

The Effect of Language at School on Identity and Political Outlooks*

Oriol Aspachs-Bracons[†], Irma Clots-Figueras[‡], Paolo Masella[§]

This Version: April 1, 2008

Abstract

The process of individual identity formation is still an enigma, as it is the capacity of public bodies to intervene on it. In 1983 the Catalan education system became bilingual, and Catalan, together with Spanish, was taught in schools. Using survey data from Catalonia and exploiting within and between cohort variation in exposure to Catalan language at school, results show that individuals who have experienced greater exposure to teaching in Catalan are more likely to say that they feel more Catalan than Spanish. Interestingly, the effect appears to be present also among individuals whose parents do not have Catalan origins. In addition, the reform also affects actions, as individuals exposed to more teaching in Catalan are more likely to vote in regional elections and vote for Catalan regionalist parties. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first paper to analyze empirically how policies affect individual identity.

*The authors thank Oriana Bandiera, Robin Burgess, Francesco Caselli, Maitreesh Ghatak, Luigi Guiso, Eliana La Ferrara, Ramón Marimón and seminar participants at the London School of Economics, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, EUI, CEMFI, Università di Pisa, IMT Lucca and at the University of Bristol. The authors also thank participants at the EEA meetings 2007, the SAE 2007 and the RES annual conference 2008. Irma Clots-Figueras gratefully acknowledges financial support from the MEC grants SEJ2004-07861 and SEJ2007-67436.

[†]LSE and FMG

[‡]Universidad Carlos III de Madrid

[§]European University Institute