewed in this light, a sentimental or vulgar sign in Catalan does not negate the relative scarcity of Catalan in those topics; instead, such signs demonstrate that the language–topic patterns are tendencies rather than categorical constraints.

The interviews likewise reinforced the need for caution in interpreting the LL as a straightforward reflection of a community's demographic make-up or linguistic profile. I was surprised by the relatively limited presence of Arabic, Urdu, Mandarin Chinese, and other languages spoken by more recent immigrant communities, including in municipalities where I had expected them to appear more frequently. The corpus cannot establish why particular individuals do or do not use these languages in public inscriptions, but participants' repeated attention to audience, local context, and the meanings attached to different languages helps explain why the languages spoken in a community are not always reflected proportionally in the LL.

Together, the two datasets reveal more than either could have shown independently. The corpus identifies recurring language–topic patterns while also documenting exceptions, regional consistency, and mismatches between local demographics and language use in vernacular signage. The interviews reveal the social meanings through which participants interpreted these patterns and provide possible explanations for why language choice does not simply mirror speakers' habitual practices or local demographics. Where the datasets align, they show how particular language–topic associations have become recognizable and commonsensical. Where they diverge, the signage data place limits on participants' explanations and help distinguish social stereotypes from observable patterns. Examining the two datasets together therefore shows that language choice in the LL is neither a direct reflection of sign creators' identities nor rigidly determined by topic. It results from the interplay of sign creators' linguistic repertoires, imagined audiences, local belonging, and the social meanings attached to particular languages, including their perceived suitability for different domains.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Catalonia is a multilingual region characterized by high societal proficiency in Catalan alongside lower habitual use, ongoing demographic transformation, and a tempered yet enduring independence movement. These conditions exist within a broader context in which Catalan remains minoritized and linguistic normalization is still underway. Against this backdrop, this dissertation has examined how language choice varies by topic in Catalonia's vernacular LL and how Catalans' perceptions of these patterns reflect prevailing language ideologies. I have pursued these aims by addressing the following research questions:

1. RQ1. Which languages are used most often for different topics in Catalonia's vernacular linguistic landscape?
2. RQ2. To what extent do language–topic patterns vary across communities with different linguistic profiles?
3. RQ3. What language ideologies are revealed by locally raised Catalans' interpretations of language choice in the linguistic landscape?

In concluding this dissertation, I first provide a summary of the key findings related to these three questions. I then discuss the contributions of this work to scholarship on language ideologies in Catalonia, LL research, and mixed-methods sociolinguistic inquiry more broadly. Next, I consider the implications of this research for language policy and normalization efforts in Catalonia and for sociolinguistic scholarship in other minoritized-language communities. I conclude by discussing pertinent limitations and directions for future research before offering a final reflection.

6.1 Summary of Findings

In response to RQ1, the topic-based analysis of Catalonia's vernacular LL reveals clear divergence by domain. In a corpus of over 10,000 signs documented and coded across 21 survey areas throughout Catalonia's eight regional territories, Catalan predominates in societally oriented signs. Artifacts coded exclusively as Catalan constitute 70% of messages about national and partisan politics, 68% of messages about social causes, and 81% of messages about community issues. By contrast, Spanish and English are far more common in signs about intimate topics. Monolingual Spanish signs make up 48% of vulgar/taboo artifacts and 58% of sentimental signs. The corresponding figures for English are 33% and 26%, respectively. Of the five most salient topics analyzed in this dissertation, social causes showed the highest representation of multilingual signs at 7%. One third of all multilingual artifacts in the corpus addressed this topic, and 80% of multilingual social-cause signs combined Catalan and English. Multivalent language assignment was most common in vulgar/taboo artifacts, accounting for 11% of signs. This was largely due to the frequent occurrence of the standalone insult *puta* [whore], which is spelled identically in the dictionaries of the IEC (n.d.) and the RAE (n.d.).

Monolingual signs also appeared in 16 languages other than Catalan, Spanish, and English. Taken together, however, these signs remained rare and were dispersed across languages and topics, limiting the possibility of systematic language-specific comparisons. They reached their highest proportional representation in signs about sentimentality, where they constituted 1.6% of artifacts. Among these languages, French was the most common, appearing in 43% of other-

language signs, followed by Italian at 11.4%. Because French and Italian were the most prevalent and also figured prominently in participants' evaluations of languages associated with romantic expression, they receive closer attention in Section 5.6. Appendix Tables C1–C3 provide a fuller account of other-language signs, including their distribution across sites, the proportion represented by each language, and the topics they most commonly addressed. The limited visibility of languages associated with more recent immigrant communities is considered in Section 5.7.

Turning to RQ2, language–topic distributions were generally consistent among the 21 towns and neighborhoods surveyed for this dissertation, with limited exceptions. Regarding societal topics, Catalan led in 19 of 21 sites for politics and social causes and in 18 of 21 sites for community issues. The outliers were the four survey areas with the lowest reported percentages of Catalan speakers: El Barri Gòtic, L'Hospitalet de Llobregat, Badia del Vallès, and Santa Coloma de Gramenet. This clustering is important because it suggests that the association between Catalan and societal discourse extends across communities with distinct linguistic profiles, while weakening in places that are more Spanish-dominant. The findings therefore cannot be explained solely by either region-wide language ideologies or local demographics. Instead, they appear to reflect an interaction between the two.

The cross-site patterns for intimate topics, on the other hand, were remarkably consistent. Spanish or English led in all 21 sites for both vulgar/taboo signs and signs about sentimentality, and not a single survey area reversed the broader pattern. English, a non-official language in Catalonia, appeared in more monolingual signs than Catalan in 20 of 21 sites for vulgar/taboo messages and in 18 of 21 sites for sentimentality. This consistency is important because it suggests that language choice for intimate topics is less closely tied to local linguistic profiles than language choice for societal topics. The widespread use of English and Spanish across distinct survey areas instead points to broader associations between these languages and particular forms of intimate expression. Whereas local linguistic conditions appear to shape the strength of Catalan's predominance in societal signage, they had little apparent effect on the broader language patterns observed for intimate topics.

In addition to site-level differences, special attention was paid to a higher-level distinction between the ten sites located within the Barcelona Metropolitan Area (BMA) and the eleven sites outside of it. This is because less than a quarter of residents within the BMA report Catalan as their only habitual language, whereas this figure approaches one half of residents in the seven regional territories outside the BMA (Idescat, 2025). The contrast between the BMA and non-BMA sites is more pronounced for societal topics, where Catalan remains dominant overall but Spanish appears at higher rates in the BMA, especially in areas where reported speaking knowledge of Catalan is lower. For intimate topics, however, cross-regional variation is much weaker. Even outside the BMA, where Catalan is more habitually used, Catalan remains rare in vulgar/taboo and sentimental signs, which are consistently dominated by Spanish and, to a lesser extent, English. The multi-site comparison therefore makes it possible to distinguish patterns that vary with local linguistic profiles from those that remain stable across communities. A study conducted in only one location could not have shown that language choice for societal signs is partly shaped by local habitual language use while the association of Spanish and English with intimate expression extends across areas with substantially different linguistic profiles.

RQ3 examined some of the ideologies through which 60 locally raised Catalans interpreted these distributions. Across the interviews, participants linked Catalan with pro-independence politics, left-wing activism, civic engagement, local belonging, middle-class identities, refinement, and softness. Spanish was often associated with immigration, working-class identities, emotional

force, aggression, eroticism, and vulgarity. These associations were neither unanimous nor stable across all topics, and participants' interpretations varied according to their linguistic backgrounds and social positioning.

The ideologies surrounding Catalan were also internally complex. Its associations with local authenticity, civic participation, refinement, and favorable socioeconomic positioning coexisted with perceptions of it as minoritized and insufficiently used across all registers. Many Catalan-dominant participants interpreted its limited presence in vulgar and sentimental signage as a possible sign of restricted domains of use, while some participants described choosing Catalan in such contexts precisely as an act of linguistic activism. These concerns were not shared equally across the participant pool, as Spanish-dominant participants typically demonstrated less concern in this regard. Sign creators' perspectives also sometimes complicated observers' broader explanations by emphasizing habitual language choice, orientation to place, or references drawn from popular culture.

Participants generally associated English with international reach, popular culture, youth, modernity, and social appeal. English could therefore serve both as a lingua franca and as a symbol of modernity, internationalism, or social appeal, even when it appeared in short, familiar, or nonstandard expressions. French, Italian, and other Italo-Romance varieties were more explicitly evaluated as romantic and flowing. Participants referred to these varied associations when describing their own hypothetical language choices and when interpreting the language–topic patterns observed in the corpus.

Overall, participants interpreted language choice in the LL not simply as a reflection of sign creators' L1 or desired communicative reach, but as an index of social meanings attached to languages, topics, identities, and places. Chapter 5 provides a fuller account of how these ideologies overlapped, conflicted, varied across participants, and were sometimes complicated by sign creators' accounts and counterexamples in the corpus.

6.2 Contributions

Taken together, these findings extend existing scholarship in three directions. They add to the empirical picture of language ideologies in Catalonia in the post-referendum era, advance methodological considerations for LL analysis, and demonstrate the value of integrated mixed-methods designs for sociolinguistic inquiry. The following subsections detail each set of contributions in turn.

6.2.1 Language Ideologies in Catalonia

The general consistency of language–topic distributions across linguistically and geographically diverse communities suggests that, although the proportions vary, most sites display the same overall ordering of languages by topic. This consistency does not mean that Catalonia should be treated as a single monolithic speech community, since Catalonia includes many sociolinguistically distinct communities, and local demographics and language practices shape the strength of the patterns observed. Nevertheless, the recurrence of similar language–topic distributions across these communities suggests that the associations identified in this dissertation are not merely products of site-specific demographics. Rather, they appear to reflect widely circulating ideologies that connect languages with particular topics and aspects of identity.

At the same time, the data reveal an asymmetry in how these patterns relate to local demography. The predominance of Catalan in societal signs weakens somewhat in certain Spanish-dominant areas, whereas its limited presence in vernacular signs about vulgarity/taboo and sentimentality remains stable across all 21 sites, including those where Catalan is widely used habitually. This suggests that local linguistic conditions may shape language choice differently depending on topic and communicative domain. The finding applies specifically to vernacular signage and should not be taken to mean that Catalan is similarly uncommon in intimate expression elsewhere. Future research in Catalonia and other multilingual or minoritized-language settings could examine whether comparable language–topic associations appear in spoken interaction, digital media, private writing, and other forms of public discourse, as well as whether the influence of local linguistic profiles varies by topic or register. Such comparisons would help determine whether the patterns identified here are distinctive to vernacular signage or reflect broader sociolinguistic associations.

A further contribution of this dissertation lies in extending prior sociolinguistic scholarship on Catalonia in the post-Franco period, which has identified similar ideological and evaluative patterns across other domains of language use. Woolard (1989), for example, found gaps for Catalan in playful and transgressive registers, while Pujolar's (2001) fieldwork with working-class youth in Barcelona showed that Spanish was perceived as tougher, cooler, and more suitable for expressing transgression and masculinity. More recently, Massaguer Comes et al. (2021) found that some YouTubers perceive Catalan as uncool, refined, or buttoned-up. Similar patterns appear in relation to erotic and sexual expression. Frekko (2009) found that Catalan was depicted as an "unsexy" language in ethnographic and media data, with Spanish often used to portray lustful and desirable figures, while Millán (2020) observed code-switches to Spanish in insults and sexual comments by Catalan-dominant characters in *Merlí*, a contemporary Catalan television series.

This dissertation shows that these judgments also appear in the post-referendum era when participants discuss largely anonymous vernacular writing in public space. Because sign creators do not usually interact directly with their audience at the moment of production, accommodation to another speaker cannot easily explain their language choices. These associations are therefore not limited to pressures that arise during face-to-face interaction. Their appearance in speech, media, and vernacular signage instead points to broader beliefs about which languages are perceived as appropriate for different kinds of expression. Although most corpus artifacts are anonymous and do not reveal their creators' intentions, the overall patterns are consistent with these widely shared associations. The findings also highlight the LL as a distinctive analytical site, where reduced interactional pressures may give sign creators greater flexibility to use languages they do not speak fluently.

The findings also document English's prominent role in Catalonia's vernacular LL, particularly in signs about intimate topics. The lower representation of Catalan in these signs is therefore filled not only by Spanish, the language with which Catalan is most often placed in opposition in the sociolinguistic literature, but also by globalized English. Spanish and English appear to operate through overlapping but partly different associations. Participants often linked Spanish to emotional force, aggression, eroticism, and vulgarity, making it a locally familiar resource for direct intimate expression. English was more often associated with popular culture, youth, coolness, and modernity (Karam et al., 2020), and using a non-native language could also create distance from the emotional force of a vulgar or intimate message. It may therefore function as a more stylistic or emblematic resource, especially in short or formulaic expressions. These findings suggest that continued normalization and revitalization efforts should look beyond

Catalan–Spanish competition and recognize that English attracts sign creators not only because of its communicative reach, but also because of its associations with popular culture and modernity. The policy implications of this are discussed further in Section 6.3.

A similar pattern may appear in other minoritized-language settings where a dominant state language coexists with global English. Comparative research could examine whether the state language is likewise associated with more immediate and personal forms of intimate expression, while English is more often used for stylized expressions drawn from popular culture and media or as an emotionally distancing resource in vernacular signage.

Finally, the data show both broad patterns and meaningful variation in locally raised Catalans' language ideologies. Some views were widely shared across participants, such as the perception that Catalan is less forceful or cutting than Spanish in insults. Others varied more clearly by linguistic background, especially concern about Catalan's future vitality, which was voiced primarily by Catalan-dominant participants. Linguistic background did not explain everything, however. Catalan-dominant participants such as Jordi, for example, stated that Spanish would be more suitable for signs about community issues in their towns because it would reach more residents, while others, including Carmen and Borja, viewed the use of Catalan as nonnegotiable for demonstrating local belonging and protecting the language. This variation is not unexpected, since language ideologies are often multiple and contested within the same community rather than shared uniformly across a population (Kroskrity, 2010). In these interviews, linguistic background shaped participants' interpretations, but its relevance varied by topic and worked alongside their broader social positioning. Because the dissertation was not designed to isolate participants' linguistic backgrounds from other variables such as political orientation, hometown, or the topic under discussion, it cannot identify any one factor as the cause of their views. Instead, participants with similar linguistic backgrounds sometimes interpreted the same issue differently, suggesting that multiple factors worked together to shape their responses.

6.2.2 Linguistic Landscape Research

This dissertation also contributes to LL research by developing the category of vernacular signage, defined in Section 2.3.4 as publicly visible signage whose primary function is expressive, artistic, community-oriented, or grassroots rather than regulatory, administrative, or commercial. Artifacts such as graffiti, stickers, posters, banners, and stencils generally fall under Scollon and Wong Scollon's (2003) classification of transgressive signage insofar as they are unauthorized in some way. However, including some sanctioned or semi-sanctioned artifacts, such as school and community murals, makes it possible to distinguish vernacular expression from unauthorized production. These signs serve expressive or community-oriented purposes even when their placement is permitted, allowing the analysis to examine language–topic patterns across vernacular signage without treating unauthorized production as the defining feature of the category. Although artistic form sometimes helped identify a sign as eligible for inclusion in the corpus, language choice rather than aesthetic form was the primary object of analysis.

These disparate artifact types are grouped together because their language choices are not generally shaped by language-policy requirements or commercial incentives. This distinction is especially important in Catalonia, where Article 32.3 of the 1998 *Llei de Política Lingüística* [Language Policy Law] requires Catalan in commercial signage. For that reason, the common LL distinction between "top-down" and "bottom-up" signage was less useful for this dissertation, since many studies place both unauthorized and commercial signs in the "bottom-up" category. In

the Catalan context, however, including commercial signs would combine signs whose language choices may reflect legal requirements with signs whose language choices more closely reflect individual preference or expressive intent.

Likewise, automatically excluding all signs traditionally understood as "top-down," in the sense of being commissioned or sanctioned by official bodies, would have excluded some signs relevant to this investigation. For example, the mural in Figure 61 says "Welcome to Santaco" in Spanish and includes the inscription "Ajuntament de Santa Coloma" [Santa Coloma city council], suggesting that the city council sanctioned or supported its creation. This example shows why institutional authorization alone cannot determine whether a sign belongs in the corpus. Although the mural had institutional support, it did not communicate a regulation, administrative requirement, or public-service announcement. Instead, it contributed a locally oriented welcome message, and its language choice did not appear to be institutionally mandated. I therefore included cases like this when their primary function was local public expression rather than institutional communication.

More broadly, this means that LL researchers should define the boundaries of their corpora in relation to the legal and social contexts they are studying. Categories such as "vernacular," "transgressive," "top-down," and "bottom-up" do not necessarily mean the same thing in every setting.

Moreover, this dissertation has demonstrated the value of heeding Blackwood and Tufi's (2015) call to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative approaches in the analysis of the LL. The large, systematically collected corpus provided quantitative robustness, while the qualitative coding analysis revealed topic-based distinctions that would have been lost had all vernacular signage been treated as a single aggregate. If the corpus had only been coded by language, the fact that Catalan was the most frequently observed language overall would have masked its rarity in signs about intimate topics, demonstrating the value of segmenting vernacular signage into topics that are locally salient in the research context.

Finally, the findings underscore the value of collaborating with local sign creators and observers in the interpretation of the LL. The language ideologies outlined in Chapter 5 reflect the indispensable contributions of 60 locally raised Catalans who shared their linguistic and cultural expertise. Complementing the corpus analysis with local perspectives provided insights that would not have been accessible through analysis of signage alone. Moreover, insights from both sign observers and sign creators added unique value. While observers' LL perceptions revealed salient language ideologies related to broader societal language practices, only creators like Aitor, Alba, Ferran, and Carlota could confirm or nuance the extent to which certain language ideologies influenced language choice in the LL.

Observers' hypothetical choices occasionally revealed different language ideologies than corpus patterns, demonstrating the utility of combining photo-elicitation interviews and hypothetical tasks in LL research. The collaborative design also yielded reciprocal benefits: several participants later shared that the interviews prompted deeper reflection on local language practices, greater awareness of language-choice patterns in public space, and, for some, renewed motivation to use Catalan more consistently.

6.2.3 Mixed-Methods Sociolinguistic Inquiry

The dissertation develops an integrated mixed-methods design in which the quantitative corpus analysis and qualitative interviews are organized around the same set of topics. This framework

could be broadly applicable to sociolinguistic research that uses corpus data. In this study, the topics used to code the signs also guided the interview protocol, including the hypothetical-choice exercise and the discussion of the LL corpus. Organizing both datasets around a shared topic framework made them directly comparable. Because I asked participants which language they would use for each topic before showing them the corpus findings, I was able to compare their stated preferences with the language choices observed in the LL. The gaps between the two then became productive prompts for metalinguistic reflection. Showing participants representative images added specificity by allowing them to respond to particular wording, language choices, visual displays, and imagined social contexts rather than only to aggregate distributions. This, in turn, elicited more artifact-specific interpretations of likely creators, audiences, tone, and communicative purpose.

The interviews were also valuable for a second reason. In a corpus of around 10,000 signs, attention is naturally drawn to dominant percentages, but focusing on the overall distributions alone can obscure important exceptions. Yet Catalan was not entirely absent from intimate signage, nor Spanish from societal signage. The interviews helped explain both the main patterns and these counter-examples, such as Roser's willingness to write an anti-independence message in Catalan or Neus's insistence on using Catalan even for insults. Such cases, which are bound to appear in any large corpus of linguistic data, show that language ideologies function as resources speakers draw on, not rules they mechanically follow.

6.3 Implications

The findings of this dissertation have important implications for language policy and normalization efforts in Catalonia, as well as minoritized-language scholarship beyond Catalonia. In comparison to other European communities, Catalonia has been remarkably successful in maintaining the vitality of its autochthonous language despite centuries of state-level minoritization (Cetrà, 2019). Post-Franco revitalization efforts catalyzed by the 1983 *Llei de Normalització Lingüística* [Linguistic Normalization Law] established Catalan as the language of instruction in schools and promoted its use across public administration, mass media, culture, and signage. According to the most recently available survey data, 93.4% of Catalonia's population aged 15 and older report being able to understand Catalan, while 80.4% report being able to speak it (Idescat, 2023). In this dissertation, Catalan was the most frequently observed language in the corpus, with over one third of all signs being monolingual in Catalan (see Figure 4). The relatively strong presence of Catalan in vernacular signage, for which language choice is not legally mandated, suggests that sustained institutional support can have effects that extend beyond legally regulated domains into vernacular expression.

This is an encouraging finding for revitalization efforts elsewhere. Prior LL research in several European contexts with weaker institutional support for minoritized languages has documented a very low presence of the minoritized language in public signage (Blackwood & Tufi, 2015; Cenoz & Gorter, 2006; Coluzzi, 2009). Comparative LL work involving comprehensive corpora of vernacular signage across minoritized-language contexts would help identify the conditions under which institutional revitalization does or does not extend to vernacular writing. Such work should also keep local language policy in mind when defining corpus boundaries and consider whether topic-based coding can reveal patterns obscured by aggregate language counts. Finally, including rural and small-town sites alongside urban ones is methodologically necessary in contexts where a substantial share of the population lives outside

major metropolitan areas and where habitual language practices may differ between rural and urban settings.

At the same time, the relatively strong presence of Catalan in the corpus overall is not reflected in vulgar and sentimental registers in the vernacular LL, where the language remains comparatively limited even in sites where Catalan use is widespread. The same policy environment that has supported Catalan use in civic or societal vernacular discourse has not closed the gap in more informal registers. The vernacular LL therefore offers a compelling site for assessing not only whether institutional revitalization extends into everyday written expression, but also which topics and registers demonstrate linguistic asymmetries.

With this in mind, I now turn to implications for language policy and normalization efforts in Catalonia. Participants often connected their assumptions that creators of signs about intimate topics were youth, immigrants, or individuals from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds with the perceived lower use of Catalan among these groups. Although the corpus cannot confirm the demographic profiles of sign creators, the limited presence of Catalan in intimate signage, even in Catalan-dominant communities, points to the importance of informal socialization spaces frequented by youth and newcomers.

Comparable approaches have been documented in other minoritized-language settings. Welsh-language theatre has been used to create spaces for teenagers to engage with Welsh beyond the classroom, while online minority-language communities and Indigenous-language music have expanded opportunities to use minoritized languages in digital and youth-oriented cultural domains (Belmar & Glass, 2019; Cru, 2018; Sams, 2024). These examples do not introduce a new principle for Catalan language policy. Catalonia has long supported Catalan-language media and informal socialization through institutions and networks such as TV3, Catalunya Ràdio, and youth leisure organizations. More recently, these efforts have begun adapting to streaming platforms, social media, videogames, and other emerging forms of digital media.

The implication of this dissertation is therefore not that these efforts should begin, but that they should continue to adapt to changing media habits and to the underrepresentation of Catalan in some domains where informal and intimate forms of expression circulate widely. Continued support could place greater emphasis on creating Catalan-language content, helping it reach audiences, making it easier to discover, and training and supporting the creators who produce it. This would build on existing normalization efforts while helping Catalan remain current and available for humor, romance, irreverence, and other informal forms of expression.

These recommendations should not be taken to mean that every use of English or Spanish represents the displacement of Catalan. Nevertheless, English's prominent role in intimate signage, together with participants' associations of English with youth, coolness, and globalization, suggests that normalization strategies should look beyond Catalan–Spanish competition and also attend to the social meanings carried by English. More broadly, multilingual and cosmopolitan language practices can coexist with support for a minoritized language (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; Newman et al., 2008; Sedivy, 2021). Vernacular signage often consists of brief words, slogans, or formulaic phrases that speakers may incorporate into their repertoires without replacing their habitual language use. English may therefore be used for coolness, humor, or affective emphasis while remaining compatible with strong identification with and support for Catalan.

6.4 Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations and future directions emerge from this work. A critical missing perspective in this dissertation is that of first-generation immigrants, who were often discussed by participants but not directly represented in the interview sample. Given that over one third of Catalonia's residents are immigrants from outside the autonomous community and nearly one quarter were born abroad (Idescat, 2023), their perspectives are essential for forming a more comprehensive understanding of language ideologies in Catalonia in the contemporary era. Future research should therefore examine how first-generation immigrants in Catalonia interpret language–topic distributions in the vernacular LL and perceive the broader relationship among language, register, and identity.

Second, I coded all the artifacts, as is standard in single-researcher dissertation work. To ensure consistency, I developed a coding guide iteratively throughout multiple coding passes conducted across the corpus. Survey areas that had been coded after the initial round of fieldwork were recoded once the coding guide was finalized. Ambiguous cases were discussed with a fellow LL scholar who has investigated vernacular signage in Catalonia. Nevertheless, the absence of additional independent coders means that inter-rater reliability was not formally established. Future work building on this study would benefit from team-based coding, since interpretive judgments need to be made about semantic content that is sometimes ambiguous.

Third, the LL corpus reflects specific towns and neighborhoods at a specific moment in time. Longitudinal LL work would help to capture change, both in terms of the topics that are socially relevant to sign creators and registerial patterns of language use. Since fieldwork for this dissertation was carried out when Catalan independence was still a salient issue in public consciousness, a useful diachronic study could examine whether language choice in vernacular political signage continues to align largely with political stance. Moreover, comparative work using a similar topic-based design would shed light on which patterns are specific to the post-referendum Catalan context and which may be replicated in other minoritized-language settings.

Fourth, a point of emphasis in the analysis of the LL corpus was distinctions in language–topic distributions between the BMA and non-BMA survey areas. The interviews, however, were largely structured according to an aggregate presentation of the LL findings. I mentioned that signs were documented across diverse sites throughout Catalonia, but I did not elaborate on geographic distinctions that are empirically meaningful in the corpus, such as the rise in Spanish percentages for societal signs in some Spanish-dominant areas. Interviewees occasionally commented on BMA versus non-BMA dynamics in their general discussion of everyday language use, but rarely touched on these distinctions when speaking specifically about the LL findings. Emphasizing similarities and divergences in language–topic patterns across diverse sites in future interview studies might allow greater insight into ideologies that are tied to specific communities within the research context.

A fifth limitation concerns the nature of interview data itself. The metalinguistic interviews reflected how participants explained and rationalized language choice in vernacular signage, which may not always correspond to their own practices or to the intentions of sign creators. This concern is especially relevant because most participants were sign observers rather than creators. The four sign creators occasionally described language choice in somewhat different terms. Of these, two reported using Catalan almost exclusively when producing artifacts in Catalonia, regardless of topic, while another explained that language choice could shift when an artifact drew on references from popular culture. These accounts suggest that observers' explanations may not fully capture

all the considerations involved in sign creation. Given the small number of creators interviewed, however, these differences cannot be treated as representative of a broader distinction between creators' and observers' perspectives.

A final limitation concerns my positionality as an American researcher, which may have shaped how participants framed their responses, particularly when discussing politically or socially sensitive issues. Future research could build on interviews with sign creators or owners and participatory ethnographic methods that involve local collaborators more actively in documenting and interpreting the linguistic landscape (Nie et al., 2023; Szabó & Troyer, 2017).

6.5 Final Reflection

I had the pleasure of meeting Dr. James Hawkey at the 20th International Colloquium of the North American Catalan Society. His sociolinguistic work on Catalan-speaking communities outside Catalonia has strongly influenced my development as a scholar. He asked me if I had gotten everything out of my doctoral program that I had hoped for. I instantly replied, "Three hundredfold." This dissertation, alongside my broader research program, has been an enriching experience that has led to growth and understanding far beyond the study of language choice and language ideologies.

Some of the most significant lessons I take from this journey are broadly applicable outside of sociolinguistic scholarship, including embracing nuance and complexity, seeing people as multidimensional rather than reducing them to social categories, and seeking out perspectives and experiences different from one's own. I began this work in the aftermath of an especially contentious political period in Catalonia and carried it out through an equally contentious period in my own country. Through this work, I came to know hundreds of people from disparate backgrounds who fell on different sides of political, linguistic, and social issues. Their experiences repeatedly complicated easy categorizations, and each contributed to my learning in a different way.

Perhaps the broadest lesson I have taken from LL research is to critically examine the inputs through which we come to understand languages, communities, and one another. Associations that come to feel natural or commonsensical do not emerge in a vacuum; they are shaped through repeated encounters with particular voices, representations, institutions, media, practices, and people. This dissertation has examined that process at the level of language ideologies, showing how associations between languages and particular topics, identities, or forms of expression can come to seem self-evident even as individual practices continually complicate them. More broadly, the perspectives available to us shape how we interpret others, while encounters that challenge familiar categories can make room for greater nuance and understanding.

For me, one implication is the value of deliberately seeking perspectives from people whose experiences differ from our own, particularly at moments when social divisions encourage us to reduce one another to categories. Just as importantly, we shape how other people understand the world around them. We can therefore seek not only to listen with the aim of understanding rather than judging, but also to represent thoughtfully the languages, communities, identities, and values that matter to us. Above all, this doctoral journey has taught me that greater understanding begins with paying closer attention to the messages around us, the assumptions they help produce, and, most importantly, the complexity of the people around us.

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Appendix A: Abridged Interview Guide, Translated to English

I. Background information
   A. Where were you born and raised, and what was the linguistic context of your upbringing? Which language(s) tended to be used in which places, and with whom?

II. Language use in school
   A. Which language did you tend to speak in classes? Was it different on the playground and more generally with friends outside of the classroom? Did this change over time?

III. Identity and linguistic habits
   A. How do you identify culturally (Spanish, Catalan, both, something else), and what factors have informed that identity?
   B. Which language do you identify with more (Spanish, Catalan, both, something else)? In your opinion, what does it mean for a multilingual person to identify more strongly with one language or another?
   C. In Catalonia, do you sense a connection between cultural identity and habitual language use?
   D. What is the linguistic context of your current town? Is it Catalan or Spanish-dominant? If someone wanted to live 100% in Catalan in your town, do you think they'd be able to?
   E. Do you ever use anglicisms or words and phrases from other languages in your everyday speech? If so, why do you think you use a foreign word when an equivalent exists in Catalan or Spanish?

IV. Connotations attached to different languages
   A. Can you give me three adjectives to describe the Spanish and Catalan languages? Not looking for anything in particular here, just whatever comes to mind.
   B. For this question you may think of languages beyond just Spanish and Catalan. Which language do you think is the most romantic? Most pleasant-sounding? Most polite? Most aggressive? Most seductive?

V. Hypothetical Graffiti Exercise
   A. Imagine you've decided to become a graffiti artist. I'll give you a description of different kinds of graffiti, and I'd like you to tell me which language you would find most appropriate to create each type of graffiti. You can choose any language, this exercise is not just limited to Spanish and Catalan.
      1. A personal insult
      2. A romantic message
      3. A political message
      4. A sexual comment of a vulgar nature
      5. A message to support a universal social cause you are passionate about
      6. A message in favor of illicit activity, such as drug use
      7. A message related to an issue affecting your local neighbourhood or town
      8. A beautiful, poetic message
   B. We have been talking about creating hypothetical graffiti. In your real life, would you follow similar patterns of choosing a different language for certain topics? For example, would you be more likely to insult someone in (Catalan, Spanish, English,

other), but declare your love for someone in (Catalan, Spanish, English, other)? (Adjust depending on interviewee responses to prior questions)

For graffiti artists who created signs in the corpus:

C. How would you differentiate street art from graffiti?
D. What inspires the themes of your signs?
E. I noticed that you tend to use (Catalan, Spanish, English, based on language used in corpus artifacts) in your signs. What motivates your choice to use one language or another in your creations?
F. What do you think about the graffiti and street art that appear on public walls in Catalonia? Have you ever thought about whether certain topics tend to appear in one language or another?
G. Do you believe that language can be used as a strategic tool in artistic expression in multilingual environments? How do you think this applies to the specific case of Catalonia?

VI. Reflections on the vernacular linguistic landscape of Catalonia

A. Over the past two years, I've documented over 10,000 graffiti, posters, stickers, and stencils from 21 towns and neighbourhoods throughout all provinces of Catalonia. These signs were all created by individuals or groups who were freely able to choose both the language and the thematic content of their messages. I analyzed the language, topic, and location of each artifact. I'd like to share a few of the key findings from the investigation, and see what you think about them.
    1. Signs about politics, social causes, and community issues tended to be written in Catalan. (Show document with various examples from corpus)
    2. Most signs about love and other emotions were written in Spanish, and many were written in English. Catalan was comparatively rare in these kinds of signs. (Show document with various examples from corpus)
    3. Most vulgar messages and signs about taboo topics were written in Spanish and English. Catalan was very rare in these kinds of signs. (Show document with various examples from corpus)
    4. In the more Catalan-speaking areas, there was a higher representation of Catalan overall. However, the thematic patterns generally still held true. Even in Catalan-dominant areas, most sentimental and vulgar messages were written in Spanish and English, whereas even in Spanish-dominant areas, most societal signs were written in Catalan.
B. Do these findings surprise you?
C. What are your beliefs about what might be contributing to the language-topic patterns I observed in my study?
D. Do you think these language-topic patterns are unique to graffiti on public walls, or are they reflected in the everyday speech of people in Catalonia as well?
E. Do you think that the findings of this study serve as any kind of indication that Catalan may be used less in certain linguistic registers or among certain kinds of people?

Appendix B: Abridged List of Salient Interview Themes

- Influence of popular culture and media on language choice (161)
- Stereotypes of Catalans and other groups (141)
- Language practices involving immigrants (135)
- Socioeconomic factors (116)
- English as global language (94)
- L1 most natural for sentimental expression (91)
- Sign creators likely youth (87)
- Formulaic phrases don't require fluency in foreign languages (87)
- Different groups make signs about different topics (83)
- Catalan as repoliticized and aligned with independence (78)
- Spanish as stronger, more cutting (76)
- Foreign languages draw attention (74)
- Catalan as delicate, refined (72)
- Catalan alignment with associationism and progressive causes (59)
- Catalan less suitable for vulgar discourse (52)
- Assumption immigrants don't know Catalan, linguistic discrimination (50)
- Foreign languages as cool or fun (50)
- Language to reach widest audience for social causes (50)
- Barcelona Metro Area different from rest of Catalonia (46)
- Prestige of foreign languages (39)
- Graffiti versus everyday talk (39)
- Use Catalan to show from here, gain respect (37)
- Spanish as dominant, ubiquitous (30)
- Default to Spanish in everyday interactions (28)
- Translations don't carry same connotation (25)
- Immigrants make graffiti, Catalans don't (23)
- Those who protest are those who desire change (22)
- Spanish predominance among youth in social contexts (20)
- English to create distance in vulgar messages (20)
- Catalan insults as weak (10)

Note. These counts are presented in descending order by number of associated text fragments. They are intended to indicate the relative recurrence of each theme in the interview corpus, not the number of participants who expressed a given view or the explanatory weight of that theme.

Appendix C: Detailed Information About Signs in Other Languages

Table C1

Distribution of Signs in Other Languages by Survey Site

Site	Signs in Other Languages (SOL)		Prevalence Within Site	
	N SOL	% of All SOL	N Total Signs in Site	SOL as % of All Site Signs
Cadaqués	9	5.7%	141	6.4%
El Barri Gòtic	25	15.8%	596	4.2%
Sant Pere, Santa Caterina i la Ribera	7	4.4%	249	2.8%
Salt	7	4.4%	323	2.2%
Girona	19	12.0%	912	2.1%
El Poblenou	17	10.8%	867	2.0%
Ripoll	9	5.7%	478	1.9%
La Seu d'Urgell	10	6.3%	576	1.7%
La Vila de Gràcia	17	10.8%	984	1.7%
Santa Coloma de Gramenet	5	3.2%	306	1.6%
Les Borges Blanques	6	3.8%	442	1.4%
L'Hospitalet de Llobregat	9	5.7%	674	1.3%
Montblanc	3	1.9%	250	1.2%
Igualada	2	1.3%	295	0.7%
Solsona	3	1.9%	456	0.7%
Badia del Vallès	2	1.3%	327	0.6%
Santa Margarida i els Monjos	2	1.3%	338	0.6%
Móra d'Ebre	2	1.3%	396	0.5%
Cornellà de Llobregat	2	1.3%	510	0.4%
Sant Cugat del Vallès	1	0.6%	279	0.4%
Cardedeu	1	0.6%	314	0.3%
Total	158	100.0%	9,713	1.6%

Note. Counts reflect the analytic corpus after exclusions described in Section 3.1.3; English excluded.

Table C2
Distribution of Signs in Other Languages by Language

Language	**N**	**%**
French	68	43.0%
Italian	18	11.4%
German	14	8.9%
Arabic	10	6.3%
Basque	10	6.3%
Latin	10	6.3%
Japanese	7	4.4%
Mandarin Chinese	6	3.8%
Portuguese	5	3.2%
Korean	2	1.3%
Romanian	2	1.3%
Russian	2	1.3%
Hawaiian	1	0.6%
Hebrew	1	0.6%
Serbo-Croatian	1	0.6%
Spanish Sign Language	1	0.6%
Total	158	100%

Note. English excluded.

Table C3
Distribution of Signs in Other Languages by Topic

Topic	**N**	**%**
Signaling presence	33	20.9%
Sentimentality	27	17.1%
Politics	25	15.8%
Abstract/philosophical musings	19	12.0%
Vulgarity/taboo	12	7.6%
Poetic messages	7	4.4%
Arts/sports	7	4.4%
Social Causes	6	3.8%
Regional or national pride (outside Catalonia)	5	3.2%
Community issues	3	1.9%
Greetings	3	1.9%
Friendship/family	2	1.3%
Money	2	1.3%
War	2	1.3%
Other topics (n = 5)	5	3.2%
Total	158	100%

Appendix D: Detailed Information About Multilingual Signs

Table D1
Language Combinations in Multilingual Signs

Language Combination	**N**	**%**
Catalan + English	87	34.7%
Spanish + English	83	33.1%
Multivalent + English	34	13.5%
Spanish + Catalan	28	11.2%
Aranese + Spanish + Catalan	2	0.8%
Basque + Spanish + English	2	0.8%
English + French	2	0.8%
English + Italian	2	0.8%
English + Other	2	0.8%
Other combinations (n = 9)	9	3.6%
Total	251	100%

Note. Language combinations are standardized alphabetically; signs containing the same languages in different orders (e.g., *Spanish* + *English* and *English* + *Spanish*) are grouped together. Duplicates of the same language within a sign are collapsed (e.g., *Spanish* + *English* + *Spanish* → *Spanish* + *English*).

Table D2
Distribution of Multilingual Signs by Topic

Topic	**N**	**%**
Social Causes	83	33.1%
Vulgarity/taboo	40	15.9%
Politics	35	13.9%
Signaling presence	30	12.0%
Sentimentality	17	6.8%
Abstract/philosophical musings	9	3.6%
Music	9	3.6%
Other topics (n = 14)	28	11.2%
Total	251	100%

Table D3
Primary Language Combinations for Salient Topics

Topic	Language Combination	% of Multilingual Signs Within Topic
Politics	Catalan + English	40%
	Catalan + Spanish	20%
	Multivalent + English	14.3%
Sentimentality	English + Spanish	70.6%
Signaling Presence	Spanish + English	40%
	Multivalent + English	33.3%
	Spanish + Catalan	10%
	English + Italian	6.7%
Social Causes	Catalan + English	79.5%
	Spanish + Catalan	8.4%
	Multivalent + English	6%
	Spanish + English	6%
Vulgarity/Taboo	Spanish + English	67.5%
	Multivalent + English	17.5%
	Spanish + Catalan	12.5%

Note. Only language combinations representing ≥ 6% of multilingual signs within each topic are displayed for readability.

Appendix E: Multivalent, Multilingual, and Other-Language Distributions by Site

Table E1
Multivalent, Multilingual, and Other-Language Distributions for Societal Signs by Site

	Politics				Social Causes				Community Issues			
Survey Area	**Mvt**	**Mlg**	**Oth**	**Total N**	**Mvt**	**Mlg**	**Oth**	**Total N**	**Mvt**	**Mlg**	**Oth**	**Total N**
Móra d'Ebre	5%	0%	0%	129	6%	3%	0%	36	0%	0%	0%	21
Ripoll	2%	2%	0%	103	1%	4%	0%	92	0%	0%	0%	15
Solsona	4%	2%	0%	112	2%	20%	0%	86	0%	0%	0%	23
La Seu d'Urgell	3%	0%	3%	74	2%	23%	1%	81	6%	6%	6%	16
Montblanc	3%	0%	1%	68	0%	0%	0%	11	0%	0%	0%	5
Les Borges Blanques	2%	2%	0%	169	2%	2%	0%	47	0%	0%	0%	35
Igualada	5%	1%	0%	75	3%	6%	3%	32	0%	0%	0%	22
Girona	2%	1%	3%	342	1%	3%	3%	74	0%	3%	0%	32
Santa Margarida i els Monjos	9%	1%	0%	70	2%	2%	0%	54	0%	0%	0%	24
Cadaqués	2%	2%	0%	44	0%	0%	0%	12	0%	0%	0%	4
Salt	6%	0%	1%	88	0%	14%	0%	22	0%	0%	0%	22
Cardedeu	6%	0%	0%	63	3%	8%	0%	36	0%	0%	0%	19
Sant Cugat del Vallès	6%	6%	2%	48	3%	0%	0%	70	0%	0%	0%	13
La Vila de Gràcia	3%	1%	1%	277	2%	1%	0%	198	6%	0%	0%	144
El Poblenou	2%	8%	1%	99	2%	17%	2%	95	0%	0%	0%	80
Sant Pere, Santa Caterina i la Ribera	3%	1%	0%	75	7%	7%	0%	14	0%	0%	0%	5
Cornellà de Llobregat	7%	0%	0%	59	11%	4%	0%	53	0%	4%	0%	25
El Barri Gòtic	6%	4%	2%	83	0%	0%	0%	77	67%	0%	0%	3
L'Hospitalet de Llobregat	21%	0%	4%	52	8%	5%	0%	61	0%	1%	0%	77
Badia del Vallès	4%	4%	0%	25	0%	15%	0%	20	0%	0%	0%	21
Santa Coloma de Gramenet	9%	9%	0%	23	0%	15%	0%	34	0%	0%	18%	11

Note. Percentages represent the distribution of the indicated language classifications within each site–topic cell. N represents the total number of signs in the cell across all six language classifications. Catalan, Spanish, and English percentages are reported in Table 5 and are therefore omitted here. Mvt = multivalent; Mlg = multilingual; Oth = other languages.

Table E2

Multivalent, Multilingual, and Other-Language Distributions for Intimate Signs by Site

	Vulgarity/Taboo				Sentimentality			
Survey Area	**Mvt**	**Mlg**	**Oth**	**Total N**	**Mvt**	**Mlg**	**Oth**	**Total N**
Móra d'Ebre	29%	0%	0%	52	3%	3%	0%	35
Ripoll	21%	3%	3%	63	3%	0%	3%	33
Solsona	15%	3%	1%	73	0%	0%	0%	36
La Seu d'Urgell	20%	6%	1%	162	7%	2%	2%	46
Montblanc	13%	0%	0%	55	0%	4%	0%	23
Les Borges Blanques	9%	1%	0%	93	0%	0%	6%	31
Igualada	8%	4%	0%	26	10%	3%	3%	31
Girona	8%	2%	1%	99	4%	0%	2%	54
Santa Margarida i els Monjos	21%	2%	0%	53	2%	0%	0%	44
Cadaqués	0%	0%	11%	9	9%	0%	9%	23
Salt	23%	8%	0%	53	16%	0%	8%	25
Cardedeu	3%	0%	0%	31	3%	0%	3%	34
Sant Cugat del Vallès	3%	3%	0%	33	13%	0%	0%	8
La Vila de Gràcia	1%	3%	3%	70	1%	0%	2%	128
El Poblenou	6%	3%	1%	97	4%	0%	4%	102
Sant Pere, Santa Caterina i la Ribera	18%	5%	0%	44	4%	0%	0%	53
Cornellà de Llobregat	7%	1%	0%	90	5%	0%	0%	56
El Barri Gòtic	0%	1%	2%	118	0%	3%	6%	121
L'Hospitalet de Llobregat	5%	4%	1%	109	3%	4%	0%	72
Badia del Vallès	16%	6%	0%	68	0%	1%	0%	71
Santa Coloma de Gramenet	7%	0%	0%	61	3%	0%	0%	40

Note. Percentages represent the distribution of the indicated language classifications within each site–topic cell. N represents the total number of signs in the cell across all six language classifications. Catalan, Spanish, and English percentages are reported in Table 6 and are therefore omitted here. Mvt = multivalent; Mlg = multilingual; Oth = other languages.