Training teachers and public social workers in linguistic diversity: the case of Catalonia

Merce Solè i Sanosa
Vicent Climent-Ferrando
Training teachers and public social workers in linguistic diversity: the case of Catalonia

Abstract

The Catalan authorities aim to ensure that immigrants undergo a high quality reception and integration process, and one of their priorities in that respect is improving the intercultural skills of public service employees. Linguamón – House of Languages – a Catalan governmental body – has designed and run an intercultural training course entitled 'Linguistic diversity among immigrants in Catalonia' with a view to bringing about such an improvement.

The course is aimed at public authority employees whose work brings them into direct contact with immigrants (specialists from immigration services, educators, health workers, people who deal with the public, etc.). The Government of Catalonia's Secretariat for Immigration has incorporated the course into the range of training it offers public service employees. The course has so far been run three times in different cities. It is therefore now possible to present an initial appraisal of the initiative and look at ways of changing and improving it.

The aims of this presentation are to set out the context in which the course has been given and to describe the process involved and the methodology followed (definition of goals, identification and selection of content, recruitment of tutors, etc.). Additionally, data related to the course and its success will be provided (attendee profile, satisfaction ratings, etc.).
Introduction

Set up in 2005, Linguamón – House of Languages is a governmental body formed by the Government of Catalonia and the Barcelona City Council. Our mission is to familiarise the general public with the world of languages, to raise awareness of the importance of preserving linguistic diversity, to portray that diversity in a positive light and to convey the tremendous potential that languages and their communities of speakers have to offer.

One of Linguamón’s lines of work consists of offering specialised services for professionals. Today’s presentation is about such a service, specifically a course on linguistic diversity especially for public authority employees whose work is related to immigrants (staff of council-run services, health workers, educators, etc.).

Some Facts and figures on Immigration in Catalonia

The number of immigrants living in Catalonia has risen sharply in the space of just a few years.

According to official data from the Catalan Institute of Statistics, there were 257,306 foreigners living in Catalonia in 2001, accounting for 4.4% of the territory’s population and 25.3% of all Spain’s foreign residents.

By 2007, that figure had leapt to 972,507, representing 13.3% of all Catalonia’s inhabitants. On 1 July 2009 Catalonia’s foreign population stood at 1,251,505, corresponding to 16.6% of the territory’s population.¹

¹ Catalan Institute for Statistics http://www.idescat.cat/dequavi/Dequavi.?TC=444&V0=1&V1=8 [consulted February 10 2010]
To look at the phenomenon from another angle, in 2007 Catalonia's population grew by 3.5% due to natural causes and by 17.3% as a result of immigration\(^2\).

The above figures underline the tremendous growth undergone in a very brief period. The table and chart below provide a breakdown of Catalonia's foreign population by place of origin in 2009.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Number of immigrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>241,227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>98,342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>85,472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>61,452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>51,522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>49,769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>48,529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>37,457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>37,386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>36,652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>35,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>29,687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>24,461</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Distribution of immigrant population in Catalonia by country of origin.

\(^2\) http://www.idescat.cat/territ/BasicTerr?TC=5&V0=3&V1=3&V3=914&V4=921&ALLINFO=TRUE& PARENT=1&CTX=B
Distribution of immigrants in Catalonia

In contrast to previous large waves of immigration in Catalonia, which mainly affected Barcelona and its metropolitan area, the immigrants who have arrived in recent years have settled throughout the territory, not only in its major cities and their respective metropolitan areas, but also, in many cases, in coastal and inland towns, rural areas and even mountainous zones.

On average, foreigners make up 15% of the population of each of Catalonia's administrative regions. There are a number of medium-sized towns where the proportion of immigrants from outside the EU is particularly high, such as Ulldecona: 6,987 inhabitants, 29.07% of whom are immigrants; Salt: 28,763 inhabitants, 39.2% of whom are immigrants; Guissona: 5,683 inhabitants, 43.46% of whom are immigrants; Manlleu: 20,505 inhabitants, 23% of whom are immigrants.

Catalonia also has a sizeable population of European immigrants, chiefly from Italy, France, Germany and the UK.

Generally speaking, the immigrants who have made their home in Catalonia have tended to settle in groups of the same nationality. For example, outside Barcelona (which, as Catalonia's capital, attracts the highest proportion of immigrants of all nationalities), the Ukrainian population has mainly established itself in inland towns and cities, such as Guissona, Tàrrega and Lleida. High concentrations of Romanians, meanwhile, can be found in towns and cities on or near the coast, such as Reus, Tarragona, Lloret de Mar and Vilanova i la Geltrú.

Catalonia's immigrants are thus not uniformly distributed throughout the territory, a factor for which we have allowed by selecting the languages to be presented at each course on the basis of the area in which it was being held.

Public bodies and services working with immigration

Catalonia's public services such as education, health, employment and social services have had to adapt to the sudden, sharp increase in the territory's foreign population. Firstly, specific units have been established in the main towns and cities and within local administrative structures (regional councils) to manage immigration. The units in question have provided support for public service employees.

Additionally, various new services and resources have been created, including public service translation and interpreting teams, specialised training programmes and multilingual informative material for immigrants.

Specialised training

In recent years, the Government of Catalonia has set up much-needed training programmes to enhance the skills of those who deal and have direct contact with immigrants as part of their job. Courses for specific sectors
(education, health, etc.) have been organised as part of long-term immigration management plans, along with events for exchanging experiences and others for showcasing best practices from countries long accustomed to hosting immigrants.

In addition to authority-run initiatives, training has been offered by civic bodies and cooperation-oriented organisations (associations that help immigrants to integrate or which assist people at risk of social exclusion, for example).

Universities are another source of specialised training, firstly in the form of master's degrees and other postgraduate qualifications on different aspects of managing immigration, and secondly as a result of projects carried out by research groups.

We realised, however, that none of the aforementioned types of training provided people who work directly with immigrants or oversee their reception with information or scope for reflection on managing multilingualism in Catalan society or on linguistic and cultural diversity among immigrants. In December 2008 we launched a training programme of our own to rectify that situation.

**Programme aims**

In conjunction with the Government of Catalonia's Secretariat for Immigration, Linguamón – House of Languages has designed and organised the first course on linguistic diversity among the immigrants living in the territory. The course is part of the specialised training that the secretariat runs for people whose work is related to immigration.

We organised the course with a view to:

- Contributing to broadening the knowledge and enhancing the skills of those responsible for immigrant reception or whose work is connected to immigration.
- Familiarising attendees with the languages and cultures of immigrants in Catalonia, so as to highlight the richness and linguistic diversity of present-day Catalan society.

The course's content was intended to answer questions such as:

- Is linguistic diversity a positive state of affairs and how does it affect a country's inhabitants?
- Is it necessary to be proficient in immigrants' languages to oversee their reception effectively?
- What does the future hold for the Catalan language now that there are immigrants from such a wide variety of countries in Catalonia?
- Is it true that speakers of a given language struggle to pronounce specific sounds or with particular aspects of the linguistics of other languages?
- Are some languages really written from right to left?
How can communication between people with very different cultural backgrounds be improved?

The main course aims were, therefore, to look at immigrants' mother tongues and cultures of origin in general, to examine more specific aspects (sociolinguistic characteristics, basic vocabulary, etc.) of languages spoken by immigrants in Catalonia; to propose approaches to managing immigrants' languages during their reception.

As for the course structure and content, it was organised into four sections:

A. Linguistic diversity.
B. The languages and cultures of immigrants living in Catalonia.
C. Language management during the reception process.
D. Communication techniques.

A. Linguistic diversity. This introductory section is intended to address questions such as:

- Are all languages equal?
- What does the term 'linguistic diversity' mean?
- Are relationships between languages neutral or power-based?
- What is language prejudice?
- Are all languages affected by prejudice?
- Why are some languages described as 'minoritised'?

These questions are aimed at combating the stereotypes and testing people’s general knowledge on these issues.

B. The languages and cultures of immigrants living in Catalonia

This section covers the course's central theme. It consists of a presentation of the different languages spoken by the main communities of immigrants who have settled in Catalonia, encompassing all the languages of their homelands rather than merely those that enjoy official status.

To select the languages to be dealt with in this section of the course, we not only consulted official census data (which lists each individual’s country of origin but not their mother tongue) but also refer to research carried out by the University of Barcelona's Endangered Language Study Group on the languages spoken by immigrants in Catalonia (Grup d'Estudi de Llengües Amenaçades, GELA). The data thus obtained is cross-checked against other sources. The Government of Catalonia's Ministry of Education systematically compiles information on foreign students' mother tongues and the other languages they speak. Hospital interpreting and assistance services and Catalan language courses for adult learners are among a number of specialised services for immigrants which also record such data. On this basis we have ascertained, for example, that many of Catalonia's Moroccan residents are Tamazight speakers, and that the territory's Pakistani
inhabitants mainly come from the province of Punjab and speak Punjabi as their mother tongue.

The presentation of each language and its associated culture covers the following:

- General aspects of the language, including basic information on its sociolinguistic situation (relationship with its territory, with other languages, with colonial languages, etc.), the countries in which it is spoken, its legal status (official, prohibited, etc.) and its use for the purposes of education, in the media and on the internet.

- The language's alphabet and linguistic traits, including similarities and differences to other alphabets, word order and sentence structure, lexical characteristics (derivation, composition, loanwords from Latin and any Catalan words that may originate from the language) and use of gender.

- The language's literary tradition and any works that may have been translated into Catalan.

- Basic cultural aspects, including the number system used, greetings, conversation etiquette, expressing gratitude and accepting and refusing requests.

- Points of interest, anecdotes and practical examples geared to broadening attendees' knowledge of the language and the culture of its speakers, including any specific difficulties that the Catalan language and culture may pose them.

As for the languages involved, it should be said that each course has concentrated on the most widely spoken languages in the part of Catalonia in which it has taken place. We focused specifically on the languages of the Maghreb (Arabic and Tamazight), the Eastern European languages (Bulgarian, Polish, Romanian, Russian and Ukrainian); South American languages (Aymara, Guaraní and Quechua); African languages (involving an overview of Africa's linguistic diversity and a closer look at aspects of Bambara, Manding, Soninke and Wolof) and Asian languages (involving an overview of India's linguistic diversity (with particular emphasis on Hindi and its ties to English) and the languages that the country shares with Pakistan (Punjabi and Urdu). China's rich linguistic diversity is also covered, mainly concentrating on the relationships between Cantonese, Mandarin and Wu.

C. Language management during the reception process

This section has been included in the course for the following reasons: Catalan is a co-official language in Catalonia, alongside Spanish, which enjoys official status throughout Spain. Nonetheless, there are contexts in which Catalan is rarely used, such as the legal system and state administrative procedures. In other words, it is not yet standard practice to use the language in all areas of Catalan society. Steps therefore need to be taken to guarantee Catalonia's inhabitants their language rights and to make the territory's traditional language and culture fully accessible to immigrants.
Catalan speakers tend to address people they do not know in Spanish, especially if they think the person to whom they are talking might not be from Catalonia. Additionally, oppressive language policies in the past and inequalities in the relationship between Catalan and Spanish have often led to the prioritisation of the latter over the former during the immigrant reception process in Catalonia. Immigrants thus get the impression that it is not particularly important for them to learn Catalan. The reality, however, is that being able to speak Catalan facilitates integration and opens up otherwise inaccessible opportunities.

Catalonia is home to a sizeable community of South American immigrants whose mother tongue is Spanish and who generally speak little or no Catalan.

In the light of the above, this part of the course is divided into two subsections: the role of Catalan during the reception process, including immigrants' linguistic autonomy, Catalan as a lingua franca, legislation on linguistic diversity, and tools and resources for learning Catalan; and managing, recognising and respecting the languages of immigrants during the reception process: including the benefits that being well informed entails in initial dealings with immigrants, resources for identifying languages, the availability of interpreting, translation and intercultural mediation services, best practices in managing multilingualism in relation to immigrant reception and considerations concerning multilingual material.

D.- Communication techniques

This section of the course explored aspects such as conveying the desired message and ways of improving communication; non-verbal communication, including kinesics (the interpretation of body language), proxemics (the study of the use of space during interaction) and paralinguistics (the study of non-verbal elements of communication expressed by vocal means, such as voice pitch, intonation, etc.); and basic courtesy and hospitality.

Methodology

As for the methodology, we tried to strike a happy medium between sessions of a more informative nature and sessions involving more active participation.

The sessions on linguistic diversity and the languages and cultures of immigrants in Catalonia mainly involve listening to tutors' explanations. Where possible, however, time has been provided during language presentations for attendees to discuss and analyse their experiences with the tutors. Attendees play a more active role in the sessions on language management during reception and communication techniques.
We have compiled a dossier that includes the content of the course's sessions and a list of recommended reading material and reference works, among other material.

**Participants and tutors**

The course has so far been run on three separate occasions, in three of Catalonia's major cities, namely Barcelona (December 2008), Girona (July 2009) and Tarragona (October 2009).

The course’s attendees fall into the following categories: teachers from primary and secondary schools, adult education centres and Catalan language courses for adults; Employees of immigration services run by municipal or regional councils; employees of hospital immigration services; and members of cooperation-oriented organisations.

The attendees were highly motivated to learn more about the course's subject matter. Many of them were already familiar with some aspects of the course due to the requirements of their job. This meant that there was scope for opinions and experiences to be exchanged during sessions.

In the future we hope to see more professionals on the course, particularly those who have not had an opportunity to consider the matters it raises.

As for the tutors’ profile, it must be said that the content on each language is presented by a different tutor (or more than one, in some cases). 14 different tutors have been involved in each of the courses run to date. Where possible, the tutors who have presented languages and cultures belong to the language community they have presented. In addition to language tutors, those who have led the course’s sessions have included lecturers in linguistics from universities, translators, intercultural mediators and public authority employees.

While all the average ratings are quite high, at around 4 out of 5, participants have recommended some ideas, namely:

- More time should be spent looking at each language community in detail.
- Practical experiences should feature more prominently.
- More information should be provided on each language community’s status in Catalonia in general and in the area in which the course is taking place in particular.
- More practical information on how to deal with the problems that intercultural communication entails.
- Ideas on classroom work on linguistic diversity would be appreciated.

The course's organisers feel that the initiative has been successful in that it has highlighted the need to improve and adopt a standardised approach to multilingual communication; it has provided an introduction to the respective languages and cultures of Catalonia's main immigrant communities, and has
offered resources for learning more about them; it has paved the way for an exchange of experiences among professionals from similar fields; it has drawn attention to the linguistic diversity in Catalan society, portrayed it as a source of wealth and opportunities, and examined the challenge of managing it.

Three courses will be taking place this year, provided that the necessary funds are available, in other locations throughout Catalonia in which specific requirements for such training have been detected.

The main differences between this year's courses and those organised previously will be as follows:

- Less time will be spent looking at general aspects of linguistic diversity so that more time can be devoted to finding out about individual language communities.
- Every session will include case study analyses.
- We will try to provide specific information on each language community's organisational structure in Catalonia (associations and institutions, activities, etc.).
- There will be a detailed presentation of online resources related to the course's content, with a view to providing more comprehensive support material.
- It will be suggested that intercultural communication techniques be studied in greater depth on a course devoted exclusively thereto.